

# Journal



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## research Middle East

Journal of Public Relations Research Middle East

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# **Marketing, Public Relations and Journalism - Enemies or Partners?**

*Prof. Dr. Thomas A. Bauer,  
University of Vienna*

## **Marketing, Public Relations and Journalism – Enemies or Partners?**

*Prof. Dr. Thomas A. Bauer, University of Vienna*

Any society organizing itself and its development is structurally depending from its communication system and culturally from its communication quality. Or even better to say: a society is, what its communication structure is like and means what its quality of sociability is like (Bauer 2011: 499). In a media-organized society the communication structure – that means at least attention, traffic, connections, topics etc. - follows the technical and aesthetical logics, the attractions, the facilities and possibilities but also the limitations of communication through its mediatized character. In any case, though it is often said that media reduces the complexity of societal communication (Luhmann 1968), on the other hand also it also gets evident that in a media environment the society and its self-interpretation becomes more complex through this mode of communication- and interaction structure - in manifold perspectives: the increasing amount of information, the variety of aspects, evaluations, opinions and options coming up to public sphere overdrive the capacities of processing of social communication. In order to feel or to realize oneself responsibly as a relevant part or partner within a communication process, one must overlook its social space (frame), its relational structures, its options of meaning and relevance and last but not least its contingency of sense. The reference to a culturally defined social framework might help to come clear with orientation.

### ***Public Communication in Media Environment***

Journalism, Public Relations and Marketing are subsystems (system sectors) of the complex communication system in a society globally organized in a media environment. Since interactional systems are characterized as operations of mutual perception and observation, they get affirmed through structures (modes of relation, goals, content, action program) generated in relation to specific internal and external expectations. If it then makes sense to find a difference in between of those public communication sectors, then it does so in the interest of the distinctness (distinguishability) of the practice because of the each of one special expectations in relation to their communicative function. And if it should make sense to find out, whether those areas are in antagonist relation to each other or maybe need each other as options of acting and observing, but taken together making understandable the entire commensurable



complex of public communication, so then it does make sense to observe their difference on the level of praxeology. Why?

First, because communication is a metaphoric theoretical construct for the human notion that sense and reality only can be constructed and agreed in mode of symbolic interaction, but this interaction always realizes as negotiation and possibly with agreements (terms) within the frames and the structures of social orders and cultural programs (Schmidt 2003, Blumer 1973, Bateson 1972). Second, because it is obvious that the comprehensive social communication in an organized social environment (society) is structured according to organizational interests, which is: in general an inter-media and inter-level communication system, politically a sphere of public opinion, but economically a social landscape of target groups or targeted persons. Following the *acteur's theory* perspective (Crozier/Friedmann 1993), the *acteurs* claim structurally a position of structuralizing the social communication program and reflect this socially ordered position through professionalization, nota bene: within an industrialized communication environment structured according to the principles of *taylorism* (cf. Hebeisen 1999). The concept of professionalization (cf. Scholl/ Weischenberg 1998: 79 ff.) reflects the development of a system, successively legitimizing itself and structures the development of public communication in the interest of affirming the really existing (hierarchical) order of the organization of society. It follows a pragmatic interest, but is by definition a normative concept, affirming the practical theory of success (public influence in the mode of commercial performance) and as such always refers to normative categories, mixing mythology (especially related to journalism – heroizing personality, but also in advertisement: creative design) with concrete interests of domination explicated with constructs as for example: vocation, appointment or assignment by higher levelled office holders, special talent or even giftedness (personality, morality, competence), specialized education and/or qualification, specialized techniques of working and withholding knowledge, sometimes even ideologically dogmatized (“what wants to be a real journalist, must do..., have..., be...”. a. s. o. (cf. Bauer 2009: 70 ff).

In a media environment communication is not just an ever similar result of media's operation. First: it is not “the media”, which is acting out the operation, but it is the social usage of media in the position of a producer as well in the position of a consumer or “*prosumer*” that makes media working like media (Bauer 2011: 468). Second: communication is not an event to be planned as an output of an organizational operation. If there any communicative action follows the inputs of an organizational program, the quality of communication depends from many more implicit and explicit circumstances than any organization is able to manage. What ever follows to a tempt of influence on the side of people that was meant and addressed to be influenced, as critical evaluation can not be called “a communication”. It is in its “best case” a

reaction within an agreement of mutual deception (Bauer 1998: 42 ff) The circuit of communication follows the logics of the social usage of media assuming that media is the generalized reference of what is new resp. to be taken as news. Communication is the social practice performing itself – the exchange of meaning - in respect to the internal and external functions of the media systems.

