

Global Media Journal

German Edition

ISSN 2196-4807

Vol. 3, No.1, Spring/Summer 2013

URN:nbn:de:gbv:547-201300261

Measuring Strategy by Tracing Political Media Relations Tactics – A Conceptualization¹

Christin Schink

Abstract: Conceptualizing the strategic interplay of communication experts with political journalists is like being in the middle of so far conflicting approaches. The mostly economic science based literature on strategic communication management often implies a prescriptive and rational approach of decision making and behavior. From a social sciences perspective, however, the empirical transfer of mere economic rational choice models has been reasonably challenged. Although many rational choice theorists accept actor rationality to be limited rather than total and the metaphor of a “game” between the two groups is frequently used, only tentative efforts of social sciences to integrate rational choice models into the concept of strategy can be observed. This article seeks to make a case for network analysis to be applied in political media relations, as it enables the integration of approaches of strategy that have been kept separate so far. Doing so would allow strategic interactions to act as infrastructure for a descriptive analysis and environment for testing cost-benefits with the help of game theory. In this way, it allows for both a systematic integration of different strategy concepts and a comparative evaluation of their validity and explanatory power for empirical ex-post analysis in different social contexts. Developed in the German context, a possible comparative approach will be exemplified by the Russian Federation in accordance with the most different systems design.

Keywords: Political Communication; Strategy; Network Analysis; Game Theory; Media Relations

Introduction

The fascination over the interplay of politics and the media can be observed in countless academic and public debates across countries. The central underlying assumption in that context is that political organizations act strategically in order to enforce their interests in the public sphere. Yet, interactions between politics and the media only occasionally become publicly observable. In Germany, for example, a heated public discussion recently evolved around a political

¹ This publication was created in the context of the Research Unit “Political Communication in the Online World (1381), subproject 6” which is funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation).

spokesperson calling the editorial team of a public broadcasting channel in order to prevent negative coverage. Since nationwide TV channels are directly controlled by the government in Russia and journalists may have internalized these external regulations, this incident probably would not have been publicly observable, as it is of no news value for the national media. This example vividly illustrates that (a) public reports and news are not appropriate material to study the interplay of politics and the media and that (b) the notion of “strategic behavior” is not universal but depends on specific contextual factors.

So far, research focused either on communication management within organizations (e.g. Ehling & Dozier, 1992) or on journalistic research methods (e.g. Reich, 2009). By applying social network analysis, the interrelatedness of politics and the media becomes empirically observable and allows profound insights into the interplay of the two. Conceptualizing these interactions with the help of game theory then provides a framework to evaluate the actual degree of the “players” potentially rational and strategic behavior.

Due to the dominance of journalism studies in communication research, interaction between a political organization and the media is often labeled as “public relations” (e.g. Schulz, 2008, p. 305). Public relations research, however, has a much broader understanding, which also includes the communication between other actors connected with or interested in the organization (Grunig & Hunt 1984, p. 6). Strömbäck and Kiousis (2011) define political public relations as

“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” (ibid., p.8)

Although the authors aimed to integrate social and economic research fields in their definition, a prescriptive perspective is clearly presented. The interactions with journalists in a narrower sense are frequently referred to as “media relations”. Here, too, one finds quite practical definitions. Zoch and Molleda (2006, p. 280) describe media relations as

„active process in which the public relations practitioner has, at least, a modicum of control over the message she wishes to reach the public, its timing, the source of that information, and the effect on the media agenda of the issue presented.“

No wonder, though, that in communication management as well as in political communication research the communication activities of political organizations are regarded as strategic, per se. The associated notion of strategic behavior, however, is conceivably diverse, as this article will show.

In order to conceptualize the interaction of journalists and communication professionals, theoretical reflections frequently call on the metaphor of a “game” between the two (see Jarren & Donges, 2006, p. 319; Donsbach, 1993). The

systematic connection to theories and methods of interdependent decision making, however, mostly fizzles out with the general statement that those interactions could principally be analyzed with the help of e.g. game theory (see *ibid.*, p. 58f.; Ehling & Dozier, 2002, p. 277ff.).

Empirically seen, different approaches to strategy remain irreconcilably up to now. By looking closer at the approaches to strategy in the context of political media relations, this article firstly aims to show the potential that may lie in social network analysis to integrate these approaches in order to simultaneously describe and measure strategy in the political-media communication network. On this basis, the implementation of game theory, as well as problems with the application of rational choice models in general, will be discussed. Afterwards, this article will look at the applicability of the introduced statements in a transcultural perspective, illustrated by the Russian Federation that has been chosen in accordance with the *most different systems design* of John Stuart Mill (see Esser, 2003, p. 466). Finally, it will sum up and conclude the value of the outlined considerations for further research.

Strategy Concepts in Political Media Relations

Describing and measuring the strategic interplay of communication experts with political journalists was so far connected with the commitment to either prescriptive management concepts or descriptive political concepts of strategy. This section will introduce both approaches and will then make the case for network analysis being able to integrate them.

