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IS TALK ALWAYS SILVER AND SILENCE GOLDEN?

THE MEDIATISATION OF POLITICAL BARGAINING

DOREEN SPÖRER-WAGNER

FRANK MARCINKOWSKI

Abstract

Political negotiators require privacy instead of publicity to achieve compromises. Triggered by the spread of governance and the media's increasing relevance to the legitimation of political decisions, democratic negotiators face challenging bargaining conditions in terms of publicity. This applies particularly to political systems whose decision-making relies on majority- rather than on consensus-building. In this article we raise the question whether and how bargaining officials perceive and respond to media scrutiny. By referring to negotiators' media-related thinking, we introduce the concept of *mediatised negotiation* which goes beyond the traditional understanding of mediatisation as an impact on political processes and outcomes. Based on interviews with 32 German political negotiators, it is shown that bargaining officials have an increased awareness of simultaneous negotiation and media management. Even though a set of (in)formal measures is available to cope with this twofold challenge, ineffective and selfish public communication by individual negotiators proved to pose major obstacles to bargaining, not caused but facilitated and intensified by media reporting. We conclude, therefore, that the mediatisation of negotiations is for the most part negotiators' self-mediatisation.

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Introduction

Talk is silver, but silence is golden, a proverb says. Consequently, it is political negotiators' reserve towards the media which enables them to find compromises more easily (Elster 1989). Over the past decades the mode of consensual decision-making has increased in Western democracies. This process refers to the emergence of *governance* as a political response to increased transnational complexities caused by the denationalisation of markets and politics (Kooiman 2003; Benz 2004; Mayntz 2004). Governance in terms of consensual decision-making is characterised by political authorities who increasingly refrain from taking hierarchical decisions and involve public and private actors in political bargaining in order to reach more adequate and more stable political decisions (Benz 2001). At the same time, the media have undergone tremendous changes in terms of growth and diversification, a trend that has contributed to the emergence of *mediatised politics* (Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999; Strömbäck 2008; see also Strömbäck and Esser 2009). Since in the age of communication people basically rely on the mass media for political information (Bennett and Entman 2001), compromise-building is attracting the media's attention more than ever before, particularly in political systems whose rationale of decision-making is usually geared towards majority- instead of consensus-building. As a result, media can "sell" political actors' willingness to compromise as a weakness which can put their (re-)election at risk. Against this background, we raise the question how negotiators cope with the transformation of basic bargaining conditions. In this study we are mainly interested in whether negotiators feel impelled to balance bargaining and media management. With this as the challenge, we consider whether new bargaining routines have developed and how the efficiency of negotiations is judged.

Theoretical insights into media-driven changes in politics are provided by research on *political mediatisation* (Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999; Bennett and Entman 2001; Kepplinger 2002; Louw 2005; Strömbäck 2008). Technological progress and professionalism in the media have created additional reporting opportunities which have resulted in a considerable rise of media coverage of political actors, processes and outcomes. Many studies deal with the media's impact, through content or intensity, on political attitudes, participation, and election campaigns (Swanson and Mancini 1996; Farrell and Schmitt-Beck 2002; Delli Carpini 2004; Graber 2004). However, political decision-making and bargaining have generally been neglected (McGinn and Croson 2004; Kepplinger 2007; Marcinkowski 2007; Helms 2008).

To approach this research gap, we first outline the characteristics of political negotiations by referring to the governance and traditional bargaining literature. Then we elaborate the implications of front vs. back stage bargaining for negotiators' autonomy. Based on a brief discussion of the political mediatisation concept which basically relies on standing rules and routines of news production, we introduce the idea of mediatised negotiation: Provided that the public's political interests are concerned in some way, media reporting can make the public, which is physically excluded from political bargaining, an integral part of negotiators' bargaining strategies, implying an adaptation of negotiation routines. To test the empirical foundation of this hypothesis, we focused on Germany as it represents a typical negotiation democracy, and conducted semi-structured interviews with thirty-two officials who were involved in domestic political negotiations which took

place between 2002 and 2005. We conclude with a discussion of media's relevance in political bargaining, suggesting a less restrictive understanding of media impact for further research.

Characteristics of Political Bargaining

The formation of majorities is a key element of political problem-solving in modern democracies. Even though majority decisions are most common for governing bodies, cooperative politics in terms of political bargaining have greatly increased over the past few decades (Kooiman 2003; Benz 2004; Mayntz 2004). This mode of heterarchical decision-making "occurs above, below, and around the state" (Gregory 2008, 282) and follows the rationale of compromise that can be achieved through joint decisions by autonomous public actors or corporative self-regulation by private associations and public administrations (Scharpf 1997; Mayntz 2004). It typically appears in *consensus* democracies (e.g. Switzerland, Belgium) which are based on political structures such as multi-party systems, oversized multi-party coalition cabinets, and corporatist interest groups that allow for broad compromises (Lijphart 1999). In *majoritarian* (Westminster) democracies (e.g. the UK), however, heterarchical decision-making can be observed less often. This competing type of democracy rests upon the rationale of intense party competition which is structurally reflected by two-party systems, one-party cabinets or atomistic interest groups (Lijphart 1999).[1]

Interestingly, many Western democracies can be classified as neither consensus nor majoritarian democracies. They rely on party competition as the rationale of political problem-solving but engage in political bargaining quite frequently (Lijphart 1999). The research on comparative politics refers to this hybrid as *negotiation democracy* which can take up three forms which are not mutually exclusive (Czada 2000):[2] First, optional cooperation between political parties in highly segmented societies to constitute an oversized coalition government (consociational system, e.g. Switzerland, the Netherlands).[3] Second, conflict resolution in labour, social or structural policies through self-regulation by public administrations, organised interest groups and scientific experts (corporatist system, e.g. Germany, Scandinavian countries). And third, compulsory cooperation between decision-makers since approval of state actors such as legislative chambers is needed for certain policy changes (veto player system, e.g. Germany, Switzerland). All three types of negotiation networks are characterised by consensual decision-making. Yet, apart from the distinct nature of conflict issues and the logics of interaction, one peculiarity can be identified with regard to the *composition of actors*: They are legitimised to bargain either by political mandate (i.e. state and interest group representatives) or by proficiency (i.e. experts). As this heterogeneity of legitimation is closely related to the representation and satisfaction of interests, political actors' strategic moves and instrumental actions in negotiations may be shaped by expectations of public reactions.

Front Stage vs. Back Stage Bargaining

A certain degree of mutual trust between negotiators is required to achieve political compromises. Primarily on that condition, confidence in the credibility of each actor's statements can be built (prior to negotiations) or maintained (during

and after the bargaining process). While stable sets of negotiation rules and procedures are crucial for confidence-building (Scharpf 1997), *communication* also plays a decisive role (Elster 1989; 1991). By strategically employing threats or promises, actors can affect partners' negotiation strategies (inside options) or they can shift attention for selected issues to actors who are excluded from the negotiation process (outside options), be it the general public or particular target groups.

The credibility of threats and promises is a function of an actor's bargaining power that is mainly determined by structural characteristics (Putnam and Jones 1982). Even though equal opportunities are demanded, Schelling (1960) emphasises power asymmetries which rely on the assignment of process powers such as agenda setting or the right to sanction. Another source of power arises from public and stakeholder support for certain bargaining positions (Schelling 1960; Elster 1991). If, for instance, distributive issues are scheduled and negotiators' resources are unequally allocated to compensate for losses among stakeholders or a large part of the population, *publicity* becomes important as an alternative power source.

Contingent upon whether political negotiations are public (*front stage bargaining*) or private (*back stage bargaining*), the quality of discussion can vary (Meade and Stasavage 2006). This idea goes back to Goffman's distinction of stages: Front stages are places where actors behave according to ascribed roles because they can be observed by (an) audience(s). Back stage actions, however, are exclusive, i.e. actors' behaviour is visible only to people involved. As a consequence, actors can deviate from ascribed roles. The stage concept is applicable to everyday situations, but also to politics. Political front stages are characterised by public or broadcasted events (e.g. stage of party conventions, TV interviews) whereas political back stage actions are excluded from public observance (e.g. informal talks, committee meetings). Negotiations behind closed doors therefore mean that only the final decision is visible to the public, and negotiators can thus express dissenting opinions without having their reputation for expertise highly dependent on individual statements. In open sessions, by contrast, both the final decision and individual statements of participants are visible. Consequently, interest representatives may be tempted to adapt to the views of target audiences, resulting in pre-emptive self-criticism if their views are publicly unknown or in attitude-shifting if they are common (MacCoun and Goldman 2006). Further motives for being reluctant to openly express one's own opinions are that negotiation goals will be distorted, and public commitment to a position makes negotiators more resistant to moderating their views in light of subsequent arguments and thus to making concessions (MacCoun and Goldman 2006; Meade and Stasavage 2006). For these reasons, the exclusion of the public from the bargaining process can provide negotiators with the opportunity to demonstrate willingness to conciliate without losing credibility as their stakeholders' loyal advocates (Elster 1991).[4] The fact that bargaining officials represent stakeholder interests gives rise to a fundamental problem in political negotiations: Compromises can only be achieved by dissociating from one's target groups (Czada 1997).

To sum up so far: Political bargaining which is isolated from the public is expected to maintain mutual trust and to facilitate compromise.[5] Provided that negotiation actors are able to dissociate from stakeholders' influence, enough leeway is available for consensus-building. A full commitment to that "rule" will contribute to a stabilisation of mutual trust among negotiators. At the same time, the risk that

any of the negotiators will prematurely exit ongoing negotiations will decline.[6] We refer to this kind of political behaviour, i.e. bargaining isolated from the public, as highly corresponding with the rationale of consensual decision-making.

The Mediatisation of Political Bargaining

Privacy may facilitate political compromise-building by giving negotiators the autonomy to concede a point. Nonetheless, this reserve towards the public collides with a fundamental principle of democracy: Political institutions are expected to be transparent (Dahl 1998), otherwise officials cannot be held accountable for their actions and political decisions will lack legitimacy (Meade and Stasavage 2006; Naurin 2006).[7] Moreover, the media in particular tend to get provoked when confronted with closed doors (Marcinkowski 2005). As a main source of political information and crucial factor in public opinion-building (Bennett and Entman 2001), "[t]he media play an important, if not the most important, role in the public sphere" (Kooiman 2003, 40). Given significant progress in media technologies and increased professionalism among journalists, almost all politics in modern democracies can come under media scrutiny, ranging from highly competitive election campaigns to contentious legislative issues.

Politics can become not only mediated but also mediatised (Strömbäck 2008). In selecting and presenting political news, the mass media stick to regular patterns: Journalists focus on political events with high newsworthiness such as negativity, and tend to present them by personalising political processes, by emphasising differences instead of common positions among political actors, and by framing the policy-making process as a contest with winners and losers (Marcinkowski 2005; Koch-Baumgarten and Voltmer 2009). As a consequence, political actors show a tendency to align their political behaviour with the media standards of news production. In media democracies this phenomenon is referred to as *mediatisation* (cf. Lundby 2009). In general this concept "relates to changes associated with communication and their development" (Schulz 2004, 88). A more specific definition is provided by Mazzoleni and Schulz (1999) who stress concomitants and effects of the mass media's development on political processes. In the political communication literature, there is a lively debate about the degree to which media and political institutions interact and to what extent media content and political actors' behaviour are governed by the logic of the media or politics (e.g. Mazzoleni 1987; Kepplinger 2007; Schulz 2004; Strömbäck 2008).[8] As the mass media have penetrated politics, we are wondering how political negotiators can achieve and maintain the level of privacy that is needed to achieve compromises. So far, most empirical studies have focused on media impact on political processes and outcomes instead of negotiators' options for action. Nevertheless, from a theoretical perspective the mediatisation literature provides a thorough grounding for approaching this research problem.

The mediatisation of politics constitutes a basic condition of political bargaining (McGinn and Croson 2004). But by definition, the rationales of media publicity and political negotiation are incompatible: The media call for transparency in political processes and show specific interest in individuals, conflicts and negative outcomes. Negotiations, on the other hand, require an atmosphere of privacy which allows for compromises, communicated to the public as collective decisions without indica-

ting any winner or loser (Marcinkowski 2005; 2007). Given this incompatibility, a considerable decline in the quantity and quality of negotiation outcomes might be likely (Grande 2004; Spörer-Wagner and Marcinkowski 2010). In particular, distributive issues are expected to have stronger impacts on large segments of society than regulatory issues (Koch-Baumgarten and Voltmer 2009). As a consequence, not only stakeholders but large parts of the population may ask for detailed information about negotiations: Prior to negotiations, journalists can press bargaining officials to take up a stance on selected issue(s), thereby restricting their scope to negotiate (MacCoun and Goldman 2006; Meade and Stasavage 2006). While bargaining is ongoing, wild public guesses about each negotiator's positions and resources will appear if a strict closed-door policy is pursued. Even after a compromise has been achieved, negotiators must be aware of the fact that negotiation outcomes will be assessed through the eyes of the media, thus personalising success and failure.

As outlined above, decision-making behind closed doors is neither realistic nor desirable to bargaining officials. As a consequence, "[n]ews management encompasses more than just keeping secrets secret" (Sigal 1973, 343): Negotiators have to interact to some extent with the media. Against the background of being observed and judged by various audiences, not only is a transformation of politics likely; even negotiators' strategic repertoire of bargaining can change (cf. Kernell 1997a, b; see also Sellers 2010). Since political actors tend to consider the media as the public opinion (Herbst 1998; Kepplinger 2007) and are expected to represent stakeholders' interests in political negotiations, bargaining officials will find it difficult to change their mind in view of new arguments once they have committed themselves to a given position in public (Chambers 2004; Naurin 2006). This triple challenge can prompt political officials' use of blame-avoidance strategies, as elaborated by adherents of the public administration school (Hood 2007). By organising press conferences, press releases or background briefings for journalists, they provide information channels which can be easily controlled. Information disseminated for that reason typically has a broad character, referring to overarching policy goals and well-known policy positions (Hood 2007).[9] More comprehensive media models have been developed by the public diplomacy school (Cohen 1986; Rawnsley 1995; Entman 2008). Gilboa (2000) focuses on mass media's impact on international negotiations and claims that officials are able to protect sensitive negotiations from the public even in the age of modern communications (Gilboa 2000, 278-290). Based on negotiation-specific contexts such as actor composition or issue, negotiators can limit media exposure, ranging from no public access (secret diplomacy), moderate (closed-door diplomacy) to extensive (open diplomacy). The former strategy allows for enormous concessions and therefore compromises; the second can help to break political impasses, and political actors has stabilisation effects only.[10] Accordingly, by delivering only a rough picture of the negotiation progress to the media, political negotiators can meet the transparency obligation by keeping enough room to bargain.

Nevertheless, bargaining officials can also exploit the media public for selfish reasons. While experts are expected to pursue their own agenda in terms of fundraising, political actors can increase their bargaining power through the mobilisation of external support, which is particularly likely when salient issues such as labour or social policies are discussed and unattractive policy options have to be killed

(Sigal 1973; Canes-Wrone 2001).[11] Effective strategies to *go public* are information leaks, characterised as diffuse sources of insider knowledge (Sigal 1973) expected to have impact on political negotiations (Sigal 1973; Davison 1974). In international negotiations, non-authorised information can contribute to illumination of the negotiation issue, facilitation of intra-governmental coordination or inter-group cooperation (Davison 1974). The circulation of non-authorised information also allows for a pre-assessment of domestic reactions to international negotiation proposals (Trumbore 1998). If negotiators feel unsure about alternatives, they can also float trial balloons which tend, however, to undermine trust (Davison 1974). Although media instrumentalisation has a tendency to decrease the quality of international negotiation outcomes (Gilboa 2000), similar effects at the national level have not become evident (Koch-Baumgarten and Voltmer 2009; see also Koch-Baumgarten and Voltmer 2010). Nonetheless, premature public disclosure of one side's negotiation strategy makes bargaining more difficult, especially for disadvantaged parties. An inauspicious climate for discussion will be generated by damaging a negotiator's confidence in him/herself or in his/her belief that he/she has sufficient public support (Davison 1974). But even erroneous public reports can complicate intra-governmental coordination, as denials or corrective press releases absorb large amounts of time and energy.

The literature review on mediatisation and political bargaining suggests that negotiators are aware of both the political challenge of achieving compromises and the media challenge of allowing for some process transparency. Since political bargaining cannot be isolated from the public in media democracies, negotiators cooperate to some extent with the media. This kind of cooperation, we assume, is guided by negotiators' knowledge of how media produce political news as well as their intellectual capacity and experience to anticipate media's impact on bargaining. As a consequence, negotiators will be attracted to develop and employ media strategies and routines complementary to or in place of prevailing negotiation strategies. In other words, we argue that depending on an actor's nature, bargaining officials are confronted with a negotiation reality which can vary in meaning and significance. One dimension is *legitimacy-driven* and refers to the expectations of stakeholders; the other is *efficiency-driven* and refers to the likelihood of achieving a mutual agreement. Both dimensions are considered to be interdependent, since the process and outcome of negotiations can affect the likelihood of political actors' re-election and experts' re-appointment. As a consequence, state and interest group representatives who are contingent upon one or the other form of democratic legitimation are expected to take into account both the legitimacy and efficiency dimensions. Experts, in contrast, are appointed due to professional expertise and can therefore neglect the legitimacy dimension. In line with this argumentation and due to their practice in interacting with target audiences and the media respectively, we expect political actors to be more careful with the media than scientific experts. More generally, bargaining and public communication strategies have to be coordinated carefully to prevent political negotiations from dysfunctions which may result from inconsistent operational logics of bargaining and news production. This phenomenon is what we refer to as *mediatised negotiations*.[12] Instead of asserting that the rationales of bargaining and news production are utterly incompatible, negotiators' media-related thinking can cause frictions,

provided certain conditions are met. By focusing on actors' strategic behaviour, this hypothesis goes beyond the conventional understanding of media impact on political processes and outcomes.

Political Bargaining under Media Scrutiny

Research Design and Data

In the empirical part of this paper we aim to find empirical evidence for mediatised negotiations at the individual level. More specifically, we are interested in gathering a better understanding of negotiators' bargaining behaviour and in clarifying to what extent this behaviour is related to the media. Based on thirty-two qualitative interviews with bargaining officials involved in three different German political negotiations, we collected the required data and analysed it by applying a mixed method strategy combining qualitative and quantitative techniques.

As suggested in the section on the nature of political bargaining, Germany represents a typical negotiation democracy (Czada 2000). Although intensive party competition is characteristic of German politics, political decision-making emerges as rather consensual with particularly strong corporatist and constitutional veto qualities. Even at the level of the federal government, consociational characteristics can be observed in terms of voluntary coordination mechanisms which were established by the coalition composed of the Social Democratic and Green parties in 1998. Based on the structural dimensions of negotiation democracies (consociational, corporatist and constitutional veto system type), we selected three negotiation cases in the second period of Schröder's chancellorship (2002-2005): The coalition committee of the Federal Government addressing labour and social issues,[13] the Commission for Sustainability in Financing the Social Security Systems (Rürup Commission),[14] and the joint mediation committee of the German Federal Parliament concerned with the reform of the labour market (Hartz legislation).[15] Each of the selected negotiation cases was subject to intensive media scrutiny, dealt with a redistributive policy, and, was characterised by negotiators with distinct legitimatory backgrounds. We purposely focused on highly mediated bargaining cases because political negotiations without any media exposure do not deliver any information on media's impact on negotiators' bargaining behaviour. We also gave priority treatment to redistributive over regulative policy issues as the former are expected to mobilise more than the latter if they become public. And last but not least, the negotiators' political and social characteristics differ along the selected cases.

Based on our case selection, we conducted thirty-two semi-structured interviews with bargaining officials. This sample resulted from a self-recruiting process, although we intended to produce a full sample composed of sixty-five negotiation participants. Table 1 displays the composition of the interview sample.[16]

The proportion of male respondents is roughly four times higher than that of female participants, while interviewees are more equally distributed with regard to age as an indicator of seniority. Remarkable deviations occur relative to respondents' party and institutional affiliations: More than half of them are members of a left-wing party whereas 15 percent have a right-wing orientation and one-third is unaffiliated with a political party. Furthermore, the majority of the interviewees

Table 1: Composition of Interview Sample

Characteristics of interviewees		Number of interviewees
Sex	Female	7
	Male	25
Age	< 40	2
	40 to 49	10
	50 to 59	9
	> 60	11
Party affiliation	Right-wing parties	5
	Left-wing parties	17
	n.a.	10
Institutional affiliation	Politics	26
	Academia	6

can be considered as political actors (affiliated to state institutions or organised interest groups) while one-fifth of them is affiliated to academia. As academic experts usually do not represent social group interests in public, we expect them to treat and judge the media differently than political actors.

To generate data on how the (self-)selected bargaining officials perceived, assessed and responded to the media's attention compared to other factors expected to have an impact on their bargaining strategies, we posed five open-ended questions in a fixed order. We opted for this interview strategy to avoid a response bias among the interviewees in terms of socially desirable behaviour. The questions were as follows:

(1) Which factors challenged the negotiations most?
(2) How do you assess the media's interest in the negotiations?
(3) How did you cope with media interest?
(4) How did the media's interest affect the negotiations?
(5) In general, how do you consider the role of the media in political negotiations?

Interviewing took place between September 2008 and January 2009. On average, each interview session took up to 60 minutes. For all thirty-two interviews, transcripts were prepared and analysed based on a standardised coding scheme. Deriving from theoretical considerations, this scheme consisted of dichotomous and categorical variables which covered the most relevant factors affecting and describing bargaining processes and results with an emphasis on the media. Coding followed the logic of positive or negative reference to the issue under consideration. For example, when a respondent noticed "hostile interpersonal communicative behaviour among bargaining officials," we coded this statement as "aggressive communication" as opposed to "constructive communication" (dummy variable). When a compromise was characterised as a bad deal, we coded such responses not as "no compromise" or "full compromise" but as "partial compromise" (categorical variable). In a final step, all coding results were transformed into quantitative data. As a rule, we accepted multiple responses, e.g. an interviewee mentioned "information leaks," "party politics" and "time pressure" as challenging factors for the

negotiation process at hand. If the same interviewee insisted on information leaks as being the most challenging factor by repeating his statement several times, we counted his response only once. When coding was complete, for those responses which resulted in ambiguous or non-values, existing variables were adjusted or dropped. The generated data were interpreted based on frequency and distribution analyses; bivariate cross-tabulations were used to identify generalisable patterns.

Negotiators' Perceptions and Responses

The empirical objective of our paper is to gain a better understanding of negotiators' bargaining behaviour and to clarify to what extent this behaviour is related to the media. A comprehensive analysis of mediatised negotiations therefore requires, first of all, a sketch of how bargaining officials perceive the media environment in which ongoing political negotiations are embedded. Table 2 summarises the most relevant categories mentioned by the respondents. Multiple answers were permitted, so categories are not mutually exclusive. Due to the diversity of responses, only those items that score higher than 8 respondents are listed.

Table 2: Perception of Media Environment

Media environment	**Number of respondents (N = 32)**
High density of reporting	21
High physical presence of journalists	16
Biased reporting	10
Negative reporting	8
Non-competent reporting	8
Personalized reporting	8

A large majority of the interviewees referred to the remarkable intensity of media reporting on the negotiation issue and process. Even though bargaining is usually a focus of media attention, media interest has obviously increased, particularly in the capital city of Berlin, as one informant stated: "The media landscape has changed considerably in Berlin compared to Bonn." According to him, political disputes prior to and during negotiations attracted a great deal of media attention in the former German capital as well. But the media of the Berlin Republic have emerged as more concentrated in terms of the number of media representatives, generating more competition for exclusive political information and, to some extent, more aggressive media coverage.

Many interviewees identified an exceptional physical presence of journalists prior to, during and after negotiations. On-site, TV journalists were in search of quick and forceful statements; newspaper persons, in contrast, attempted to contact negotiators on "neutral" territory such as in their business offices. Bypassing the media was neither desirable nor possible: "It cannot be that bargaining takes place behind closed doors … and results will be consistently implemented. This notion corresponds with a pre-democratic thinking. We couldn't enter the building due to the crowd of journalists." Another interviewee, in contrast, pointed to me-

dia-free zones as a prerequisite for successful compromise building: "If you want to achieve a compromise, you need discretionary zones. So never ever breathe a word about it [bargaining]." The reason why some discretion is required was given by a fourth respondent: "The media try to exert influence on political decisions by pushing decision-makers into a specific direction while interviewing them." So public hearings were organised or media requests were delegated to official spokespersons or to the news management department of participating negotiators. Even off-the-record conversations with journalists took place. Nevertheless, a considerable number of negotiators tried to avoid the media by using rear exits even if there were security areas (escape tactic) or by simply refusing to make any public statement (denial tactic).

Apart from journalists' obtrusive efforts to obtain statements from negotiators, the political news framing met also with criticism. Although media coverage was characterised as sound and critical in general, according to a considerable number of the informants, news tended to be too negative, biased and personalised. The Rürup Commission, for example, was framed as the nation's scapegoat, aiming at destroying the intergenerational contract in social security, as one respondent noted. This bias resulted in a distorted public perception of the Commission, according to several respondents. Other interviewees pointed at the media's tendency to focus on hardliners' statements, distracting undesirable media attention from negotiation "softliners."

The empirical evidence has shown so far that most of the respondents have a quite detailed picture of the media environment they were embedded in during negotiations. Nonetheless, as can be concluded from the interviews, in the eyes of political actors the mass media as such "neither harm nor push" bargaining processes. Table 3 shows the major obstacles to the bargaining process as mentioned by the interviewed bargaining officials. Again, multiple answers were possible. In total, twenty-three items could be identified but only those which scored higher than ten respondents are listed.