Taking the media communication and discourse as the social frame for a meaningful orientation increases the complexity of observation, since this frame always changes according to what is becoming a news value (Galtung/Ruge 1987, W. Schulz 1976). In such an environment communication is at its best a symbolically generated or mediated interaction between mutually supposed expectations and mutually supposed roles or positions (industrially realized in the division of producers and consumers) in the interest and need of exchange of experience, opinion and meaning. The relational structure representing this process socially is not directed or meant between one to one, but circulated indirectly between many not individually known or knowing each other, but generally meaning in relation to a generalized code of relevance represented by media. Media is the referential instance for attributing meaning and relevance to (any) information represented as a part of the public media discourse, insofar every one supposes that any other one would give relevance to know, what an other gets to know as well. So anyone thinks having to know, what any other one is able to know in order to feel connected (as a part of) to the society (Bauer 2011: 512).

Media in that sense is not a black box with effects on its consumer and is not the instance of decisive selection, not a gate keeping space, and not just a technically organized mechanical complex. Media is first of all a socially structured setting of and for public communication, embedded in strategically developed and developing systems, in doing so the strategies correspond to interests of economy as well as to public relevance, influence, and power. Exactly those results do not only depend from *acteurs* (journalists, editors, PR experts or marketing strategists), since media is not a tool just in the hands of them. Since media is the socially organized environment of public negotiation of meaning and of relevance of events, of stories and discourses, the usage of media - as well on the side of the so called recipients, audience and consumers – is, what technological infra-structures makes them becoming media (Krotz 2008:43 ff. Hepp 2008: 63 ff)

### ***The acteurs of Ccommunication in a Media Environment***

A theoretical conception of media communication as it has been roughly designed just before does consciously and by good purpose not follow the traditionally used concept of media communication, usually theoretically framed (cf. an overview in: Burkart 1995,p. 464 ff.) as a process through which

an acting person or organisation – always embedded in a specified context of experience and interest - creates messages sending them via media to be received by a disperse public – as well embedded in a social and cultural environment - expecting that they will be influenced in their mind, attitude, habit and action and that there finally will accrue a short- or long term effect that corresponds to the intentions or inspirations of the communicator position (Lasswell 1948). Even if this process-model often got fine-tuned (cf. Maletzke 1967) the metaphor of transport and translation remained as the leading model conceptualizing theoretically communication as a process realized from and between actors, depending from their action input. The *acteur's theory* (communication happens as a process caused and initialized by someone who occupies or represents an anyhow legitimized position in the direction of how it was meant by such and claiming by doing so a position of leadership and elite) argues its observation with the positivistic assumption that anything to be verified just happens by action or as an distinguishable action and mainly through the initiative of predominately acting people, *acteurs* (Crozier/Friedberg 1993) thus claiming social capital (Bourdieu 1997, 1993) and saving constellations of power in the interest of the maintenance of public influence. *Acteurs* - as this is the main categorie of the theory - in a political or societal sense represent a class of elites, parties, syndicates, associations, organizations, or institutions representing or marking an elite status, as well as leadership and public prominence through their chain of actions or their (maybe even professional) action programs. (Merkel 1999). In this theoretical environment the professions related to the three public communication working fields, to be a subject of analyse here, journalists, public relations and marketing officers, managers or experts, count as publicly relevant elites steering the flows of information and the distribution of opinion among the audiences.

Applying this theoretical concept (communication as a publicly intended action set by an *acteur* and supposed to do this in the interest of public attention) in order to understand the position of professional groups dealing with public communication - who are by such a definition influential elites in the professional role of journalists, Public Relations managers/experts and marketing managers/experts - could make it comprehensible to define those groups as such *acteurs* initializing a process of intention and influence on audiences, fragmented publics, or individual recipients. In the interest of such categories the distinction between those *acteurs* groups only could be set either according to the direction of their action programs (e.g. selling program for marketing, credibility and empathetic attention for Public Relations, news. Information and opinion for journalism) or alongside the quality of intended communication effects (e.g. persuasion for marketing, tentative conviction for Public Relations, information for journalism) a process of transaction, of transfer, of transmission or of transport of messages from a producer-position

(communicator, *acteur*) to a consumer-position (recipient) over a system that has influence and effects on its users. All those mechanical metaphors do not describe, what media is, but just represent the interest of observation supposing that media are substantially related to communication and communication socially is related to the social arrangement of domination and power.

