

1

Introduction: Mapping the field of government communication

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The quality of government communication matters for human well-being. Governing necessarily involves constant exchanges of information and communication about policies, ideas and decisions between governors and the governed. In a context in which internet technology, with all its possibilities of information processing and targeted communication, is pushing forward what Pfetsch denominates the 'professionalization of government communication' (2008, pp. 71–2), government communication is 'a large growth industry in many countries' (Howlett, 2009, p. 23) as governments contract agencies and expand capacity.

Having written in 2010 that 'despite its key importance for twenty-first-century politics, the topic of government communication has been a neglected area of scholarly interest' (Canel & Sanders, 2012, p. 85), a few years on the situation has changed significantly. Government communication (and related concepts such as political public relations, government public relations and government political marketing) has attracted the interest of a growing number of researchers. There is a realization of the need to build bridges between cognate areas and disciplines for the study of government communication (Lee, 2008; Strömbäck, Mitrook & Kioussis, 2010; Liu, Horsley & Levenshus, 2010; Horsley, Liu & Levenshus, 2010; Jackson, 2010; Seltzer & Zhang, 2011; Hong, Park, Lee & Park, 2012). Nevertheless, there is still work to be done

2 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION: CASES AND CHALLENGES

since, although there is research examining specific issues, concepts and countries, there is as yet no thorough and systematic interdisciplinary study of the subject.

In the United States, for example, authors have explored in depth presidential rhetoric and presidential communication strategies (Denton & Hahn, 1986; Smith & Smith, 1994; Denton & Holloway, 1996; Ryfe, 2005; Farnsworth, 2009; Coe & Reitzes, 2010), presidential news operations (Kurtz, 1998), presidential power and communication (Buchanan, 1978; Kernell, 1986, 1997), organizational issues (Cox, 2001; Kumar, 2001a, 2001b, 2003a, 2003b, and 2010; Kumar and Sullivan, 2003), presidential relations with the media (Hess, 2000; Spragens, 2003; Walcott & Hult, 2008), chief executive communication strategies in relation to political scandals and terrorism (Canel & Sanders, 2006, 2010), presidential public relations (Kiousis & Strömbäck, 2010; Eshbaugh-Soha, 2011) and the tensions between information and persuasion in public institutions (Maltese, 1994). Presidential communication in-between elections has been studied as a 'permanent campaign'. Some studies have focused attention on the role of communication in public institutions, particularly, in the development of governmental agencies (Garnett, 1994; Garnett & Kouzmin, 1997; Graber, 2003; Pandey & Garnett, 2006).

In Europe, Seymour-Ure has explored British prime ministers' relationship to the media (2003), Franklin has examined UK political communication and the allegations of manipulative government communication (2004) together with a number of other scholars and journalists (Andrews, 2006; Gaber, 2007; McNair, 2011). Organizational issues, including the structure and operations of media relations, have been the focus of several studies (Ingham, 2003; Moloney, 2000; Gaber, 2004). Australian scholar, Sally Young (2007) has produced perhaps the most comprehensive country-based overview of government communication.

However, no considered examination of the subject exists that provides either an account of the contemporary landscape with regard to government communication or an exploration of common and diverging themes on a cross-national basis. This volume aims to make a contribution to fill this gap. We explore how central national governments communicate today in 15 countries, and seek to identify common cross-national trends.

This introductory chapter analyses approaches and frameworks used for the study of government communication. First, we attempt to clarify the notion of government communication. Second, we attempt to situate government communication analysis at the crossroads of the research traditions of political communication and other cognate fields (such as public relations, corporate communication, political marketing and strategic communication). Third and finally, the research approach of this volume is discussed.