Table 3: Major Obstacles to Political Bargaining

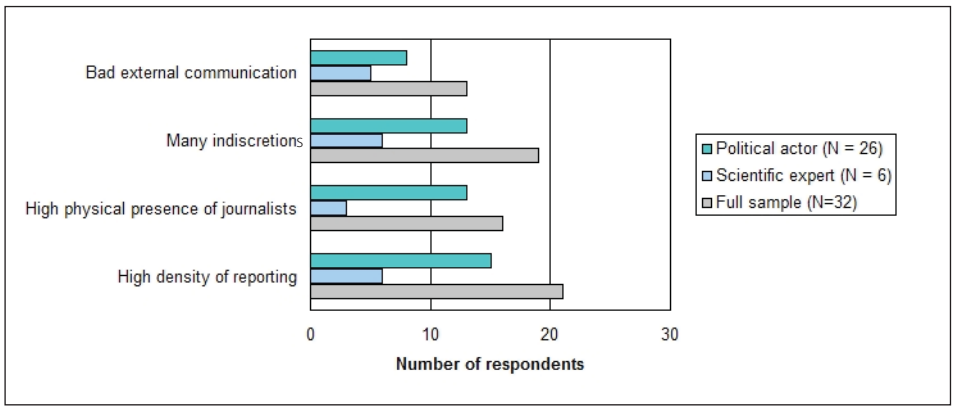
Negotiation context	**Number of respondents (N = 32)**
Issue management	22
Indiscretion	19
Network composition	16
Institutional conflicts	16
Pressure politics	15
Re-/distributive issue	13
External communication	13
Issue instrumentalisation by external actors	12
Workload	11
Leadership of chairman	10

According to some respondents, the most relevant factors that complicated bargaining were inherent in the negotiations at hand (e.g. complexity of negotiation mandate, tensions between political institutions involved such as the Federal Parliament and the Federal Council, and actor heterogeneity of the Rürup Commission). However, on closer inspection of the data it becomes clear that two aspects refer to the media implicitly: In line with one respondent's statement that "if negotiators really want to achieve an agreement but a detail of bargaining reaches the public, the compromise can be dashed when the disseminated information was salient," a large number of the interviewees pointed to unauthorised public statements. Many of them identified unprofessional official news management as obstacles to achieving compromises.[17] Negotiation leaders in particular were expected "to direct compromise building by protecting negotiators from the public" and to "discipline dissenters."

Based on respondents' information, two main strategies were pursued to interact with the media: For avoiding public cacophony, speakers were appointed in line with bargaining function, group affiliation or professional competences. Spokespersons were authorised to announce interim results of the negotiations, to inform about issues in dispute, to announce deadlines or, if compromises were at risk of failure, to assign blame to others in order to deflect blame from themselves. The dissemination of alternative policy options or individual accusations was not permitted. Nevertheless, individual statements could be given provided that comments related solely to the area of personal expertise and referred to information already circulated by authorised speakers. Even though news management regulations had been established, rules were violated by some negotiators. As indicated by a number of respondents, the circulation of confidential information frequently occurred by text message or unauthorised reports. The spread of non-authorised information was also facilitated by diffuse communication networks, which had resulted mainly from the number or heterogeneity of negotiators, inefficient news management by the negotiation leadership, or uncoordinated statements by appointed speakers.[18]

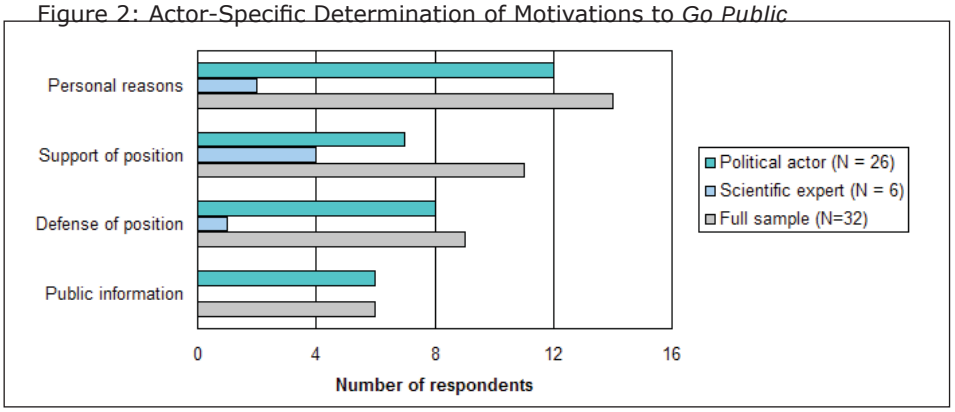
Academic experts' perceptions of the media environment were consistently more intensive than those of political actors. Figure 1 shows in more detail how the different bargaining actors perceived the media environment and assessed bargaining actors' media-related behaviour. The results displayed in Figure 1 rely on the data presented in Table 2 and 3. While the latter are generally accustomed to public observation, academics' public experiences are usually limited. Instead of representing corporate interests, they are appointed to add new arguments to the bargaining process based on their academic expertise. Not surprisingly, then, among the experts, incomprehension prevailed about the media's engagement in confusing expert positions with political ones, the obvious lack of journalists' policy know-how and political actors' tendency to circulate information in the public with purpose. As one expert said, for example, "experts constitute neither a court nor a parliament; they are independent of political majorities." Conversely, some of the political respondents speculated that non-politicians cannot adequately respond to media pressure as they are not used to interacting with the media which have become an essential part of politics. As illustrated in Figure 2, two main motives causing indiscretion can be deduced from negotiators' responses. Again, the categories are not mutually exclusive and respondents could give multiple answers.

Figure 1: Actor-Specific Perception of Media Impact on Political Bargaining



Based on a chi-square test, all variables are significant at the .05 level except for the journalists' presence variable (not significant) and the media coverage variable (0.1 level).

Figure 2: Actor-Specific Determination of Motivations to *Go Public*



Based on a chi-square test, the support variable is significant at the .01 level.

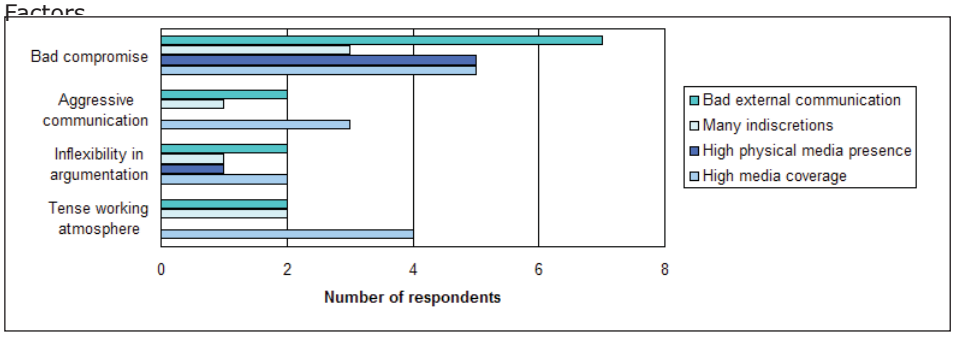
The first motive is supported by a majority of informants who assume selfish negotiators attempting to advance their individual career by generating, for instance, new contacts to the media, and pushing or defending bargaining positions by reducing compromise options, especially during election campaigns. One political respondent acknowledged the need to defend stakeholder interests in the public: "Everybody knows the constraints of the other. As a consequence, it is comprehensible that stakeholder positions must be defended against competitors, that PR has to be made." One of the scientific experts, however, emphasised the instrumental power of the media for strengthening specific positions: "If you can't find majorities within … a larger group, proposals [covering competitive interests] must be made public in order to be dashed. That is part of the game."

The second motive refers to the democratic mandate of public information which is mentioned by only some interviewees. In short, as one respondent reported, non-confidential behaviour is usually interest-driven and only occasionally a matter of

individual style ("vanity ball"). It also became evident that academic experts expect indiscretions to occur as a means of revealing bargaining positions, while political actors consider them a publicity pusher for personal reasons.

The empirical findings suggest that confidence violation is part of the negotiation game. Even though promising bargaining relies on "[negotiators who] are expected to keep secret as much detail as possible,"more than once it was mentioned that some degree of publicity is needed. For a few informants, publicity generated through the media is even part of political bargaining without turning it into a public event, since "nobody wants to be the one who gains short-term media publicity at the expense of a potential compromise." Based on respondents' statements, for the most part, delegation considerations serve as a means to justify negotiators' addiction to the public: Political negotiators depend on regular public assessment of their political performance to remain in office. Irrespective of publicity motives, advanced communication skills are required from negotiators to inform adequately about bargaining positions, delegates' efforts and (interim) results for different target audiences such as parliamentary groups, government, state administrations, stakeholders, or the public at large. Based on the empirical analyses, a dynamic media environment in terms of media coverage and presence of journalists as well as selfish and inefficient public communication occur as major media-related factors affecting political bargaining. The data displayed in Figure 3 summarise the bargaining assessment of those respondents who considered one or more of the four above-mentioned factors relevant.

Figure 3: Assessment of Political Bargaining Contingent on Major Media-Related Factors



Along with the bargaining process, we focused on the working atmosphere, and negotiators' capability to introduce and defend their positions, as well as the style of interpersonal communication. As indicated by a few respondents, intense media coverage, many indiscretions and inefficient news management activities correspond with a deterioration of the bargaining atmosphere. The most unstressed atmosphere prevails when doors are closed and journalists are kept out. These findings, however, fit only partly the respondents' expectations of how media usually affect bargaining: Some of them anticipated a complication of the negotiation process.[19] Referring to the politics-academia distinction, a considerable number of experts stated a worsening of the working atmosphere compared to only a few politicians.

As it is atypical to sanction the dissemination of confidential information (e.g. through replacement), apart from frequent interruptions of ongoing discussions,

even negotiation routines were modified on short notice: First, instead of electronic invitations that had included off the record material more than often, handouts were provided at the beginning of negotiation sessions. Second, working groups were established and were intended to meet at the same time in order to release the negotiation assembly from public pressure and to push consensus-building. Third, the amount of informal contacts increased, in particular between negotiators with similar goals and arguments. Fourth, to compensate for failed individual news management, intensive discussions took place at the beginning of each meeting, or working lunches or dinners were organised by chairpersons. Fifth, unscheduled press conferences or press releases emerged as more visible correction measures. Finally, exit had been considered by minor actors, but this idea was abandoned because exit prevents codetermination and makes a loss of reputation more likely.

Astonishingly, while anonymous information leaks tended to destroy policy options in advance, personalisable indiscretions provided grounds for new discussions, as one experienced political negotiator noted. According to him, coping with information leaks is merely a technical problem, given that indiscretions usually make much ado about nothing. Thus, as confirmed by many respondents, mediated information does not cause conflicts, but either reflects or intensifies existing ones. Unauthorised information resulted not only in more difficult bargaining processes but also triggered public information avalanches in terms of counterstatements intended to inform or calm down affected stakeholders. Nevertheless, some negotiators' public inclination turned out to be beneficial for bargaining since it distracted media attention from working groups.

Compared to the negotiation process, respondents showed more media sensitivity towards the bargaining outcome. Although one respondent indicated that the negotiation results did not suffer from any media impact, a considerable number of informants identified serious problems accumulating in the media's pressure for quick compromises: "They can't achieve an agreement anyway." This resulted in bad compromises, according to some respondents. More interestingly, this finding corresponds with a small number of respondents' expectation that the number of available options for compromise decreased. Among the respondents, a majority of the scientific experts considered the compromise a bad deal whereas only a minority of the politicians appeared as critical as that. Bad compromises were defined as either optional (i.e. parallel and preliminary) solutions or minority votes intended to satisfy stakeholder interests of each negotiation party:[20] Optional solutions represent genuine political decisions from which only one will succeed (usually the most efficient); minority votes stress relevant aspects deviating from the final outcome which, however, can contribute to more efficient political decision-making at a later stage.[21] In general, those respondents who looked upon the compromise rather pessimistically cited the intensity of media reporting and the mode of external communication most frequently. The physical presence of journalists was of minor importance, suggesting that chairpersons did a rather good job in protecting negotiators from the public, for example, by chatting with journalists or, when organising meetings, by taking advantage of huge negotiation buildings which provide negotiators numerous opportunities to retreat from media representatives.

Political actors are less sensitive to distortions of bargaining processes and outcomes. Unlike experts, political negotiators have to blow their trumpet in public, and

most of them are aware of risks arising from media involvement. As one political informant emphasised, interaction with the media can be compared with a circus horse: Some can control it, but others fall down. Exposure to media has to be learnt, and consequently, it was no big surprise that some of the academics walked into the media trap – intentionally or not. Among other things, it was frequently criticised that academics tended to present individual positions on behalf of the negotiation leadership. By contrast, the quality of compromise came under criticism from academics. They complained about the lack of scholarliness, or, as noted by one respondent, "a good compromise has to be perfectly structured and economically reasonable." Consequently, political compromises can imply problems for academics' professional reputation. Nevertheless, the academics' uncoordinated public approaches oppose the logic of bargaining and can violate citizens' confidence in politics given that academics are not accountable for political decisions. Therefore, political respondents in particular expressed the desire for academic statements to be postponed until the announcement of the final decisions.

Discussion and Conclusion

Public talk during political negotiations is not always silver. It can be golden if negotiators master public communication in a way that ensures that the process of bargaining will never be put at risk. Even though public exposure is postulated to impede political bargaining in media democracies, neither bargaining actors nor processes can be isolated from the general public. This study's empirical findings suggest that, first, negotiators are aware of the need to manage bargaining and public communication simultaneously. This consciousness, however, seems to be less pronounced with academic experts than with political negotiators. Second, new bargaining routines have developed from the need to counterbalance negotiation dysfunctions stipulated by unauthorised or ineffective public communication. Third, the death knell of political negotiations has not sounded yet, but political negotiators to some extent perceive themselves challenged to meet both their stakeholders' and negotiation partners' demands.

Based on the newly introduced definition of mediatised negotiation, whereby negotiators consider and employ media strategies that are complementary to or replace typical bargaining routines, in this study we focused on the strategies of thirty-two German bargaining officials to cope with intensive public observation of contested negotiation issues. We were able to show that these negotiators had a quite detailed picture of both the media and political context of ongoing negotiations. Since bargaining officials are usually dependent on public responses to remain in office, they allow some publicity of negotiations. It became evident that a number of formalised instruments were available to satisfy the media's interest without jeopardising bargaining as such. Nevertheless, indiscretions and ineffective public communication occurred as major obstacles to compromise, not caused but facilitated and intensified by media reporting.

Media tend to have ad hoc effects on political bargaining, covering different rules and procedures to manage cooperation among negotiators and, of course, with the media. Apparently, media logic is omnipresent in political negotiations, but it does not put them at risk per se: Rather, media impact can be generalised as institutional responses by strategically thinking negotiators that can make dif-

ficult bargaining and inefficient compromises more likely. Even if the approaches we applied to collect and analyse our data do not allow for generalisable results, we tried to make clear that mediatised negotiations are more than an empirical artifact worth studying in more detail. More systematic comparisons either at the institutional level of political negotiations or across nations could help to test the validity of our preliminary results. In addition, systematic analyses of the impact of various degrees of media scrutiny can shed more light on the media impact on bargaining processes and routines. Related to this suggestion, an additional actor type should be considered for further research: journalists. They could contribute to the discussion of which factors make (which type of) political negotiations more attractive than others. Furthermore, it would be interesting to evaluate journalists' understanding of political bargaining and the extent to which it differs, for instance, from that of academic experts.

Our qualitative data imply that political actors seem to show a deft hand in handling media and public interests. But the results from this study also suggest that political negotiations are very context-sensitive, making media strategies more likely under certain conditions. Approaches that consider both different types of negotiation systems and the extent of media exposure can be promising for future research. We suggest three scenarios of negotiation-media arrangements to be analyzed: First, political negotiations take place unnoticed by the media, although negotiators are authorised to take decisions of consequence. This case is most likely under the condition that basic criteria for selecting political news are not met, simply because low-ranking negotiators are involved, the negotiation issue is of less public significance or has to compete with more salient issues for media attention. Second, political negotiations are highly mediatised and benefit from intensive media scrutiny. Provided that the issue at hand is both relevant to the majority of the people (re-/distributive issues) and treated morally by the media, public attention can be considered a catalyst: either for political compromises, if mutual agreements are unlikely for whatever reason and negotiators may not opt out, or for "successful failure", if negotiation networks have been established with the (only) purpose being to incur the wrath of the public so that executives can enhance chances to make essential but less fundamental decisions. Last but not least, negotiations under intensive public observation face difficulties that range from postponement to deadlock of consensus-building. Such constellations are most likely when the negotiation issue is of public importance but cannot be politically solved. By launching and maintaining media strategies, individual negotiators, who may not exit the bargaining process, focus on the improvement of their strategic position in either opposition-government or federal-level power plays.

Based on this study's empirical findings we suggest a less restrictive understanding of the mediatisation of politics. Since media effects can also be observed at the level of actors' subjective perception, further research could contribute to the clarification of conditions under which negotiators' behaviour are more likely to be mediatised. Even if the rationales of bargaining and news production are incompatible, media logic's emergence is neither unavoidable nor unmanageable. To interact with the media, a large set of instruments is at negotiators' disposal, all of which, however, affect the process and outcome of political bargaining. As outlined above, further research could shed light on the circumstances in which each instrument is most likely to be used, and what effects this will have on bargaining.

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Notes:

1. Consensus and majoritarian democracies differ along two dimensions: The executive-parties dimension refers to the likelihood that a single party can take complete control of the government; the federal-unitary dimension deals with the opportunities available to a government to change policy and minority rights (Lijphart 1999).

2. Frequently used synonyms for "negotiation democracy" in comparative political research are "bargaining democracy" and "system of negotiations."

3. Apart from "institutionalised" coalition cabinets as in Switzerland, grand coalitions can also be established, for instance in Austria or Germany. Those are composed of the two strongest parliamentary groups, i.e. Social and Christian Democrats.

4. The same logic applies to post-consensus situations by selling a compromise as a collective result without specifying winners and losers (Elster 1989).

5. Despite the strong normative claim for discretion, the empirical research on the mediatisation of political bargaining shows that some disclosure of political bargaining details can be a catalyst for compromise-building (see review and discussion of mediatisation research literature, pp. 9-12).

6. According to Czada (1997), the more segments of society a negotiator represents, the less likely a premature exit will be.

7. Transparency is defined by the extent to which citizens have access to information about political events and processes (Naurin 2006).

8. The political logic is referred to as "collective and authoritative decision making as well as the implementation of political decisions" (Strömbäck 2008, 233).

9. Prior to decision-making processes, officials also engage in the delegation of responsibilities to dilute political accountability for resulting decisions.

10. Empirical evidence suggests that negotiating participants with strong opposing positions were more flexible when media coverage was limited (Druckman and Druckman 1996).

11. Contrary to the democratic norm according to which many officials inform the public about politics since they feel they have an obligation to do so, ego gratification is another explanation to go public (Sigal 1973).

12. McGinn and Croson (2004) also use this terminology but they refer to the degree to which face-to-face negotiations are affected by electronic media.

13. Based on a coalition contract, Social Democrats and Greens met once a month to mediate contested policy issues. In the years from 2002 to 2005, the commission agenda was dominated by almost the same labour and social issues; we therefore consider the entire bargaining period as one negotiation case.

14. This commission was appointed by the German government to make recommendations for a social security reform. It was composed of social and economic interest representatives as well as scientific experts, convened in November 2002 and ended with the presentation of the final report in August 2003.

15. Between November 2002 and December 2003, delegates of the Federal Parliament (Bundestag) and Council (Bundesrat) prepared four legislative packages for approval in the Federal Parliament.

16. The interview sample covers 49 percent of the actual group of negotiators whose individual and institutional characteristics are appropriately represented by the interviewees.

17. Interestingly, almost all informants identified individual news management as the most relevant news selection criteria for the media. A large majority of the respondents referred to conflict-related aspects such as re-/distributive issues, external power struggles between government and trade unions or within government, or the high profile of individual negotiators.

18. Occasionally, even untrustworthy journalists were indicated as a source of information leaks and leaks also arose quite frequently from a large number of working sessions. Interestingly, some interviewees stated that the absence of formalised news management established fertile ground for indiscretions.

19. As indicated by one respondent, the spread of confidential information can also result in additional negotiation sessions, meaning not only a delay in compromise-finding but also an increase in the costs of implementing final outcomes. But even if no information leaks appear and compromise could be achieved quickly, a number of sessions have to be held as a kind of ritual expected by the public.

20. Many respondents pointed out that after the final decision had been officially announced, both types of bad compromises attracted intense media interest.

21. A good compromise was defined by most of the respondents as a political outcome that sufficiently accounts for the interests of each negotiation party.

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UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEMATIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ECONOMICS AND COMMUNICATION STUDIES AND POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

SERGIO SPARVIERO

Abstract

This article argues that communication scholars should collaborate with pluralist economists rather than traditional ones, as alternative economic theories are better suited to understanding the evolution of communication industries and to integration into multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks. In order to illustrate this point, first the main features of traditional economics that are incompatible with the study of the communication sector are outlined, then, a selection of theories and concepts from complexity economics, service innovation studies and the neo-Schumpeterian approach are presented. Moreover, as an example of the efficacy of alternative economic theories for explaining change in the communication sector, these concepts are used to provide arguments for the convergence of media and communication industries and to describe the main innovation drivers of the video tape and disk rental industry.

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The Contradictory Relationship Between Mainstream Economics and Communication Studies

George Stigler once defined economics as an imperial science because economists attempt to "colonise" other disciplines by investigating various topics with their tools and methodology (Stigler 1984, cited by Wildman 2008). At least to a certain extent, communication studies have also been victims of this colonisation: as Wildman (2008) notes, the communication field is absorptive and outward-looking and its scholars tend to incorporate findings from related research by economists, while economists are much less inclined to cite the work of communication researchers. However, in this paper it is argued that only the "neoclassical" and mainstream economic approach is closed, inward-looking and "imperialist" and that communication scholars should find it more efficient to look into alternative economic approaches for concepts that can support their theories, given that alternative economic approaches are absorptive, outward-looking and more similar and compatible with communication studies in many ways.

In order to explain why mainstream economists rarely cite the work of communication researchers, one has to understand the fundamental characteristics of the neoclassical approach. First of all, neoclassical writers adopt deductive reasoning and mathematical modelling to describe economic dynamics and to solve economic problems, most of which can be said to be grounded on understanding individuals' choices of allocation of scarce means between alternative uses (Hodgson 2004). *Deduction* is a process of reasoning in which the conclusions must logically follow from a set of premises and it is particularly useful to find a solution (or a set of solutions) to defined problems. When this set of premises is complex, solutions can be found with deductive reasoning by using computers. *Induction*, on the other hand, is reasoning by pattern recognition and by drawing conclusions from a preponderance of evidence (Beinhocker 2007). So, if deduction is the reasoning process of computers, induction is reasoning process used, for example, by doctors to cure patients. After gathering as much information as possible from a patient, directly or from other sources, a doctor decides on a treatment course that, although the life of the patient might depend on, is nothing more than his or her best guess. A doctor cannot be sure to provide a solution to the patient's problem, because he or she relies on partial information and because he or she might be facing the unknown (i.e. a new disease). Moreover, "trial and error" is a methodology associated with inductive reasoning: when a doctor observes that a treatment does not provide the expected results, he or she uses the new information for a new best guess.

Deduction, meanwhile, is applied to find solutions to problems that are well defined, i.e. without ambiguity or information missing (Beinhocker 2007). Therefore, in order to use deduction and mathematical modelling, mainstream economists adopt neoclassical assumptions to remove uncertainty from economic problems. These assumptions transform consumers into rational individuals, whose behaviour is standardised and can be forecast and modelled. Hence, in economic models framed using standard neoclassical assumptions (which will be referred to here also as "traditional economic models"), first, individuals have the same consumption preferences; second, and more importantly, they have access to any piece of information they need; third, they are able to interpret all of this information to

make perfectly informed decisions on how to maximise their consumption (see Beinhocker 2007).[1]

The standardised firm is the object of neoclassical models when production is the focus of an economic analysis. As in the example above, this firm has access to information and takes perfectly informed decisions about prices and quantities to be produced so that its profits are maximised. Moreover, the quantities and prices chosen by all of the firms as assumed to match consumers' expectations, therefore they represent a given market's equilibrium. This equilibrium is only temporary as changes outside of the system-model (including people's inventions and government actions) occur and put the equilibrium under pressure. As firms (and individuals) are, however, assumed to have a perfect understanding of the consequences of these changes, they take new rational decisions leading to a new equilibrium. Assuming the existence of markets' equilibria is fundamental and has a crucial effect: it is necessary to justify the existence of models' solutions, but also, it implies that markets are self-regulating.

Nelson and Winter's seminal critique of the neoclassical approach (Nelson and Winter 1982) explains why this is not absorptive and imperialist. They argue that neoclassical theories define the economic variables, the relationships that are important to understand, the way in which explanations are acceptable and, more generally, certain ways of talking about economic phenomena. Consequently and by exclusion, neoclassical economic theories also classify some phenomena as peripheral, unimportant and theoretically uninteresting, and certain kinds of explanations as ill-informed and unsophisticated (Nelson and Winter 1982). From this critique, one can understand why the mainstream economic approach is largely incompatible with the work of communication researchers: neoclassical writers are likely to consider communication scholars' writings as ill-informed given that, at least to a large extent, communication scholars apply induction reasoning to samples, comparisons, simulations, empirical exercises and/or historical analysis to justify their *conclusions* instead of framing their questions as problems and looking for *solutions* by adopting deduction and mathematical modelling.

Moreover, even though communication policy and economics of communication industries are two areas where communication scholars and mainstream economics researchers are most likely to be aware of work by members of the other discipline (Wildman 2008), there are more practical reasons explaining why collaboration between them might, nevertheless, be difficult. These reasons stem from the incompatibility between standard traditional assumptions and what communication scholars consider important characteristics of communication policy and industries. For example, most traditional economists tend to frame policies and regulations as external factors in their models and independent from the choice of individuals and firms (possibly, also in light of some markets' capacity to self-regulate).[2] While many communication scholars tend to think of policies and regulations as shaped by many factors, including the dominant ideology or the pressure exerted by important corporations (e.g. McChesney 1999; 2001) as well as integrating (and fundamental) elements of communication markets. In addition to this, media content producers have a very unclear understanding of consumer preferences given that, at least prior to the act of consumption, consumers themselves have often a poor understanding of the level of satisfaction that might result from consuming

a creative product (Flew 2007). This characteristic of media markets is considered by communication scholars as important for understanding the business models of media industries, but, on the other hand, is clearly incompatible with the rational decision-making process assumed by traditional economists. Therefore, ironically, communications scholars should find some of the most fundamental economic theories (i.e. the ones embracing all the traditional assumptions) as ill-informed and their results uninteresting.

Many years have passed since 1953 when Milton Friedman was arguing that unrealistic assumptions simply did not matter in economic theories as long as they made correct predictions, as nowadays, even neoclassical economists challenge the use of restrictive assumptions (Beinhocker 2007). Communication scholars, therefore, can certainly find within the field of mainstream economics recent and less "traditional" models that question the same assumptions that are incompatible with their own vision of communication policies and the economics of communication industries. It is argued here, however, that communication scholars are likely to find the use of some alternative economic theories more efficient and useful than the adoption of mainstream economic theories. This can be argued, first of all, because the range of methodologies employed by communication and alternative economics scholars is quite similar as it is characterised by the (also combined) use of samples, historical accounts, comparisons, simulations and/or empirical exercises, as well as the use of induction as the main process of reasoning.