Following the *acteur's* theory those three communication systems, marketing, public relations and journalism can be understood as organized and systemic contexts of public and symbolic interaction, by which the players leak to each other expectations in respect to knowledge and decision in form of industrially fragmented roles. All three systems are predominately characterized by their *acteurs*. If this is the case, then the “*differentium specificum*” would be in each case the particular professional acting program, its special quality and the communication functions depending from it. The mechanism of trust (between *acteurs* and audience or addressees) is based on an in each case different agreement of mutual expectations between the positions of producing and receiving messages. The professional and praxeological features (working techniques, , professional knowledge, communication skills, attention towards public value, ethical standards, media competence, personal responsibility) of those three systems are in general and roughly the following:

### *Journalism*

Is thought to be the professional practice within an editorial system of public communication, providing news in form of information and opinion to give connection to a relatively diverse audience to what might be relevant to know about (news values), and doing this – as a factor of democracy - under the conditions of independence, freedom of expression, quality of research and critical search of sources in the interest of plurality, diversity, and “objectivity” of what is reported so far, understanding this position of news-selection as a gate watching over collectively relevant information and discourse, usually personally not involved as a part of the event (cf. Rühl 2007). What makes journalism a systemic reference of public trust is the (often not realized) supposition that journalists work not only professionally (technically) correct, but more with competence (which means capacity, capability, skills, responsibility for objectivity and truth) and with respect of public needs of valuable news and sensitively understanding, what would be the news factors of the mass-audience to be addressed ( cf. Scholl/Weischenberg 1998 , Machill).

### *Public Relations*

Is – in distinction to journalism delivering external information related to others – analytically described (cf. Szyszka 2009) as an organizationally conducted and strategically planned communication architecture, as a self portrayal of particular and proper interests (image building), as communication

by and due to assignment, as influence of public sphere caring about self-interests (Röttger/Preusse/Schmitt 2011:32) and thought to be the management of communication between organizations and their targeted groups or/and specified publica (Gruning/Hunt 1984), a system of communication dedicated to the relation of reciprocally supposed interests between organisations, institutions, associations, or companies and their public stakeholders, organized and maintained by professionals of strategic communication following the business objectives of their organizations or companies to earn public understanding for the goals, acceptance for products, for ideas or acting programs, and gain credibility for the company's or organization's competence and quality, also to establish positive images and to maintain continuing attention and to set motifs of stake holding at the side of their addressees and stakeholders (Freeman 1984) for institutions, organizations or companies (cf. Kunczik 1993). In context of a so called "media society" public relations has more and more become a management system of media relations, even if PR is not working for a media discourse audience, but more for a public sphere related to thematic discourse (Jarren/Donges 2006.:105) Taking – again – truth, transparency and - at least – mental, if not real interaction as factors of a desirable process of communication – in context of specific public relations or public affairs of institutions, organizations or companies – the public relative communication is not supposed and not expected to claim responsibility for a commensurable display of truth of circumstances, but is expected to take responsibility on its situational conformance (Merten 2008: 55).

It became accepted within theories of public communication to analyse public relations on three levels, namely on micro-, meso-, and macro levels. - On macro level the P.R theory describes and analyses P.R as a functional subsystem (Rühl 1992) of an (economically) organized society: the socio-theoretical perspective (cf. Signitzer 2007).

- On meso-level the P.R theory analyses the communication system in relation to marketing in in reference to the market segments: the organization theory perspective.
- On micro-level the P.R theory orders and classifies organization and management of communication and the communication of organizations as a process, which is relevant in both environments, the internal and external and its relation of each-other. This analysis is relevant for any organization, profit- or non-profit, commercial or industrial: the marketing-oriented perspective.

### *Marketing*

Is thought to be the system of getting connected through exchange of interest at the level of producing and using or of selling and consuming products,

programs or ideas between people that is interested to target and address or to become possibly an owner of goods or a representative holding stakes of ideas, reminded by commensurate communication strategies to their explicit or latent needs. The professionalism of this system is to turn human individual or collective needs of identity, self-representation, attention or of shaping out the own life into models of requirements and requisition. Since that communication system is working with communicative tools of persuasion, the quality of communication, the challenge of credibility and the social mechanism of trust is based on an agreement of mutually supposed deception (Bauer 2011:495) or even more (Merten 2008:52) taking the category of truth as the distinguishing feature, Marketing (and in particular advertisement) does not claim for it self objectivity, transparency or truth as a factor of relevance of communication, but produces positive information purposely excluding all details that could discredit the subject or the product to be communicated.

