



Introduction: The Expanding Field of Political Communication in the Era of Continuous Connectivity

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In less than the working lifetime of most individuals, in just a few decades, political communication as practiced and as a field of scholarly investigation has been transformed by a new era of continuous connectivity. The transformation began with broadcasting in the last decades of the 20th century, when advances in cable and satellite technology brought forth more choices for information and entertainment from around the world than ever before. New global 24/7 news channels, such as Al-Jazeera, built new transnational audiences. By the turn of the 21st century, with the explosive growth of the Internet and the widespread use of mobile phones and texting, the information environment had transformed into a global and local marketplace rich with opportunity.

In the first decade of the 21st century, many stories became world news because citizens were empowered by new social media such as Facebook and Twitter or their local variants. Even in closed societies where access to information is routinely controlled and denied by authorities, connectivity means that many local protests and crackdowns can become global news. Today, individuals, organizations, campaigns and social movements, and governments around the world are all affected by the opportunities and issues presented by the new media environment (Bennett, 2003; Graber 2003).

Although everything appears to have been profoundly changed by the new norm of ubiquitous

wireless connectivity, the questions and concerns that lie at the heart of the interdisciplinary field of political communication remain the same. Questions about access and control, choice and contents, and impacts on learning, opinions and behavior have been addressed in a number of national and international contexts (examples include Cappella and Jamieson, 1997; Diebert et al., 2008, 2010, 2011; Graber 2001; Mutz, 2007; Prior, 2005). Today's scholars and practitioners are as just driven by an interest in understanding the mechanisms of power and influence as their predecessors.

Precisely these issues were at the heart of the phone hacking scandal in the UK in early 2011 that rocked the empire of the world's most powerful media magnate, Rupert Murdoch. The scandal raised internationally resonant and profoundly important ethical questions for journalists, criminal investigators, politicians and governments about their work and relationships. Professor Richard Tait, Director of the Center for Journalism at the Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies, whose experience includes serving as a BBC governor and trustee, and an editor, producer and editor-in-chief at ITN, Channel 4 news, and BBC television, provides the latest insights on the implications of this scandal for journalism and politics and the field of political communication research in this volume.



The SAGE Handbook of Political Communication is a timely resource for students, scholars and practitioners around the world. Leading experts from more than a dozen countries have contributed to this volume. The volume stands apart from most handbooks in which summaries of the literature are the main focus. The 41 chapters in this volume go beyond that to advance innovative arguments about timely issues and present new data, and many offer new approaches and methods for doing political communication research.

In what follows, we discuss the expanding field of political communication, beginning with its multidisciplinary past and present. Over the past decade there has been the beginning of convergence across theories and approaches that marks the development of the field. We discuss what the future holds for this vibrant and growing field before outlining the contents of the five sections of the Handbook.

A MULTIDISCIPLINARY PAST AND PRESENT

The roots of the field of political communication are deep and multi-disciplinary. The comments of a number of leading scholars acknowledge the historic influence of an array of disciplines in the arts and social sciences (see *The Future of Political Communication Research*, 2005; Graber, 2003; Bennett and Iyengar 2008). Indeed, in universities around the world today, many different academic departments, schools and programs provide the institutional bases for what we would describe as research and teaching in political communication including: communication, journalism and media studies, political science and history, international relations, public and international affairs, cultural studies, sociology, psychology, anthropology, marketing, advertising, public relations and economics. Generations of graduates from these programs have gone on to become practitioners and many have become scholars.

Innovative political communication research can be found in a wide array of journals. Around the world a large number of journals include articles with a political communication focus, such as the *Asian Journal of Communication*, *Communication Research*, the *European Journal of Political Research*, the *European Journal of Communication*, *Journal of Communication*, *Media Culture & Society*, and the *Journal of Political Marketing* among others. There are two longstanding and widely recognized dedicated journals in this interdisciplinary field – *Political Communication* and *International Journal of Press*

Politics – and the editorship of the former is shared between representatives of the political communication sections of the International Communication Association (ICA) and the American Political Science Association (APSA). The University of Southern California's (USC) E-Governance Lab at the School of Policy, Planning and Development also home to the *Journal of E-Government* that focuses on e-governance and how state and local governments can improve their use of information technology and enhance the delivery of public services and information. Another example of a new journal that provides a dedicated channel for research on political communication is the online *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* launched in 2009. These last two journals are connected with the APSA's Information, Technology and Politics (ITP) organized section. There is also the *International Journal of Communication*, an open-source, online journal launched in 2006 at USC's Annenberg School, edited by Manuel Castells and Larry Gross, which has published more than 40 political communication related articles in its first four years. Judging from this brief overview, we can expect that political communication research will continue grow in a wide range of publication outlets.