This claim can be further supported by arguments explaining the potential of alternative economic theories for studying communication policies and communication industry economics are provided. The theories presented here belong to three alternative economic approaches: service innovation theories, institutional economics (and neo-Schumpeterian) accounts and complexity economics. After a short introduction about their basic characteristics, theories from these approaches will be introduced with the intention of illustrating how they can help to understand different aspects of communication industries' innovation dynamics. Although these approaches differ from their respective main focuses, all three of these schools of thought frame *innovation* as a multidimensional process of change that is compatible with communication scholars' accounts on how media industries evolve. Service innovation studies, for example, stress the need for a broad concept of innovation that includes the non-technical changes typical of service activities. The notion of stylistic innovation put forward by Schweizer (2003), for example, is a notion of change that can be applied to new technical devices as well as to new types of narratives.[3] Institutional and complexity economics, on the other hand, embrace an evolutionary definition of innovation. According to this notion, innovation is a trial and error process also affected by random elements; therefore innovators (e.g. film producers, book writers, editors, etc.) can only partially anticipate the effects and the consequences of their efforts.

Service Innovation Literature

Service innovation scholars argue that service activities have long been understood as being low-capital intensive because they do not require the construction of expensive production plants. Rather than innovators, service enterprises are also generally conceived as innovation adopters and dependent on the manufacturing

sector for technological change. Moreover, these scholars also argue that mainstream economists tend to see a company's capacity to innovate as proportional to the size of its fixed capital and the level of its R&D efforts (Gallouj 2002). Service innovation scholars are also critical of those mainstream economists that undermine the non-technical, "upgrading" routines typical of many service activities. They also stress the importance of extending the concept of "innovation," which is traditionally understood as primarily a process increasing the stock of science and technology (S&T) knowledge. Miles (2003), for example, explains that innovation is also aesthetic, cultural, social and organisational, and that it not only contributes to S&T knowledge, but also to knowledge of markets and user requirements. Moreover, empirical studies show that there is a multitude of different investments that, together with R&D, can be considered essential or supporting elements of innovative activities. These include intangible investments in know-how, industrial patterns and design, patents and licenses, artistic creations, copyright, rights to receive royalty payments, training, and also other investments in human resources, market share, product certification, customer lists, subscriber lists and lists of potential customers, product brands and service brands, and software and similar products (Den Hertog and Bilderbeek 2000). Moreover, service innovations scholars distinguish themselves from mainstream economists because they stress the importance of defining the relationship between users and providers, more so than concentrating on the actual object (tangible or intangible) of the exchange (e.g. Gadrey 2000).

Most activities of the communication sector are best described as services, therefore concepts drawn from service innovation studies are particularly useful in understanding how these activities evolve. On the contrary, studies investigating innovation in service activities that are informed by mainstream economic theories can be misleading. Generally, traditional economic studies focus on pricing and interfirm strategies when they examine a firm's behaviour and they consider each market as a distinct entity and independent to its environment or cultural and economic settings (Shepherd 1975; cited by Babe 1993). For example, a study conducted by the multinational consulting firm Arthur D Little Inc in the early 1980s claimed that cinema theatres were destined to disappear and be replaced by new and alternative film exhibition outlets, such as pay TV and home video rentals, by 1990 (Gomery 2004). The analysis carried out by researchers at Arthur D Little Inc is a good example of a rather naive application of mainstream economic thinking to the analysis of communication industries' behaviour. The main argument of this study can be summarised as follows: given that cinema theatres and other exhibition outlets fulfil the same role of final deliverers of audiovisual media products, they are part of the same market and compete for the same market shares. Therefore, economists at Arthur D Little thought that the more modern services of pay TV and home video rentals were going to replace cinemas because all of these services are in the business of delivering the same audiovisual media products and because the former were growing faster than the latter, at least when their study was carried out.

On the contrary, an economic analysis informed by a service innovation viewpoint is likely to concentrate on the relationship between users and providers and, therefore, it is likely to be more attentive to the different aspects of the experiences that media outlets offer to users. Such an analysis would agree that home video

rental services and cinema exhibition theatres although they share the same type of content, they offer different experiences to users, characterised by different factors. These include, for example, the time of release of these movies and the conditions in which users see them. Therefore, this theoretical approach, contrary to what Arthur D Little Inc was forecasting, can be used to explain that in the last twenty years cinema theatres have flourished and increased their revenue, because cinema theatres are directly competing with pay television or home video only to a limited extent. In fact, cinema theatres are the blockbuster movies' producers use cinemas as the first release window for most of their films and other media outlets as subsequent windows. Therefore, these types of services are better understood as complementary rather than substitute, as synergies are realised between cinema theatres and alternative media outlets, as the latter group also benefits from the marketing efforts spent in promoting movies to cinema audiences.

Complexity Economics

The second economic approach presented here as an alternative to traditional economics for studies of communication industries is *complexity economics*. There are many questions marks regarding what falls under this umbrella term, as "complexity economics" is better defined as a research program rather than as a single, synthesised theory. However, as Beinhocker (2007) claims, complexity economics distinguishes itself from work that has gone before it, because of five principal ideas: first, contributors to this school of thought consider the economy as defined by the existence of open, dynamic and non-linear systems that never reach a static equilibrium. Second, these social systems exist through the interaction of agents composing them; these agents use inductive rules of thumb to take decisions which are based on incomplete information and learn and adapt over time. Third, networks provide the model of interactions between agents. Fourth, there is no distinction between micro and macroeconomics; the latter emerge directly from agents' behaviours and interactions at the micro level. Fifth, evolution is the process of differentiation, selection and amplification that is responsible for a system's order and complexity growth (Beinhocker 2007).

Systems are the focus of investigations in complexity economic studies, like institutions in evolutionary economics, or the rational individual/firm in neoclassical economics. In its most general definition, a system is any set of space, matter, energy or information for which boundaries can be defined (Beinhocker 2007). Systems are composed of sub-units which are also systems. Some groups of sub-units known as *modules* present the following characteristics – their elements are strongly connected with each other but weakly connected with elements of other units (Baldwin and Clark 2000). In the case of some systems (e.g. open and "intangibles" such as the Internet), their boundaries are only conceptual and they can be the result of a rational exercise. Using the concept of systems is very useful, particularly in light of the rule that sub-systems share some of the characteristics of their containers and obey the same laws. Therefore, one can understand how a particular product, process or institution changes and innovates from the properties of the hypothetical system-container representing the product, process or institution's environment. Therefore, many communication scholars should find this principle of complexity economics (as well as the illustration reported here below) interesting, as

it confirms that communication industries are "embedded" in (i.e. exercising and influence on, and at the same time, being influenced by) other social spheres and that change in these industries also depends on innovations in these other social spheres.

Complexity economists use the first two laws of thermodynamics and the *evolution* algorithm, which apply to all systems belonging to the physical world, to demonstrate that this property of "inheritance" between systems is a rule and not just an assumption. Of course, these principles also apply to communication industries, as they are systems – as their boundaries can be defined – and they belong to the physical world – as their components and features can be observed; therefore, as it will be argue, although very abstract, these concepts can enrich the way scholars understand how these industries change and develop.

The first law (or the conservation of energy principle) stipulates that, in the universe, energy is neither created nor destroyed. The second law states that entropy, which is a measure of disorder or randomness in a system, is always increasing. Thermodynamic systems are characterised by a never-ending battle between energy-powered order creation and entropy-driven order destruction. For order to be created in one part of the universe, order must be destroyed somewhere else, because the net effect must always be increasing entropy/decreasing order (Beinhocker 2007). The economy is a social system contained by the system-universe (i.e. the physical world) and, therefore, also subject to the law of entropy and *evolution*, which is the mechanism by which order is created (Georgescu-Roegen 1971, cited by Beinhocker 2007). In essence, evolution is an algorithmic process of variation, selection and replication that is conducted recursively on the population, with output from one round acting as the input for the next round. At the origin of this process there are design spaces, which are the imaginary containers of all the different forms systems can take. Evolution discovers designs through a process of trial and error: a variety of candidate designs are rendered and introduced into the environment where they compete for scarce resources. In the environment, some designs are successful and retained, replicated and built upon, while others are unsuccessful and discarded. Moreover, the fittest interactors are also the most frequently replicated and built upon (Beinhocker 2007).

From first two principles of thermodynamics and the concept of one can understand the media activities' innovation in the following way. Every system (i.e. an industry, an activity, a product or a service) has its own hypothetical design space which contains all of the possible forms it can take. If inventions are the elements of design spaces, innovations are the inventions that are rendered, i.e. introduced into the environment after having been materialised. A market is the most likely environment in which media industries' products (good or service) are introduced. Markets have their rules as well as other social and cultural conditions, which carry out the evolution algorithm and test innovations' fitness. Therefore, the innovation process of communication industries is also subject to entropy, as energy is employed to create and/or improve existing solutions. Furthermore, in a way that is reminiscent of Schumpeter's waves of creative destruction, innovations that the market judges as "fit" are successful, replicated and built upon (which means that they are improved and re-introduced into the market), while old technologies and unsuccessful characteristics of these old technologies, become obsolete, disappear and are no longer replicated.

At least two other schools of thought, which can be easily integrated with complexity economic approaches, provide useful concepts for investigating change in communication industries. These are complex products and systems (CoPS) and modularity approaches. Both of these schools of thought investigate activities delivering complex products and services and, more specifically, they focus on the relationship between products and organisational design. First of all, innovation increases a system's complexity in the sense that it increases the amount of specialised knowledge that is embedded in it and that is necessary to produce (Pavitt 2005). The first consequence of this trend is that production processes and, more in general, the organisational design, constantly adapt in order to adjust to the new conditions. In some cases, organisations are also re-designed as modular as a consequence of products (or services) becoming modular.

Baldwin and Clark (1997) define modularity as the practice of designing systems from smaller subsystems that function together as a whole, but that can be designed independently. Modular systems have several characteristics and advantages in comparison to integrated systems, which are those systems where the sub-units work only when they are combined together. First, modular systems require interfaces or "rules of the game" that determine how modules work together. When a system is not "self-generating," a system architect plays the leading role in the creation of the interfaces and in delineating the standards defining inter-operability and compatibility of these interfaces. All the module makers need to be aware of the inter-operability rules for the system to work as a collection of modules: therefore, the knowledge composing the interfaces, which is referred to as *visible design rules*, is shared among the system's participants. The personal computer, for example, is a modular system; therefore components makers (such as monitor producers) do not have to worry about making their products compatible to all of the other peripherals that can be attached to a computer (mouse, keyboards, printers, etc.), as they only need to comply to the standard interface (e.g. Conventional Peripheral Component Interconnect), which is a set of rules shared by all.

On the other hand, the knowledge generated by module-makers that determine the functioning of a sub-system but does not affect its inter-operability, is kept private by its owner(s) and referred to as the *hidden design parameters* (Baldwin and Clark 1997). The second feature of a modular system is that the design, innovation and/or production can be outsourced to specialised module makers. Moreover, thanks to the existence of interfaces (and visible design rules), coordination between production units is achieved with minimal managerial efforts and costs (Brusoni and Prencipe 2001). Third, and most importantly, modular systems are assumed to be characterised by a faster innovation rate then equivalent integrated systems. This faster innovation rate at a system level is achieved thanks to the existence of parallel innovation efforts carried out by the module makers (Baldwin and Clark 1997). The existence of parallel local research efforts is also susceptible to improving the quality of innovation, because competing approaches attempt to solve the same problems (Nelson 1982). Going back to the example of the personal computer, this means that there is a pool of stakeholders focussing on (and competing for) improving hard drives and, at least to a large extent, this research process does not influence other attempts carried out by other stakeholder targeted at improving display technologies.

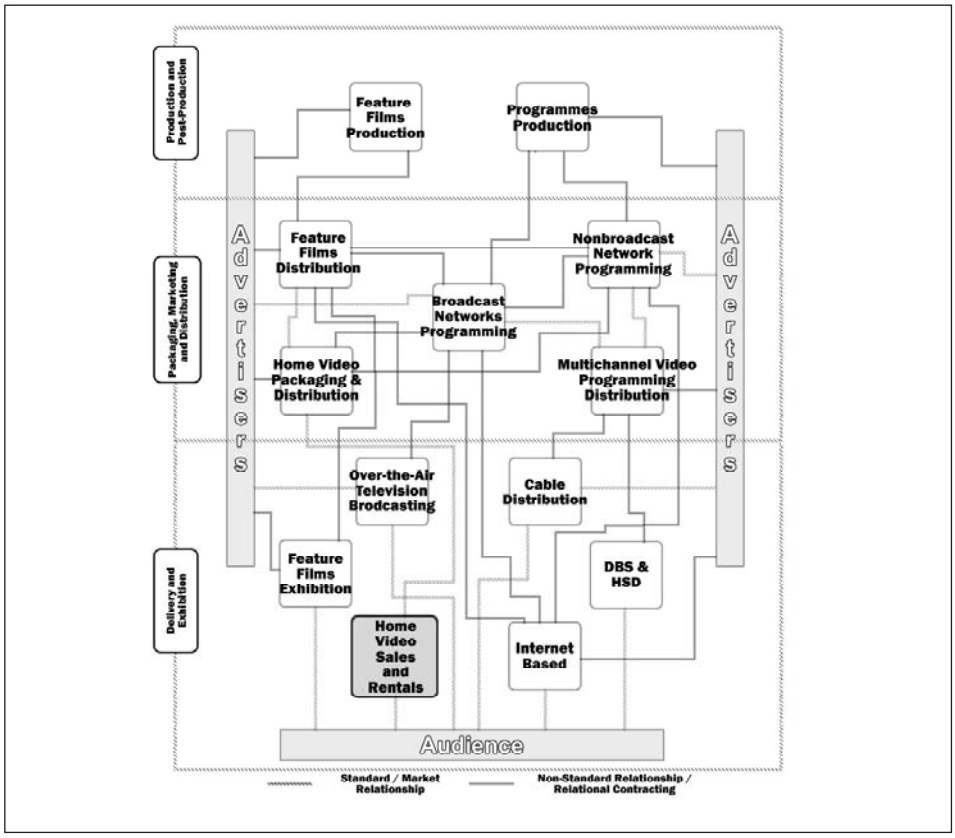
As explained above, complexity economics concepts can be useful to inform accounts of innovations in communication industries: the properties of these types of complex and modular systems can be used to explain, for example, how media industries' products and services adapt and benefit from innovations within their environment. As an illustration of this claim, recent changes in the US video tape and disk rental industry are presented with a short evolutionary account informed by complexity economics concepts. First of all, the video tape and disk rental industry can be considered as a part of a group of interdependent activities (i.e. *modules*) belonging to the audiovisual media service sector (i.e. its system-container). This sector includes three value-chain stages: (1) the production, (2) the distribution and marketing and (3) the exhibition of audiovisual media content (see figure 1). Over the years and as a result of the introduction of many innovations the knowledge embedded in the audiovisual media service sector has increased and this system has become more complex. The increased complexity of this system can be illustrated with the multiplication of activities: so if in the early stages (i.e. from the 1920s to the 1940s) the audiovisual media service sector was more integrated and film producers were also responsible for the distribution and exhibition of content in cinema theatres (see De Vany and Mc Millian 2004), nowadays and as a result of numerous innovations, the production of audiovisual media content is delivered to final users through a variety of different activities, including, for example, cinema theatres, broadcast and cable television channels and video tape and disk rental outlets. Consequently, the video tape and disk rental industry innovates independently within its own design space, but this process of innovation is influenced by the changes taking place at the system-container level (i.e. the audiovisual media service sector).

By the mid-1980s the main technical innovations and regulatory norms providing the basis for the future growth of the home video industry were already in place, but the video tape and disk rental industry only reached a mature stage by 1995, when almost 90 percent of all households with a television had one and they were renting a video nearly every week (Winston 1998). Two types of innovation have recently shaped this industry into its current form. The first was the diffusion of a new form of media distribution, the Digital Versatile Disk (DVD). The quality of this new "packaging" of audiovisual media content was superior to its predecessors and it was quickly adopted by the market. As a consequence, the video and disk rental industry benefited from the diffusion of this technical innovation that contributed to improve its services.

Secondly, new contractual agreements (or "rules of the game"/interfaces) between rental outlets and distributors were also responsible for the improvements to this service and the increase of revenue. According to the prior rules of the game, distributors provided video tape and disk rental outlets with pre-recorded VHS tapes of a new release at the wholesale price of around 60 to 70 dollars. After a period of generally five months in which the pre-recorded tapes could only be rented, distributors used to start selling pre-recorded tapes at a "sell-through re-pricing" of ten to fifteen dollars (Mortimer 2005).The main problem of this old system was that rental shops were exposed to a risk: over-stocking of pre-recorded tapes. Therefore, rental shops used to underestimate demand giving up opportunities to make extra business as they often found themselves stocked-out of new releases. As

the cost of producing pre-recorded cassettes and DVDs shrank, it made more sense to promote a new system based on revenue sharing. According to Dana and Spier (2001) the home video and DVD distributor that is credited with the introduction of this system is Rentrak. Under this new system, videos are purchased by rental and sales outlets for a price that ranges from zero up to eight dollars each and the rental revenue is typically shared as follows - the video retailer keeps 45 percent of the revenue, the movie studio gets 45 percent, and the remaining 10 percent goes to distributor (Dana and Spier 2001; Chiou 2006). The fixed cost of buying extra copies is reduced and so is the risk involved in the acquisition of large amounts of pre-recorded disks. Moreover, with the introduction of standard revenue-sharing agreements, distributors have extended the design space of the video and disk rental outlets. The latter, as a result of this change, are now freer to innovate and decide, for example, on the length of the rental window (see Mortimer 2005 and Chiou 2006), or on the timing and the quantity of new releases to go on sale. As the Federal Communication Comission (FCC) reports, the sales and rentals of DVDs have grown to account for 60 percent of entertainment companies' profits over the past eight years (FCC Media Bureau 2006), and, certainly, the diffusion of the revenue-sharing system is likely to have played a major role in this growth.

Figure 1: The Home Video Sales and Rentals as a Module of the Audiovisual Media Service Industry



Institutional Economics and the Neo-Schumpeterian Approach

The main focus of institutional economists is to investigate and demonstrate how specific groups of common habits are embedded in, and reinforced by, specific social institutions (Hodgson 1998). Processes of innovation are also part of these common habits investigated by institutional economists. In particular, they investigate how innovation is influenced by other routines and cultural and social aspects of institutions. Institutions are not simply organisations (such as corporations, banks, and universities) but also integrated and systematic social entities such as money, language and law. They involve the interaction of agents, with crucial information feedback, they sustain and are sustained by shared conceptions and expectations and, although they are neither immutable nor immortal, they have relatively durable, self-reinforcing, and persistent qualities. Furthermore, institutions incorporate values and processes of normative evaluation. In particular, they reinforce their own moral legitimation (Hodgson 1998, 179).

Neo-Schumpeterian writings also fall under the category of institutional economics; however, their main focus is the rationale, shape and length of long waves of economic development (also known as Kondratieff Waves or Cycles). These studies offer some assistance and provide a complement to the political economy of media and communications tradition (Mansell 2004). They are useful, for example, in order to understand the general, long term economic environment in which new communication technologies are introduced and the role of different sectors and industries within this environment. Therefore, according to neo-Schumpeterian theories, (here only briefly summarised) the "trigger element" of an upward and structural economic trend is a specific innovation (or a set of specific innovations), referred to as the key factor, which fulfils the following conditions: (1) presents low and rapidly falling relative costs; (2) has an unlimited availability of supply over long-term periods; (3) bears the potential of being used profitably in many products and production processes (Perez 1983; Freeman and Perez 1988).

Different industries or sectors play different roles within the general innovation trend or techno-economic paradigm; this role also depends on the ways that the benefit from the key factor. Perez (1983), for example, provides a classification of different sectors based on the roles and distinguishes between motive branches, which are responsible for the production of the key factor, and other inputs that are associated with it; carrier branches, which are activities developed by making intensive use of the key factor; and induced branches, which are the activities complementary to the carrier branches. This categorisation is applied to classify and understand the dynamics of the last four – and the currently unfolding fifth – Kondratieff Cycles or "economic revolutions." The first wave started in the 1780s, peaked around 1815 and then ended in 1848. The key factors identified for this wave were iron, raw cotton and coal, while the techno-economic paradigm was characterised by the water-powered mechanisation of industry. On the other hand, the fourth wave, which is the one completed most recently, started in 1941 and peaked around 1973; its techno-economic paradigm was characterised by the motorisation of transport, civil economy and war, while its key factors were oil, gas and synthetic materials (Freeman and Louçă 2001).

More interesting for the purpose of this paper and its audience of communication scholars, is the existence of a fifth Kondratieff Cycle, which is a long wave of economic development sustained by the succession of innovations taking place in various branches of the information sector. The key factors of the current wave are semi-conductors, and the techno-economic paradigm is explained by the diffusion of the products of carrier branches, such as the computer and telecommunication industries, and the large variety and diffusion of products and services by the induced branches, which include media content producers, distributors and exhibitors, and other businesses exploiting the existence of computer networks. Therefore, this fifth "economic revolution" represents the environment in which new digital communication technologies are evolving and testing their fitness; an environment that, although new and evolving, also present many features in common with the four preceding cycles.

For example, neo-Schumpeterian economists explain the economic dynamic of all of the long waves as follows: key factors are responsible for creating the conditions for new techno-economic paradigms. A new key factor gradually matures (i.e. the key factor is improved by incremental innovations, the number of applications and their diffusion increases) during the downswing of a Kondratieff Cycle, while the key factor and related products of the preceding wave loses momentum. In this period, investors start looking at the development of new technologies and they are more ready to take risks (Freeman and Perez 1988). At some stage, there is harmony between the techno-economic paradigm that has been maturing during the downswing of the previous Kondratieff Cycle and the socio-institutional climate (Perez 1983). It is in these conditions that investments are made so that the new paradigm is developed, fostering economic growth up to a new peak. During this period, there is a bandwagon effect and every productive unit, one after the other, tends to apply what becomes the "optimal form of productive organisation." A new international pattern of investment, trade and production is established. Society and institutions also adapt. New statistical quantifications are introduced to better understand the impacts of the new paradigm and the need for new and better tuned policies. The peak is a sort of economic frenzy while the new techno-economic paradigm produces big success stories (Perez 1983). The exhaustion of new product and process investment opportunities associated with the new technology and the consequent slowing down of the economic performance of carrier branches is what triggers the downswing. The capabilities of motive branches to maintain, or to reduce further, the relative cost advantage of the key factor are worn out. Various disequilibria manifest themselves in the various markets (labour, inputs, money, and equipment), as a result both of the contraction in the old dynamics and the uncertain market trends generated by the new investment patterns. More and more pressure is put on the central authority to find new means of stimulating and managing the economy. Furthermore, investments in new technologies become less risky and more logical as the power of the heuristics of the current/old paradigm has diminished (Perez 1983).

Media and communication industries convergence is an important subject of investigation in communication studies. According to Küng, Picard and Towse (2008), there are three main aspects of convergence that are investigated in the literature; a first approach focuses on computers and their increasing role as ver-

satile communication tools, while a second approach focuses on the rise of new networks and their capacity to offer different communication services. A third approach looks at the consequences of digitalisation on the organisation of the communication sector and the rise of information conglomerates that incorporate content (i.e. media), computing (i.e. information technology) and communication (i.e. telecoms and broadcast distribution) industries (Küng, Picard and Towse 2008). On the other hand, institutional economics and neo-Schumpeterian economic concepts provide an alternative viewpoint to understanding these trends as they can be used to sketch a parallel between digital-convergence and the "steam-powered mechanisation"-convergence of the first economic revolution.

Therefore, thanks to neo-Schumpeterian concepts, the convergence of communication/media activities can be explained as the consequence of two related innovation trends occurring within the more general context of the current long cycle. Information industries are complex and composed on many interdependent activities (or modules). Some of these activities emerged during the current techno-economic paradigm and they can be considered *induced branches*. Innovations in the semi-conductor, (other) hardware and software industries have transformed computers from office tools to powerful multimedia platforms, as computers' applications have expanded to include also the creation, distribution and exhibition of media content. Therefore, the industries that incorporate these new activities are "converging" because induced branches-activities, which have common roots and innovate as a consequence of the improvements in the semiconductor and computer industries, are multiplying.

However, convergence is not occurring purely because there are many new activities, largely "induced" by innovations in the leading industries of the current economic paradigm; activities within the communication sectors which existed before the beginning of the new paradigm are also changing. Moreover, innovation in these activities (as in many other) is a trial and error process, and efforts to innovate are carried out with a relative high degree of incertitude. Therefore, investing in the technologies responsible for the main success stories of the new techno-economic paradigm and, as a consequence, adapting to what is considered the optimal form of productive organisation, is the most likely outcome because it is also considered the safest one. Moreover, as Perez (1983) explains, the socio-institutional climate changes and favours the adoption of the technologies that are characterising the current economic paradigm: therefore, governments, for example, are likely to promote the use of products based on semi-conductor technologies and/or or of "computerised" services. As a consequence, it is safe to assume that many "old" activities within the communication sector converge because the current general business climate shape their preference for digital technologies as the basis for possible innovations.

Conclusion

This paper focussed on the potential for the integration of economic theories with communication studies. So far, it has not contemplated why this process can be potentially an interesting objective for communication scholars. The most obvious explanation is that economics is the academic discipline that plays the biggest role in shaping public policies and industrial trends. Clearly, this is also the case

in the field of communications: for example, in 1993 the FCC reviewed and further relaxed the rules limiting the concentration of media ownership and although the consequences of media concentration is certainly an extensively debated topic in media studies, the FCC's decision was supported by twelve studies which focused predominantly on the economic aspects of the issue, while virtually excluding other analytic perspectives (see Blevins and Brown 2006).[4]

Moreover, the neoclassical paradigm is the mainstream economic approach and much more influential than alternative approaches because it is "non problematic" given that is not critical (Mansell 2004). Also, the neoclassical approach occupies the centre and right of centre space in the political spectrum and it provides information, advice and policies that strengthen capitalism (Mosco 1996). Although its critics attach a political "colour" to this approach, mainstream economists defend its neutrality because it supposedly relies on mathematical rigor and scientific objectivity, even to the point of considering it unrelated to ethical considerations and moral concerns (Mosco 1996; McCloskey 2002). On the contrary, political economy of communication is indeed critical and committed to historical analysis, to understanding the broad social totality, to moral philosophy or the study of social value and of the good social order, and, finally, to social intervention or praxis (Mosco 1996).