Strategy in Politics

Political communication research understands every communication activity that is driven by particular interests as strategic (e.g. Kriesi, 2004; Manheim, 2011). The development of the concept of strategy has been described as progress “from normative idealism to critical realism” (see Frandsen & Johansen, 2010), which means that over time it aimed to draw near social scientific perceptions. *Strategy*, in a political context, is regarded to be in an exploration phase; on the other hand, in social sciences descriptive and incremental models are preferred. In this sense, strategy can be described only retrospectively by qualitative research designs. Most recent is the “strategy as practice”-approach that grounds on action theory and understands strategy as the activity of practitioners that are embedded in social contexts like organizations and societies (Raschke & Tils, 2010a, p. 11f.; e.g. Jarzabkowski, 2005).

Representatives of this view criticize that the ability to act strategically is almost always taken for granted. They replace hard data and calculations by a “weighing up” of practitioners and differentiate between strategy-thinking (actor’s

interpretations) and strategy-making (actual interactions) (Raschke & Tils 2010b, p. 367). Political strategy analysis is characterized by a large part of open, “inner” strategy processes, complex interrelations between individual and collective action as well as between the micro, meso and macro level and the embeddedness of strategic processes in historic contextual coherences (ibid., p. 361). Due to the lack of reliable information about strategy in the political context, the only chance to integrate rational choice is seen in developing it more explicitly and sophisticated in the long run (ibid. 373). Using social network analysis may be one way to describe the social interrelatedness of actors and inherent consequences for their ability to act strategically. For this purpose the social network must be defined in a broad sense as a “set of actors connected by a set of ties. The actors (often called ‘nodes’) can be persons, teams, organizations, concepts, etc.” (Borgatti & Foster, 2003, p. 992)².

As strategic communication is considered to be more than a mere voice that announces the decisions of the political organizations (see Sarcinelli, 2010), it is regarded as an executive function from a social science perspective as well as from an economic perspective.

Strategic Communication Management

Strategic management and strategic communication are closely connected within literature on communication management (e.g. White & Dozier, 1992). Due to this close relationship, prescriptive management understanding and rational choice assumptions dominate within this field (e.g. Bentele & Nothhaft, 2007, p. 373; Wilson, 2001; Mast, 2006, p. 144ff.; Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2000).

These classical assumptions of efficiency and rationality have been challenged by the so-called “Critical Management Studies” (e.g. Phillips & Dar, 2009) as the representatives of this view also stress the social embeddedness of the communication professionals and therefore doubt the empirical value of rational choice assumptions for the description of social situations. Even the literature on strategic management notes that the logics of commercial and non-profit organizations differ in the strategy selection process (see Lynch, 2009, p. 382). From this flexible, complex, and hardly quantifiable understanding of strategy selection various new approaches to strategy in strategic management research as well as in political organizations emerge.

One of them is the network-based approach that deals with “strategic networks”. These networks are regarded as the outflow of a cooperation strategy in order to gain competitive advantages (Sydow, 2005, p. 93) and value is placed upon the degree of cooperation (Lynch, 2009, p. 429). Such benefit-approaches can also be

² It thereby follows the formal definition of the research project “Media Relations Online” which is funded by the German Research Foundation and which the here outlined concept of a planned dissertation is embedded in.

found in literature on the management of relationships with the media (e.g. Hallahan, 2001). Not surprisingly, communication professionals themselves perceive their strategic actions in quite a prescriptive way (Frandsen & Johansen, 2010). The network approach, though, may be able to integrate the so far separated branches of strategy research.

Networks as Bridges between the Approaches

It is important that the term “social networks”, (from the social sciences point of view), and the term “strategic networks”, (from an economic science based perspective), must be distinguished. Social networks serve as an infrastructure to describe the structure of a network, including its size and closure (Scott, 2012; Monge & Contractor, 2001, p. 444). The relations between the nodes (e.g. organizations or individuals) in the social network can be manifold; they reach from membership to reputation attributions up to exchange relations like the exchange of information or resources (see Jansen, 2006, p. 75). Strategic networks, on the other hand, principally assume a value connected to interactions within the network (Lynch, 2009, p. 429). The focus is therefore not on the description of the network and derived assumptions about influences on the actor’s ability to take strategic action, but on the concrete competitive advantages which can arise from cooperation within the network (Sydow, 2005, p. 93).

Nevertheless, it has been theoretically shown that descriptive and prescriptive understandings of strategy may be integrated as retrospective and prospective sense-making in organizations do not need to exclude one another (Raupp & Hoffjann, 2012). Social Network analysis has the great potential to integrate the so far separated branches of strategy research even empirically by serving as a frame for descriptive analysis, as well as environment for testing cost-benefit-considerations with the help of game theory in only one research design. Thus, the determined structure of the communication network between political and media organizations merely reveals, in the first instance, media relations tactics as isolated interactions. These may, subsequently, serve as evidence for underlying long-term managed strategies of the actors involved (see de Certeau, 1984, p. 29f.). In order to evaluate the degree of the involved actors’ tactical behavior using game theory, rational choice assumptions need to be applied – a plan that still continues to be a big challenge, as the following section will show.