Political communication research also appears to be well and thriving in many of the traditional discipline-based journals in political science and economics. Our review of a number of journals archived in JSTOR in political science and economics, for example, found that 194 articles focusing directly on political communication topics were published between 2000 and 2009. The number of articles increased over time, with 43% of the 194 articles published between 2000 and 2004 and 57% published between 2005 and 2009. This review included: *American Economics Review*, *American Journal of Political Science*, *American Political Science Review*, *British Journal of Political Science*, *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, *Journal of Political Economy*, *Journal of Politics*, *Political Behavior* and *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*.

Most political scientists and communication scholars do not read academic journals in economics and would be surprised to learn that research on political communication can be found in these outlets. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, for example, published several articles that directly address compelling political communication research questions, based on an analysis of keywords and abstracts, as the following article titles suggest: 'Radio's Impact on Public Spending' (2004), 'A Measure of Media Bias' (2005), 'Television and Voter Turnout' (2006) and 'The Fox News Effect: Media Bias and Voting' (2007). *The American Economics Review*

published six articles relevant to political communication in this time period on such topics as the market for news, the randomness of social networks, and *The New York Times* and the market for local newspapers.

The expansion of the field is evidenced by the growth of publications in these various outlets in the social sciences. The structure of the academic disciplines and their often similarly named top journals has no doubt limited general awareness of some of these findings that help us to recognize the growth of political communication research in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Many scholars in political communication based in departments of political science or communications may not even be aware of some of the pioneering work published by economists in economics journals, yet some of this work directly addresses major questions facing scholars in the field of political communication around the world. One such question, for example, is whether media bias effects voting.

Most will recall that it was only after a highly charged debate and contested 2000 US presidential election result that President George W. Bush entered what became the first of two terms in office. News around the world on Election Day in November 2000 reported on the problems with US voting booths and the fact that some citizens were prevented from voting in battleground states, such as Ohio and Florida. The hotly disputed first-term presidency began only after a 5–4 Supreme Court vote and a highly charged public debate. Much innovative research has been published on the 2000 US election by scholars in political science and communication around the world, but it was research published in *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* that established how the Republicans' path to the presidency began four years earlier in October 1996 when the conservative Fox News Channel was rolled out in the cable systems of 20% of US towns. Drawing on presidential and congressional voting data from more than 9000 towns where Fox News was introduced between 1996 and 2000, economists Stefano Dellavigna and Ethan Kaplan (2009: 1187) establish significant effects on the vote and conclude that Fox News 'convinced 3 to 28 percent of its viewers to vote Republican, depending on the audience measure'. Xinshu Zhao's (2008) careful analysis of the vote revealed that the 2000 US presidential election result was invalid and his study on the plight of elections in democracies around the world became a best-selling book in China.

In this new information era, research in the traditional disciplines of political science, sociology, journalism, psychology and anthropology, each of which has contributed in different ways to the development of the field called political

communication, has been impacted dramatically as scholars seek new ways to conceptualize the expanding field, adapt old methodologies and create new ones. Our research on publications in just some of the social science journals shows that research in the field is growing. The multidisciplinary roots of the field remain visible in a number of journals that we describe as dedicated to political communication research. In addition, we find that fundamental research questions in the field are being addressed in publications from other disciplines such as economics.

As the substantive research in the field is expanding across more disciplines, over the past decade there also has been the beginning of convergence across of theories and approaches that marks the development of the field. This convergence gives primacy to the perspective of the citizen as a consumer and producer of contents, and draws upon research in marketing, branding, public relations, public affairs and public diplomacy.