Defining government communication

Public and, more specifically, government communication involves considerable complexity in terms of goals, needs, audiences, definition and resources as compared to the corporate sector (Da Silva & Batista, 2007; Liu et al., 2010; Sanders, 2011; Canel & Sanders, 2012). Government communication operates in a multilayered and organizationally diverse environment. In relation to the issue of goals, for example, government communication often has to juggle what appear to be conflicting objectives set by political masters. Communication goals related to persuasion are considered problematic by many scholars, particularly by those working in the political communication tradition (see, for example, the analysis of Jackson, 2010). In relation to publics, government communication operates on a multilayered level, taking into account a diverse group of stakeholders including other politicians, service users, minority groups, regulatory bodies, and the like. Heads of communication, for example, in government ministries, agencies and institutions may be appointed on the basis of partisan rather than professional criteria.

A review of much of the political communication literature shows that it is often used to refer solely to top-level executive communication at the presidential or prime ministerial level (Canel & Sanders, 2012). Indeed the vast majority of political communication research centred on government communication has tended to examine themes such as media management and office holders' rhetoric exclusively in relation to senior national government. But government communication can also be used to refer to communication undertaken by executive institutions at regional and local levels (Ipsos, 2008; Jenei, 2012).

The task of defining government communication can be approached at different levels, looking, at its actions (what *it does*) or looking at what *it is*. For instance, defined as a policy tool (what *it does*), Howlett sees government communication as a policy tool or instrument to give effect to policy goals; to influence and direct policy actions through the provision or withholding of information or knowledge from societal actors (2009, p. 24).

We understand that definitions of government communication from the perspective of what *it does* could be restrictive in the sense that they look at activities which are part and only part of what government communication *is*. For instance, in Pfetsch's analysis, government news management is understood as a strategic variant of public information whereby governments manage communication in order to influence public opinion by controlling the news media agenda (Pfetsch, 2008, p. 90). Lee, Grant and Stewart (2012) deal with the practice of government communication understood in terms of government public relations.

We think it is possible to go a step further examining what government communication is. Strömbäck and Kiouisis' definition of political public relations is useful in this sense. They provide the following definition of political public relations: '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' (2011, p. 8).

This definition refers to what *it is* (a management process) including its purposeful feature; the elements included to describe the purpose (namely, 'establish, build and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations') points out notions and dimensions that, as will be seen below, introduces new perspectives for the analysis of government communication.

In order to capture the full range of the possibilities of government communication, we suggest the following working definition of government communication:

The role, practice, aims and achievements of communication as it takes place in and on behalf of public institution(s) whose primary end is executive in the service of a political rationale, and that are constituted on the basis of the people's indirect or direct consent and charged to enact their will.

This definition includes both conceptual as well as functional aspects. The notion of 'purpose' opens up broader questions for the analysis of government communication. It includes prime ministerial or presidential communication as well as mayoral or local and regional government communication. Executive communication is contrasted with the deliberative communication legislatures use to decide public policy through determining the law, and with the judiciary, whose function is to make judgements in relation to disputes about the application of the law. In this study we will focus on central executive government communication.

Situating government communication research at a crossroads

The issues raised by government communication cut across the disciplinary areas represented in communication research namely, political communication, public relations, corporate communication, organizational and strategic communication. Elsewhere we have drawn upon these fields to elucidate main issues for government communication research (Sanders, 2011; Canel & Sanders, 2012). Strömbäck, Mitrook and Kiouisis (2010) have examined

the theoretical connections between political marketing and public relations. Strömbäck and Kiousis (2011) have looked at the concept of 'political public relations' at the intersection of different research traditions such as political communication, political marketing and corporate and strategic communication. From a public relations perspective, Liu and Horsley (2007) have proposed a model for analysing the relationship between governments and publics; Gregory (2006) has provided a competencies framework for government communicators designed to improve performance and the consistency of the communications function across government; Vos (2006) has developed a model to measure efficiency of government communication; Liu et al. (2010) compare government and corporate communication practices; Kim and Liu (2012) compare crisis management in the public and private sector; Hong et al. (2012) work on public segmentation of publics for building government public relations and Lee et al. (2012) have depicted tools for the practice of government public relations. Finally, from the area of corporate communication, Da Silva and Batista (2007) discuss the concept of government reputation.