However, in order to adopt mathematical models and to provide linear solutions, traditional economists have to simplify economic problems. Mathematical models and linear solutions, nonetheless, can only identify and explain partial trends (Solow 1985). Hence, one could argue that traditional economics cannot fulfil the task of explaining the communication sector's evolution and its growing complexity *without* the collaboration of other theoretical approaches. On the other hand, this task of understanding the complex evolution of the communication sector as some media, cultural economists and communication scholars suggest (e.g. Küng, Picard and Towse 2008; Flew 2007; United Nations 2008), should be undertaken by adopting multi-disciplinary theoretical frameworks. Therefore, alternative economic concepts and traditions like the ones illustrated in this paper, which are not "imperialist" and bear the potential for inclusion in multi-disciplinary frameworks, can be found useful for studying these complex trends. Moreover, many communication scholars might not be aware that a transformation process is evolving and changing the field of economic studies. The most recent form of this transformation process aims at breaking the almost exclusive presence of the neoclassical theories in teaching, university books and economic policy analysis and is now led by the post-autistic economic movement, which organise alternative economic conferences and seminars and publish alternative economic books and journals (see Fullbrook 2004).

Therefore, in order to attempt to increase their influence on public policies and industrial trends communications scholars should consider embracing, and contributing to, this pluralist economic revolution at least for two reasons: first, because studies informed by traditional economics analysis have created many exaggerated expectations about the economic effect of the generalised adoption of digital sources of information, therefore, there may now be greater receptivity to studies of innovation in media that are informed both by sociological and political economy approaches (Mansell 2004). Second, because instead of being confined

to academic debates, the limits of traditional economics for understanding real economics' trends are increasingly becoming known to a wider audience (e.g. *The Economist* 2009), therefore alternative economic approaches bear the potential for becoming more prominent in a near future.

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Notes:

1. Traditional economics is the set of concepts and theories articulated in undergraduate and intermediate graduate-level textbooks. It also includes the concepts and theories that peer-reviewed surveys claim, or assume, that the field generally agrees on (Nelson and Winter 1982).

2. Writings about the "regulatory capture," on the contrary, investigate how vested interests affect state intervention in different forms. These papers can be considered as neoclassical economic writings, although not traditional economics as defined above. For a review of these papers, see Dal Bó (2006).

3. A stylistic innovation is "the sum of product and/ or process features, which: (a) Differentiate a (group of) producer(s) from other (groups of) producer(s), (b) are based on particular cognitive structures leading to the realization of new means and/or ends in the product and/or process and (c) Are perceived as novel and therefore mismatching the collective expectations of a particular certification environment." (Schweizer 2003: 28).

4. Unsurprisingly, economic analytical frameworks were also adopted at the expense of other perspectives in the process of trying to assess the effects of media ownership concentration on social spheres other than economic welfare (e.g. when attempting to assess the consequences of concentration on the diversity of media content) (Blevins and Brown, 2006).

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AN INSTITUTIONALIST VIEW OF PUBLIC RELATIONS AND THE EVOLUTION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN TRANSITION ECONOMIES

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Abstract

The paper provides an institutionalist view of public relations as a refined mechanism for maintaining corporate power. The institutionalist theory of the firm, based on Galbraithian and Marxist tradition, offers a convenient framework for including public relations into economics. The authors present the role of public relations managers, the creation and management of issues as well as methods of financing the public relations activities. The institutionalist approach bears also relevant aspects for the analysis of the developments of public relations in transition economies, which is shown in a tentative periodisation of the evolution of public relations. During the past twenty years the public relations practices in transition economies have evolved through several stages. After having "successfully" assisted in neutralising the turbulent social consequences of transitional processes in the initial phases of transition, the public relations departments of transitional firms now tend to apply the proactive public relations strategies in order to enhance corporate power.

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Introduction

The growing importance of public relations in contemporary capitalism is illustrated by the fact that expenditures on corporate public relations have been rising constantly over the last decades and are expected to grow in the future (Robinson 2006).[1],[2] While the societal roots of public relations have been inspected thoroughly (for a survey of present societal approaches to public relations see Ihlen and van Ruler 2007), articles matching public relations and economics are more rare, e.g. Ehling (1992), Ehling and Dozier (1992), Kim (2001) and recently Duhé and Sriramesh (2009) and Podnar et al. (2009). In our view, analysing public relations from the economic perspective brings to the forefront the importance of the concept of power. Although the concept of power is implicitly referred to in many societal definitions of public relations – e.g. public relations as "a guide to social conduct," "social and political engineering," "builder of public opinion," "persuader," "devil's advocate," or public relations as having evolved from "the public to be damned" to "the public to be manipulated" or public relations being equated with "reputation management," etc. (see Hutton 1999, 200-202) – the role of power in societal approaches to public relations remains unclear and relatively vague. In the emerging economic approaches to public relations, however, the concept of power is expressed more clearly, that is, in concrete accounting categories such as investment, profits, ROI, etc., and in connection with corporate power, market shares and barriers to entry. Since public relations activities and expenditures have not been extensively studied from the economic perspective, one can use the same words as John Kenneth Galbraith did in commenting advertising expenditures: "They are too big to be ignored" (Galbraith 1958, 156), which means that the phenomenon of public relations needs to get included into the corpus of economic theory. Especially among the institutionalist economists, who have been striving for a broader, social approach to economics, the tendency is to "translate" the vague societal "power" approach to public relations into economic processes and categories.

The paper presents public relations from the perspective of economic institutionalism, with some considerations about the role of public relations in transition economies. The orthodox economic theory is based on the neoclassical paradigm, according to which the economic analysis is focused on the formalisation of market equilibrium through maximisation calculus and not on the issues of power and the formation of preferences, where public relations activities have a crucial role. Institutionalist paradigm, on the other hand, provides a much more convenient framework for including public relations into economics. This can mostly be seen within the institutionalist theory of the firm which, in Galbraithian and Marxist tradition, builds on the "power sustaining" behaviour of the oligopolistic corporation. John K. Galbraith, as is well known, in his works continually criticised the neoclassical logic that producers' decisions are basically guided by consumers' tastes and preferences, and argued that in contemporary capitalism this sequence has been reversed. Large and powerful corporations rule the markets and mould consumers' tastes and preferences (e.g. Galbraith 1958). We assume that an increasingly important role in the "reversing of the sequence" has been played by public relations functioning as a refined mechanism for exercising corporate power.

The paper is structured as follows. In the first section, we briefly review the goals of the firm in neoclassical and institutionalist economic theory, and empha-

sise that sustaining power is the main goal of the oligopolistic corporation as the dominant type of the firm in contemporary capitalism. This is the framework for the institutionalist approach to public relations presented in the second section, with implications for organisation, issue management and financing of public relations. The third section indicates some considerations regarding the role and evolution of public relations during post socialist economic transition, illustrated by public relations practices of firms in Slovenia.

Power as the Main Goal of the Firm

"Power can be and is used in fighting for profitable positions in the market and for maintaining them, for influencing the framework which determines the working of market mechanisms, and power is also important as an aim of economic activity" (Rothschild 2002, 433). Nevertheless, according to Rothschild, the concept of power is very much neglected in contemporary economic theory, except in Marxist, radical and institutional theories. Similarly, M. Lavoie claims that the "notion of power, except when related to the pure monopoly, has been systematically ignored in economics, with the exception of institutionalists and Marxists. Among the former, Galbraith is the most well-known recent exponent of the importance of power in the economic sphere" (Lavoie 1992, 100). While the neglect of power in orthodox economics is guided by the ambition of neoclassical economists to be "scientific" and to therefore concentrate only on rigorous analysis of maximisation and equilibrium, the heterodox theories stick to political economy approach, which incorporates power as an essential element of economic processes. Thus for V. Mosco, the issue of power relations is also a distinctive feature of political economy as "the study of the social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources" (Mosco 2009, 24). Political economy (as distinct from economics!) concentrates "on a specific set of social relations organised around *power* or the ability to control other people, processes, and things" (ibid.; emphasis in the original). From political economy perspective, the firm is therefore seen as a typical institution that exercises power, both internally, through its hierarchical structure, and externally, by influencing and controlling its environment.

Such view of the firm is in opposition with neoclassical economics, in which the concept of power has generally remained "on the sidelines."[3] In neoclassical economics, the firm was long considered to be simply a profit maximising unit, where all the attention was placed on the technical relation between inputs and outputs and on the passive implementation of the optimisation procedures based on rational choice, while the internal hierarchical organisation and structure of the firm seemed to be of no importance. This approach has often been called, by its critics, the "black box" view of the firm (Sawyer 1989, 124-126; see also Browne and Quinn 2008, 246) or firm as a "robot decision-maker" (Davidson 1991, 69). Giant corporations with their internal and external power relations were put on the same theoretical level with small entrepreneurs in a free enterprise economy, which was clearly inconsistent with capitalist economic reality, where powerful corporations prevail. However, neoclassical economics has found an elegant way to circumvent this obvious inconsistency. Based on the work of Coase (1937) and Williamson (1975) evolved the neoclassical theory of the firm, which became the foundation of the so

called "new institutional economics." According to new institutionalists, firms are considered as "huge islands of hierarchy (power) in the sea of market relations" (Browne and Quinn 2008, 247). But the decision about which coordination to use, market or hierarchy, is a matter of rational choice of economic subjects, based on the criterion of the minimisation of transaction costs. So Browne and Quinn (2008), in their critique of the absence of power in neoclassical theory, rightly conclude (246-247), that the neoclassical firm as institution has thus itself become a product of a maximising calculus, and the potentially autonomous logic of power has been subsumed under the dominant neoclassical paradigm of rational choice.[4]

To introduce a realistic view of the firm into economic theory, which would incorporate a wide notion of power, has long been a prime task on the agenda of institutional economists. By the term "institutionalism" in this paper we refer to the so called "old institutional economics" (also sometimes called original institutional economics or institutional-evolutionary economics) which is (contrary to "new institutional economics") based on the Veblenian tradition (Rutherford 1994). Economists of this strand have been striving to provide non-neoclassical explanations of firm behaviour, such as growth maximisation (Berle and Means 1932), the importance of advertising (Kaldor 1950), moulding of consumer preferences (Galbraith 1958), corporate hegemony (Baran and Sweezy 1966/1996; Dugger 1989), innovation and technological progress (Shapiro 1991), pricing (Eichner 1976; Downward 1999), microfoundations of distributional issues (Lavoie 1992), and competition and rivalry (Capoglu 1991).

The old institutionalist view, based on the assumption that sustaining power over its environment is the ultimate underlying objective of the behaviour of corporations, has been recently reinforced by Pressman (2006-7). Pressman supports the Galbraithian view of the prevailing role of powerful corporations striving for growth, which not only prevents firing managers but also serves the psychological needs of managers for prestige. Institutionalists have been focusing their microanalysis on pricing and investment behaviour of the oligopolistic firm intended to maximise its long-run growth and to increase its power. M. Lavoie, a distinguished institutional economist, claims that power (and not profit maximisation) should be considered as the ultimate objective of the firm. "The firm wants power over its suppliers of materials, over its customers, over the government, over the kind of technology to be put in use. (…) A powerful control over events and human actors provides the conditions required for such long-run existential goals" (Lavoie 1992, 99, 100; see also Capoglu 1991, Ch. 2; Lavoie 2001 and Lee 2003).

While the brutal power of corporations in economic and political spheres, either in the form of squeezing out the competitors by barriers to entry, attacking the consumer sovereignty by aggressive advertising or by being engaged in political plotting, was discussed already in the works of early Marxists and institutionalists, the more refined means that corporations use to achieve "social" power over their environment through creating favourable public opinion began to be analysed at a later date. Baran and Sweezy were among the first to stress that corporations employ "increasingly refined and elaborate techniques of suggestion" (Baran and Sweezy 1966/1996, 121). Also, Alfred Eichner, a renowned institutional economist, in his detailed microanalysis of corporate behaviour (Eichner 1976) stressed the importance of internal investment funds for creating "a more favourable public image. This can be done through 'institutional' advertising as distinct from product

advertising, through basic research as distinct from applied research or through the erection of aesthetically pleasing office buildings and similar public relations gestures" (Eichner 1976, 93). At approximately the same time, the issue of corporate social responsibility was launched in literature (e.g. Sethi 1975) with growing importance in the next three decades. Image oriented advertising, corporate social responsibility and public relations have become three important elements of the theory of corporate behaviour, representing the refined ways of sustaining corporate power and an effective "antidote" to the falling rate of profit in capitalism.[5] We will limit ourselves to the issue of public relations.

Power-Related Aspects of Public Relations

The concept of corporate power has been excluded from neoclassical economics, because in neoclassical theory the forces that guide the decisions of rational economic agents in their search for profit maximisation are reduced to changes in market prices. According to the neoclassical logic, producers, who are at the service of consumers whose tastes and preferences rule the market, do not have the power to impose their prices (see Pouchol 2006, 73-74). This is based on the fundamental neoclassical assumption that, in perfect competition, equilibrium market prices lead to the optimal allocation of the resources of a firm as well as of the economy as a whole. Already Chamberlin claimed that in the perfectly competitive model of neoclassical economics, where perfect information exists and where a competitor can sell as much as he wants, there is no need for advertising (Chamberlin 1946; Dorfman and Steiner 1954) and no need for any other promotional activities, public relations included. These activities would only increase costs of the perfect competitor, decrease profits and, viewing from the macroeconomic perspective, distort the optimal allocation of productive capacities. In the imperfect competition, the neoclassical approach to public relations concentrates on the "optimum level" problem, that is, an optimal combination between market prices, revenues and costs of communication of the firm. More precisely, the problem for the firm is to find the optimal level of communication expenditures, taking into account that increasing communication expenditures, i.e. "costs," tend to equal "benefits" such as cooperation with or reduction of the possibilities of conflicts with its stakeholders and environment (see Ehling and Dozier 1992, 268-270; Kim 2001).

From the institutionalist perspective, the emergence of power based on promotional activities can be fundamentally explained within the framework of Galbraith's dependence effect and social construction of wants. Fifty years ago Galbraith wrote: "If the modern corporation must manufacture not only goods but the desire for goods it manufactures, the efficiency of the first part of this activity ceases to be decisive" (Galbraith 1958, 257). These words can already be seen as his prophesy that the activities, techniques and expenditures related with the creation of desires and wants will become more and more important and subtle. This is noticed in the foreword to the newest edition of the *New Industrial State* by his son James Galbraith, who views public relations as one of the new characteristics of modern corporations (Galbraith 2007, xxiii). While the influence of advertising on target consumers' desires is more or less direct and predictable (see Lah et al. 2006-7), the economic effect of public relations on consumers is indirect, complex and less predictable. This can be attributed to the fact that public relations, before reach-

ing the final impact, involves interactions with many different stakeholders and publics. Hutton (1999, 208) claims that due to its broadness and several long-term implications, public relations in fact means "managing strategic relationships" with corporate stakeholders. In the following subsections we briefly refer to three aspects of public relations which all point to the relevance of the concept of power in the analysis of public relations.

The Role of Public Relations Managers

The Galbraithian view of corporate power is related with the class of techno structure personalised in corporations' top management. The members of techno structure "are not driven by profit maximisation, but instead by combinations of compensation, compulsion, identification, and adaptation … mostly motivated by *identification* – their connection to the status of their organisation within the techno structure – and *adaptation* – their accumulation and exercise of power, especially to shape social attitudes, beliefs and values" (Waller 2008, 18, emphasis added). One of the ways of exercising power by top management, when "shaping social attitudes" in accordance with corporations' interests, is public relations. Lauzen (1995) argues for the necessity of the value congruity between public relations managers and top management stressing that, once the key values are shared between top management and public relations managers, they can efficiently perpetuate their power within the corporation and over the corporation's environment. Therefore, PR departments and PR managers cannot be treated simply as a productive factor which passively adapts to changes in the social environment. Rather, they exert strong influence on the social environment and are in fact, to extend the famous Galbraith's term, "creators of dependence."

Regarding the internal organisation of public relations department, Lauzen (1995) following Dozier (1992) distinguishes between public relations managers and public relations technicians: "Public relations managers make communication policy decisions and are held accountable for the success or failure of public relations efforts. Technicians, on the other hand, handle the production of public relations messages, take photographs, edit the writing of others, and implement policy decisions made by others" (Lauzen 1995, 290). While the work of technicians (practitioners) can be qualified as supportive, even similar to routine manufacturing work and therefore powerless, the public relations managers have intraorganisational power, stemming from their specific knowledge of corporate environment: "Public relations managers function as organisational boundary spanners, individuals within the organisation who frequently interact with the organisation's environment and who gather, select, and relay information from the environment to decision makers in the dominant coalition" (Lauzen, ibid.). Of course, the power of public relations managers in the decision making process is limited to consultancy, suggestions and communication and not to the content. Ruler and Verčič (2004, 6) define four characteristics of the (European) public relations – it is reflective (analysing changing standards, values and standpoints in the society), managerial (developing plans to communicate and maintain relationships with public groups), operational (preparing means of communication) and educational (helping members of the organisation to become communicatively competent), where the consultative and thus inferior position towards top management is obvious. When the power of large

corporations leads to undesired social effects such as high unemployment, great income inequality, and other "egregious social problems that stem from excessive corporate power (e.g. environmental degradation, an arms race that threatens civilisation, and urban decay)" (Presmann 2006-7, 68), the task of public relations managers in particular corporations is to communicate these issues favourably and to construct "a desirable reality" (Bentele 2004, 490).

The institutionalist view of the role of public relations as outlined above contrasts with Grunig's *idealistic* view of public relations presented in his, as he calls it, "general theory of public relations" (Grunig 1992, 2, 27), which is based on the four-model evolutive typology of public relations[6] with the highest stage (two way symmetrical model) implying parity between organisations on the one side and publics (i.e. all the relevant stakeholders) on the other. He advocates the idealistic role of public relations as "a mechanism by which organisations and publics interact in a pluralistic system to manage their interdependence and conflict" which includes that "public relations scholars and practitioners can and should criticise public relations for poor ethics, negative social consequences, or ineffectiveness, suggesting changes to resolve those problems" (Grunig 1992, 9-10). By this he opposes the *conservative* view of public relations, according to which the purpose of this activity is "to maintain a system of privilege by defending the interests of the economically powerful" (Grunig 1992, 8). Following the institutionalist theory of corporate power, the public relations should be viewed from the conservative perspective. This means that even public relations in its highest form, as exemplified in Grunig's "excellent" symmetrical public relations model, represents only "a strategy of hegemony" (Roper 2005) to allay the concerns of stakeholders and "to reshape the social and legal environment in their own favor" (Dugger 1989, 23). Therefore, according to the "power approach" to public relations, also the distinction between "functionalist" and "cocreational" perspective of public relations, as discussed by Botan and Taylor (2004, 651-653), is irrelevant. The corporation exercises power in both cases, whether employing publics functionally or in a cocreational way, that is, by absorbing opinions of the publics to achieve its goals (long-term growth). The latter case is only a refined way of exercising corporate power.

Creation and Management of Issues

Beside his already mentioned definition of public relations as management of strategic relationships, Hutton also discusses the term "corporate communications" (Hutton 1999, 203) as a synonym for public relations.[7] On the other hand, when estimating the "state of the field" of public relations, Botan and Taylor maintain that "the idea that issues management is strategic public relations is generally accepted in the public relations world" (Botan and Taylor 2004, 654). Therefore, *issues* and *publics* are the core concepts in public relations. An issue is created, when one or more publics pay attention and attach significance to a particular situation, event, problem, activity, product, etc. in the organisation's environment. A combined definition of public relations, from the institutionalist perspective, might therefore be: *managing strategic relationships regarding issues in order to maintain corporate power*.

There are very diverse issues in the corporations' internal environment (problems with employees, technology, organisation, etc.) as well as in their external

environment (stakeholders' interests, political problems, environmental trends, etc.), which may potentially benefit or harm the corporation. Many of them are economically irrelevant, if they do not affect consumers' wants (and sales), because they either simply fade or are neutralised by public relations activity. Gaunt and Ollenburger (1995) suggest that "successful issues management tends to remain invisible."

A number of authors agree that "[i]ssues appear to evolve in a predictable manner," that is, that they go through a life-cycle (Hainsworth 1990, 34). Botan and Taylor (2004), modifying previous work of Jones and Chase (1979) and Crable and Vibbert (1985), argue that public issues, similarly to products, go in their life-cycle through five stages (preissue, potential, public, critical and dormant) and concentrate on the relation between particular issue and specific publics involved during these stages. From the economic perspective, it should be remarked that a direct impact of issue life-cycle on sales happens rarely. But resolutions of big issues from the critical stage may definitely leave long run traces in the company's public image and sales.

The strategy of issues management might be *proactive/persuasion* or *reactive/advocacy* (Hutton 1999, 205-207).[8] While the first relies more on the exercise of power, the second is more passive and has a neoclassical flavour. The proactive issues management works similarly to (and often in connection with) advertising: in the last consequence the goal is to affect consumers' perception of the company and its products. Concerning the reactive issues management, Botan and Taylor (2004, 654), following Dewey (1927), suggest that publics "have a kind of will of their own (…) and decision making as the driving force in the development of issues." This approach is somehow similar to the consumer in neoclassical theory who autonomously makes decisions about goods bought and who in that way "votes" for their further production. While the reactive strategy of public relations bears neoclassical features, the institutionalist view of public relations is related with the proactive strategy, emphasising the power of public relations managers. In the initial stage of the issue-creation process their task is to detect and select the potentially beneficial issues for the corporation; in later stages they are responsible for the preparation of public relations programs and control of issue development. Thus, although apparently positioned on equal footing, the publics remain, over the long run, in an inferior position towards the corporations. Only in cases when aggressive activists succeed in creating an issue spin, leading to intensive protests from the side of the publics, the corporate investment or production may be stopped. But due to the alertness of PR departments such developments are rare.

Financing Public Relations

Kotler and Keller (2009, 524-525) define four general methods of financing promotional and communication activities: affordable, percentage-of-sales, competitive-parity and objective-task method. In the case of budgeting public relations, the first and the fourth method can be excluded: the first due to its neglect of the importance of public relations as a permanent activity for modern corporations; the fourth due to the impossibility of estimation and exact measuring of the impact of issue life-cycles, potential publics involved and final impact on sales (this method is questionable also in the case of advertising). It seems that the relevant

methods are the second and the third stressing routine budgeting at the beginning of each planning period. However, it has to be noted that the established pattern of routine budgeting might be changed, depending on different strategic issues defined by public relations department in the preparatory stage when scanning the environment to identify publics involved. Such situation arises when, for example, a company with a specific innovative product proactively plans to launch a big issue potentially leading to an extensive public debate, which will have to be covered by public relations. This brings us to the problem of the predictability of public relations financial effects, which is from the institutionalist perspective viewed differently than in neoclassical theory.

The neoclassical reasoning assumes that profit maximisation calculus can be applied to public relations isolating public relations as a "productive factor." Such reasoning presupposes that both "marginal costs" of public relations (i.e. spending on public relations managers, practitioners, use of communication technology, public relations programmes, etc.) and the "marginal product" of public relations activities (the improved public image and increased company's sales) are always exactly known and fully predictable. Such predictability of financial effects of public relations seems highly unrealistic.

The institutionalists view the corporation and its investment decisions dynamically, dividing its operational path into successive planning periods. Strategic decisions are taken at the beginning of each planning period. Decisions about expenditures on public relations should be treated *pari passu* with other investment expenditures, following the idea that "advertising expenditure is similar in many ways to investment in durable plant" (Nerlove and Arrow 1962, 129; see also Lah et al. 2006-7). Public relations expenditures are thus treated in the same way as other strategic expenditures of the corporation, which means that they can be more or less predicted, mostly on the basis of expenditures from previous years or from revenues. The financial impact of public relations, however, cannot be predicted. This is due to the uncertainty in the environment and to the unexpected effects of public relations activities. Public relations departments usually deal simultaneously with many issues, some issues are perplexing, each particular issue is at a different stage of its life-cycle and it cannot be predicted how long a particular issue will last (an uncontrollable spiral issue spin may always happen). The final financial result of public relations on public image and sales can therefore never be predicted. Such view is consistent with Grunig et al. (2002, 21, 109), who report that return on investment (ROI) in public relations, as estimated by a sample of CEO's, is very high (225 percent) but the rate of return is "lumpy, long-term, and … major return … may occur only once every 10 to 20 years."[9]

Public Relations in Transition Economies

The Socialist Experience

"The main characteristic of public relations development in Russia is the absence of communication tradition" (Tsetsura 2004, 340). Tsetsura's statement is relevant also for many other ex-socialist economies. In socialist economies, the term "public relations" did not even exist. Conceptually, firms' autonomous decisions about public relations, as understood in contemporary market economies, were

not compatible with the command system of central planning, in which individual firms were subordinate to the political as well as to the planning authorities. In the Soviet Union, for example, all mass communication media for addressing the publics were monopolised by the state. The information was directed and manipulated to show "the victories of firms" – this was the so called "lie syndrome" (Tampere 2004, 97). The situation was more or less similar in other Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries. In Bulgaria, the term "public relations" was first mentioned in 1972, but with no real impact in the society and economy (Zlateva 2004, 72). In Hungary, although there were some traces of public relations practices in the sixties and seventies, the book on public relations in 1968 was banned, and no texts with the term "public relations" were allowed to be published (Szondi 2004, 187). When public relations were introduced at the beginning of transition in Poland, this activity was viewed as a suspicious propaganda stemming from the historic role of censorship during socialism (Lawniczak 2004, 221). A somewhat different situation was in Slovenia (then a part of socialist Yugoslavia) where firms, within the so called self-management market economy, were relatively autonomous, some of them even establishing departments for "contacts with the public" (Verčič 2004, 378). It is interesting that the noun "public" was never used in plural. There was only one public – the socialist public (see Verčič et al. 1996, 45).

The non-existence of the term during socialism does not mean that some sort of *quasi* public relations between firms and publics did not exist. "Socialist managers" were obliged to discuss important economic issues with an adequate level – depending on the significance of the issue – of political hierarchy. Political journalists were then assigned to communicate big issues through selected mass media to general publics, while the firms were "autonomous", entitled to communicate only minor issues associated mostly with local environment. Political structures were thus in the last consequence the main directors of the information flows and were therefore also able to predict the final result. In short, "public relations under communism meant political relations, not public relations" (Žáry 2004, 366).

After the collapse of socialism public relations regained its position within the organisational structure of postsocialist firms. Lawnizcak (2005, 2007) stresses the important role that public relations activities, taken generally, played at the beginning of the postsocialist period: it was a powerful instrument for changes of the institutional regime on the macro level, that is, from socialism to democracy, and for the acceptance of norms and institutions of capitalist economy. In the initial stage of transition, public relations, according to Lawnizcak, had three main tasks: to reverse fears and prejudices toward "ruthless capitalism" instilled during the socialist era, to inform people about a variety of "capitalisms" to choose from, and to facilitate effective functioning of the market economy (Lawnizcak 2001, 14-15).