The Challenge of Applying Rational Choice

The most difficult point in putting into practice these considerations are the scruples connected with a rational choice approach to research political media relations. As rational choice models are not seldom considered as to be free of subjective expectations and sense making, they are not regarded as being able to describe nor to predict social phenomena (see inter alia Denzin, 1990; Zey, 1992;

Ward, 2002). Looking more closely at the presumptions of neo-classic economic theory this is hardly surprising; it is characterized by tangle incentives for the actors, their ability to act in a purely rational manner, non-varying preferences, costless transactions and complete information about possible alternatives of action and their consequences regarding central assumptions of the actor (see Kirchgässner, 1991).

Yet, advocates of the rational choice approach point out its heuristic value (e.g. Franz, 2004). Terms like "preferences" and "alternatives of action" are regarded by critics as not being connected to specific events and actors (Raschke & Tils 2010b, p. 373). Seen positively, this "flexibility" of the rational choice approach, as Braun & Gautschi (2011, p. 303) call it, was definitely striking while trying to integrate this approach into the research of political media relations (see following section).

As rational choice models do not take sociological background or individual perceptions and values of actors into account, they are, however, trivialized (Raschke & Tils 2010b, p. 376f.). Yet, even earlier models make allowances for influences of the social environment of the actors (e.g. Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Granovetter, 1978). The application of rational choice models in natural situations like the interaction within the political-media communication network is difficult to implement. Nevertheless, an integration of action-theoretical variables on the micro level into a multi-level analysis, as will be outlined later on, is considered a crucial step towards a rational choice analysis of social phenomena (Kunz, 2004, p. 148f.). Furthermore, a multi-step analysis approach keeps the following in mind: different logics of action, the interaction patterns between the actors, the influences on different levels of analysis, and even temporal relations between macro and micro variables (see Blossfeld, 1996; Esser, 1993).

The major problem in rational choice research is the battery of unforeseeable variances that challenge the idea of utility maximization. That is why the subjective definition of the situation by the actors themselves is considered to be the crucial key to deal with those irrationalities (e.g. Esser, 2003; Schulz-Schaeffer, 2008). Empirically explanatory perspectives of the rational choice approach should therefore be implemented for the case of political media relations.

One of the major issues in modeling political media relations as rational interactions is that this field is also strongly formed by habits and routines (e.g. press releases, conferences and regular off-the-record conversations). This fact seems like an obstacle for the implementation of a rational choice approach as the actors may not always rationally maximize their own profit but count on established routines. Watkins (1972, p. 353) explains how brushing one's teeth in the morning may be one of the most manifest routine actions, but that this does not imply that brushing your teeth is irrational.

By integrating all these considerations into the rational choice approach the former neo-classical economic assumption of the actor who maximizes his own benefit gives way to the assumption of actors with limited mental capacity and rationality as well as incomplete information – actors who “satisfice” instead of maximize (see Simon, 1978).

That is why Braun and Gautschi (2011, p. 299f.) point out that even if the postulation of the continuously optimizing actor is considered as empirically invalid, one does not have to give up on the rational choice theory. Instead, the authors rather criticize the methodology and operationalization of many rational choice studies. Laboratory experiments tend to have a considerable internal validity at the expense of external validity. Acceptable predictions could only be expected if the decision situation is simply to understand, and incentives, as well as a sufficient learning period, are granted. Therefore, Braun and Gautschi (2011) conclude that hypotheses derived from a rational choice approach, on the one hand, must include former experience, but that they mainly refer to long-term relevant behavior that cannot be distorted without effort. That is why the idea of researching political media relations with the help of a rational choice approach seems so prolific: all named requirements work fine for the idea of researching the interactions of political journalists and communication professionals in political organizations e.g. with the help of semi-structured interviews. They know best in which everyday-situation they are, and one can assume that they are sufficiently experienced in interacting with each other. The actors' behavior can, under these conditions, be considered more or less stable.

In summary, the way of applying game and network theory to political media relations in order to integrate strategy concepts empirically seems as obvious as promising. That is why the following section will attempt to show how these theoretical ideas can be applied to the concrete context of political media relations.

Game Theory and Media Relations

As pointed out in the previous sections, an exhaustive conceptualization and theoretical discussion is essential in order to describe and measure the strategic interplay of political journalists and communication professionals. It has been shown so far that game theory, although frequently referenced in the context of media relations (e.g. Jarren & Donges, 2006, p. 319; Donsbach, 1993), cannot be applied in a universal sense to the social phenomenon of political media relations. Instead, this rational choice approach needs to be integrated into a broader understanding of the concept of strategy, which can be done empirically through network analysis, as it may serve as a framework for economic, as well as social variables. Even when the aforementioned pitfalls and potential of rational choice models are considered, their integration into the research on political media relations remains promising. This section outlines how game theory can be

usefully applied to study the relationships between politics and media.

