

Call for Papers

Deadline for abstracts: April 15, 2012

Politics – PR – Persuasion

Annual Conference 2012 of the Research Group PR/Organisational Communication of the
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Publizistik und Kommunikationswissenschaft (DGPuK)

in cooperation with:

„Munich Center on Governance, Communication, Public Policy and Law“ (MCG) of the LMU,
the DGPuK Research Group „Communication and Politics“
and the Research Group „Politics and Communication“ of the DVPW

November 1-3, 2012, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München (LMU)

Almost every day the mass media report on the mingling of politics and PR and cast their critical eye on the connexions between the two. Whether it is public money spent on communications service providers, the influence of collective and individual lobbyists on political decision-making processes (such as Stuttgart 21) or the attempts of agencies to stage-manage certain top-ranking politicians in a manner appealing to the mass media – the proximity between professional communications service providers and politics seems to be news in itself. More often than not, the tenor of such coverage turns out to be on the negative side. Still, the representation, mediation and assertion of particular interests are anything but adverse to a political system; on the contrary, it is pivotal to pluralistic democracies and indispensable for political decision making. Only the exchange of different perspectives and expertises can create the basis for the formation of a legal act. Political decision makers become legitimized by continuous communication. The political system is even legally required to continuously communicate with the people, providing information and elucidation. However, different theoretical perspectives upon democracy have taken quite different views upon this interaction, arriving at drastically different appraisals of political PR accordingly.

The attention paid to this topic by the mass media contrasts with its relative neglect in scientific inquiry. This loophole is particularly evident in German speaking research. One reason may be that the topic is situated on the interface between ‚organisational communication‘ and ‚political communication‘ and that these disciplinary research areas have hitherto taken too little notice of one another. Consequently, the envisaged conference „Politics – PR – Persuasion“ is intended to bring together researchers of both fields, in order to detect latent synergies that will come in useful for further research. The conference is dedicated to the interactions between organized lobbyists, political decision makers, PR experts and the mass media. Their connexions may be examined both on an interna-

Prof. Dr. Olaf Hoffjann
Ostfalia – Hochschule für angewandte Wissenschaften

Karl-Scharfenberg-Str. 55/57
D-38229 Salzgitter
Tel: +49 / 5341 875 52570
o.hoffjann@ostfalia.de

PD Dr. Simone Huck-Sandhu
Fachgebiet für Kommunikationswissenschaft und Journalistik
Universität Hohenheim

Fruwirthstraße 49
D-70599 Stuttgart
Tel: +49 / 711 / 459-23255
simone.huck-sandhu@uni-hohenheim.de

tional/European as well as on a national and local level. In doing so, we would like to leave room for theoretical papers. This call is divided into three parts:

Part I: Political Lobbying and Public Affairs

Very little is known about the *influence of political lobbying and public affairs on political decision making* on the one hand and on medial news coverage on the other. Consequently, the conference is dedicated to this subject area and welcomes papers that analyze and systematize the various forms and the content of the existing lines of influence (e.g., by developing a typology). Possible approaches include:

- How can the interactions of lobbyists, decision makers, stakeholders and mass media be systematized?
- Which organisational, institutional and contentual features of political lobbying / public affairs can be identified?
- Are decision makers' attempts at influencing media (organizational and / or content-related perspective) becoming more professional and if yes, how so?
- Which methodical innovations help analyzing this complex and opaque interaction? Which additional benefits can approaches such as sociological network analyses or participant observations have for such an analysis?
- Which ethical problems and dangers are harboured by political lobbying and how could the various approaches to regulation, transparency and containment be evaluated?
- How can *interdependencies* between lobbying and public affairs for political decision makers on the one hand, and lobbying and public affairs aimed at media coverage on the other, be described and analyzed?

Such questions may be tackled theoretically, comparatively, or by means of case studies based on current developments and events (such as energy, health or education politics).

Part II: PR of Politics

Central to part two are PR activities in politics / within the political system in a narrow sense, i.e. parties, politicians, civil services, governments, parliaments, ministries, relevant NGOs, etc. On the one hand, this applies to *organizational structures and processes of planning and executing PR (including PR consulting)*. On the other hand, *aspects of content* (such as agenda setting, framing) should be considered (or both, interactively). Possible questions could be:

- How are the structure and organization of PR of politicians, parties, parliaments, PR consulting, etc. becoming more professional?
- How are the contents of the PR of politicians, parties, parliaments, PR consulting, etc. becoming more professional?
- Does the PR practice of the political system and its protagonists differ between exceptional circumstances (e.g., scandal/crisis/conflict/risk; election campaigns as a form of permanent campaigning are not considered exceptional circumstances) and normal/everyday situations, and if so, how?
- How do parties, politicians, ministries, NGOs, etc. prepare for *exceptional circumstances* such as political crises, conflicts and risk as regards organization, structure and content?
- Which strategies do they employ with regard to contents and/or organization/structure, and with how much success?
- Have there been changes during the last years/decades (considering, e.g., social media and web 2.0)? Have the content and/or organisation/structure/function of political events (e.g. party conferences, state visits, international summits) changed in consequence of the strategic use of PR, and if so, how?