This growing production suggests that the study of government communication requires a multifaceted theoretical approach (see Strömbäck & Kiousis, 2011, p. 13; Kiousis & Strömbäck, 2011, pp. 314–15). Our examination of this literature suggests three main and related implications for the study of government communication.

From vote seeking to relation building

The political communication perspective provides valuable theoretical standpoints from which to orient government communication research. Examining an early twenty-first-century review of political communication research (see Lin, 2004; also see Graber, 2005), we identify five theoretical perspectives from which political communication scholars have explored government communication issues namely, rhetorical analysis of political discourse, propaganda studies, voting studies, mass media effects and the interplay of influence between government, press and public opinion. These studies have explored four main thematic concerns in relation to government communication (sources are summarized in Table 1.1)

The first is chief executive communication, beginning with Neustadt's classic study *Presidential Power* (1960), continuing with work that includes country focused studies and also generalist literature (see Table 1.1). Second, the development of the 'permanent campaign' (Blumenthal, 1980), which implies a critical approach based on a tradition arising out of propaganda studies (see, for example, McChesney, 2008) with critical consequences for the practice of political communication; and linked to this, government advertising

TABLE 1.1 Political communication and the study of government communication

Chief executive communication	The development of the permanent campaign	Logistical and operational issues	News media/government nexus
Neustadt, 1960 Denton & Hahn, 1986; Tulis, 1987; Smith & Smith, 1994; Denton & Holloway, 1996; Cox, 2001; Edwards, 2003; Zarefsky, 2004; Edwards, 2009; Crockett, 2009 <i>Country focused studies:</i> De Masi, 2001; Seymour-Ure, 2003; Franklin, 2004; Young, 2007	Blumenthal, 1980 <i>Analysis of critical consequences:</i> Patterson, 1994 and 2003; Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999; Ornstein & Mann, 2000; Cohen, 2008; Dulio & Towner, 2009; Hajer, 2009	Kumar, 2001a, 2001b, 2003a, 2003b and 2008; Kumar & Sullivan, 2003 <i>Government communication practices associated with the development of electronic technology:</i> Axford & Huggins, 2001; Saco, 2002; Izurieta, Perina and Arterton, 2003; Chadwick, 2006; Davis, 2010; Gibson & Ward, 2012	<i>Indexing hypothesis:</i> Bennett, 2004 <i>Primary definition:</i> Gitlin, 1980; Hall, 1982; Herman & Chomsky, 1988 <i>Agenda setting:</i> McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Weaver, McCombs & Shaw, 2004 <i>Priming:</i> Iyengar & Simon, 2000 <i>Framing news stories:</i> Reese, Gandy & Grant, 2003; Entman, 2004; Bennet & Iyengar, 2010; De Vreese & Lecheler, 2012

in general and the area of government social marketing communication in particular (health campaigns, environmental change, driving behaviour, etc.). Third, the logistical and operational issues of how governments organize their communication, as well as the examination of government communication practices associated with the development of electronic technology. Finally, the study of the news media/government nexus has generated a rich body of concepts and theories (see Table 1.1 for a selection of sources). A major area of study examines the development of the news media as a political actor in contemporary politics and how, in Cook's words, 'news media today are not merely part of politics: they are part of government' (2005, p. 3). More recent work (see, for example, Dahlgren, 2009; Brants & Voltmer, 2011) examines the

changing media environment and its implications for politicians' performance and presentation as well as citizens' interactions and civic culture.

The political communication literature provides two valuable theoretical standpoints for government communication research: first, an emphasis on the exploration of and sensitivity to institutional and social contexts; second, an attention to normative concerns about how communication 'performs its civic functions at the center of social and political life', and a concern with 'shaping communication to better serve democratic processes' (Swanson, 2000, p. 200). The political communication field has pointed research towards notions of purpose and performance but it may be the case too that it has contributed to a kind of intellectual pessimism about the possibility of creating the conditions for civic conversation in contemporary media democracies (see Sanders, 2009, pp. 229–33): government communication is seen simply as a way to gain votes.