Public Relations and the Stages of Transition – The Institutionalist View

Following the study of Verčič et al. (1996), Lawnizcak (2004, 218) adopts the idea that there are some generic principles of public relations, which can be applied in every political and economic system. We may agree with this idea, since the areas discussed in the previous section (organisation, issue management and financing of public relations) have been relevant also for firms and companies in transition economies. The basic specificities of the transitional environment stem

from the intensity of changes during postsocialist period, especially in the initial stages of transition. In the majority of Central and Eastern European countries, the period of transition might be divided into stages determined by political decisions related with the dynamics of the EU-accession process. The steps towards EU have subsequently been changing the companies' environment, the surrounding institutions and norms, as well as potential issues, and thereby also the role of public relations. This evolution of public relations in transition economies is schematised in Table 1.

Table 1: Evolution of Public Relations in Transition Economies

STAGES	ENVIRONMENT	DOMINANT ISSUES	PR – CONTENT STRATEGY (MODEL) FINANCING
Socialism (pre-transitional period)	Stable	Political selection and determination of issues (often with no economic relevance)	• No public relations • Political propaganda and state control in the last instance • PR budget not specified
(1) Introduction of market capitalism	Turbulent changes	Privatisation, managerial buyouts, massive firings, FDI	• Emergence of PR departments, unsystematic expression of power • Public information model, waiting/reactive "fire brigade" strategy • Affordable, no rule method of financing
(2) EU-accession process	Stabilising	FDI, acquisitions, mergers	• Identification of crucial stakeholders, emergence of systematic expression of power • Asymmetrical communication • Beginnings of planned routine financing
(3) EU (EMU) membership	Stabilised	Products, product policy, employees, environmental issues, corporate social responsibility	• Developing stakeholder relations, expression of power further refined • Beginnings of symmetrical communication, proactive strategy and cocreational view of PR • Routine financing

In the first stage of transition – no matter whether the country decided for shock therapy or followed a gradualist strategy towards capitalism – the new capitalist managers noticed the usefulness of public relations departments to communicate big issues such as brutal firings, explaining of "necessary" (and many times questionable) privatisations of formerly social property, etc. Many foreign companies were entering new markets in transition economies (FDI) and so were many PR agencies. Viewed from a different angle, this was an unsystematic expression of rude power of the new class of managerial elite. Public relations was typically seen from the functional perspective. Szondi (2004, 194) succinctly points out: "Public relations is brought into play when the decisions have been already made and need only to be communicated to the public," thus playing the role of the "fire brigade" (Zlateva 2004, 79). The most practised model at this stage was, to use

already mentioned Grunig's typology, public information related with the reactive strategy of "waiting" and combined with hope that issues will not provoke undesired reactions in the environment. Grunig and Grunig (2005), using the four-model typology, observed: "In the transitional societies of Eastern Europe many organisations are tempted to use public relations to try to asymmetrically impose their idea of the change on the publics that are affected by the change" (2005, 5). Since there was high unpredictability of issue spins, the budgeting of public relations was irregular (affordable no rule method) and also the impact on consumers' wants and sales – being of secondary importance for "new" capitalist managers – could not be estimated.

In the second stage of transition the environment was stabilising. This stage was characterised by gradual accomplishing of privatisation processes and by the acceptance of laws, norms and standards imposed by EU-membership, which all contributed to further stabilisation of the transitional environment and to the normalisation of public relations in accordance with the standards of developed countries. New issues emerged due to an increased internationalisation of transition economies, growth of FDI, mergers and acquisitions, takeovers, etc. Public relations activities were adopted in ever more companies and public relations departments expanded with the purpose of systematic identification and classification of crucial stakeholders (suppliers, government and ministries, even newly established consumers' organisations and emerging activist publics of civil society). Even the laggard firms, becoming aware of the importance of public relations for their businesses, established public relations departments. At the beginning of this stage, the possibility of unpredictable issue spins was still present and the budgeting of public relations was still irregular. But later the unpredictability of big issue spins retreated and, with standardised public relations, the budgeting became planned, with some firms already adopting proactive strategies. The power of the managerial class thus came to be exercised in a more refined way. Public relations managers noticed the importance of permanent maintenance of relations with selected crucial stakeholders.

The trend towards westernisation of public relations practices and similarity with public relations financing in developed economies has been continuing in the third stage of transition, when the business environment has stabilised. In the advanced transition economies, more and more corporations use public relations to systematically express their power and to gain competitive advantage. The public relations strategies of corporations have been characterised by cocreational approach and routine financing. The cocreational approach is often adopted to absorb the prevailing public views related with issues such as social responsibility, health and health care, environment protection, security, etc. Some companies are adopting symmetrical communication as a model for corporate public relations. However, all these strategies should be viewed in light of companies' efforts to increase their power in a refined way.

The Case of Slovenia

Slovenia was the first among ex-socialist transition economies to join in 2007 (after becoming a member of EU in 2004) European Monetary Union thus achieving full integration into EU. This was the result of a systematic governmental

macroeconomic policy from the beginning of transition as well as of the adaptation of firms towards EU-standards at the micro level. The development of public relations followed the same path. The results of the quantitative study carried out in 1998 (Grunig et al. 1998) showed that the principles of excellent public relations (although having less support of dominant coalitions within firms) clustered into an identical index for Slovenia as well as for the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada. Therefore, as already mentioned, Slovenian practice can be taken as an example of the public relations development in transition economies. During transition, several large Slovenian companies have been successfully applying various PR strategies to improve their market position and enhance their reputation and power.

By applying the above schematisation of the evolution of transitional public relations to Slovenia, some typical cases of successive stages may be illustrated. In the first year of transition, Slovenia adopted voucher mass privatisation, but during the following years some former socialist managers through not always transparent buyouts privatised large parts of profitable firms, mostly trading companies, like Mercator (the largest Slovenian merchandiser) and BTC (the largest shopping centre). These privatisations became an issue in the media, where various publics questioned the legality of buyouts, spinning the issue on the basis of at that time still present socialist egalitarian thinking, with people claiming that the new owners/managers used to be "one of us." The newly established public relations departments in these companies mostly applied waiting/reactive PR strategies. The main argument, which neutralised the considerations put forward by the publics about the negative consequences of privatisation, was that the emerging owners and managers would follow the benefits of the company (and of its employees) instead of unclearly and broadly defined benefits of the working class as a whole proclaimed during the socialist regime.

The second stage can be illustrated by the case of Belgian brewery Interbrew attempting to take over the Slovenian brewery Union. Union's management supported the takeover, but Laško, another Slovenian brewery, launched a public campaign against the takeover by a foreign company. The campaign identified the crucial stakeholder – the ministries, which later provoked the parliamentary debate based on the spin of "national interests." At last Laško, with the help of the government, took over Union. Another example is Revoz, a branch of Renault, located in Slovenia since 1989. Revoz has had a strong public relations department building the company's image as an important local job provider and national exporter. It continuously stressed the benefits for local environment, especially in terms of knowledge, technology, production methods and skills. Also, the cooperation with local educational and training system is being emphasised as important for both the firm and local environment. One of the results of this positive approach, stressing mutual interdependence, came in 2005, when the Renault headquarters decided the new Twingo model to be produced exclusively by Revoz. This required an extension of existing production capacities. Because of the broader macroeconomic effects (700 jobs were expected to be directly opened and another 500 with local suppliers) the crucial stakeholder – Slovenian government – agreed to subsidise the 400 million Euros project with 10 percent of total value. Due to well created and sustained image Revoz is today appreciated in both local and national community.

The third stage might be illustrated by Krka, a successful Slovenian pharmaceutical company, which has had a well organised public relations department proactively planning the public relations programs, i.e. analyzing the potential big issue spins and routinely dealing with daily communications with stakeholders, thus permanently cocreating the environment. In 2003, pharmaceutical giant Merck accused Krka of manufacturing a product for which patent had not yet expired. As big fine was expected, Krka's shares were falling sharply. The infringement was becoming a big issue with further unpredictable consequences. But Krka's public relations department and the CEO predicted this issue spin and managed to neutralise the issue by launching in media a campaign about the firm's high profitability and related social responsibility. Later, the alleged patent infringement dispute was ended by the decision of the Supreme Court which refused the request by Merck. Therefore, by using proactive PR, Krka even increased its power in and over the environment. Also, the Gorenje Group Company, producing primarily household appliances, is a good example of both second and third stage. The company started to consider its environment early, and focused on both the production for cleaner environment and cleaner production, thus expressing its social responsibility. The company has been very successful not only in providing information to its investors, but has also managed to create a proactive public relations policy that strengthened the company's role as a producer with good business results as well as a company that is deeply involved with broader social development in Slovenia and aware of the importance of investing in knowledge, human capital and new technologies for its long term progress. Consequently, by expressing its power through public relations, Gorenje in a refined way managed to enhance the position of its brand's image.

Conclusion

Public relations activities deserve attention of the economists and should be studied within the institutional paradigm viewing large companies as dominant players in the economy and rejecting the neoclassical focusing on the optimisation approach to PR. Public relations has to be viewed as a subtle mechanism by which corporations create, maintain and enforce their power or, more precisely, as a modern modification of the technocracy's control over the corporate internal and external environment with the purpose to maximise growth over the long run. This is close to the Galbraithian and Marxist view that PR is part of the sales effort which, although wasteful from the broader social perspective, helps to perpetuate the capitalist process by sustaining the demand for the ever increasing production of corporations. Institutional approach bears relevant aspects also for the analysis of public relations in transition economies. The schematisation of the evolution of public relations in transitional companies has shown that in the initial stages of transition public relations activities served to reduce the people's fears of capitalism and to facilitate the institutional transformation in the turbulent aftermath of the collapse of socialism. In later stages, particularly in Central and Eastern European transition economies on their way towards EU-membership, public relations departments in transitional firms worked on the creation and management of issues connected with product policies, environmental questions and social responsibility. Through increasingly proactive strategies and planned budgeting public relations in transitional environment is rapidly catching up with the standards of the field

in the developed economies. Elaborate PR strategies, related with philanthropy and other social issues, indicate that transitional firms have come of age and that refined means of competitive struggle, characteristic for developed capitalism, have become a common practice in transition economies. This might be one of the signs that transitional process is getting accomplished.

Notes:

1. According to Harris and Whalen (2008, 8) the public relations budget of the average US company exceeds US$ 3 million. Sir Martin Sorrell, CEO of WPP (one of the world's largest communications conglomerates), reported that these activities represented more than one-third of his firm's US$ 6 billion in revenue in 2004. He also predicted that they will reach one-half within the decade (ibid.). Also, the wages of spin/PR spending in America will be growing faster than ad spending and will reach more than $5 billion in 2009 (The Economist, 19th January, 2006, "Do We Have a Story For You?"). It is interesting that even the governmental public relations spending has been growing. According to the Federal public relations spending report (2005, 1), in 2004 the contracts with the PR companies were worth 88 million US$, which represents an increase of 128% from 2000, with some of the funds also being spent as a way of promoting Acts. Public relations industry market assessment 2007 reported that both in Europe and in the US PR industry has been growing fast: the top 30 agencies report increases of around 17% in the US and by 10.5% in the UK in 2006 in comparison with 2005. Even in present economic crisis spending on public relations in America grew in relative and absolute terms: PR spending grew by more than 4 percent in 2008 and nearly 3 percent in 2009 to $3.7 billion, compared with contracting spending on advertising by nearly 3 percent in 2008 and by 8 percent in the past year (The Economist, 16th January, 2010, "Good News").

2. In postsocialist economies the public relations spending was also high: in Slovenia, which, according to the leading theoreticians in the field Larissa and James Grunig, "provides an excellent example of how public relations should be practised in a transitional East European country" (Grunig and Grunig 2005, 8), the spending on managed communication in commercial sector is 1.5 percent of GDP (Verčič 2004, 377).

3. Rothschild (2002, 436). Rothschild claims that in neoclassical theory power is restricted to narrowly defined concepts such as monopoly power or bargaining power in goods and labour markets, that is, to specific "market- and price-relevant power phenomena which can be easily endogenized into a theory of competitive markets as deviations from perfect competition" (ibid., 433).

4. According to Browne and Quinn (2008, 246) there are, from the perspective of an economist, two keys for the analysis of social life: rational choice for the neoclassical, and class struggle (power) for the Marxist (and the institutionalist). At the level of the firm, the new institutionalists with the transaction costs paradigm (although granting the point of Marxist and institutionalist critics about the relevance of power relations) effectively promote rational choice as the principle key of analysis, while the principle of power has again been relegated to a secondary position. New institutionalism therefore belongs to the neoclassical paradigm (Rutherford 1994).

5. C.f. Baran and Sweezy (1966/1996). For Baran and Sweezy, "sales effort," which is conceptually "identical with Marx's expenses of circulation" (114), has turned out "to be a powerful antidote to monopoly capitalism's tendency to sink into a state of chronic depression (…) (and its) role in the capitalist system (…) has advanced to the status of one of its decisive nerve centers" (131, 115). Public relations can be viewed from the same perspective as "sales effort." Although Baran and Sweezy, in thoroughly Marxist terms, consider public relations experts as a new stratum of "surplus eaters" (ibid., 127), it is obvious that PR activities on the other hand contribute to sustaining corporate power and to absorbing the surplus. But from a social point of view, Baran and Sweezy, consider public relations to be, just like sales effort, nothing but massive waste (ibid., 379-380).

6. Until then, in Grunig's opinion, public relations was "a field without a body of knowledge" (Grunig 1992, 5). See also Grunig et al. (2002, 5). According to the four-model typology, which was first presented by Grunig and Hunt (1984), the evolution of public relations went from lower level to higher level models: (1) press agentry – publicity model; (2) public information model; (3) two way asymmetrical model; (4) two way symmetrical model.

7. Nayden (2009), for example, offers a different starting point for the concept of public relations arguing that the basic level of public relations is relations between individuals as "strangers," which do not need any "institutional mediation." Taking Nayden's conceptualization, we focus on the aims of PR as "institutional mediation" of the modern corporation.

8. According to Kotler and Keller (2009, 563), "public relations (PR) includes a variety of programs to promote or protect a company's image or individual products," which is similar to proactive/reactive distinction, since promotion might be understood as proactive public relations, while protection is reactive.

9. However, high profitability is "valid" only for companies practicing excellent symmetrical model of public relations and not for companies with lower level models of public relations such as press agentry and public information. On average, ROI in public relations is about 186 percent (Grunig et al. 2002, 109).

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POLITICAL DISCUSSION AND NEWS USE IN THE CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC SPHERE:

THE "ACCESSIBILITY" AND "TRAVERSABILITY" OF THE INTERNET

JENNIFER BRUNDIDGE

Abstract

This article is directed toward understanding the impact of Internet use on the accessibility of politically relevant online discourse (news and political discussion) and about the extent to which these forms of discourse are meaningfully and intimately connected. Through the use of nationally representative survey data, findings suggest: (1) when compared to offline counterparts, SES and political knowledge are equally, if not more relevant to frequent use of online news and engagement in online political discussion, suggesting that Internet use has contributed to a slightly less accessible public sphere; (2) when compared to offline counterparts, the relationship between online news and online discussion is the strongest, suggesting an especially intimate and important connection between the two forms of discourse.

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In the last decade or so, the Internet has revolutionised the structures of the public sphere by creating a virtually unlimited number of news sites and forums of political discussion available on demand to citizens with Internet access, and by blurring and making more porous the boundaries between "news use" and "political discussion." Questions about what these changes portend for the state of democracy yield numerous and often complex answers. Yet by having the structural aspects of the public sphere brought so visibly into the forefront, the Internet may in fact help us to be more concrete about what the public sphere is, and how people engage with it.

In this regard, Dahlgren (2001, 2005) points us in an interesting direction:

> *Interaction [in the context of the public sphere] actually consists of two aspects. First, it has to do with the citizens' encounters with the media – the communicative processes of making sense, interpreting, and using the output. The second aspect of interaction is that between citizens themselves, which can include anything from two-person conversations to large meetings. To point to the interaction among citizens – whether or not it is formalised as deliberation – is to take a step into the social contexts of everyday life. Interaction has its sites and spaces, its discursive practices, its psychocultural aspects; in this sense, the public sphere has a very fluid, sprawling quality …. With the advent of the Net, civic interaction takes a major historical step by going online, and the sprawling character of the public sphere becomes all the more accentuated* (Dahlgren 2005, 14).

In this context, blurred and porous boundaries between "news" and "political discussion" help to create this fluid quality and an impressive "interspatiality," (Dahlgren 2001), which allow individuals to traverse seamlessly and with relative ease from one discursive space to the next.

Indeed, the structural transformation of social boundaries – the increasing blurred and porous form they seem to be taking – is perhaps one of the most quintessential aspects of the contemporary public sphere, evoked frequently in Internet related scholarship (e.g. Bimber, Stohl and Flanagin 2005; Cammaerts and Van Audenhove 2005). Yet for the most part, vivid and compelling accounts of a structurally "fluid and sprawling" online public sphere with impressive "interspatiality" and weakened social boundaries have remained at an abstract theoretical level.

Empirical research on online news and political discussion has instead tended to focus on particular outcomes of these processes, such as increased or decreased social capital and political participation (e.g. Bimber and Davis 2003; Shah et al. 2005), political learning (e.g. Eveland, Martin and Seo) or altered framing (e.g. Zhou and Moy 2007) and selective exposure processes (e.g. Tewksbury and Althaus 2000). These studies do lend substantial credence to the importance of the mechanisms involved with online news and political discussion, but tell us little about individual-level interaction with the structural characteristics of online news and political discussion in and of itself, irrespective its more instrumental, pro-political-participation-purposes. In what was perhaps a rush by researchers to search for more instrumental "effects," some relatively basic questions about forums for online news and political discussion, as the essential "institutions" of the public sphere have been somewhat overlooked at the empirical level.

This may in part stem from the notion that critical and interpretive approaches are far better at capturing the more nuanced aspects of human experience. Quantitative measures seem ill equipped to capture the abstract experiences of human interactions within the "boundaries" of the public sphere. This notion is not unfounded. Yet an empirical, even quantitative approach could provide support for, if not perhaps a thorough test of the validity of critical theoretical claims.

In this article, I therefore take an initial step toward empirically addressing the subject of individual-level interaction within the changing structural context of the "online" public sphere. I do this by first explicating two key concepts: *accessibility* and *traversability*. I argue that the structural boundaries of the Internet – the increasingly blurred and porous form they seem to be taking – are not increasing the accessibility of the public sphere, but are increasing its traversability. To examine this proposition, I generate several hypotheses related to accessibility and traversability and test these using nationally representative survey data.

Conceptualising Accessibility and Traversability

Before more explicitly relating the concepts of accessibility and traversability to the online public sphere, they may usefully be traced back to public sphere theory. Indeed, in many ways, the issues raised by the institutions of the online public sphere are old ones because the role of news media and forums of political discussion in the operation of democracy are classic concerns of public sphere theory. Most fundamentally, news media and forums of political discussion are theorised to work in tandem toward the proper formation of deliberative public opinion, with one activity solidifying the other. Indeed, "publics," according to Habermas (1991) and also Dewey (1954), exist as discursive processes:

> *By "public sphere" we mean first of all a domain of our social life in which such a thing as* public opinion *can be formed. Access to the public sphere is open to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere is constituted in every* conversation *in which private persons come together to form a public. When the public is large, this kind of communication requires certain means of dissemination and influence; today,* newspapers and periodicals, radio and television *are the media of the public sphere* (Habermas 1991, 398; emphasis added).

Other prominent theorists make similar claims (e.g. Tocqueville 1840; Bryce 1888; Tarde 1899). Bryce (1888, 4) illustrates, albeit in a highly gendered fashion, how the deliberative process takes shape: "A business man reads in his newspaper at break-fast on the events of the preceding day. He goes down to his office in the train, talks there to two or three acquaintances, and perceives that they agree or do not agree with his own still faint impressions. ... Then debate and controversy begin." More recently, Page (1996) makes the claim that "public deliberation" can take place only with the assistance of "professional communicators," while Anderson and his colleagues suggest that, "News is what people talk about, and news makes people talk" (Anderson, Dardenne and Killenberg 1994, 37).

Implicit (and in some cases explicit) in the normative arguments of these and other theorists are at least two basic claims: (1) Spaces of news and political discussion can and should be *accessible* to all citizens, so that "debate and controversy"

can in fact begin in any meaningful or widespread way. (2) People can and should be able to *traverse* with relative ease from news use to political discussion – from reading the newspaper, for instance, to discussing what was read in the newspaper on a train. In short, the *accessibility* and what might be referred to as the *traversability* of the news media and forums of political discussion are normatively desirable characteristics of the public sphere.

Accessibility, in this sense, involves the degree to which the structure of the public sphere may be easily penetrated. Assuming the essential existence of the news media and forums of political discussion, constructs related to accessibility would seem to be primarily governed by the porousness of the boundaries between the private and the public sphere. Traversability, on the other hand, becomes relevant only after people have accessed the public sphere and is governed by the nature of the boundaries between the news media and forums of political discussion. In this case, blurred and porous boundaries between the categories of news and discussion make travel between these discursive spaces respectively seamless and easy. This is because these boundary characteristics translate into news media and forums of political discussion that are tightly connected in time and space, allowing citizens to discuss news with others near or at the same time that they receive it.

The classic public sphere seems to have been, in its way, relatively traversable, grounded as public deliberation was in world of Arts and Letters. The salons and coffee houses at this time were, according to Habermas (1989, 32-33), "centers of criticism – literary at first, then also political" and were places where "literature had to legitimate itself." In this sense, the boundaries between the discursive spaces of the classic public sphere were both blurred and porous. They were *blurred* because literary works were at least metaphorically speaking, both "written" and "discussed" in the coffee houses and salons – literature was discussion and discussion was literature. The boundaries between literature and discussion were *porous* to the extent that the very purpose of the salons and coffee houses was the discussion of literature. It was obviously then quite easy and indeed expected to broach topics political and otherwise that were related in someway to literature. Collectively the structural boundaries of the classic public sphere seem to have provided direct mechanisms for connecting literature (including news) and discussion in time and space, allowing participants to traverse seamlessly and with ease from one form of discourse to the other. This in fact, is at the very core of the idea of the classic public sphere.

On the other hand, the classic public sphere was not nearly as accessible as it was traversable, at least by contemporary standards. Though there was an active emphasis placed on the idea of accessibility, grounded in Enlightenment ideals of equality, questions remain as to how that idea bore out in reality, even among white propertied men. And, as acknowledged by Habermas himself, women and people of lower socio-economic status, were not admitted.

One of the chief features of the "industrial age public sphere," however, was to democratise information thereby increasing accessibility (at least to information). The mass production and distribution of newspapers made politically relevant information widely available to the public and made large-scale democracies possible (e.g. de Tocqueville 1840/1945). Even the much-maligned television, seems to have had, at least initially, a democratising effect on information. As witnessed

by Blumler (1970): "[television] conveys impressions of the world of politics to individuals whose access to serious coverage of current affairs is otherwise quite limited" and could "promote the development of more effective patterns of citizenship." In fact, early research findings indicated that voters, not excluding less informed ones, became more informed through their television use (Trenamanand and McQuail 1961; Blumler and McQuail 1968).

At the same time, a classic line of thought in the social sciences has been in effect that the traversability of the public sphere in the western world was problematised during the industrial age through increased urbanisation and suburbanisation, which generally resulted in anomie, the erosion of community infrastructure and available forums for civic association (Durkheim 1952; Putnam 2000). Up to a point, Marx (1844) can be placed with this group, for his concern with the structural forces of capitalism and industrialisation in separating humans from labour, nature, and political community. The Internet provides a departure from the hampered traversability associated with the late 19th and the 20th century – a transition from an industrial to an information age.

The concepts of *accessibility* and *traversability* help generate empirical questions about individual characteristics that might make the boundaries between people and online news and forums of political discussion more or less permeable or porous (accessibility), how intimately online news and political discussion are related (traversability), and how these relationships compare with traditional news media use and "face-to-face" forums of political discussion. From a theoretical perspective, we can further look to the knowledge gap hypothesis, rational choice theory, and theories of the public sphere, for clues about answers to these questions.

Accessibility: How "Public" is the Online Public Sphere?

At first glance, the contemporary public sphere would seem more accessible than ever before. There are now more available news sources and forums of political discussion than ever before, most of which are immediately accessible online, which is to say they are available at any time of day, to anyone with access to the Internet, from any location where the Internet is available, and for the most part without cost (Madden 2006). The contrast on each of these counts with print newspapers, television news, and radio can hardly be overstated.

Moreover, the number of these resources and the number of people taking advantage of them are on the rise. Since the creation of the World Wide Web in the early 1990s, news sites and the users of them have rapidly multiplied. By the end of 2005, nearly 50 million people in the US obtained some of their news through the Internet on an average day (Horrigan 2006). A recent 2008 Pew report finds that the proportion of Americans who report regularly learning about the presidential campaign online has doubled since 2000 (9 percent) to 2008 (24 percent). Online political discussion has also been steadily growing in prevalence. Surveys report that almost a third of Internet users regularly engage with groups online, with nearly 10 percent reporting that they engaged in online discussions about the 2004 presidential election (Rainie, Horrigan and Cornfield 2005).

Yet there are structural level and individual level mechanisms that may make access to these resources more or less likely. At the structural level, there are a number of economic and technological barriers that may make access to the online

public sphere less likely. First and foremost, people may not have simple physical access to the Internet, let alone access to the more politically relevant aspects of it. Assuming sufficient physical access at the structural level, which is to say that there is a viable Internet connection and regular access to a computer to connect to it, the remaining relevant structural conditions lie at the level of the online public sphere itself. The structural level of the online public sphere obviously encompasses an array of phenomena, including media ownership, political economics, and legal frameworks, a thorough discussion of which is beyond the scope of this article. But perhaps most relevant to the changing structure of the news and political discussion are structural transformation of the boundaries around and between these discursive spaces – the increasing blurred and porous form they seem to be taking. In this way, the structural realm creates a kind of "political ecology," setting the boundaries that influence the navigation of information and discussion online (Dahlgren 2005). At this level then, the increasing online options for convenient news use and political discussion, would seem to have the effect of making somewhat more porous the boundaries between the private and the public spheres, at least for those with high quality Internet access, which would then facilitate increased access to the public sphere, especially for those who might not otherwise engage in news use and political discussion. If this were the case, we would expect to find that at the individual level, standard predictors of political behaviour, including education, income, political knowledge, and self-efficacy, are less strong influences or regulators of who is engaged with the public sphere. The "public" aspect of the public sphere would be then be accentuated by the Net.