If the success of the game only depended on the player itself, decision-theoretical assumptions could be made. But in the case of media relations, there is an interdependent decision situation, which means that the success of one actor (respectively: player) also depends on the decisions of other actors within the political-media communication network. As the actors influence each other's decision-making processes, game theoretical considerations have to be made. Monge and Contractor (2003, p. 293) point out that social network analysis lacks theory. This deficit can be met with the application of game theory; an attempt that has been considered fruitful within theoretical and methodological reflections of public relations (Kleinnijenhuis, 2008; general overview: Kunczik, 2002, p. 274 ff.).

It makes an important difference in the analysis of game situations whether cooperative or non-cooperative game theory is applied. As the former presupposes valid, suable contracts (see Diekmann, 2010, p. 15), which are usually not concluded between political journalists and communication professionals in political organizations, the ideas outlined here have non-cooperative game theory as a starting point. It goes without saying that this is a broad-brush approach and that this decision is hard to make. A diligent analysis of the social situation in which the players meet is needed before statements about rational behavior can be made. The application of fixed game scenarios, like Murphy (1991) did for case studies of corporate communications in crises, remain on a descriptive level so that findings are hardly generalizable. Charron (1989, p. 47) made a case for a differentiated game theoretical analysis of media relations by saying "each universe is governed by its own rules".

Following him, one has to define a narrow field in which the introduced concept may be applied (e.g. strategic interactions of political journalists and communication professionals of political organizations in Germany on the federal level). In the German context, these relationships are characterized by both non-cooperation – for example, distrust, secrecy and competition (see Fröhlich & Kerl, 2012), and cooperation – in the form of a symbiotic relationship, as well as trust and harmony (see Pfetsch & Wehmeier, 2002, p. 85). Both have to be considered within a situation analysis prior to the planned game theoretical considerations. These new theoretical and methodological reflections require a deductive approach. The research design therefore must include both: the exchange of resources (information and publicity), and the allocation of influence which derives from rules of the game (Charron, 1989) that need to be developed for political media relations. Individual interaction settings in this context lead to different rules of the game and also to different games (see Holzinger, 2003, p. 176). One can, for example, assume that the head of the organizational communication department has a wider scope in deciding to cooperate than one of the staff members. The situations in which their decisions are embedded, as well as

their perceptions of the network, differ, (see Johnson & Orbach, 2002) and therefore different rules of the game must underlie the game theoretical considerations.

The players in a political-media communication network do not interact only once, but they can draw on experiences they had with other players. In game theoretical analysis it is often assumed that the same players interact. But if the combination of game theory and network analysis is pursued, players, who are functionally and structurally equivalent within the network, will consequently emerge in similar game situations. Political media relations in this case could also be conceptualized as repeated games with varying actors (respectively: opponents) (see Fudenberg & Tirole, 1991, p. 168).

Buskens (1999, p. 58), who game-theoretically examines trust in social networks, felt that studies which are conceptualized as games with varying opponents cannot describe social networks in detail (e.g. Kreps, 1990). Those concepts would assume that new actors would know what had happened before they joined the game. That is why those assumptions would lead to the same results as models in which the same players always interact. Moreover, Buskens criticizes that influences like basic distrust of the actors, and pre-established reputation, are not considered in those concepts. Aside from the fact that these problems can be avoided in future studies, game theory indeed distinguishes between games with and without information. If a game is repeated and the new player has no information about his opponent, because it is the first interplay and there is no instance or community to inform the player, non-cooperation is the most rational game strategy (see Milgrom, North & Weingast, 1990). If the community, on the other hand, is small and interconnected enough, it may be possible that the player can get information about his opponent. Uncooperative players could therefore be sanctioned in the interest of the community.

The reflections up to this point refer only to the player's degree of integration within the network and the influence of that integration on his rational play behavior. As mentioned before, a profound analysis of strategic interplays within the political-media communication network is grounded on diverse assumptions about the social situation as well as about the characteristics of the players themselves (see Holzinger, 2000, p. 3f.). In the logic of game theory the relevant characteristics of the actors derive from different cost-benefit ratios.

Applicability in a Transcultural Perspective

Strategic decisions in the management of communication with the media are influenced by a number of factors on different levels of analysis (see Frandsen & Johansen, 2010, p. 303). On a macro level it may be factors like laws, cultural norms, as well as the structure of the communication network itself. Furthermore,

organizational and personal factors on a meso and a micro level, like self-perceptions, influence the strategic behavior of the players in the network.

All these factors may be part of what can be described as media cultures. Bignell (2000, p. 5), for example, broadly defines them as "a terrain on which communication between people in a concrete historic-economic situation takes place". This underlines that the national context in which political media relations are being discussed is important (see Hepp & Wessler, 2008). Therefore, analyzing games (or cases) comparatively appears to be beneficial and will therefore be illustrated in the following section.