A public relations theoretical perspective introduces into political communication the notion of 'relationship building' (Ledingham, 2011). Relational theory understands that organization–public relationships are represented by patterns of interaction, transaction, exchange and linkage between an organization and its publics (Broom, Casey & Ritchey, 1997, 2000). It maintains that relationship management is the ethical and efficient management of organization–public relationships focused, over time, on common interests and shared goals in support of mutual understanding and benefit (Ledingham, 2011, p. 247). Communication success is not, then, measured primarily or solely by communication output or influence on the opinion of various publics, but by the quality of the relationships between an organization and its publics. Thus, notions of stakeholder loyalty, the impact of time on the quality of the relationship, trust, openness, involvement, satisfaction, commitment, mutuality (mutual understanding) and symmetry become more significant (Ledingham, 2011; see also Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011; Canel & Sanders, 2012). The notion of symmetry is at the heart of the work of the influential public relations scholar, James E. Grunig (Grunig, 1992; Grunig & Grunig, 1992; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Grunig, 2001; Grunig, 2008). Imported into the analysis of government communication, this relational perspective poses the question of whether the *purpose* of government communication is used as a long-term tool that seeks to engage with citizens.

From tactical to managerial level

Understanding government communication as being about building relationships with publics implies that government communication is not simply about managing public opinion for electoral gain.

As Ledingham puts it – referring to political public relations – to elevate the discipline from a craft to a strategic management function is crucial to the

successful interaction of organizations and publics (2011, p. 235). To keep the public's loyalty and trust, political actors need to seek to engage in conversation with citizen voters over a long period of time (Lilleker & Jackson, 2011, p. 166), which requires a more proactive and strategic approach rather than a reactive and merely technical one (Kiouisis & Strömbäck, 2011, p. 315).

The application of this approach to the study of government communication has several implications. We here point out two: first, the scope of government communication should go beyond media relations to include other activities such as reputation and issues management; second, relationship building implies a strategic communication approach.

Dealing with the first point, it is true that the media play a central role (connecting the study of government communication to concepts such as information subsidies, agenda setting, agenda building, primary definition, indexing, government news framing, etc.) (Zoch & Molleda, 2006; Froehlich & Rudiger, 2006; Kiouisis, Popescu & Mitrook, 2007; Lieber & Golan, 2011; Tedesco, 2011; Hallahan, 2011; Canel, 2012). But government communication should not be equated with news media relationships but include other functions and activities.

One of these activities is related to the notion of reputation (for a review of definitions of this concept see Gotsi & Wilson, 2001; Barnett, Jermier & Lafferty, 2006; Walker, 2010). Public relations (and related fields already mentioned here) add to the field of political communication and of political marketing 'a wider consideration of the overall reputation of politics' (Lilleker & Jackson, 2011, p. 172).

While there is some work on parties' brands and reputation (Bale, 2006; Smith, 2009; Scammell, in press; Jackson, 2010), there is, as far as we are aware, no research examining government communication from the perspective of reputation (apart from some work on the reputation of local governments – Ipsos, 2008 – and on the concept of 'government reputation' from stakeholder thinking – Da Silva & Batista, 2007). Although many studies have centred on government leaders' popularity or public perceptions of public policies, no work has been done so far on what is the meaning of public leaders' reputation; nor has work been carried out on how to build the reputation of government institutions and their leaders.

Political communication research has also centred more on issues of image so that one can find discussions such as those of Waterman, St Clair and Wright (1999) about 'the image-is-everything presidency'. In this sense, research perspectives that emphasize the significance of reputation helpfully shift the focus to the reality of political outcomes and the truth of who and what a leader and public policies are. Research being developed in the area of intangible assets in the public sector may contribute to this shift (Carmeli & Cohen, 2001; Cinca, Molinero & Queiroz, 2003; Pandey & Garnett, 2006; Luoma-aho, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008; Luoma-aho & Peltola, 2006; see also

in the area of public administration studies Glenny, 2008; Bell, Hindmoor & Mols, 2010; Bevir 2011).