Economy has to be taken as a fundamental process of social life and is within the social system supposed to be a basic institution. Public politics and policy cannot be separated from economy, since political power depends from economical resources and economical power always tends to claim political influence. In that sense no one field of public communication is an hermetic system by itself and for itself. Economy, politics (in sense of public relevance), those two basic institutions of the society always are involved in a publicly relevant communication and interaction system.

### ***The Relevance of Theoretical Concepts of Public Communication***

In order to deliver a meaningful reflection and to design a problem-referring setting of knowledge on those three communications sectors and in framework of that complex of hypotheses to find out, what are their similarities and what would be seen as their differences, it makes sense to relate to theoretical concepts. These concepts can be constructed in different theoretical consideration of the functions of analysis (cf. Merten 1999: 31):

- descriptive functions of theories help to understand the social, societal, the cultural and the organizational environment of communicative action,
- explicative functions of theories illustrate, what was the social or cultural paradigm and what the driving energy of and in communicative action,
- discovering functions of theories, mostly related to a (critical or affirmative) model of/for communication, are the methodological shoehorn to discover new interrelations in and of communication and society,
- prognostic functions of theories allow for preparation of problems of communication or media developments, while

- heuristic functions of theories are thought to lead the research and the development of further or deepening theories.

Taking advantage of those functions when using well done model-oriented or model-building theoretical concepts permits to figure out meaningful distinctive categories in order to find and to describe a continuum of graduation between similarities and differences of those three fields of public communication, all that negotiated in the interest of analytically based, critically observed and heuristically (creative) developed cultural practice of social communication. Through such theories, when enough complex in order to reflect the complexity of reality, it might be possible to outline abstract comparative models which use categories of substantial comparability of communicative functions between journalism, public relations and marketing. The established communication science usually knows three models of comparability, which work with the category of the character of the relation between journalism and public relation. Marketing occupies in that concept a special position aside publically relevant communication environments as it is theoretically considered as an extreme strategically conceptualized practice of communication, interested in creating markets predominately to sell ideas, images or products, and by far not as relevant in relation to public assignments as this counts for journalism and public relations.

### *The Determination Thesis*

It was a study of Barbara Baerns (1991) analyzing the relation between politics, political public relations, and local-political media reporting in a German province that came to the result, that public relations and journalism, both seen as communication systems, are in an relation of competition for public attention. Describing the relationship the most marking finding is, that public relations dominates the public discourse by themes and by timing. Or even more: the study finds, that public relations is controlling journalism, since more than 60 % of what was analysed as journalistic report, was identified as related in terms of topic an time to P.R initiatives. The journalists, when relating to those P.R activities , even reduced their research, just shortened the disposable texts. All that might show, that journalism is (makes itself) depending from P.R activities. Of course , there are conditions of changing, of intensifying or loosing that relationship. A huge research track has been developed following the determination thesis.

### *The Inter-Effication Model*

Recognizing that P.R and journalism come into competition, because both of them verify their interest of attention through the relevance (agenda setting,

public opinion public attention) of their acting at the side of their addressees, and recognizing that both systems need each an other in realizing their public functions, manifests the reciprocity of the relation between journalism and P.R. Understanding the mutual reprehension as a complex interaction program (co-orientation and mutual enhancement ) nourish the assumption of mutual support in verifying the particular effectiveness – called: *inter-effication* (Bentele 2004), and saying, that communicative inductions , set by whom of both ever, are valued from each with an other as intended and consciously directed animation, which shall lead to public resonance. Each one of those system owns mechanisms of accommodation in order to get adapted to each with the other.