Citizens as Content Consumers and Creators: Branding, Public Relations and Public Diplomacy

As the mass media systems moved from a 'one to many' model to a 'many to many' model, the field of political communication shifted from a mass media model to what Margaret Scammell (2007: 611) has called 'a consumer model of political communication'. The concept of the brand subsumes all, she argues. Branding has moved from products to politicians, with the same methods and practices in politics that are common in marketing and public relations. Scammell's (2007) case study of the branding of Prime Minister Tony Blair in the UK 2005 general election is an early example of what observers of global political marketing find are growing similarities in the marketing practices of political parties around the world (Lees-Marshment et al., 2009).

Research and theory concerning elections and campaign effects, marketing, public relations, public affairs and public diplomacy all can be described as falling within concept of a process that Jesper Strömbäck and Spiro Kioussis (2011) call 'political public relations'. Their definition of the process clearly falls under the umbrella of political communication: 'Political public relations is the management process by which an organization or individual actor for political purposes, through purposeful communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with its key publics to help support its mission and achieve its goals'. In addition to the usual work of

political parties, governments and politicians, this process also describes public affairs and public diplomacy activities that involve state as well as non-state actors ranging from artists and producers of culture to non-governmental organizations.

The field of political communication incorporates the new public diplomacy that involves corporate and non-state actors, grassroots and transnational organizations and citizens whose activities, though not controlled by the state, may nevertheless foster knowledge building, learning and, potentially, impacts on opinions and behavior.

THE FUTURE: INNOVATION

Today's scholars aim to identify new approaches and methods for studying the process of political communication under media hyper conditions, alongside flourishing activity among citizens as consumers and creators of content. Entertainment and the arts are more visible and varied than ever before in this new information age. Individual content creators upload hundreds of thousands of new videos daily to sites such as YouTube. In 2009, just four years after its launch, YouTube was seen by more than 1 billion viewers each day. Facebook, founded in 2004, had more than 500 million users in early 2010.

Individuals and organizations are also more vulnerable than ever before because of the security issues that go along with reliance on technology and social networks. Cyber attacks are a daily cost for companies in doing business while governments aim to find ways to prevent cyber war. Cyber attacks are a coordinated form of millions of requests, known as distributed-denial-of-service or DDOS attacks, to overload and shut down servers. These have been common practice in war and conflict between nations recent years, such as the cyber attacks on the Georgian government's servers just prior to Russia's 2008 invasion of the country.

The familiar phrase 'the only constant is change', has a special meaning for scholars and practitioners in the field of political communication. Failure to innovate is not an option. Under these rapidly changing conditions, scholars and practitioners have to constantly reassess their research priorities.

ORGANIZATION OF THE HANDBOOK

Evidence of the transformational impact of the Internet in societies around the world can be

found throughout this volume. The Handbook is organized into five parts.

Part I discusses the developments in technology and the media that have broadened the terrain for political communications especially over the past decade. Trends in the media industry, entertainment media and popular culture are discussed, as well as the still unfolding impact of the Internet on citizens, journalism and the news business, political parties and campaigning, and government approaches to communications. As normative conclusions are often part of political communication research, Part I concludes with an innovative agenda that sets forth standards for normative evaluations of media and citizen performance.

Part II addresses how individuals and groups are engaging with one another, learning and communicating in the new media environment, and discusses potential future scenarios. The first four chapters each take different perspectives on traditional media, new media and social media to discuss the transformational impacts on civil society and civic learning. The last four chapters focus on specific sites for studying citizens and civic engagement including women as political communicators, negative campaigning and its impacts, commercialization and public service broadcasting in the European context, and the value of social networks.

Part III focuses on the latest developments in research designs and methods for studying political communication in the varying contexts of traditional, old and new media. New perspectives on how to measure effects and content are presented in this section, drawing on new data provided by the chapter authors.

Part IV concerns the conceptual importance of power in political communication research. The chapters in this section draw upon various contexts including foreign policy, war and combat, political rhetoric, everyday conversations and social media.

Part V focuses on the various geographic contexts for political communication practice and research. From China and Korea to Latin America, from Russia and the new EU states to transnational Al-Jazeera, the local, national, regional and transnational contexts are discussed in the chapters in this final section. In the penultimate chapter in the volume, Paolo Mancini and Daniel Hallin offer their comments on comparative political communication research. In the last chapter of this section, which is also the last chapter in the volume, leading broadcaster and professor of journalism Richard Tait discusses the impact of the Britain's phone hacking scandal and the implications for the future of journalism.

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