Other functions and activities that should be considered for the study and practice of government communication can be found in areas such as issue management (Heath, 2006; Heath & Waymer, 2011), public diplomacy (Signitzer & Wamser, 2006; Molleda, 2011), public affairs (Harris & Fleisher, 2005; McGrath, Moss & Harris, 2010) and its relation with government communication (Harris, 2007) and crisis communication (Coombs & Holladay, 2010; Coombs, 2011; Kim & Liu, 2012).

The second implication of a managerial approach is the strategic dimension (Steyn, 2007; see also Rodríguez & La Porte, in press). As Strömbäck and Kiousis say, 'For public relations and strategic communication to be effective, their practitioners must be involved when making decisions on both grand strategy and strategy, and not confined to the role of technicians carrying out the tactics' (2011, p. 15). The interesting point that emerges from the revision of the literature on strategic communication is that different conceptualizations of the notion of strategy result in different approaches to the practice of government communication. It is the notion of strategy upon which authors such as Kumar (2001a, 2001b, 2003a, 2003b and 2008; Kumar & Sullivan, 2003) and Cox (2001) base the analysis and description of a government communication office.

The strategic approach sets the parameters for the analysis of a government communication office: the organizational chart (is the responsibility for formulating communication strategy at the functional or middle management level?); specific communication tasks (to see to what extent communication officers strategically plan or merely implement political strategy decided by others); analyses of public perceptions (to see to what extent communication officers scan the environment for issues, people's concerns and government's reputation risks). In sum, an analysis of government communication using a strategic approach implies the exploration of to what extent communication is not simply an enabling function for politicians but a contribution to the strategic-decision-making process shared with the people.

From democratic concern to democracy building

As we mentioned above, one of the concerns of political communication research is a normative focus on how communication serves democratic processes. A review of concepts, theories and themes of cognate fields leads us to conclude that a multifaceted approach can enrich thinking about government communication in relation to the challenge of building democracy.

In focusing on relationships and on advancing mutual understanding, the conceptualization of both the people and the government as communicator

are fundamentally altered. First, the people: if government communication is to be conceived of as the cultivation of long-term relationships oriented to mutual understanding rather than being modelled on short-term, vote-winning approaches, the public is not seen as a passive spectator at the end of the communication process but as an involved, interactive actor. This is in keeping with an approach to thinking about the public sector which, according to Luoma-aho's analysis implies a change in the legitimacy of public organizations: the idea is that individuals and groups around the organization are taken into consideration and involved in the processes instead of merely being monitored and controlled. Thus, support and dialogue becomes more important than control (Luoma-aho, 2008, p. 447).

Second, the conceptualization of government as communicator is also altered. It is understood that governments and public officials have the task of developing tools and strategies to aid citizens in fulfilling their democratic responsibility. To keep the public informed and to be informed by their publics is seen as an obligation of a public servant. Democratic accountability is enhanced where managers are provided with insight relating to how publics think and react to government decisions (for discussions about the public administration's duty to communicate, see Lee, 2008; Garnett, 1997; Garnett & Kouzmin, 1997).

All this stresses the importance of certain values in the relationships that are established between governments and citizens such as transparency, trust, accessibility and responsiveness (see Pandey & Garnett, 2006; Roosbroek, 2006; Spencer & McGrath, 2006; Cloete, 2007; Fairbanks, Plowman & Raulins, 2007; Gaber, 2007; Zmerli & Newton, 2008; Greiling & Spraul, 2010; Kim, 2010; Salminen & Ikola-Norrbäck, 2010). Finally, looking at government communication from a multifaceted perspective poses the question of whether and how the *purpose* of governments when they communicate with citizens is directed towards democracy building.