### *Structural Interpenetration - Super System*

Within a system theory consideration journalism and Public Relations appear as systems being in an inter-systemic relation to each other. That means: For journalism pr and marketing (as well) are somehow an economically, culturally and socially determined environment, in which journalism is challenged to realize its special functions – but exactly because of them structurally distinguishable by proper operation closed in itself. The idea of the theses of the structural interpenetration of P.R, Marketing, and Journalism is, that all those systems behave to each other as problem and problem-solution – mutual integration of external references into the concept of *self-referentiality* thus constructing somehow a super-system of public communication (cf. Luhmann 2004, Sarcinelli 2009)

Those three usual concepts of distinction, based on the relevance of the attribution of different communicative functions, are useful in developing a critical praxeology of communicative for each one. Once set onto a theoretical level, the distinction also relates to the assumption that there is a causal moment to be considered, which is in any way actor (*acteur*). The acteur's theory analyzes the professional communicative acting in reference to the supposition of relevance of the position of governing the communication process or the discourse on behalf of and according to the interests of all those who might hold stakes within a communication system. Insofar the communication systems in journalism and public relations are working in the structures of the market, the systems develop and shape out their structures in mode of hierarchical organizations assuming that there is a necessity of a position that directs the decisions and conducts and governs the interchanges and interactions within the system and thus representing the system. The concept of communication and/or media governance (Meier 2011) refers to the desiderate of (individual and systemic) responsibility on the one hand and to the experience of the necessity



that there has to be a person who represents the social mechanism of mutual confidence. Those two reasonable interventions are explicitly mirrored with the theory of political economy of industrial relations (*acteur's centred theoretical approach*) (Crozier/Friedberg 1993) as already described.

### ***Media- and Communication Competence: a Social Currency in a Media Society***

When approaching media communication as a phenomenon of social symbolic interaction and interpreting that in the interest of its relevance for the self-awareness and to the development of the society, and doing this through a social theoretical and culture-theoretical perspective, it is to set a clear theoretical evaluation at the end of this analysis: Media – the practical environment for public communication within the systems of journalism, public relations, and marketing - is not, what the every-day-theory thinks to observe: a technically made item individually used in order to get connected to the public discourse. Media is not, what the functionalist perspective is making of it: a technically made and organisationally used instrument in order to structure the public communication in the need of the stability, development, and welfare of the society.

The comparison between those three communication and media (sub) systems should not be done in a functionalist tradition of theoretical consideration, but has to be done as an analysis of the cultural interference and interdependence of all of them. A culturalist social theory perspective focuses on the interrelation of observation and action and finds its theoretical paradigm in the concept of signification. (cf. Hall 1993) Both, observation and action – better to say: observation as an action and action as an observation – construct significations, which get generalized through and as symbolic interaction (G.H. Mead 1973, Herbert Blumer 1973). The exchange of signification realized in the way of relating action and observation to codes, within a cultural programming development creates generalized configurations of meaning. Culture then is the social interactive and communicative environment to archive those configurations of meaning construction in structures of symbolic and ritual interaction to be used as statement of commitment or as a reference of control for social compliance in case of need. Any style of life is observable as an habitual expression of such commitment and compliance, and that is the reason why it makes sense, when the concept of Cultural Studies observe culture as any “whole way of life” (Williams 1958)

Following this culturalist perspective, the answer to the question put at the beginning, whether journalism, public relation, and marketing are friends or enemies, there is to say: they can be friends, but they must not be like that to

each other. They can be enemies, but they must not be in such a relation to each other. They are systems working within a society organizing its communication and communicating its organization, each one at its best and according to its moral and quality standards, if they take critically care each one for its own culture, connected to each other through critical observation, thus compensating each another their (structural, cultural, moral, political) weaknesses through exchange of knowledge in the interest of the social and political culture of public communication. Adding to that there has to be generally mentioned, that in respect to the convergence of media and of communication systems the differently thought professional specification for Journalism, Public relations, and Marketing need to be not only completed each by itself, but generally expanded from professional qualification to a concept of communication (and media) competence. Claiming a communication quality in each of those three professional areas does not only refer to hard skills (capacity, ability), but always as well to communicative “soft skill”: a habit (Bourdieu 1997) of and for communication is a cultural measurement that includes ethical and moral standards in the interest of an authentic and self-confident society.

The attitude of a communicative habit has to be seen as the cultural basis of a somehow generative competence (ability, capacity, responsibility, motivation) to produce communicatively meant action even in new or unusual contexts of social practice – similar to what Noam Chomsky has conceptualized with the term of a “generative grammar” (Chomsky 1980, Beckmann 1997). On that level all communication systems are addressed by the same general obligation. A society, in which a critical-reflexive usage of communication and media has become an integrative moment of education, is rich in terms of cultural reserves for every day challenges of a democratic configuration of its social and political development. In that overall context then any specified professional expertise as well gains - at least: functional - credibility.

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