Classic explanations of political behaviour, rooted in rational choice theory, would seem to point us in this direction (e.g. Downs 1957). A "rational choice" involves a form of cost benefit analysis, which may in this case, be applied to strategies involved in information/news seeking and decisions to participate in political discussion. In the case of news use, for example, if the potential costs of news (e.g. time, money, mental exertion) for certain individuals outweigh its potential benefits (e.g. uncertainty reduction), these individuals are unlikely to seek news or engage in political discussion. Of course, the exact opposite is true, if the situation is reversed and the benefits outweigh the costs. This line of reasoning suggests that if technological developments, such as the Internet, structurally reduce the cost of news acquisition, provide more convenient and less demanding forums for political discussion, people will be more likely to engage in such activities. Most importantly, those individuals with the most to gain will be the most likely benefit from these developments (for discussion see Bimber 2003).

Yet human beings are not necessarily rational creatures (Katz and Rice 2002; Neuman 1991). Any technology, and especially the Internet, is shaped not only by its rational uses, but also by human psychology, which suggests that as the cost of entry to the public sphere decreases and sources of news and forums of political discussion increase, the "public sphere rich" will actually get richer, while the "public sphere poor" will remain relatively poorer (Bimber 2003). This is the fundamental proposition of the knowledge gap hypothesis (Donohue, Tichenor and Olien 1975). The psychological basis of this proposition draws on schema theory and related research, suggesting that individuals with more complex cognitive schema are better able to process and incorporate new information. Tichenor, Donohue

and Olien (1970), for example, contend that education creates more sophisticated communication skills and abilities that assist individuals in processing information more easily and effectively.

Overall, it appears that those people who used the news before the Internet are quite similar to the people who use the news on the Internet. As with users of traditional political information sources, users of online information sources tend to be white males, high in socio economic status, political efficacy, and political knowledge (Bimber 2001; 2003; Scheufele and Nisbet 2002), who have an interest in politics and who are more likely to be sceptical of information (Bimber 2003; also see Shah et al. 2005). A recent Pew report furthermore finds that people who used the Internet for news and information about the 2006 U.S. midterms elections were predominantly: white (77 percent) males (53 percent) under the age of 50 (71 percent) with a high income (over 75,000 – 44 percent), and a college degree (49 percent) (Rainie and Horrigan 2007).

Political discussion, highly related to news use, should also conform to the knowledge gap hypothesis. While studies attempting to predict online discussion have been somewhat limited, findings thus far seem to be reflective of the findings on face-to-face political discussion, and generally support the knowledge gap hypothesis – that is, in terms of political discussion, the online forums do not appear to be markedly more accessible than their "face-to-face" counterparts. In a field experiment using a nationally representative panel, Price, Cappella and Nir (2002) find that individuals who participated in scheduled online discussions conformed to a hierarchical model of participation – they were older, highly educated, predominantly white, more politically knowledgeable, more politically interested and active, and had higher levels of social trust.

Overall, however, in terms of accessibility, human behaviour dramatically complicates the potentially rosy picture painted by some structural aspects of the public sphere. Increased ease of entry into the public sphere is an insufficient criterion for participation in it. In spite of initial hopes, we should therefore not expect the Internet to revolutionise news use and political discussion by bringing in entirely new participants. Instead, the "public sphere rich," those high in SES and political knowledge, for example, will likely get richer. This leads to a general expectation that in terms of accessibility, data on participation in the public sphere via news consumption and political discussion will provide similar portraits of both online and offline media and forums of discussion, or more specifically:

> *H1: Online political discussion and online news use are positively related to standard predictors of political engagement (e.g., education, income, political knowledge).*

However, we should expect some variance in terms of individual characteristics, including socio-demographics and political attitudes, that may help us to understand what sort of "public" has access to and is engaging in the online news use and political discussion and how that public compares to the "offline" public. This is not well understood. There is at least some evidence to suggest, for example, that online political discussion is attracting a new kind of political discussant with only some of the individual characteristics of offline discussants. Stromer-Galley (2002) finds that a need for privacy and social anxiety predicts online talk but not face-to-face talk.

Two sets of findings stand out as particularly characteristic of online news use and political discussion: those on age and gender. Unlike traditional news, young people are especially inclined to use the Internet for news and information (e.g. Madden 2003; Madden and Fox 2006). In particular, findings suggest: While most citizens use the Internet to supplement other media sources, there is some evidence that suggests that there is a growing segment of the population, in particular young people (e.g. "generation X" as suggested in a early study by Shah, Kwak and Holbert 2001), for whom political engagement is most intensely connected to Internet use. Young people may then find the online public sphere more accessible than the offline public sphere.

Findings suggest that women, on the other hand, are somewhat less likely to use the Internet for news and political discussion (e.g. Katz and Rice 2002), finding it less accessible than other media and forums of discussion. The usage gap between men and women has been substantially reduced as Internet technology has continued to diffuse into mainstream use. Nevertheless, a small gap remains. A recent national level survey by the Pew Research Center finds, for example, that during the 2006 midterm election, more males (34 percent of all male Internet users) got their campaign related news from online sources than did female (29 percent of all female Internet users) (Ranie and Horrigan 2007). Stromer-Galley (2002), also finds that women are somewhat less likely to access the available spaces for online political discussion.

Overall, however, it is not entirely clear how relevant these demographic variables are relative to other standard predictors of political behaviour and in comparison with offline news use and discussion in various "face-to-face" forums. I therefore ask:

> *RQ1: Do the variables predicting online news use vary from those predicting traditional news use (i.e., newspapers and television news)?*
>
> *RQ2: Do the variables predicting the frequency of online political discussion vary from those predicting frequency of discussion in various "face-to-face" forums?*

Traversability: Characterising the Relationship between News and Political Discussion

In contrast to *accessibility*, however, *traversability* (the ability to move easily or seamlessly from news to political discussion) seems an especially defining aspect of the *online* public sphere. Once people have crossed the individual-level and structural-level hurdles to accessing the online public sphere, important questions arise as to how the boundaries of this "new world" influence their experience of it. That is, once people have accessed online news and online political discussion, they are likely to already possess the individual characteristics (e.g. SES, political knowledge, political self-efficacy) that empower them to take advantage of whatever structural advantages the Internet holds in the way of traversability.

I have argued that the more intimate the relationship between news and political discussion, the greater the traversability of the public sphere. This dynamic stems from a more general relationship between news media use and political discussion that varies in intimacy but is relatively consistent in terms of its mere existence.

Indeed, an empirical relationship between news media use and political discussion has been relatively well established in research. Koch (1994), for example, finds that reading *The New York Times* on a daily basis causes a significant increase in political discussion. Similarly, research by McLeod and his colleagues, indicates that newspaper reading and local news viewing predict civic participation at the community level, where individuals reflect and deliberate about issues (McLeod et al. 1999). Kim, Wyatt and Katz (1999) furthermore find a relationship between newspaper reading and political conversation. Interestingly, however, they do not find a significant relationship between television news use and political conversation. This finding is in line with the notion that television is not particularly useful to the public sphere (Habermas 1989). It is not clear from these studies, however, how certain types of news media connect up to different forums of political discussion. The newspaper, for example, may lead to discussion in certain forums, whereas television news may conceivably lead to discussion at other forums not explored by these studies.

Importantly, it is difficult to predict where the political discussion might take place because traditional news media seem to present no clear connection to particular forums of political discussion. It is difficult to see, for example, how a newspaper is directly connected to political discussion at the workplace (commonly invoked as an important forum for face-to-face political discussion, e.g. Scheufele et al. 2004; 2006). While it is easy to see how reading the newspaper could lead to discussion in any number of forums, a newspaper presents no obvious link to any contemporary forum of political discussion. The boundaries between newspapers and political discussion at the workplace, for example, are not blurred but easily delineated. One knows when one is reading the newspaper and when one is discussing politics at the workplace. The boundaries between these two spaces may also be less porous than those found online for at least 2 reasons: (1) Newspapers and the workplace are not aligned closely together in time and space, allowing information garnered from newspapers to be forgotten or made less meaningful in the transition; (2) The workplace is usually not a specifically designated space for political discussion, and indeed has other, more explicit purposes, which may make the transition from news to discussion a bit more challenging.

This kind of lower-level of traversability may in fact be a general feature of the industrial age. Online news, as we shall see, seems to have its most obvious expression in online forums of discussion. In this sense, the online public sphere may be more akin to the classic public sphere where salons and coffee houses were ostensibly intimately linked with the world of Arts and Letters (Habermas 1989). For an understanding of just how this might operate we turn to the structure of the online public sphere.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, coffee houses, salons, and newspapers were the institutions comprising the structural realm of the classic public sphere. With the intensification of the industrial age in the late 19th and 20th century, newspapers, radio, television, and perhaps volunteer associations, church, and the workplace may perhaps, be identified as institutions of the public sphere. With the advent of the Internet, the institutions of the public sphere have taken a new structural form – they may include formal news sites, video sharing sites, blogs, wikis, social networking sites, chat rooms, website bulletin boards, email,

instant messaging, and so on. Within this form, the categories of news and political discussion are tightly connected in time and space and indeed, often blur into each other. Prior to the Internet, for example, mass communication and interpersonal communication could be rather clearly delineated from one another. This delineation is substantially blurred online, where communication can occur on various levels at the same time (Dahlgren 2005).

Within these online discursive domains, blurred and porous boundaries between one communicative space and the next allows for increased traversibility between online news and spaces of political discussion. This may happen in a number of different ways. For example: Most news sites now enable readers to comment on certain articles, allowing people to discuss (or at least comment on) what they read in the same space that they read it. Social networking sites allow users to post links to news articles and their opinions or thoughts on political information via status updates on Twitter and Facebook, which may then be discussed among social networks through "comments" and "tweets." Often news sites even provide links to social networking sites, which allow for easier transitions from one to the other. Indeed, most transitions between news and discussion are either seamless or just a click or two away. People may therefore read about or watch the news online and in the very next moment blog about it or post a video on a video sharing site, such as YouTube, where it may in turn be discussed, or simply email someone about what they read.

Occasionally, it is altogether unclear when one is using the news and when one is discussing it (e.g. blogs, tweets). Some scholars see this form of ambiguity as fundamentally postmodern due the unprecedented amount of agency given to audiences (e.g. Landow 1997; Murray 1997; Wall 2005). As Murray (1997, 128) suggests (while clearly not referring to blogs or social-networking sites, which did not yet exist), "When things are going right on the computer, we can be both the dancer and the caller of the dance. This is the feeling of agency."

All in all, in the structural realm of the contemporary public sphere, online "news" and political "discussion" appear to be intimately linked and indeed, sometimes indistinguishable from one another, facilitating high levels of traversability. We should therefore expect to find a similar relationship between online news and online discussion to that which exists between traditional news media and offline discussion, but perhaps an even more intimate one given the virtually unlimited number of politically-relevant online spaces and the rather porous and blurred boundaries between them. That is, there should be a stronger relationship between online news and online discussion to that which exists between traditional news and various "face-to-face" forums of discussion, such as volunteer associations, commonly mentioned as an important space of political discussion. The Internet provides direct links between news and discussion, compressing them in terms of time and space, drawing them closer together. In this regard, the online public sphere may be somewhat more like the classic public sphere and less like the public sphere of the industrial age.

Empirical research supports the possibility of a particularly close connection between online news and online discussion, though there has yet to be a thorough model comparison between online and offline news use and political discussion. According to the survey findings of Shah and his colleagues, for example, online

information seeking is positively associated with interactive civic messaging, while newspaper use and television news use are non-significant (Shah et al. 2005). A Pew Research Center survey furthermore finds that of the people who report getting their 2006 midterm election campaign related news online, 8 percent of them report posting their own campaign related blog, 13 percent report forwarding someone else's political commentary, 1 percent report creating their own audio or video recordings, and 8 percent report forwarding some else's political audio or video recordings. All in all then, 23 percent of people who report getting their 2006 midterm election campaign related news online also report engaging in some sort of subsequent communication about it (Fallows 2007).Therefore:

> *H2: The relationship between online news use and online discussion is stronger than the relationships between offline news use and offline forums of discussion.*

Online news may also provide a direct link to at least one "face-to-face" forum discussion: the workplace. This is because of the intimate connection between the Internet and many places of work. A Pew Internet Project report, for example, suggests that 57 million organisational members (62 percent of all employed workers) in the United States have Internet access (Fallows 2002). Given the central role of the Internet at many places of work, people may be reading online news and then be speaking to someone in the next cubicle or around the "water-cooler" in the very next moment. This seems less likely to be the case with a newspaper, for example. While "extra-curricular activities" such as reading the news online may be to some extent be frowned upon at some places of work, this activity is far less conspicuous than reading the newspaper at work, which would be quite awkward in almost any work setting.

The relationship between online news use and political discussion should be somewhat weaker than the relationship between online news and online political discussion, however, to the extent that there is somewhat less traversability in the former context. While the boundaries between online news and political discussion at the workplace may be blurred, the boundaries may not be as porous as the online political discussion context because the workplace is not always deemed an appropriate place for political discussion. Therefore:

> *H3: Online news use is positively related to frequency of political discussion at work but the relationship will be somewhat weaker than the relationship between online news use and online political discussion.*

Research Design

Variables

Socio-demographic Variables and Factual Political Knowledge. The age of respondents was an open-ended continuous item (M = 50.1, SD = 17.2). *Sex* was coded with female equal to 0 and male equal to 1 (54.8 percent female, 45.2 percent male). *Education* was an open-ended continuous item that asked respondents to report their total number of years of schooling (M = 14.6, SD = 3.0). *Income* was evaluated by asking respondents to report their total household income for the previous year (2002) by selecting from 10 categories ranging from *$10,000 or less* to *101,000* or more (median = $50,000 to $60,000).

Political Attitudes. Several standard predictors of political behaviour were used in the analyses: *Ideology* (M=4.2, SD=1.4) was measured by computing the mean of two 7-point scale items. One item asked about the respondents' fiscal ideology and the other asked about social ideology, with 1 being *very liberal* and 7 being *very conservative*. The measure for *ideological polarity* also employed these two items. The farther along the ideology scale in either direction indicated higher polarity (M=2.5, SD=1.6). *Political self-efficacy* was measured by computing the mean of three items (1 = strongly agree, up to 10 = strongly disagree) that assessed respondent's beliefs about their ability to understand and influence government processes (M=5.8, SD=.93). *Factual political knowledge* (M = 2.6; SD = 1.2, α = .63) was an additive index of four items tapping correct identification of public figures and knowledge of current events, such as *Do you happen to know what job or political office is held by Dick Cheney?* Finally, *social trust* was assessed through one item (1 = strongly agree, up to 10 = strongly disagree), which asked about the extent to which people can generally be trusted.

News Media Use (offline and online). *Newspaper news use* (M=6.2, SD=2.5) and *television news use* (M=6.0, SD=2.7) were each created by computing the mean of two items (from 0 = never to 1 = very rarely, up to 10 = all the time) that asked about attention to newspaper coverage of *national* and of *international* public affairs (newspaper news use) and attention to television coverage of *national* and of *international* public affairs (television news use). Online news use was similarly created by computing the mean of two items (from 0 = never to 1 = very rarely, up to 10 = all the time) that asked about the frequency with which respondents searched online for information on *international* and *national issues* (M=3.1, SD=3.1).

Political Discussion. *Offline political discussion* was assessed through the use of five separate items (from 0 = never to 1 = very rarely, up to 10 = all the time) measuring the frequency of political discussion at various face-to-face forums of discussion commonly referenced to in political communication literature (e.g. Mutz 2006; Scheufele et al. 2004), including the *workplace* (M=3.6, SD=2.9), *church* (M=2.5, SD=2.4), *non-church community/ volunteer groups* (M=3.0 SD=2.5), with *family* (M=5.8 SD=3.0), and with *neighbors* (M=2.9 SD=2.4). *Online political discussion* (M=.82, SD=.60) was assessed through computing the mean of two separate items (from 0 = never to 1 = very rarely, up to 10 = all the time) that asked about frequency of political discussion via *chat/instant messaging* and *email* (M=1.3 SD=1.6).

Data

The data used to test the hypotheses and research questions are derived from a national level survey conducted by The Cornell University Survey Research Institute in October and November of 2003, using CATI methods (N = 781). I am indebted to Dietram A. Scheufele, who was the principal investigator for the original study. The response rate was 55 percent based upon AAPOR definitions (Research definition Response Rate 3).

Results

I employed nine OLS regression analyses to examine the hypotheses and research questions. All hypotheses are supported by the data.

Research Question 1

Research question 1 asked whether the variables predicting online news use and traditional news use would vary. A series of three regression analyses were run examining the predictors of online news use, newspaper news use, and television news use. Online news use was inversely predicted by age (β =-.21, $p < .001$) and positively predicted by education (β =.15, $p < .001$), sex (male) (β =.07, $p < .05$), political knowledge (β =.20, $p < .001$), political self-efficacy (β =.11, $p < .01$), and while falling just short of significance, income (β =.06, $p < .10$), newspaper news use was positively predicted by education (β =.13, $p < .001$), political knowledge (β =.12, $p < .01$), age (β =.24, $p < .001$) and social trust (β =.09, $p < .05$). Finally, television news use was positively predicted by education (β =.09, $p < .05$), political knowledge (β =.13, $p < .01$), age (β =.15, $p < .001$), and though falling short of significance, ideological polarity (β =.09, $p < .10$). Out of the three models, the one predicting online news use is the strongest, with an adjusted R2 of .18, compared with .13 for newspapers and .07 for television (See Table 1).

Table 1: OLS Regressions Explaining News Use: TV, Newspaper, Online

Variable	TV	NP	Online
Education	**.09***	**.13*****	**.15*****
Sex (male)	.02	-.01	**.07***
Income	.01	.06	**.06+**
Age	**.15*****	**.24*****	**-.21*****
Political Knowledge	**.13****	**.12****	**.20*****
Ideology (conservatism)	.03	-.04	-.03
Ideological Polarity	**.09+**	.05	-.003
Political Self-efficacy	.01	.03	**.11****
Social Trust	.06	**.09***	.05
N	692	696	696
Adj. R^2	.07	.13	.18
F	7.1***	12.8***	18.3***

+ p<.10; * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001
Note: Regression entries are standardized Beta coefficients.

Research Question 2 / Hypotheses

Research question 2 asked how the variables predicting offline forums of political discussion and those predicting online political discussion would differ. A set of regression analyses therefore examined the influence of several standard predictors of political engagement on frequency of political discussion online, at work, with family, at church, with neighbours, and at volunteer associations.

Again the strongest model overall is that predicting the online activity. Frequency of online discussion is inversely predicted by age (β =-.24, $p < .001$), and positively predicted by income (β =.08, $p < .05$), political knowledge (β =.08, $p < .05$), and importantly, online news (β =.33, $p < .001$). Frequency of discussion at work is inversely predicted by age (β =-.28, $p < .001$), and positively predicted by sex

(male) (β =.09, $p < .05$), online news (β =.08, $p < .05$), and while falling just short of significance, newspaper news use (β =.09, $p = .06$) and television news use (β =.07, $p < .09$). Frequency of discussion with family is inversely predicted by sex (male) (β =-.09, $p < .05$) and age (β =.-12, $p <. 05$), positively predicted by education (β =.10, $p < .05$), newspaper news use (β =.10, $p < .05$), and television news use (β =.22, $p < .001$). Frequency of discussion at church is positively predicted by ideology (indicating greater conservatism) (β =.16, $p < .001$), ideological polarity (β =.14, $p < .001$), newspaper news use (β =.14, $p < .01$), and while falling just short of significance, television news use (β =.06, $p < .06$). Frequency of discussion at volunteer associations is positively predicted by newspaper news use (β =.11, $p < .05$), television news use (β =.11, $p < .05$), and falling just short of significance, sex (male) (β =.07, $p < .08$), and inversely, income (β =-.07, p = .09). Finally, frequency of discussion with neighbours is positively predicted by newspaper news use (β =.16, $p < .01$) and television news use (β =.11, $p < .01$), and falling just short of significance, ideological polarity (β =.17, $p < .06$), and inversely by education (β =-08, p = .08).

Among these relationships, it was hypothesised that the relationship between online news use and online political discussion would be stronger than the relationships between offline news use and offline forums of political discussion, which would suggest greater traversability. This hypothesis was confirmed, with online news use being the strongest media use predictor in general, and by far, the strongest predictor of online political discussion (β=.33, $p<.001$). Hypothesis 3 was also confirmed, with online news predicting discussion at work. And as further hypothesised, the relationship was rather small relative to the relationship between online news use and online political discussion (β=.08, $p<.05$). Notably, discussion at work and discussion online were the only discussion variables that were predicted by online news use (See Table 2).

Table 2.: OLS Regressions Explaining Frequency of Political Discussion

Variable	Online	Work	Family	Church	Volunteer	Neighbor
Education	.06	.03	**.10***	.04	.05	**-.07+**
Sex (male)	-.01	**.09***	**-.09***	-.04	**.07+**	.04
Income	**.08***	.03	.003	-.03	**-.07+**	-.01
Age	**-.24*****	**-.28*****	**-.12****	-.01	-.05	.01
Political Knowledge	**.08***	.03	**.16*****	.00	-.04	.07
Ideology (right)	-.05	-.01	.04	**.16*****	-.02	.02
Ideological Polarity	-.03	.04	**.07+**	**.14*****	**.06+**	**.07+**
Self-efficacy	-.003	.05	.05	-.02	.03	-.05
Social Trust	.05	.02	.001	-.01	.06	-.004
Online news	**.33*****	**.08***	.004	.03	-.001	-.02
Newspaper news	.06	**.09+**	**.10***	**.14****	**.11***	**.16****
TV news	-.02	**.07+**	**.22*****	**.08+**	**.11***	**.12****
N	692	681	685	683	680	687
Adj. R^2	.26	.13	.16	.08	.04	.06
F	21.6***	9.1***	11.7***	6.2***	3.3***	4.8***

+ p<.10 * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001
Note: Regression entries are standardized Beta coefficients.

Discussion

The purpose of this article was to examine the accessibility and traversability of the contemporary public sphere. In terms of accessibility, it appears the typically "public sphere rich" are in fact getting richer. As this applies to news use in particular, the overall model of online news, which includes most standard predictors of political behaviour, is the strongest when compared with offline news counterparts. This means that the socio-economic and cognitive hurdles are actually greater for accessing the online public sphere than accessing the offline public sphere.

Why is online news less accessible than offline news? One possible reason is that "searching" for internationally and nationally relevant news online may be a more cognitively engaged activity than simply attending to such information as it appears in the newspaper or especially on television. Engaging in online searches for news requires a cognitive schema relating to the kinds of information one wishes to acquire. This may furthermore require a higher level of education, which according to Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry (1996), develops in citizens the cognitive skills required for political engagement and political knowledge creation. Political self-efficacy may furthermore endow citizens with the expectation that their online searches will indeed be fruitful. Conversely, people with low political self-efficacy may not have the same expectation and may therefore be less likely to engage.

Still, online news use may actually be more accessible for at least one typically less politically engaged group: Younger people seem to find online news more accessible than traditional news, perhaps, as has been suggested, because it fits more readily into their already high levels of Internet use. Overall, however, given the socio-demographic and cognitive hurdles citizens must overcome when searching for online news, online news seems somewhat less accessible than many observers of the Net had previously imagined.

Online political discussion, on the other hand, does appear to be somewhat more accessible than online news, but not substantially more accessible than offline forums of political discussion. Unlike online news use, education is not a significant predictor. Furthermore, in spite of their relatively equal accessibility overall, one interesting difference between online discussion and many forums of "face-to-face" discussion, is that sex is not a significant predictor of online discussion. This stands in contrast to the earlier findings of Stromer-Galley (2002) and is consistent with the possibility that online discussion is more gender neutral than "face-to-face" political discussion (see Flanagin et al. 2002).

In terms of *traversability*, I proposed that blurred and porous boundaries between online news and online discussion create a more intimate relationship between the two than seen in traditional media domains, by connecting news and discussion in both time and space as citizens move seamlessly and with relative ease between various categories of discourse (Dahlgren 2001; 2005). The results generally support this proposition. Of all the news use and political discussion variables, online news use and online discussion do indeed have the strongest relationship, suggesting that they are more intimately linked, more bound in time and space. The only other forum of discussion to be significantly predicted by online news use is discussion at work, though somewhat less so.

Yet, the "Industrial Age" public sphere may not be as low in traversability as originally theorised in this article. The strong relationship between television news

use and political discussion with the family was unanticipated, but clearly makes sense – unlike the reading of newspapers, television watching is done almost exclusively in the home and is very often a collective activity. Unlike neighbours or volunteer association members, for example, families may commonly watch the news on television together and then discuss what they see as they see it, which has the effect of linking news and political discussion in time and space. Television news and discussion about politics within the family may actually be a fairly traversable discursive environment, though somewhat less so than the online environment. Certainly, with the addition of Internet to the Industrial Age options, we live in an increasingly traversable media environment.

It should be noted that this study is not without important limitations. It is first unclear that online news use directly leads to or causes online political discussion. Though the two are highly correlated, while controlling for a number of theoretically relevant variables, there are no questions in the survey that ask respondents if their discussion online was a direct result of their online news use. It may then be that the two variables are simply highly related for other reasons than those related to the "traversability" between them. The argument for traversability does, however, become more compelling when comparing the strength of the relationship between online news and online discussion and the relative weakness of the relationships between traditional news use and "face-to-face" forums of political discussion. Second, the data may be criticised on the grounds that they are too old and that the Internet has evolved greatly beyond what it was in 2003. Indeed, the number of people who actually report discussing politics online in this survey is quite low. Yet I would argue that the theoretical arguments put forth in this study have actually been strengthened with recent online developments, suggesting that the relationships found in this study would actually be stronger today than in 2003.

In order to more fully examine blurred and porous boundaries in the context of traversability, future research should provide more direct tests for the specific mechanisms that lie between news use and political discussion. Such tests might include experimental research aimed at examining the precise micro-level-processes involved in traversing the online public sphere in combination with survey research employing more direct questions about the ways in which individuals navigate their online experience. Moreover, interpretive research might examine the complexity likely involved with people's experience of accessibility and traversability, helping to answer the question of what this really means for people and democratic life. The theoretical constructs and research findings presented in this article provide a starting point for this potential line of research.