While putting the outlined ideas into practice from a comparative perspective, one has to keep in mind the different game situations of the players that derive from the characteristics of the players as well as from context factors like different media systems and media cultures that form the social situation the players are embedded in. A comparative application of this model is probably easier to realize for environments that are similar, for example in relation to the influence of state authorities on the media (e.g. Germany and the U.S.), than with countries that differ in that regard (e.g. Germany and the Russian Federation, see Blum, 2005, p. 9f.).

In accordance with the most different systems design of John Stuart Mill (see Esser 2003, p. 466) Russia is chosen as an illustration for the following discussion of a comparative perspective of the concept outlined so far. By taking a closer look at its political journalism and political public relations, it becomes clear that media relations are embedded in an entirely different social situation than for example in Germany or the United States (overview: Pasti, Chernysh & Svitich, 2012). As stated before, this social situation and its careful analysis are the basis for game theoretical considerations.

Although public relations research in the Russian Federation is done almost exclusively via case studies, which describe functions and practices (Tsetsura, 2003, p. 659), they are insightful: "zakazukha" (paid public relations without checking facts, see *ibid.*, p. 665) are interesting, as they inform game theoretical assumptions on the micro level that are distinctly neo-classical and thus do not reflect the ethical norms of the international associations Russian professionals have joined (e.g. International Public Relations Association) (Tsetsura, 2004, p. 343f.). Moreover, on the macro level the advertising law which does not specify the difference between hidden advertising and political public relations (*ibid.*) could influence the behavior of the actors within the communication network in Russia as in regions outside the big cities journalistic publications based on press releases are reprimanded by the *Antimonopoly Committee* and its regional departments (*ibid.*). Without further research it is hard to say how these conditions will influence network patterns and strategic behavior within the political-media communication network.

In order to analyze the strategic interactions within this network, the situation and self-perceptions of Russian journalists are at least as important as the situation of political public relations in Russia. Wu, Weaver, and Johnson (1996, p. 538) who conducted a comparative survey of American and Russian journalists found that the most important role of Russian journalists is that of the disseminator of information. They interpret this finding as an effect carried over "from Soviet days when information and facts were highly valued commodities, too often inaccessible" (ibid.). The comparatively weak self-perception, as critics of the government, underlines their interpretation that "journalists share leadership with state officials" (see also Behmer et al., 2011). The most striking difference between American and Russian journalists was the active role as agenda setter, which was twelve times as high in Russia as it was in the United States. This supports not only the explanation of the authors that Russian journalists fulfill ideological and propaganda functions but this finding is also in line with the rising relevance of Internet communication and online journalism. In addition to the highly influential nationwide TV channels that are directly controlled by the Russian government, new, qualitative and state independent online media outlets evolve that are considered as important and trustworthy sources especially in big cities (see Pörzgen, 2011). What is latently striking in conversations with Russian journalists from online media, namely the impression that they do not only report about but are themselves political activists, is also revealed in Wu et al. (1996): "Russian journalists see themselves playing a role as creative, independent agents in the Russian social and political contexts" (ibid., p. 544).

From these two different logics of political journalism in Russia, different rationalities in the behavior of the actors can be derived, outlining two separate communication networks of political journalists and communication professionals of political organizations in Russia. As TV channels and other state controlled media are considered as part of the political elite, their behavior probably will be as cooperative and closely connected to governmental organizations as one can imagine. Independent newspapers and online media, on the other hand, who perceive themselves as political activists of their own kind -not necessarily as opposition- have no need to cooperate with state institutions in this political environment. They will probably closely cooperate with non-governmental organizations or even be an active member of them. Even so, as mentioned before, much more elaborate research of political journalism and public relations in Russia, as well as more comparative studies, are needed in order to derive reliable and valid assumptions about the interactions within the political-media communication network(s) in Russia. Despite all complications that could be connected with the aforementioned methods of semi-structured interviews in Russia, this approach would definitely be a gain for the comparative analysis of political-media relations, since only journalists' attitudes and not their actual behavior were comparatively measured in Russia and the United States (ibid., p. 545).

To summarize: these mentioned points serve as a glimpse into the possible influences on the strategic behavior of Russian journalists and communication professionals of political organizations. The first sections clearly pointed out that in the limited national context of one country alone, the implementation of the outlined concept is highly ambitious. The problems connected with applying a rational choice approach merely stay the same on a comparative level (see Sciulli, 1992). This means that only after testing the presented ideas in a limited context will it be possible to state reliable consequences and perspectives about a possible applicability in a comparative perspective of communication research.