Looking at government communication cross-nationally

Comparative research in political communication has looked at issues such as media effects, media content, political advertising and, of course, election campaigns. There is some comparative work examining relations between government spokespeople and the media, spin doctoring and government news (Esser, Reinemann & Fan, 2001; Pfetsch, 2001, 2008; Van Dalen, 2011). However, there are, as far as we are aware, no general comparative studies of government communication.

We agree with scholars (Swanson, 2004; see also sources quoted in the coedited book by Esser & Hanitzsch, 2012a) on the advantages and contribution

of comparative studies. Comparative studies can provide helpful insights into the role of culture, structure and agency in political communication as well as providing baseline empirical data for theoretical development and hypothesis building.

Comparative work is difficult (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995). It is an expanding field, which has gone from its infancy to its 'late adolescence' (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995), 'poised to maturity' (Gurevitch & Blumler, 2004, p. 326), developed 'with a considered substance and solidity' (Blumler, 2012, p. xi) but still with uneven results (Esser & Hanitzsch, 2012b, p. 3) which need substantial improvements in research designs (Norris, 2009). Conducting comparative research implies risks and problems, as well as important theoretical and methodological challenges (Pfetsch & Esser, 2004; Stevenson, 2004; Esser & Pfetsch, 2004; Norris, 2009; Esser & Hanitzsch, 2012a).

Esser and Hanitzsch identify three theoretical approaches for comparative communication research. The actor/behaviour-centred approach, that focuses on individuals and groups as actors who make strategic choices in their communication behaviour; the structuralist or institutionalist approach, that focuses on the broader framework conditions of macrolevel communication arrangements that constrain or facilitate the communication behaviours of actors; and finally, the culturalist or interpretative approach, that focuses on the ideas, interpretations and mental construction of collectivities and individuals as placed in the context of shared meanings within communities (2012, 11–12).

In this volume we provide deep descriptions and analysis of how government communication operates in a number of specific contexts, elucidating trends which can be identified as common to different countries. The comparativeness of the book lies in the common research questions explored for each country through the case-study methodology.

We are very much aware of the difficulties of this attempt: it requires deep knowledge of the worlds being examined as well as sensitivities to differences in language and meanings. We are aware too of the limitations of this approach but believe the effort is worth making.

The case-study methodology

Government communication is examined in fifteen countries using the case-study methodology. Case studies enjoy a natural advantage in research of an exploratory nature. They are 'understood to comprise the first line of evidence' (Gerring, 2007, p. 99). Case studies are a useful starting point for generating basic data, as seen, for example, in Semetko's (2009) four country study (Kenya, Mexico, the Russian Federation and Turkey) of election campaigns and news media partisan balance. Her work highlights differences and similarities within the distinct components and characteristics of these

12 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION: CASES AND CHALLENGES

countries' media and political systems that point to shared challenges and possible strategies for improving governance capacity in them.

For the selection of countries we have used the Freedom House indices, democracy indicators or political and press freedom (Freedom House, 2012). We selected 15 countries according to these indices (see Table 1.2 for selection of countries).

TABLE 1.2 Freedom House indices, 2012

Countries	Political freedom rating ^a	Press freedom rating ^b	Group
Sweden	1 (F)	10 (F)	1
Germany	1 (F)	17 (F)	
United States	1 (F)	18 (F)	
United Kingdom	1 (F)	21 (F)	
Australia	1 (F)	21 (F)	
France	1 (F)	24 (F)	
Spain	1 (F)	24 (F)	
Poland	1 (F)	25 (F)	
Chile	1 (F)	31 (PF)	2
South Africa	2 (F)	34 (PF)	
India	2.5 (F)	37 (PF)	
Mexico	3 (PF)	62 (NF)	3
Singapore	4(PF)	67 (NF)	
China	6.5 (NF)	85 (NF)	
Zimbabwe	6.5 (NF)	80 (NF)	

Source: Freedom House (2012). *Freedom in the World*. Washington, DC: Freedom House.
Freedom House (2012). *Freedom of the Press*. Washington, DC: Freedom House.