Overall, the findings suggest that the online public sphere is somewhat less or at best, equally *accessible*, but also substantially more *traversable* for those with the ability, skill, and motivation to access it. In the case of accessibility, the presumably more porous boundaries between the private and the public sphere created by the structure of the online public sphere do not seem to be enough to counteract strong forces embodied by the knowledge gap hypothesis. The blurred and porous boundaries between online news and online discussion do, on the other hand, appear to be enhancing the ease with which people transition from news to political discussion – potentially connecting news and political discussion in new and powerful ways, conducive to public opinion development.

At least in terms of the criteria discussed in this article, the online public sphere seems not remotely akin to the questionably accessible but highly traversable "classic" bourgeois public sphere, but somewhat further removed than the somewhat more accessible but less traversable "industrial age" public sphere. As noted by Papacharissi (2002, 21) both are relatively low in accessibility: "This virtual sphere is dominated by bourgeois computer holders, much like the one traced by Habermas consisting of bourgeois property holders." Both are also comparatively high in traversability – created by distinctly configured porous and blurred boundaries between information and discussion. Clearly, traversability and accessibility are not the only normative requirements for a healthy public sphere. Even when these requirements for the institutions of the public sphere (news and forums of political discussion) are met, the normative quality of the discourse that takes place within the structures may still be relatively low.

One might even argue that the kind of traversability experienced online, absent of any commitment to high quality deliberation, may in fact lead to less civil, off the cuff, less processed, political talk, or less of what we might traditionally call discussion. Posting a comment on somebody's facebook page would seem to be a far cry from the high minded debate that ostensibly took place in the coffee houses and salons of classic public sphere.

Nevertheless, I would suggest that accessibility and traversability are necessary while not sufficient criteria for a healthy public sphere. A public sphere with increased traversability and limited accessibility, suggests a newly dynamic communication environment for a certain segment of the citizenry.

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LEGITIMISING THE BBC IN THE DIGITAL CULTURAL SPHERE:

THE CASE OF CAPTURE WALES[1]

NANCY THUMIM
LILIE CHOULIARAKI

Abstract

This paper explores the use of new media by the BBC as a strategy for sustaining institutional legitimacy under a new regulative regime favouring open market competition. Focusing on the case of Capture Wales, a BBC Wales internet-based project that describes Wales from the citizens' autobiographical perspectives, and using a discourse analysis approach, we examine how the BBC re-positions itself in the emerging digital cultural sphere by using technology in the service of public participation. We observe a sense of empowerment in the opportunity participants were given arguing that such empowerment is no small thing, insofar as it clearly demonstrates that the public value produced through technological innovation lies in re-negotiating the power relations between institutional authority and ordinary people – in allowing the latter to appropriate the "means of media production" and to tell their own stories in public. Ultimately the article suggests that competing interests give rise to crucial tensions between ethico-political (serving society) and instrumental (justifying the licence fee) conceptions of benefit within Capture Wales, which in turn produce constant struggles over the visibility as well as the vision of/for this digital storytelling project by the stakeholders involved in its execution.

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Introduction

This paper explores the use of new media by the BBC as a strategy for the institution to sustain its legitimacy under a new regulative regime that favours open market competition. Even though the BBC, one of the major Public Service Broadcasting institutions worldwide, is not privatised, it is nonetheless now obliged both to adopt practices that originate in the private sector in order to remain competitive in the changing media environment, and, at the same time, to continually secure and consolidate its justification for public funding. The changing media environment we refer to is one of increasing corporatisation, which, for many, implies a crisis for publics. For example, Hardt observes:

> *Who speaks, where and when, and under what social or political constraints, have become important questions, since an individual shouting into the wind or the spectre of town-hall meetings are no match for sophisticated technologies of mass communication* (Hardt 2004, 5).

It is in this context, we suggest, that one of the legitimisation strategies employed by the public service broadcaster, the BBC, is the use of new media for purposes of public participation and self-representation by ordinary people. While noting the long history to self-representation by ordinary people both inside and outside the BBC, we focus on a particular case of this practice: Capture Wales, a BBC Wales internet-based project that describes Wales from the citizens' autobiographical perspectives.[2]

Even though the BBC has established multiple user-generated content hubs, which are designed to host and selectively broadcast citizens' contributions, we choose to focus on Capture Wales, because this online project of self-representation best illustrates the institutional ambivalence of the BBC around its use of new technology as a strategy of legitimisation. We define institutional ambivalence as the consequence of co-existing yet unresolved tensions within the BBC regarding the visibility and status of the project as well as the BBC's broader vision for new media as a means to public participation. Our argument is that, even though tensions around public participation are historically ongoing in the BBC, the use of new media as the vehicle for institutional legitimisation re-articulates these tensions around the idea of "public value," refashioning BBC's institutional identity in new, though not unproblematic, ways.

The chapter is organised in four sections. We begin by describing the context in which the legitimacy of the BBC in the new media market is debated and locate the case study of Capture Wales in this context ("Public Value" and Digital Story-Telling). We move to a discussion of the rationale that informs the BBC strategy to connect the use of new media with projects of public participation (Discourses of Benefit: Civil Society and the Licence Fee) and we subsequently focus on two central tensions, first over the visibility of Capture Wales within and outside the BBC and, second, over the BBC's broader vision regarding the use of new media for public engagement, as these emerge through stakeholders' accounts and other forms of empirical documentation[3] (Institutional Ambivalence Around "Capture Wales": Visibility and Vision). In conclusion, we point to the advantages and limitations of this strategy as it seeks to address at once the demands of the market, in terms of competitiveness, and those of civil society, in terms of publicising the "authentic voices" of ordinary people (The BBC in the Digital Cultural Sphere).

"Public Value" and Digital Story-Telling

Capture Wales is an award-winning project, which was set up as a partnership between BBC Wales and Cardiff University in order to facilitate people in the making of digital stories: Everyone has a story to tell… each story is as individual as the person who made it (www.bbc.couk/wales/capturewales).[4] Running monthly workshops between 2001 and 2008, the project pioneered the training of ordinary citizens into the use of new media so as to "tell their own stories," which were subsequently broadcast on the BBC Wales' website. Two elements are indicative of the rationale that informed the project: digital technology and real-life experience. Whereas the former points to the centrality of digital media (cameras, mobile phones, i-pods etc.) as vehicles of public engagement through and with the BBC, the latter points to the valorisation of ordinary individual experience as a privileged domain of BBC's online mediations.

Of course, the mediated representation of "ordinary people's" everyday experience has a history within and without the BBC. In cultural institutions outside the BBC, a perceived lack of representation of the diversity of points of view of the national population has been addressed in various ways, across time . The category of the "ordinary person" lies, for example, at the heart of documentary practice from the Grierson-led movement of the 1930s onwards, suggesting that this cinema explicitly valorised the category of the ordinary:

> *a declared belief in modern citizenship, unprejudiced by older, class hierarchic values and newly committed to exploring "ordinary life" as part of a proper representation of community and nation* (Corner 1995, 82).

Similarly, the 1930s Mass Observation project has been described as an explicit response to the way that "ordinary people" were hitherto represented (Highmore 2002). From the 1960s, the oral history movement addressed the continued perception that there was a serious lack in the mainstream representation of the public in the historical account. Simultaneously, the Direct Cinema movement in the US and Cinema Verité in France offered a specific response to a perceived failure in attempts to represent "ordinary people" – both movements claiming to represent "ordinary people" with minimal mediation. Corner argues that these movements influenced subsequent documentary television and the development of access television in the 1970s (Corner 1994).

Within the BBC, the notion of the "ordinary person" played a key role in early British radio and television, incorporating explicit and conscious representations of "ordinary people" throughout the early years (Scannell 1996; Scannell and Cardiff 1991) Indeed Anthony Smith's edited compilation of reports by and about the BBC makes clear that the institution has always grappled with the question of how to represent ordinary individual experience, as part of a struggle for legitimacy:

> *As broadcasting developed into a double medium, and television joined radio to create extremely powerful concentrations of cultural power in each society, the problems of how to organise the medium, how to finance it, how to supervise it and how to allow the public* some kind of representation *within it multiplied the perplexities which had been present from the beginning (Smith 1974, 14; our emphasis).*

Self and community representation within the BBC, then, clearly predate the new media technology of the internet. The BBC's Access project began with the programme slot, Open Door in the 1970s, in which "The accessees had editorial control over the content and form of the programme" (Corner 1994). Access was, as Corner shows, an explicitly political project that set out to address systemic failures in broadcasting to represent the views and experience of particular groups in society. By the 1990s, the Community Programmes Unit was producing Video Diaries and Video Nation, which were widely regarded as exemplars of the Access tradition on self-representation (see, for example, Carpentier 2003; Corner 1994; Kilborn and Izod 1997; Dovey 2000).

What today marks a shift from the past, however, is the particular combination of two elements: digital technology and real-life experience – albeit scholars had predicted the BBC Access project's increasing focus on real-life experience instead of group and issue politics (Corner 1994; Dovey 2000). Indeed the beginnings of the BBC's move towards a discourse of "public value" can be found in the changing nature of the Access Project from the group politics of Open Door in the 1970s to the individual experience portrayed on Video Nation Shorts in the 1990s. This shift was arguably linked to wider technological, cultural, political and economic contexts, including deregulation and the 1990 Broadcasting Act (Ellis 2000) and the rise of identity politics reflected, as Renov notes, in the growth of the genre of auto-biographical film-making (Renov 2004).

In the context of the current shift, the first distinct element, the amateur use of technology in videos and personal stories is associated with the rise of user-generated content and has been seen both as an opportunity for democratising news flows (e.g. Beckett 2008) but simultaneously treated as a threat to the journalistic values of validity and trustworthiness (e.g. Bennett and Entman 2001). The second distinct element of the contemporary shift, the valorisation of ordinariness, has similarly been met with continued ambivalence, as mediated representations of real-life are frequently caught in struggles over authority and prestige: either accused of popularising content ("dumbing down") in genres such as talk shows or reality television (e.g. Murdock 1999), or celebrated for democratising content (e.g. Van Zoonen 2001). As the presence of "ordinary people" in media spaces continues to proliferate, scholars are addressing (and problematising) such binary oppositions while to highlight ambivalences surrounding the very notion of ordinariness itself (e.g. Syvertsen 2001; Van Zoonen 2005; Carpentier and Hannot 2009; Turner 2010).

The BBC Wales digital-storytelling project introduces a different dimension to these controversies and histories, in that it professionalises the citizen's use of digital technology in their own personal storytelling productions, through BBC-run regular workshops; in so doing, it also seeks to re-valorise ordinary experience as an important part of its own institutional mediations: "each Digital Story is made by the storyteller themself, using his or her own photos, words and voice" (www.bbc.co.uk/wales/capturewales). It is this shift towards teaching the digital and encouraging self-representation (one's own photos, words and voice) that points to the emergence of "public value" as the dominant discourse for understanding the role of the BBC in the contemporary digital media milieu.

Public value reflects here an increasing concern within the BBC to abandon "elitist complacence," whereby the delivery of high quality informational and

educational content was regarded as automatically ensuring public trust and institutional legitimacy, and to regard public trust as something to be constantly aimed for and earned by the public (Born 2004). The rise of public value as a discourse that informs the BBC's key policy concerns is tightly linked with changing market circumstances. Coming to replace the "public service provider" discourse with its universal license fee policy, the discourse of public value promotes a conception of the BBC as one among many competitors for public trust, operating in a mature open market of subscription-based providers and convergent media (McQuail 1998; 2000).[5]

In this new landscape, the public value discourse provides a novel rationale for the existence of the BBC, which both acknowledges the shifting terrain of media industries and re-asserts the continuing importance of the public as the key reference for service provision in the digital age. Public value performs this double act by merging consumer research methods measuring "value" indicators among individual consumers – the public value test (Cole and Parston 2006), with the public interest in delivering service that is beneficial to society as a whole – public value here projecting the BBC's traditional role as an institution of public education that today seeks to navigate its audiences into the digital future.

It comes then as no surprise that the new public purposes, which the BBC White Paper (2006) announces as its priority commitments, reflects with precision the very priorities of the Capture Wales project: "sustaining citizenship and civil society; promoting education and learning; stimulating creativity and cultural excellence…; reflecting the UK's nations, regions and communities."[6]

Indeed, even though the launch of Capture Wales dates prior to the White Paper, it is chronologically located at the centre of debates around the new role of the BBC as an institution with a unique market position with respect to engaging both with new technologies and promoting citizenship.

Specifically, Capture Wales' dual focus on the professionalisation of digital skills and on the re-valorisation of individual experience can be seen as manifestations of the double claim to legitimacy that the public value discourse makes possible. On the one hand, the project provides a space for public education, in the form of skills-training, that generates public value in the form of participation and self-expression; on the other hand, it is geared towards the production of concrete artifacts, in the form of digital content, that can become the object of evaluation along the lines of a public value test.

This dual focus, however, is not without its tensions – tensions inherent in the public value discourse between a market logic of value measurement, which aims to deliver what we call instrumental benefit, and a social logic of the valorisation of public participation, which aims to deliver what we call ethico-political benefit. In the next section, we unpack these tensions in the BBC's public value discourse, by referring to the ways in which BBC Wales' stakeholders argue for the potential benefit of Capture Wales: as strengthening civil society but also as justifying the organisation's licence fee.

Discourses of Benefit: Civil Society and the Licence Fee

What is the benefit of introducing digital story-telling projects as platforms for civil participation in the BBC? There is no single response to this question but

there is instead, what we may call, a cluster of discourses that provides different, often complementary but potentially conflictual, arguments around the benefit of such projects.

Specifically, two different discourses cluster around the question of what the BBC producers regard as the benefit of using new media to enhance public participation.[7] The first is ethico-political and sees the benefits of public participation in terms of public good, as enhancing the repertoire of voices in civil society; the second is instrumental and sees these benefits in terms of institutional interest, as increasing BBC's chances for public funding. To be sure, the ethico-political and the instrumental are analytical rather than substantial distinctions and, in practice, all strategic decision-making is informed by considerations of both. The distinction is useful, however, in drawing attention to potential discrepancies between the two and particularly to the difficulty in fitting the instrumental benefit of using new media at the service of public funding in a celebratory rhetoric of the BBC as enhancing the dynamics of deliberation in civil society.

The ethico-political benefit for the BBC in running Capture Wales connects the use of new media with new opportunities for citizen participation in public debate. In so doing, it directly reflects the discourse of public value, we mentioned earlier. It does so insofar as public value refers to the BBC's capacity to go beyond "traditional" concerns of equal citizen access and fair reporting and move towards the idea of using new media as a vehicle for citizens to broadcast their own content:

> *the importance of user generated content is growing in the BBC. It's actually, we've come full circle in that it's suddenly got a really huge place because … there's a feeling that we actually don't connect with our audience, the fact that there are people out there that have just got great stories to tell.*[8]

Whereas the BBC's user-generated hubs already testify to the institution's commitment to deliver public value by connecting with citizens and rendering their accounts of events legitimate newsworthy items (Beckett 2008), in fact Capture Wales goes beyond this in two ways.

On the one hand, content production goes hand in hand with new media skills-training, that is with such competences as scanning, editing and uploading still and moving images. In Capture Wales, the development of digital literacy skills by professionals, in the five-day workshops run by the expert team under the auspices of the BBC, is seen as a crucial form of empowerment that enhances people's capacity to use technology and to perform in public. In this sense, the BBC community studio sessions, cyber café functions or internet taster gatherings:

> *are part of a broader effort to … develop as many different kinds of tools as possible, to engage the public with programme makers more directly, in discussion, in contributing to programmes, and to engage people in projects around media literacy and creativity.*[9]

On the other hand, participation goes beyond reporting and becomes self-representation, that is public story-telling organised around experiences of the self and its immediate environment. Capture Wales is a digital storytelling project that follows a grassroots rationale of "digital technology at the service of the people" and, as such, understands the idea of people speaking about themselves to be part of the radical political vision of genuine democracy.[10] The idea of "authentic voices" is

central to this vision. This is partly because of the strong truth claim and emotional power that such voices bring to mediated content, but also, importantly, because of the strategic role that "ordinary" voices can play in transforming the character of the BBC from a paternalistic institution, where "sometimes you get the sense in the BBC that authentic, real voices, need to be interpreted to be communicated," to a contemporary institution that gives people control over the representation of their own lives – what BBC's Director of Nations and Regions called a revolutionary move.[11]

Such rhetoric brings together quite different positions of interest when, for example, in a similar vein to BBC management, the Creative Director of Capture Wales, Daniel Meadows, also uses the language of revolution echoing the (Marxian) radical discourse of people owning "the tools of production":

> *No one has ever given people the tools of production, they've only eked them out, little by little. Oh yes, well you can take a Handicam and film yourself, you know, crying over the loss of your boyfriend but we're going to edit it. You know, that's gone now and it's fantastic, you know. And that we've managed to achieve that is for me, that's where the ground's been broken, that's the difference we've made.*

The defining moment around this shift of control lies in the elimination of editorial intervention on behalf of the BBC: the institution does not edit user content as, in the BBC's Director of Regions quote above, the voices of the people do not any more "need to be interpreted to be communicated." This radical rhetoric by the BBC management and the Capture Wales expert team provides some grounds for the celebration of participation but, as we shall see, leaves intact institutional tensions between, for example, management priorities and those of the creative team or between individual and collective agency of media users.

Parallel to the ethico-political benefit, crystallised in this celebration of popular empowerment through new media, there is also a strong instrumental benefit for the BBC in launching Capture Wales. The project's use of new media to engage the public seeks to re-affirm the relevance of the BBC to increasingly larger constituencies of audience, now potentially lured away by the abundance of digital content on offer, and ultimately to justify its state funding through the licence fee. As part of a broader market-driven process of radical change in BBC's online presence, Capture Wales can be seen as an example of content production that intends to "be made more distinctive, and deliver more public value, in this developing and growing market."[12] Specifically, it can be seen as reflecting a fundamental re-structuring, whereby the BBC closed down a number of websites on the grounds that "they would not meet our new test of public value," whereas it re-oriented others, shifting their "focus on educating people about the creative process of film-making and allow audiences to share this."[13]

Participation through new media appears again as a key word of this strategic discourse on benefit – though, this time, benefit is not understood in ethico-political terms as authentic self-expression but in instrumental terms as an innovative service that increases BBC's competitive position towards other players in the digital market. This instrumental discourse on benefit correspondingly reflects a competing conception of public value, also mentioned earlier in this article, which, rather than relating to public good, is oriented towards the measurement of user satisfaction. The main reference to this instrumentalist conception of benefit is online content,

insofar as content is the only measurable indicator of product quality and user satisfaction in the context of the Capture Wales project.

Online content evidently refers to concrete stories as outputs of the project and is directly linked to the funding of the BBC: "The license fee essentially is about content, so we felt it was really important that the workshops produced the kind of content that we could publish."[14] This reference to publishability contrasts with other examples of digital storytelling, where the outcome does not necessarily have to be published on organisational platforms,[15] and points directly to the institutional criterion of quality – so that the kind of content we could publish, in the quote, means high quality content capable of being displayed on BBC Wales' website. This precondition of quality is repeatedly emphasised by others involved in the production of Capture Wales[16]:

> *I think one of the things the BBC has massively been able to do …is massively been able to inject a level of quality. You know, we have delivered the very best to the people who've made them in terms of our editorial experience, our teaching experience and our technical experience. That matters, the benchmark is high. People don't make crap digital stories when they work with us, but they still feel they're their stories.*[17]

Whereas the quote firmly asserts the ethico-political view on story-telling as an expression of "authentic" voices, in that people still feel they're their stories, its concern with publishability, in that "the benchmark is high people don't make crap stories," captures a different interest in institutional standards and measuring quality – a concern that could potentially compromise the publication of "authentic," that is unmediated and non-edited content.

The key to striking a balance between the two lies in the BBC seeing its public value provision not only as a matter of the story products themselves but, importantly, of the process of producing stories in the skills-training workshops. This is evident in the quote asserting that "the BBC has delivered the very best in our editorial experience, our teaching experience and our technical experience." Clearly here, the participants' sense of ownership goes beyond online content as product; ownership rather refers to the sense of community that the project seeks to establish among the local stakeholders that participate in the process of story-telling. This conception of community continues to evoke a grassroots view of spontaneous creative encounters in local collectivities, reflected in the metaphor of BBC's digital story-telling projects "as the digital campfire around which people gather to tell their stories."[18] Yet, the BBC's concern with quality deliverables also reveals a more instrumental approach to the learning community as the aggregate of public preferences, which can be assessed in terms of the degree to which participants respond to or interact with expert input by the institution – the public value test measuring quality precisely in terms of "responsiveness to refined preferences" (Horner et al 2006, 44).[19] In this context, measuring the public value of the BBC's digital story-telling crucially involves the organisation's capacity to demonstrate that it can mobilise effective expert-user partnerships with a view to increasing the digital literacy capital of local users.[20] The importance of community here lies not so much in unleashing and promoting the creative resources of the public, but rather in demonstrating the extent to which BBC Wales provides innovative services through stakeholder networking so as to justify and legitimise its public funding. To

the satisfaction of the BBC governors, Capture Wales did indeed work to that effect: "further development of the digital storytelling project Capture Wales/Cipolwg ar Gymru … record attendance at community events and outside broadcasts … all helped deepen the relationship with license payers across the UK."[21]

The use of online content is, therefore, doubly defined by the instrumental discourse on public value: as process, referring to the expert team-media users collaboration in the community, and as product, referring to the outcome of the collaboration. Both these definitions reflect the requirement of the public value of discourse to monitor institutional quality in tangible terms, as authentic stories and as innovative networks. Yet, it is precisely the unresolved tensions between these institutional requirements and the parallel claims to public ownership, popular authenticity and community building, originating in the ethico-political discourse of public value, that produce a fundamental institutional ambivalence in the Capture Wales project. It is to these tensions that we now turn.

Institutional Ambivalence Around "Capture Wales": Visibility and Vision

Institutional ambivalence is evident in the ways in which the BBC staff refer to their own experience of Capture Wales. In this section, we explore the articulation of such ambivalence in terms of two central themes: the visibility and status of the project among BBC staff, including the BBC management and the Capture Wales creative team, and the vision around the project as articulated by these same stakeholders.

Visibility and status. Despite the BBC's enthusiastic endorsement of digital story-telling, Capture Wales, together with the sister project, Telling Lives, in the BBC English Regions, always remained insignificant in quantitative terms. On the one hand, its hits were too low to be recorded by the Audience Research Department of the BBC, so the project remained outside the range of institutional visibility granted to projects with higher ratings.[22] At the same time, its story-telling products only occasionally made it into the prime time BBC Wales television network, thus restricting the external visibility of its content to the visitors of the BBC Capture Wales website (although there is recently a more continuous presence as a result of the development of BBCi and the inclusion of Capture Wales and other user generated output like Video Nation, "behind the red button"). Nevertheless, at least in 2004, according to the BBC's own internal research into user-generated content, the wider public beyond the project participants did not know about the project at all.[23]

Such problems with visibility inevitably reflect difficulties in the overall status of the project within the BBC. Despite the enthusiasm of top management, which included Capture Wales in one of BBC's reviews towards the Building Public Value Charter renewal, publicity and promotion staff found promoting the project challenging. This may have been a consequence of the very innovative character of Capture Wales, which left press officers with nothing similar to compare this project with:

> *The BBC Wales' press office is set up to promote its television programmes and radio programmes … But … When you're trying to get across to them*

> *... a rather more wide ranging concept about something, and what we're really trying to get is people to get personally involved in the BBC and to use the BBC to get their own personal messages across really, then we have press officers, who are not used to doing that, speaking to journalists who have never come this before.*[24]

The validity of such organisational justifications granted, the net outcome of this lack of engagement has been that the visibility of the project was severely restricted and its status remained local, thereby minimising the dissemination of "authentic" public voices.

Problems of publicity further indicate that it would remain challenging to fully integrate the different stakeholders of this innovative partnership within the BBC. As Capture Wales' Creative Director put it, the expert team's experience of community, youth work and education, as well as professional photography, functioned as a strength for the BBC, but, at the same time, it sustained a sharp distinction between themselves and the BBC:

> *Well the BBC is a funny institution, it is sort of run on this cross between the army, public school and the civil service, in that everybody has a rank, you see. And it's terribly respectful of rank and, I mean I could never work in it if I wasn't doing digital storytelling.*[25]

As this quote clearly suggests, the Creative Director, as well as other members of the expert team, seemed to distance themselves, at least to some extent, from the wider institution whose priorities they did not always share. According to one of the team members, if another funding source emerged, she was certain that the team would happily all leave the BBC; Capture Wales was, she implied, more important than the BBC affiliation. Indeed there was a gulf between senior management's enthusiasm and the inability of the Capture Wales team to achieve a higher profile for the project – "a gap between rhetoric and practice," in the words of the Creative Director. The clearest illustration of this gap is perhaps the fact that the English Region's Telling Lives was discontinued in March 2005, despite the senior BBC management's apparent enthusiasm for digital storytelling.[26]

To sum up, the institutional ambivalence around the visibility and status of Capture Wales refers to a discrepancy between, on the one hand, the celebration of online story-telling evident in BBC strategic documents and in the launch of this project (and similar ones), and, on the other hand, to the minimal visibility of the project within and outside the institution; to the unclear perceptions of the project among BBC publicists; to the difficulties of integration between the BBC and the Capture Wales creative expert team; finally to the short-lived trajectory of its sister project and the ultimate discontinuation of Capture Wales itself in 2008. Whereas the celebratory rhetoric can be seen as reflecting the ethico-political discourse that permeates BBC official documents and management stakeholders, the multiple failures to integrate and formalise the project within the BBC could be interpreted as reflecting a certain reluctance on the part of the organisation to fully embrace the project as a grass-root initiative of public participation, sustaining it only to the extent that it serves the institution's instrumental benefit of monitoring its own public value in terms of innovative product and process.

Vision. The central vision of the BBC's digital story-telling initiatives is to turn passive audiences into active communities, where everyone has the chance to tell their story and enjoy the stories of others:

> *From Voices through Video Nation to Digital Storytelling and Telling Lives, hundreds of people with no previous broadcasting experience have taken the opportunity to tell their stories. For some, it has given them the skills and confidence to change their lives.*[27]

Tightly linked to the discourse of public value, again, this vision both aspires to use new media as a form of citizen empowerment at community level and simultaneously to situate the organisation at the heart of a competitive market of innovative transformations towards the digital future. As a consequence, similarly to the discussion on Capture Wales' visibility, the BBC's vision of the project is torn between the ethico-political interest on value, articulated in the "grass-roots" claims to social empowerment and community building, and the instrumental interest of value, best captured in perceptions of Capture Wales as an individualised and skills-based endeavour that facilitates the BBC's public value test rather than strengthen civil society. We explore a key manifestation of this tension around the conception of self-representation in the Capture Wales project, particularly the potential of self-representation to contribute to online community building.