Conclusion and Perspectives

The article started by criticizing the general assumption that communication activities of political organizations are regarded as strategic, per se, although strategy concepts are imaginably diverse. Up to now, integrative concepts of strategy remained largely theoretical. By applying the introduced design of social network analysis and game theory integrative strategy concepts may for the first time become empirically observable in the form of involved actors' communication tactics. Thereby different approaches to the concept of strategy may be compared empirically as well as theoretically. From a transcultural comparative perspective, the article has shown that different social contexts result in different game scenarios and different logics of strategy. The Russian example illustrated that on the micro level journalists' self-perceptions as disseminators of information as well as on a macro level a law which does not specify the difference between hidden advertising and political public relations result in a completely different interaction situation than in the German context.

The interaction of political journalists and communication professionals are regularly described with the metaphor of a "game", yet a game theoretical analysis, in this context, has only been done by using fixed scenarios unsuited to handle the complexities of these interactions. Insofar future research of political-media relations may be able to make the game metaphor applicable by following the track outlined here. Multi-level analyses, the inclusion of empirical explanatory perspectives, as well as multistep-precisions have been discussed as possible measures for a reasonable application of rational choice assumptions.

These considerations may serve as a first intermediate step on the way of integrating rational choice into the concept of strategic political communication. That is naturally an open-ended process with the goal to gain information about possible gaps that are still needed to be filled. Nevertheless, this article showed that social network analysis in political-media relations by due consideration of different social contexts may be able to integrate separated approaches of strategy. It can serve as infrastructure for a descriptive analysis as well as environment for testing cost-benefit-considerations with the help of game theory. Therefore, it

allows for a systematic integration of different strategy concepts as well as for a comparative evaluation of their validity and explanatory power for empirical ex-post analyses.

Bibliography

- Ajzen, I. & Fishbein, M. (1980). *Understanding Attitudes and Predicting Social Behaviour*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Behmer, M. et al. (2011). Wer Journalisten sind und wie sie arbeiten. Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung. [html]. Retrieved from <http://www.bpb.de/izpb/7527/wer-journalisten-sind-und-wie-sie-arbeiten?p=all>.
- Bentele, G. & Nothhaft, H. (2007). Konzeption von Kommunikationsprogrammen. In M. Piwinger & A. Zerfaß (Eds.) *Handbuch Unternehmenskommunikation* (pp. 357-380). Wiesbaden: Gabler.
- Bignell, J. (2000). *Postmodern media cultures*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP.
- Blossfeld, H.-P. (1996). Macrosociology, Rational Choice Theory and Time. *European Sociological Review*, 12, 181-26.
- Blum, R. (2005). Bausteine zu einer Theorie der Mediensysteme. *Medienwissenschaft Schweiz*, 2, 5-11.
- Borgatti, S. P. & Foster, P. C. (2003). The network paradigm in organizational research: A review and typology. *Journal of Management*, 29(6), 991-1013.
- Braun, N. & Gautschi, T. (2011). *Rational-Choice-Theorie*. Weinheim: Juventa-Verlag.
- Brennan, G. (1992). What Might Rationality Fail to Do. In Zey, M. (Ed.) *Decision making: alternatives to rational choice models* (pp. 54-62). Newbury Park: Sage.
- Buskens, V. (1999). *Social networks and trust*. Utrecht u.a.: ICS.
- Certeau, M. de (1984). *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.
- Charron, J. (1989). Relations between journalists and public relations practitioners: Cooperation, conflict and negotiation. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 14(2), 41-54.
- Cutlip, S., Center, A.H., & Broom, G.M. (2000). *Effective public relations* (8th ed.) Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Denzin (1990). Reading Rational Choice Theory. *Rationality and Society*, 2(2), 172-189.
- Diekmann, A. (2010). *Spieltheorie: Einführung, Beispiele, Experimente* (2nd ed.). Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt.
- Donsbach, W. (1993) (Ed.). *Beziehungsspiele - Medien und Politik in der öffentlichen Diskussion: Fallstudien und Analysen*. Gütersloh: Verlag Bertelsmann-Stiftung.
- Ehling, W.P., & Dozier, D.M. (1992). Public Relations Management and Operations Research. In J.E. Grunig (Ed.) *Excellence in public relations and communication management* (pp. 151-184). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Esser, H. (2003). Der Sinn der Modelle. Antwort auf Götz Rohwer. *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, 55, 359-368.
- Esser, H. (1993). *Soziologie: allgemeine Grundlagen*. Frankfurt: Campus-Verlag.
- Frandsen, F. & Johansen, W. (2010). Strategy, Management, Leadership, and Public Relations. In R.L. Heath (Ed.) *The SAGE Handbook of Public Relations* (2nd ed.) (pp. 293-306). Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Franz, S. (2004). *Grundlagen des ökonomischen Ansatzes: Das Erklärungskonzept des Homo Oeconomicus*. In Universität Potsdam (Ed.) *International economics working paper, 2004-02* [html]. Retrieved from <http://www.uni-potsdam.de/u/makrooekonomie/docs/studoc/stud7.pdf>.
- Fröhlich, R. & Kerl, K. (2012). Das Bild der Public Relations in der Qualitätspresse. *Publizistik*, 57(2), 179 - 203.