^a Countries are assessed on the average of the political rights and civil liberties ratings known as the political freedom rating: Free (F) (1.0 to 2.5), Partly Free (PF) (3.0 to 5.0) or Not Free (NF) (5.5 to 7.0).

^b Each country receives a numerical rating from 0 (the most free) to 100 (the least free). Countries considered Free (F) are rated from 0–30; Partly Free (PF) 31–60 and Not Free (NF) 61–97.

Full details of methodology can be found at www.freedomhouse.org

Countries were selected, as Wirth and Kolb's (2004) discussion on comparative research suggests for some international comparisons, applying an initial criterion that there were local researchers able to access data and key informants, allowing us draw on material for nine countries. We added six more countries to have a full range of cases from the Freedom House Index. As Wirth and Kolb suggest, this kind of sample avoids problems (such as having access to interviewees and empirical observations) but at the same time it does not constitute a representative sample.

The temporal unit of analysis is the recent situation of government communication: how it works and functions at the time of writing. This does not exclude references to the recent past. For instance, the chapter on Spain draws on its transition to democracy to account for the current context of government communication. The chapters on Australia, Sweden and the United Kingdom examine how changes approximately over the past ten years have resulted in the establishment of mechanisms for increasing government's accountability.

Case-study research can be usefully complemented by large scale data sets that help provide quantitative evidence for broader patterns and relationships. Norris' critical review of comparative political communication studies (2009) points to the need for such mixed methods research designs and the overall requirement for the use of more rigorously defined concepts in order to generate meaningfully comparative data. These are challenging tasks but, we suggest, necessary ones for the development of government communication research.

Our analysis includes the use of data bases and information from research which relies on secondary evaluation of material (documents and academic literature) such as constitutions and legal texts, government reports, scientific studies and evaluation of statistical data, audience ratings and readership figures, published opinion polls and expert interviews (mainly with government communicators).

The intention is that the case studies will generate hypotheses for future research and, as Wirth and Kolb put it, we adopt a 'pretheoretical research strategy with context factors' (2004, p. 93), focusing on descriptive and exploratory research questions. We are aware of the risk of implicitly sliding into an a-theoretical description (as these authors alert, 2004, p. 93); but we consider the achievement of systematizing dispersed and fragmented data on government communication from different countries as a useful one – not provided by the literature so far – and a necessary first step for future theoretical and conceptual development. We also think that, in placing side by side different countries, apart from elucidating common trends, we will be able to test the limits of some of the more general claims made about government communication.

Putting empirical data in context

We will analyse empirical data within each country context and then elucidate from the comparative observation common cross-national trends.

We are aware we are tackling here one of the most critical issues of comparative research, how to relate micro-, meso- and macrolevels (Esser & Pfetsch, 2004; Esser & Hanitzsch, 2012a).

In establishing dimensions for a cross-country observation, Gurevitch & Blumler (2004, pp. 338–9) mention the relationship between the media and political systems (the political system), norms that define the roles and functions of the media for society (the media system), and finally, relationship between citizens and their political systems (citizenry). Following these dimensions, Pfetsch (2004) has proposed a theoretical approach to comparative analysis including institutional conditions of the political system and the media system at the macro- and the mesolevel. In comparative research (looking at the United States, the United Kingdom and Germany) on government communication (termed 'government news management'), Pfetsch (2008) assumes that government news management styles and outcomes across different political systems depend on a series of contextual factors, originated in the political system, the media system and the political communication culture. Pfetsch together with Esser (2012) has further developed this approach to what they call the 'political communication system', a framework in which different levels of analysis must be discerned and social interaction thought of as a constellation of micro- and macrolinks.