Self-representation is at the core of the practice of digital story-telling; in Rennie and Hartley's words, "a digital story is something personal, generated from photo-albums and people's memories" (2004). As we saw earlier, project stakeholders celebrate the elements of individual creativity and personal involvement that characterise such story-telling in Capture Wales, in particular emphasising the people's access to tools of production and the lack of editorial control in the composition of content. This positive spirit is further reflected in BBC Wales' reporting on participants' workshop experiences:

> *… it's quite extraordinary on the feedback forms, you get this kind of, you know: how much experience have you got with computers to date? And you know, on a scale of one to five, that's often a kind of one or two, and then all the questions about the value people put on the experience are all, kind of, up at five, I mean really it's extraordinary.*[28]

Nevertheless, we need to keep in mind that self-representation texts, far from being the outcomes of unrestricted self-expression, involve an acute awareness of generic convention and a high degree of regulation: "Written with feeling and in the first person there's a strictness to their construction: 250 words, a dozen or so pictures, and two minutes is about the right length." This means that the pedagogic process of teaching skills to media users was simultaneously a process of tight control over the style, genre and length of their individual texts, with a view to securing the quality outcomes demanded by BBC Wales. In the words of Creative Director Daniel Meadows, "digital Stories – when properly done – can be tight as sonnets: multimedia sonnets from the people." In this manner, the highly structured workshop process ensures that a subtle and (thereby all the more) effective gate-keeping mechanism is in place, whereby the rejection of self-representation stories is very rarely necessary because the creative workshop itself leads to the production of a very particular form of self-representation: family photographs

and a first-person voice over. Participants did not deviate from this very specific repertoire of genres of self-representation, even if they might have felt restricted by the representational possibilities of such genres, because the participatory logic of "having a voice" through BBC's digital storytelling went hand-in-hand with skills-training in the production of a very specific textual genre.

The strict regulation of the workshop process by the creative team is clearly dictated by a sound educational rationale: the learning of a creative craft means, at least to an extent, being subject to the power of the expert.[29] Yet, as is the case in all pedagogic power relationships, the vision of empowerment in Capture Wales, that is allowing the users' "authentic" voices to populate the BBC online content, was achieved under a certain institutional condition: rather than authenticity meaning people "gaining" some control over what to say and how to say it online, authenticity here involved a narrow definition of self-representation (family pictures plus voiceover) and of the content and style of people's story-telling practices (digital "sonnets"). Whereas this institutional condition leaves some space for the articulation of the ethico-political interest to public value, as we shall see below, Capture Wales (probably unavoidably) seems to privilege the instrumental interest insofar as the regulation of content guarantees the delivery of measurable products (quality outcome) without necessarily delivering the promise of "democratising" their content (the grassroots aim of "giving voice" and building community).

The ethico-political moment of the project seems to lie, in particular, in the empowerment that the project makes possible for its participants through the process of skills-training itself – a process delivered by a creative team with top quality expertise and strong commitment to the cause of digital education. Together with the stories themselves, as the quote below implies, it is the quality of the team that defines the participants' experience of digital storytelling and their relationship to the institution itself:

> *Whatever else happens, the experience of the people in the workshop, and their relationship with us, is crucial…. Because that's what makes it special, that's what makes it different … that's why picking the team is very important.*[30]

As a result of the BBC Wales' choice to collaborate with "one of the highest quality media teams in the UK," the workshops indeed turned into a uniquely rewarding experience for participants. As BBC Wales' Head of Talent, Maggie Russell's, put it:

> *Now what is fantastic is, I haven't heard one story in four years of somebody having a bad experience making a digital story…. I think it's to do with the quality of the team that are delivering it….it's to do with, we are probably one of the highest quality community media teams anywhere in the UK.*

This strong quote clearly emphasises the value of teamwork in the Capture Wales' training process and the potential for individual agency in making stories that the project managed to mobilise (in the remarkable line that there seems to be no account of somebody having a bad experience making a digital story). What is left out of this quote, and indeed from broader institutional considerations, is the dimension of collective agency in the Capture Wales project. A central part of the ethico-political interest of public value, which focuses on the strengthening of civil society and the democratisation of ordinary voices through digital platforms, col-

lective agency draws attention to the fact that the creation of community requires more than the sharing of autobiographical narratives. In the words of Rennie and Hartley (2004), it requires an effort to use new media platforms in ways that enable the "narratives produced … to become more than the sum of their parts." With its current dual emphasis on capturing individual lives and creating community,[31] the project throws into relief the difficulties of sustaining the ethico-political interest. Such difficulties may have to do with the practical impossibility to keep such communities going for any length of time beyond the five-day span of the workshops themselves – inevitably here the concern is with the former, capturing lives, rather than the latter, creating community. Yet, such a collection of individualised accounts on private lives can only be defined as a public in the narrow sense of being dispersed in the space of digital display rather than in the broader sense of sustaining communities of communicative action, that is formations of collective deliberation over shared concerns with a sense of common purpose and commitment.

Along these lines, a more instrumental version of the vision on digital story-telling is put forward by the BBC's Head of Talent, when asked to reflect on the success of Capture Wales:

> *I mean the important thing for me is that we've done it, we've done it really well. It continues to be valid. As long as it continues to be valid, we'll continue to do it. But, you know, it may be that this has sparked off a new idea and we should be doing the new idea.*[32]

This "it's good as long as it continues to be valid" logic reveals a vision of Capture Wales, perhaps not shared by all stakeholders inside or outside the BBC, as just one "idea" among many that generally signals the institution's innovative spirit rather than a conscious investment on the power of new media to publicise ordinary voices and strengthen civil society.

The BBC in the Digital Cultural Sphere

Our discussion suggests that the BBC is approaching digital story-telling as a tool to enhance its institutional legitimacy through expanded public participation, in terms of both educating the public via skills-training and providing voice to the public through new online content. Following its agenda to increase public value, this emphasis on digital story-telling is part of the BBC's broader move to incorporate audiences in its organisational practices through interactive sites and user generated content hubs as well as journalistic blogging. Such practices should be seen as the BBC's efforts to restyle itself away from its traditional elitist profile and closer to the contemporary profile of an innovative, open and inclusive organisation; simultaneously, they are also efforts to render itself competitive in an open market regime where the national audience cannot be taken for granted as the BBC's "natural" constituency but needs to be persuaded in terms of the network's added value vis a vis other content providers.

By embarking on this self-restyling project, the BBC further contributes to a restructuring of the cultural public sphere, the sphere where citizenship is not exclusively about political deliberation but also about personal narrative, lifestyle choice and aesthetic appearance, precisely by renegotiating the boundaries between the expert and the ordinary, the private and the public (e.g. Couldry et al. 2007;

Dahlgren 2007). Of course, as we have noted above, the BBC has throughout its history been engaged in struggles for legitimacy (e.g. Smith 1974), thereby constantly shifting and negotiating these boundaries but, as we have sought to show, the form this battle currently takes is particular to the current context of digital innovation and open market competition.

The use of new media in this process is strategic in the sense that these media provide a central platform for the BBC's articulation of a public value discourse – a strategic discourse which makes a dual claim to legitimacy in terms of measuring the BBC's economic performance (value for licence fee money) and enabling the democratisation of ordinary voice and agency. This duality, we argued, produces a fundamental ambivalence between instrumental and ethico-political conceptions of benefit – an ambivalence that we explored in terms of how the visibility and vision of the digital story-telling project Capture Wales figures in stakeholder accounts within the BBC.

Capture Wales, let us recall, has been a successful BBC Wales – Cardiff University initiative that brought together an expert creative team with a large number of media users to produce a series of highly praised short digital stories, thereby demonstrating how local partnership in skills-training can offer an empowering experience of mediation for ordinary participants. Our discussion, however, indicates that the relatively low visibility of the project outside the circle of those already involved as well as the systematic failures to integrate and formalise the project within the organisation may be seen as compromising the ethico-political benefit of the project, sustaining it only to the extent that it serves the institution's instrumental benefit of monitoring its own public value in terms of innovative product and process. At the same time, the vision of Capture Wales to publicise autobiographical accounts that enhance civil society seems to be troubled by a narrow conception of self-representation (family pictures) and a loose dispersion of individual voices in the digital space. What would further the ethico-political interest, in this context, would be a stronger sense of commitment of the BBC to a temporally sustainable project of publicising people's voices or a reflexivity about how to turn this digital space into a space of collective deliberation over matters of common concern. In the light of our remarks, the interest, at the moment, seems to be restricted to the BBC demonstrating its capacity for innovative service delivery, a key assessment criterion for the organisation's economic value, rather than maximising ethic-political value.

What our discussion ultimately indicates is that, as a consequence of this ambivalence around the ethico-political interest in its public value claim, the BBC re-positions itself in the emerging digital cultural sphere by using technology in the service of public participation – and thereby also redrawing the hierarchical boundary between the private and the public. It does so, however, only to the extent that it enables individual users to disseminate private stories in public space rather than in the sense of enabling collective participation in sustained projects of cultural citizenship, where the voices of individuals may be put to the service of (deliberating over) a common good. In this manner, the potential of digital story-telling to establish a space of publicness where new styles of communicative agency and new forms of authoritative discourse populate the cultural sphere, engaging with but also challenging the traditional hierarchies of broadcasting,

was not fully realised. Clearly, a sense of empowerment for project participants lies in the opportunity they were given in the workshops to get a brief glimpse of the world of media production and to act out the roles of the media presenter and/or performer. This is no small thing, insofar as it clearly demonstrates that the public value produced through technological innovation lies in re-negotiating the power relations between institutional authority and ordinary people – in allowing the latter to appropriate the "means of media production" and to tell their own stories in public. For such sense of empowerment, however, to give rise to more complex forms of collective agency, the BBC's technological innovation needs to be embedded in communicative channels that make it possible for digital stories to be effectively circulated and cited as powerful and legitimate chains of reference within broader projects of civil engagement.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we use the case study of Capture Wales in order to examine the role that the new media play in the innovation efforts of a major broadcasting organisation, the BBC, in the context of the UK's de-regulated media market. We argue that the BBC's use of new media, as a privileged site for the users' engagement in digital storytelling, can be understood as a strategic legitimisation move in the BBC's attempt to reposition itself in the digital cultural sphere. This attempt is based on the double-edged nature of the emerging public value discourse that the BBC is promoting for itself in the contemporary media market. Competing interests within the discourse, however, give rise to crucial tensions between ethico-political (serving society) and instrumental (justifying the licence fee) conceptions of benefit within Capture Wales, which in turn produce constant struggles over the visibility as well as the vision of/for digital storytelling by the stakeholders involved in its execution.

Notes:

1. For a related discussion see Thumim, Nancy and Lilie Chouliaraki. 2009. BBC and New Media: Legitimisation Strategies of a Public Service Broadcaster in a Corporate Market Environment. In L. Chouliaraki and M. Morsing (eds.), Media Organisations Identity. Palgrave, London.

2. Capture Wales began the BBC's broader Digital Storytelling initiative. A similar projects in the English Regions network was entitled Telling Lives. (http://www.bbc.co.uk/tellinglives/). Celebrating the potential of digital media to strengthen public participation, the Capture Wales project was initiated by Cardiff university academic, professional photographer and Creative Director of the project, Daniel Meadows, and launched in April 2001 by Menna Richards, controller BBC Cymru Wales. Working with an adaptation of a Californian model of digital storytelling, this pioneering project has won four major awards, including a BAFTA Cymru.

3. The empirical material is drawn from N. Thumim's PhD Thesis entitled "Mediating Self-Representations: Tensions Surrounding 'Ordinary' Participation in Public Sector Projects," London School of Economics (2007). Interviews were conducted between September 2003-2004.

4. There are several books and articles about digital storytelling either recently published or forthcoming; see, for example, Digital Storytelling, Mediatized Stories, in the Digital Formation series at Peter Lang Publishing (edited by K. Lundby), Story Circle. Digitial Storytelling Around the World, to be published by Blackwell (edited by J. Hartley and K. McWilliam at Queensland University).And see also: Kidd, 2005; Burgess, 2006.

5. For the emergence of the concept of "public value" see Moore 1995, whose definition of public value as the delivery of a set of social as well as economic outcomes that are aligned to citizen

priorities in a cost-effective manner, has been very influential in subsequent developments of public value models. Cole and Parston (2006: xiv) have formulated two key questions for the delivery of public value by public service organisations, which focus respectively on the social value of what these organisations are bringing to the public and on the economic value of how effectively they are spending taxpayers' money: "Why (or to what end) does this organization or program exist? And, how will we know when the organization or program has achieved its intended purpose or goal?" (Cole and Parston 2006: xiv). It is largely these two questions that the BBC is seeking to address in launching digital-story telling projects, such as Capture Wales.

6. BBC White Paper: "A Public Service for All: the BBC in the Digital Age" (March 4th, 2006).

7. We use the term "producers" to refer to staff members at BBC Wales who are involved in various ways, and to various degrees, in the production of Capture Wales. The project teams are those most closely involved in the day-to-day production of the projects. In addition, personnel from different levels of the institutions are involved in the funding, production, marketing and display of the self-representations. (Thumim 2007, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of London).

8. Carole Gilligan, Editor of the BBC user generated content-website, Video Nation – which followed from the BBC Community Programmes Unit Terrestrial television project of the 1990s.

9. Mandy Rose, Editor, New Media, BBC Wales.

10. See development of oral history as a political force to counter dominant histories (e.g. Perks and Thomson, 1998).

11. Pat Loughrey, Director of BBC Nations and Regions at the International Digital Storytelling Conference, Cardiff, November 2003.

12. Michael Grade, BBC Chairman, CBI Conference 2004.

13. Michael Grade, BBC Chairman, CBI Conference 2004.

14. Mandy Rose, Editor, New Media, BBC Wales.

15. For example, in the original initiative of the Centre for Digital Storytelling in Berkeley, California, where emphasis falls on individual "writing" and self-expression rather that any sense of public value: … "our primary concern is encouraging thoughtful and emotionally direct writing."

16. For example, by Daniel Meadows, Creative Director, Capture Wales; Gilly Adams, Head of Writers' Unit, BBC Wales, and leader of the Capture Wales Story Circle.

17. Interview with Maggie Russell BBC Wales' Head of Talent.

18. Michael Grade, BBC Chairman, ICM Conference 2004.

19. Indeed, the instrumental conception of public value involves an understanding of the concept in terms of "finding ways to harness professional expertise in order to shape and guide public preferences," thereby measuring public "responsiveness to refined preferences" (Blauge et al, 2006). A clear example of this instrumentalist use of public value as capitalising on local expertise so as to have a measurable impact on specific communities is the UK government's use of Jamie Oliver's TV documentary series, "Jamie's School Dinners" as a model example to show how "public value can be created by responding to that shift [in consumers' preferences]" (Oakley, Naylor and Lee 2006).

20. The aim [of Capture Wales] is to work with local communities to generate material capable of being displayed on local web-sites, BBC web-sites and, selectively, on broadcast television, including on BBC 2 Wales Internal BBC document Welsh Lives – original Capture Wales proposal.

21. www.bbcgovernorsarchive.co.uk/annreport/report03/audiences.txt - 24k.

22. Emma Trollope, Audience Research, BBC Wales, notes from a phone call.

23. Sparkler Report (2004), internal report about BBC user generated projects; press articles copied and collected by David Cartwright, Head of Press and Publicity, BBC Wales.

24. David Cartwright BBC's Wales Head of Press and Publicity.

25. Interview with Daniel Meadows, Creative Director, Capture Wales.

26. Capture Wales discontinued running workshops in 2008, although it continues to publish digital stories made by partner organizations on its website. Given the commitment of the expert team and the inspiring leadership of creative director, Capture Wales did manage to turn a two month project… into a one year pilot and then a three-year commission, which ultimately ended up lasting seven years (Meadows personal website).

27. Building Public Value: Renewing the BBC for a Digital World, (BBC, June 2004: 72).

28. Interview with Mandy Rose, Editor, New Media, BBC Wales.

29. This position reflects a particular type of institutional agency that Capture Wales makes available to its participants, namely that of "conditional freedom" (Chouliaraki 2008, 846). We use the term conditional freedom, in the context of our study, to refer to the function of institutional practices to regulate, but by no means determine, the participants' relationship to new media by opening up a restricted number of educational and creative possibilities for them to engage with. As an economy of institutional regulation, we argue, conditional freedom is not resolutely negative but rather inherently ambivalent, positive as well as negative.

30. Interview with Karen Lewis, Production Manager, Capture Wales.

31. This tension echoes Joe Lambert's, CDS' Director, book title Digital Storytelling: Capturing Lives, Creating Community. (2002, CDS, Berkeley, California) and is critically discussed by Beeson and Miskelli (2005, 5).

32. Interview with Maggie Russell, Head of Talent, BBC Wales.

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DOREEN SPÖRER-WAGNER
FRANK MARCINKOWSKI

JE GOVORITI VEDNO SREBRO IN MOLČATI ZLATO? MEDIATIZACIJA POLITIČNIH POGAJANJ

Politični pogajalci zahtevajo zasebnost namesto javnosti za doseganje kompromisov. Demokratični pogajalci so pred izzivom javnosti s širitvijo vladovanja in povečanjem pomena medijev za legitimnost političnih odločitev. To še posebej velja za politične sisteme,v katerih odločanje temelji na večini in ne na doseganju soglasja. Članek postavlja vprašanje, kako pogajalci dojemajo in se odzivajo na nadzor medijev. V navezavi na z mediji povezano mišljenje pogajalcev uvaja pojem mediatiziranega pogajanja, ki presega okvire tradicionalnega razumevanja mediatizacije kot vpliva na politične procese in rezultate. Iz razgovorov z 32 nemškimi političnimi pogajalci je razvidno, da se pogajalci vse bolj zavedajo povezanosti upravljanja medijev in pogajanja. Čeprav je na voljo vrsta (ne)formalnih ukrepov za spopad s tem dvojnim izzivom, se je izkazalo, da je neučinkovito in sebično javno komuniciranje glavna ovira za pogajanja, ki ni posledica poročanja medijev, pač pa jo mediji omogočajo in krepijo. Ugotovljeno je bilo, da je mediatizacija pogajanj predvsem samomediatizacija pogajalcev.

COBISS 1.01

SERGIO SPARVIERO

RAZUMEVANJE PROBLEMATIČNEGA RAZMERJA MED EKONOMIJO IN KOMUNIKOLOGIJO TER MOŽNE REŠITVE

Članek trdi, da bi morali komunikologi sodelovati s »pluralističnimi«, ne pa s »tradicionalnimi« ekonomisti, saj so alternativne ekonomske teorije primernejše za razumevanje razvoja komunikacijske industrije in za vključevanje v multidisciplinarne teoretične okvire. Za ponazoritev članek najprej pokaže, da glavne značilnosti tradicionalne ekonomije niso primerne za proučevanje komunikacijskega sektorja, nato pa je predstavljen izbor teorij in pojmov iz ekonomije kompleksnosti, študij inovacije storitev in neo-schumpeterskega pristopa. Kot primer učinkovitosti alternativnih ekonomskih teorij za pojasnjevanje sprememb v komunikacijskem sektorju, so ti pojmi uporabljeni za predstavitev argumentov za konvergenco medijev in komunikacijske industrije in opis glavnih nosilcev inovacij na področju izposoje video kaset in ploščkov.

COBISS 1.01

MARKO LAH, ANDREJ SUŠJAN, IN TJAŠA REDEK

INSTITUTIONALISTIČNI POGLED NA ODNOSE Z JAVNOSTMI IN RAZVOJ ODNOSOV Z JAVNOSTMI V TRANZICIJSKIH GOSPODARSTVIH

Članek predstavlja institucionalistični pogled na odnose z javnostmi kot izboren mehanizem za ohranjanje korporacijske moči. Institucionalistična teorija podjetja, ki temelji na galbraithovski in marksistični tradiciji, ponuja priročen okvir za vključevanje odnosov z javnostmi v ekonomijo. Avtorji predstavijo vlogo menedžerjev odnosov z javnostmi, ustvarjanje in upravljanje vsebine in metod financiranja odnosov z javnostmi. Institucionalistični pristop vključuje tudi pomembne vidike za analizo razvoja odnosov z javnostmi v tranzicijskih gospodarstvih, kar je prikazano s preliminarno periodizacijo razvoja odnosov z javnostmi. Potem ko so »uspešno« pomagali pri nevtraliziranju turbulentnih socialnih posledic tranzicijskih procesov v začetni fazi tranzicije, oddelki za odnose z javnostmi v tranzicijskih podjetjih zdaj pogosto uporabljajo proaktivne strategije odnosov z javnostmi, da bi povečali korporacijsko moč.

COBISS 1.01

JENNIFER BRUNDIDGE

POLITIČNE RAZPRAVE IN UPORABA NOVIC V SODOBNI JAVNI SFERI: »DOSTOPNOST« IN »PREHODNOST« INTERNETA

Članek je namenjen razumevanju vpliva rabe interneta na dostopnost do politično pomembnih spletnih diskurzov (novic in političnih razprav), in tega, v kolikšni meri so te oblike diskurza smiselno in globoko povezane. Podatki, zbrani na reprezentativnem nacionalnem vzorcu ZDA, kažejo: (1) da sta socioekonomski status in politično znanje v primerjavi z offline diskurzi enako, če ne celo bolj pomembna za pogosto uporabo spletnih novic in sodelovanje v spletnih političnih razpravah, kar opozarja, da je uporaba interneta nekoliko zmanjšala dostopnost javne sfere, (2) da je razmerje med uporabo spletnih novic in spletnimi razpravami močnejše kot offline, kar kaže pomembno povezavo med dvema oblikama diskurza.

COBISS 1.01

NANCY THUMIM IN LILIE CHOULIARAKI

LEGITIMIZACIJA BBC V DIGITALNI KULTURNI SFERI: PRIMER PROJEKTA »CAPTURE WALES«

Članek obravnava uporabo novih medijev v BBC kot strategijo za ohranjanje institucionalne legitimnosti v novi regulativni ureditvi, ki spodbuja prosto tržno konkurenco. Na primeru projekta »Capture Wales«, spletnega projekta BBC Wales, ki opisuje Wales iz avtobiografskih perspektiv državljanov, in z uporabo diskurzivne analize, avtorici proučujeta, kako se BBC premešča v nastajajoči digitalni kulturni sferi z uporabo tehnologije v službi participacije javnosti. V priložnosti, ki je bila dana udeležencem, je očitno določeno opolnomočenje, ki ni majhna stvar, saj jasno kaže, da javna vrednost, proizvedena s pomočjo tehnoloških inovacij, leži v preurejanju razmerij moči med institucionalnimi oblastmi in običajnimi ljudmi – v omogočanju ljudem, da si prisvojijo »proizvodna sredstva« in v javnosti povedo svoje lastne zgodbe. Končno članek kaže, da konkurenčni interesi povzročajo bistvene napetosti med etično-političnimi (»služiti družbi«) in instrumentalnimi (upravičevanje naročnine) pojmovanji koristnosti projekta »Capture Wales«, kar po drugi strani sproža med deležniki tega projekta trajne boje za vidnost kot tudi glede vizije projekta digitalnih pripovedi.

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Rokopise pošljite na naslov uredništva po elektronski pošti v formatu Microsoft Word/Windows. Če uporabljate drugačen urejevalnik besedil, shranite dokument v formatu Word. Zaradi lažjega anonimnega recenziranja naj bodo imena in naslovi avtorjev v posebnem dokumentu.

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Za bistvene opombe ali navajanje neobičajnih virov uporabite opombe na koncu članka in jih označite z zaporednimi številkami, ki so nadpisane na ustreznih mestih v besedilu.

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Navajanje internetnih virov:

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Manuscripts should be submitted electronically as e-mail attachments to the Editor in Microsoft Word for Windows format. If you are using another word-processing program, please save the file as Word for Windows documents. To facilitate blind review, names and affiliations of authors should be listed on a separate file.

Maximum length of articles is 50,000 characters (8,000 words). Single space your text, use preferably 12-point Times Roman and a ragged (not justified) right margin. Indent the first line of each paragraph with a single tab and use only one hard return between paragraphs. Do not lay out (design) your manuscript. Do not format text beyond the use of italics or, where necessary, boldface. Do not use headers and footers.

Headings in articles should be concise and descriptive and should not exceed one hundred characters. A few basic formatting features (larger font, bold) should be used to make clear what level each heading is. Major sub-heads should appear on a separate line; secondary sub-heads appear flush left preceding the first sentence of a paragraph. Do not number headings and subheadings.

Material quoted directly from another source should be in double quotation mark or set in a separate paragraph in italics with increased indent when longer than 300 characters.

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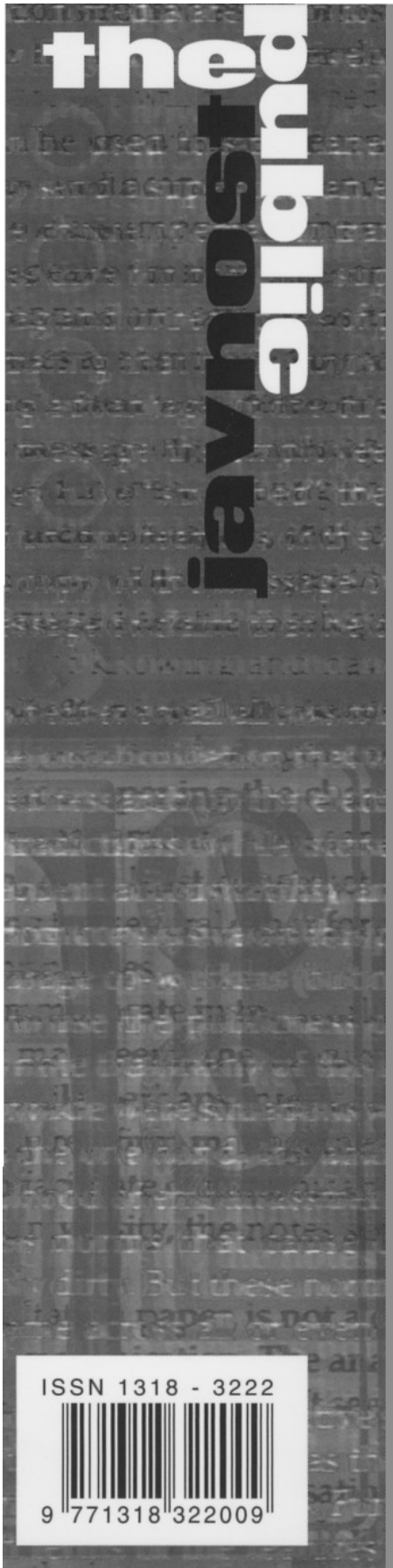

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