- Fudenberg, D., & Tirole, J. (1993). *Game theory* (3rd ed.). Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Granovetter, M. (1978). Threshold Models of Collective Behaviour. *American Journal of Sociology*, 83, 1420-1443
- Grunig, J. & Hunt, T. (1984). *Managing public relations*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Hallahan, K. (2001). Strategic Media Planning. Toward an Integrated Public Relations Media Model. In R.L. Heath (Ed.) *Handbook of public relations* (pp. 461-470). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Hepp, A. & Wessler, H. (2008). Interkultureller Dialog und Medien heute: Transnationale und transkulturelle Kommunikation als Herausforderung. *Medienimpulse*, 63, 15-18.
- Holzinger, K. (2003). Common Goods, Matrix Games and Institutional Response. *European Journal of International Relations*, 9, 173-212.
- Holzinger, K. (2000). *Gemeinschaftsgüter: Recht, Politik und Ökonomie*. Preprints aus der Max-Planck-Projektgruppe Recht der Gemeinschaftsgüter, 2000/8. Bonn.
- Jansen, D. (2006). *Einführung in die Netzwerkanalyse: Grundlagen, Methoden, Forschungsbeispiele* (3rd ed.). Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Jarren, O. & Donges, P. (2006). *Politische Kommunikation in der Mediengesellschaft* (2nd ed.) Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Jarzabkowski, P. (2005). *Strategy as practice: an activity-based approach*. London: SAGE
- Johnson, J.C. & Orbach, M.K. (2002). Perceiving the political landscape: ego biases in cognitive political networks. *Social Networks*, 24, 291-310.
- Kirchgässner, G. (1991). *Homo oeconomicus: das ökonomische Modell individuellen Verhaltens und seine Anwendung in den Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaften*. Tübingen: Mohr.
- Kleinnijenhuis, J. (2008). Empirical research in contemporary social sciences relevant to Public Relations: the network approach. In A.A. van Ruler, A.T. Verčič & D. Verčič (Eds.) *Public relations metrics: research and evaluation* (pp. 60-87). New York: Francis & Taylor.
- Kreps, D. (1990). Corporate Culture and Economic Theory. In J. Alt & K. Shepsle (Eds.) *Perspectives on Positive Political Economy* (pp. 90-143). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kriesi, H. (2004). Strategic Political Communication. Mobilizing Public Opinion in Audience Democracies. In F. Esser & B. Pfetsch (Eds.) *Comparing Political Communication. Theories, Cases and Challenges* (pp. 184-212). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kunczik, M. (2002). *Public Relations. Konzepte und Theorien* (4th ed.). Böhlau: UTB.
- Kunz, V. (2004). *Rational choice*. Frankfurt: Campus-Verlag.
- Lynch, R.L. (2009). *Strategic management* (5th ed.). Harlow: Prentice Hall.
- Manheim, J.B. (2011). *Strategy in information and influence campaigns: how policy advocates, social movements, insurgent groups, corporations, governments, and others get what they want*. New York: Routledge.
- Mast, C. (2006). *Unternehmenskommunikation - ein Leitfaden* (2nd ed.). Stuttgart: Lucius & Lucius.
- Milgrom, P., North, D. & Weingast, B. (1990). The Role of Institutions in the Revival of Trade: The Medieval Law Merchant. *Economy and Politics*, 2, 1-23.
- Monge, P. R., & Contractor, N. S. (2003). *Theories of communication networks*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Monge, P. R. & Contractor, N. S. (2001). Emergence of Communication Networks. In F.M. Jablin & L.L. Putnam (Eds.) *The New Handbook of Organizational Communication. Advances in Theory, Research, and Methods* (pp. 440-502). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Murphy, P. (1991). Game Theory Models for Organizational/Public Conflict. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 16(2), 277-289.
- Pasti, S., Chernysh, M. & Svitich, L. (2012) The Russian Journalists and Their Profession. In D.H. Weaver & L. Willnat (Eds.) *The Global Journalist in the 21st century* (pp. 267-282). New York: Routledge.
- Pfetsch, B., & Wehmeier, S. (2002). Sprecher – Kommunikationsleistungen gesellschaftlicher Akteure: Medien und politische PR – Interdependenzen auf Systemebene. In O. Jarren, & H. Wessler (Eds.) *Journalismus – Medien – Öffentlichkeit* (pp. 39-97). Wiesbaden:

- Westdeutscher Verlag.
- Phillips, N. & Dar, S. (2009). Strategy. In H. Willmott, M. Alvesson & T. Bridgman (Eds.) *Handbook of Critical Management Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pörzgen, G. (2011). Russische Medien zwischen Vielfalt und Bedrohung. Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung. [html]. Retrieved from <http://www.bpb.de/apuz/59636/russische-medien-zwischen-vielfalt-und-bedrohung?p=all>.
- Raschke, J. & Tils, R. (2010a). Ausgangspunkte der Analyse politischer Strategie. In J. Raschke & R. Tils (Eds.) *Strategie in der Politikwissenschaft: Konturen eines neuen Forschungsfelds* (pp. 11-18). Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Raschke, J. & Tils, R. (2010b). Positionen einer strategischen Politikanalyse. In J. Raschke & R. Tils (Eds.) *Strategie in der Politikwissenschaft: Konturen eines neuen Forschungsfelds* (pp. 351-388) Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Raupp, J. & Hoffjann, O. (2012). Understanding strategy in communication management. *Journal of Communication Management*, 16(2), 146-161.
- Reich, Z. (2009). *Sourcing the News: Key Issues in Journalism in an Innovative Study of the Israeli Press*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Sarcinelli, U. (2010). Strategie und politische Kommunikation. Mehr als die Legitimation des Augenblicks. In J. Raschke & R. Tils (Eds.) *Strategie in der Politikwissenschaft: Konturen eines neuen Forschungsfelds* (pp. 267-298) Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Sciulli, D. (1992). Weaknesses in Rational Choice Theory's Contributions to Comparative Research. In J.S. Coleman & T.J. Farraro (Eds.) *Rational Choice Theory. Advocacy and Critique* (pp. 161-180). London: Sage.
- Scott, J. (2012). *What is social network analysis?* London: Bloomsbury Academy.
- Simon, H. A. (1955). A Behavioral Model of Rational Choice. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 69, 99-118.
- Simon, H. A. (1978). Rationality as Process and Product of Thought. *American Economic Review*, 68, 1-16.
- Schulz, W. (2008). *Politische Kommunikation: theoretische Ansätze und Ergebnisse empirischer Forschung* (2nd ed.). Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Schulz-Schaeffer, I. (2008). Die drei Logiken der Selektion: Handlungstheorie als Theorie der Situationsdefinition (The Three Logics of Selection: Theory of Action as Theory of Defining the Situation). *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, 37(5), 362-379.
- Strömbäck, J. & Kioussis, S. (2011). Political Public Relations. Defining and Mapping an Emergent Field. In J. Strömbäck & S. Kioussis (Eds.) *Political public relations: Principles and Applications* (pp. 1-32). New York: Routledge.
- Sydow, J. (2005). *Strategische Netzwerke: Evolution und Organisation*. Wiesbaden: Gabler.
- Tsetsura, K. (2003). The Development of Public Relations in Russia: A Geopolitical Approach. In K. Sriramesh & D. Vercic (Eds.) *The Global Public Relations Handbook. Theory, Research and Practice* (pp. 301-319). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Tsetsura, K. (2004). Russia. In B. van Ruler & D. Vercic (Eds.) *Public Relations and Communication Management in Europe. A Nation- by-Nation Introduction to Public Relations Theory and Practice* (pp. 331 -346). Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Watkins, J. W. N. (1972). Idealtypen und historische Erklärung. In H. Albert (Ed.). *Theorie und Realität. Ausgewählte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre der Sozialwissenschaften* (2nd ed.) (pp. 331-356). Tübingen: Mohr.
- Ward, H. (2002). Rational Choice. In D. Marsh & G. Stoker (Eds.) *Theory and Methods in Political Science* (2nd ed.) (pp. 65-89). Houndsmill: Palgrave.
- White, J. & Dozier, D.M. (1992). Public Relations and Management Decision Making. In J.E. Grunig & D.M. Dozier (Ed.) *Excellence in public relations and communication management* (pp. 91-108). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Wilson, L. J. (2001). Extending Strategic Planning to Communication Tactics. In R.L. Heath (ed.) *Handbook of public relations* (pp. 215-222). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Wu, W., Weaver, D.H. & Johnson, O.V. (1996). Professional Roles of Russian and U.S. Journalists: A Comparative Study. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 73(3), 534- 548.

- Zey, M. (1992). Criticism of Rational Choice Models. In M. Zey (ed.) *Decision making: alternatives to rational choice models* (pp. 9-31). Newbury Park: Sage Publications.
- Zoch, L.M. & Molleda, J.-C. (2006). Building a Theoretical Model of Media Relations Using Framing, Informations Subsidies, and Agenda Building. In C. H. Botan & V. Hazleton (Eds.) *Public relations theory II* (pp. 279-309). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Author

Christin Schink is a research associate at Freie Universität Berlin. She specializes in political communication, media relations and social network analysis at the division "Organizational Communication" within the Institute for Media and Communication Studies (research project "Media Relations Online. Political-Media Communication Networks under Online Conditions", funded by the German Research Foundation, DFG). In 2011, Christin Schink taught "Media & Politics" at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations in Russia. She accomplished her Master's degree in "Media and Political Communication" and her Bachelor's degree in "Media and Communication Studies" and "English Language and Literature" at the Freie Universität Berlin. As former practitioner, Christin Schink worked several years for a local newspaper and later provided counseling to German companies and organizations in the areas of strategic planning and public relations evaluations.

Email: christin.schink@fu-berlin.de