In this book, we have taken aggregate data and system level data for the macrolevel (see below). For the mesolevel of analysis, we rely on a framework of analysis we elaborated in previous work, where we comparatively analysed government communication from the perspective of professionalization in the United Kingdom, Germany and Spain (Sanders, Canel & Holtz-Bacha, 2011). Our framework drew on the strategic planning and quality management literature (see Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2000; Gregory, 2006; Vos, 2006). It allowed us to capture both what we called structural elements as well as ongoing processes (see Table 1.3). Structural elements are those related to two administrative organizational dimensions: the first covers formal rules (see Vogel, 2010) and the second relates to financial resources. Formal rules include all relevant legislation, policies and guidance as well as organizational charts detailing communication roles. Financial resources include budgets and reward systems. Human resources are regarded as a separate structural element and include the skills, knowledge and values of the communication workforce as detailed in professional profiles, training and recruitment programs together with the number of those employed in communication. The framework also profiles communication processes related to information

TABLE 1.3 Framework for the analysis of government communication

STRUCTURE	Administration	Formal rules	Organizational charts Legislation Policies and guidance
		Financial resources	Budgets Reward systems
	Human resources	Skills Knowledge Values	Professional profiles Training Recruitment
PROCESS	Communication	Information gathering and analysis	Research work (commissioned or internally undertaken) Coordination and planning mechanisms and routines
		Information dissemination	Briefings, meetings, press conferences Digital media Campaigns and advertising
		Information evaluation	Feedback mechanisms Media analysis Communication metrics (ROI measures)

gathering, analysis and dissemination and processes related to information evaluation.

More specifically, our analysis of government communication takes, first, scores from the Freedom House indices. These indices are computed using both analytical reports and numerical ratings. The Political Freedom index measures political rights (electoral process, political pluralism and participation, and functioning of government) and civil liberties (evaluation of freedom of expression and belief, associational and organizational rights, rule of law, and personal autonomy and individual rights). The Freedom of the Press index assesses the degree of print, broadcast and internet freedom in every country, examining the legal environment for the media, political pressures that influence reporting and economic factors that affect access to information (see Freedom House, 2012 for more details about methodology). These indices summarize systemic features we consider relevant to government structures and processes: we understand that the way government communication operates is associated with the degree of

freedom (participation, pluralism, etc.) as well as with the presence/absence of government control of the media and of people's access to information. We assume that governments from countries with higher scores for both political and media freedom will behave differently in their communication from countries with lower scores.

Each individual chapter gives information on the systemic features that illustrate aspects of the indices. More specifically, each chapter provides information on (1) characteristics of each political system – constitutional relationships between different powers, sources of prime ministerial/presidential power, electoral system, political party system; (2) specificities of the media landscape and culture – the broadcasting system, the newspaper market, media use habits, development of digital media, journalists' roles and values.

We have also looked at structural elements such as the (1) relevant legal and regulatory context including mechanisms to enhance accountability; (2) government communication financial resources; (3) human resources – professional profiles, training and recruitment of government communicators; the role of civil servants and political appointees; (4) organizational structure. This includes the organizational chart, the formal representation of the place communication occupies in the decision-making processes, showing how power and responsibilities are allocated in an organization and whether communication is considered of strategic importance; (5) communication activities – press conferences, events, campaigns, websites, Twitter, YouTube, and so on; (6) functions and tasks of government communicators; (7) finally, examining whether and how government seeks public feedback (polls, focus groups, media monitoring, etc.) is key to analyse purposes of government communication.

Plan of the book

The book consists of sixteen chapters each of which, with the exception of Chapter 11 (which covers two Southern African countries, Zimbabwe and South Africa), provides a country case study. The countries are grouped according to their position on the Freedom House indices (see Table 1.2). Part one refers to countries which score highly in the rankings of political freedom and press freedom: Sweden, Germany, United States, United Kingdom, Australia, France, Spain and Poland. Part two refers to those countries located in the middle of any of these indexes: Chile, South Africa and India. Finally, in part three we deal with countries at the end of both indexes: Singapore and China (although Zimbabwe is at the end, it has been analysed

comparatively with South Africa in Chapter 11). The concluding chapter draws together the results from the fifteen countries. We use concepts from public relations and corporate communication literature to elaborate elements to assess the data from country chapters and their relation with professional government communication. Finally we elucidate common emerging themes and challenges.

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