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Roles and functions, the organization, structure and contents of PR particularly in political *scandals* are to be addressed in this part.

Part III: Use and Effects of political PR (-consulting)

The effects of political communication have always been a focal point of research and a frequent theme of national and international conferences. However, the *use, processing and effects of political public relations* (as regards journalism as well as other relevant, intended sections of the public) remained mostly unexplored, save for a few early approaches within PR determination research (effect on journalism/media contents in particular). Also the use and effects of political PR on the *internet* (as a journalistic research tool but also in relation to other intended sections of the public) has attracted little attention to date. Possible questions include:

- How do PR campaigns influence the formation of political attitudes? Which effects of political PR ensue under which conditions in the medium and long term, among different user and target groups (development of trust in political PR messages, the generation of knowledge, agenda setting- and framing effects, etc.)? To what extent do recipients consider political PR to be credible?
- How does political PR affect the mass media's meta-coverage of political PR? How do other political protagonists (such as NGOs) broach the issue of political PR as a phenomenon/problem on a meta-level? Which effect does such meta-framing have on various users/target groups (e.g., with regard to confidence in politics)?
- Which influence do professional political communications service providers exert on the development of a political public sphere?
- What effect does the recognizability of political PR have on its use and effects?

Particularly in view of web 2.0:

- Who uses which political blogs, why and with what results (motives of use, considering different professional or other user groups)?
- How credible are PR-generated or PR-initiated social media tools of political protagonists (such as Chancellor Merkel's video blog, youtube videos of politicians) — also compared to messages of political stakeholders outside of PR-generated or PR-initiated social media tools (e.g., on independent platforms such as abgeordnetenwatch.de)?
- Which role does political *online*-PR play, and which influence does it exert on the (intermediary) agenda setting process? Which influence does specific political *online* PR have on opinion formation?
- Does political PR on the web 2.0 effectively offer better chances for pinpointed (group-targeted) political communication? Under which conditions precisely? What are the specific challenges related to this?

Finally, a further theme which cuts across all three parts on a meta level, consists in theoretical and / or empirical research on how different ideas on democracy have an effect on the (respective) analysis and evaluation of political PR.

Submission of Papers

Contributions relating to the theme of the conference as outlined above can be submitted in German or English. Empirical studies as well as theoretical discussions and research reports from comprehensive projects (published or not) are very welcome.

Proposals with a specific relation to the conference theme should be assigned to one of the above topics. Presentations should not exceed 20 minutes. Submissions should be abstracts [4.000 to 5.000 characters overall; divided into a) cover sheet with title, name/s and contact details and b) abstract in-

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cluding title but without name/s and contact details; please take care to also remove identifying information from the automatically stored file information!] in pdf format and addressed by email to romy.froehlich@ifkw.lmu.de by April 15 2012.

Conference contributions must be original texts which have not been published or presented at any other conference. This must be explicitly stated on the cover sheet. It is, however, possible to pick out single aspects from already published and presented papers in order to examine them in more detail within a new context. This procedure must be apparent from the abstract. As to empirical studies, their current stage should become clear from the abstract (planning-, survey-, evaluation-phase, completed). By submitting, all authors declare their intention to participate in the conference if their proposal is accepted. For the sake of an inspired and substantial discourse, the continuous presence of all speakers is expected.

Peer Review Process

Each conference contribution will be evaluated through an anonymous peer review process by two reviewers. The usual DGPK selection criteria (relation to the theme of the conference, theoretical foundation, relevance of approach, originality, acceptability of method and practice, clarity and poignancy in representation) apply.

All applicants will be notified of the results of the review process by May 30, 2012. The program will be published by June 15, 2012.

Further details on venue, costs and hotel proposals will follow in due course.

Chair:

Prof. Dr. Romy Fröhlich
Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München
Institut für Kommunikationswissenschaft und Medienforschung
Schellingstr. 3 (Raum 401 VG, 4. Stock)
D-80799 München
Tel. +49 (0)89-2180 9457
Fax. +49 (0)89-2180 9014
froehlich@ifkw.lmu.de
<http://www.ifkw.de/froehlich/>

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