(IN)FORMING CONFLICT PREVENTION, RESPONSE AND RESOLUTION:

INFO CORE

THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN VIOLENT CONFLICT

INFOCORE Working paper (03/2014)

Mission Statement WP6

"Strategic Communication/PR"

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Mission Statement WP6 "Strategic Communication/PR"

In the phases of problem articulation and policy definition (= policy process), political and/or social actors are influenced primarily with respect to what the problem they are dealing with is (issue), but also how the problem in question is defined, and which proposed solutions are considered (framing). This interrelationship is of particular relevance in terms of news coverage of wars and decisions pertaining to security policy. Besides professional news values, which guide the journalistic process of news selection, it is also PR influence which leads to consonance of media content (at least within a given cultural or national context) (cf. Fröhlich, 2008). Research on the influence or penetration of strategic communication/PR on or in the media has repeatedly shown that PR plays an important role in the topic selection and production of news media (for example Turk, 1988; Shoemaker & Reese, 1991; Berkowitz, 1993; Davis, 2000; Curtin & Rhodenbaugh, 2001). Furthermore it is certain, that the role of PR in the production of news coverage depends on a number of factors, including the status of the respective news organizations, the issue itself and the type of media being examined.

Research so far, however, rarely addresses the specific problems of restrictive circumstances caused by strategic communication, PR and propaganda in times of war.[1] This is astonishing, since the goal of strategic communicators during (public) debates on violent conflict and/or war extends beyond merely bringing attention to or away from an issues/topic. Instead, the main goal is to communicate specifically selected/emphasised views, solutions and interpretations of issues/topics – including for example gendered stereotypes (cf. Fröhlich, 2010, 2013) – which are considered to be ideologically and strategically useful for the respective advocate/client.

INFOCORE's WP6 "Strategic Communication" aims to close this gap. With respect to the six specific conflict/war cases, this work package analyses the strategic communication/PR of *advocates/strategic communicators* (see separate definitions) about conflict related topics and issues communicated, transmitted and disseminated towards the public, particular opinion leaders and/or political decision makers. In doing so, WP 6 also applies a *gender-sensitive* approach (see separate definition). For this purpose, WP6 investigates on information, messages etc. that are articulated for example by NGOs, PR-firms, lobbyists, public affairs professionals etc. It focuses on advocates' (= strategic communicators) strategic verbalization of evidential claims, pursued agendas etc. through the identification and analysis of their individual perspectives, meanings and interpretations (= frames).

Since strategic communicators not only try to shape and influence media agendas but also political debate(s), public opinion, and/or policy (political decisions) beyond mass media, the central question of WP 6 is how powerful and successful strategic communication/communicators is/are at bringing their specific perspectives (1) *into the media*, (2) *into the public debate* (public opinion) as well as (3) *into particular political and/or military discourses* beyond mass media. Narrowly linked to this is the question, whether and how the media use their power to shape the meaning of the PR-information/-messages it receives. These questions cannot be answered by an analysis of *themes* or *topics* alone. Instead, this requires a deeper and more complex analysis of specific *perspectives, meanings, interpretations* and *positions* (= frames) communicated in the respective PR/strategic communication material. The 'framing' concept, which is applied by all of INFOCORE's content analytical work packages, is an ideal method for this purpose (cf. Fröhlich & Rüdiger, 2006; Scheufele, 2006).

WP6 compares its results from the framing analysis of strategic communication with the meanings and positions identified in the media coverage, the public debate (public opinion) as well as the political and the military discourses. In particular, we compare our results firstly to the respective

[1] For example Hierbert, 2003. See also Lasswell's classic work "Propaganda Technique in the World War", published in 1927.

media coverage (→ WP7); this will shed light on the particular pattern of media-specific selection, transformation, and dissemination routines. Secondly, our results for the strategic communication are compared to the respective social media content/discourse (→ WP 5), to the political elite's public debates (→ WP8; framing/content analysis of for example parliamentary debates) and to the content of expert media (→ WP 4; NGOs, intelligence actors etc.). Thirdly, our results for the strategic communication are compared to the particular views of professional journalists (→ WP1; survey), NGOs (→ WP4; survey), political actors (→ WP 2; survey) and lay publics (→ WP 3; focus groups/survey). In doing so, we analyze how the insertion of specific strategic contents into the debate influences their further dissemination and the evolution of available news content. This knowledge then feeds into the definition of suitable strategies for communicating toward the media, and for influencing the future course of respective debates.

We expect our results to explain why (some) strategic communicators disseminate their perspectives successfully toward the public debate while others don't. Among other things this will enable us (1) to identify the conditions most likely to amplify strategically inserted messages and (2) to define the key roles – both constructive and destructive – that strategic communication plays, under specific circumstances, in shaping the dynamics of conflict news content and the public debate. On the basis of this knowledge, which will enhance the understanding of the content dissemination processes in times of war and violent conflict, WP6 aims to improve future strategic communication for peace keeping and conflict resolution. For this purpose, we will devise specific strategies for communicating toward different media and publics for conflict prevention and response. In particular, the results of WP 6 aim to

- improve strategies for devising and implementing external communication policies of the EU which shall reinforce existing communication efforts for raising visibility and building public support/legitimacy for common European policy solutions like for example foreign intervention;
- improve communication strategies for supporting EU's and relevant NGO's existing conflict prevention, response, and resolution policies;
- enable EU security policy makers to directly reach out to key populations and actors in a conflict and instigate social dialogue and mediation.

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