

(IN)FORMING CONFLICT PREVENTION,
RESPONSE AND RESOLUTION:



THE ROLE OF MEDIA
IN VIOLENT CONFLICT

INFOCORE Definitions

“Strategic Communicator/Communication”

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How to cite this paper: Fröhlich, R. & Jungblut, M. (2015). *INFOCORE Definitions:*

“Strategic Communicator/Communication”. Munich: Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München. Online available at <http://www.infocore.eu/results/definitions/>

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Definitions: “Strategic Communicator/Communication”

Within conflict news coverage a ‘strategic communicator’ can be seen as an **advocate** who speaks to the media in order to ensure that a message enters the public discourse. Following the differentiation between sources and advocates (→ see definition “source/advocate”), strategic communicators can be connected to push-communication, because they want their messages to enter the public discourse. In this sense, every actor who actively influences the public debate on conflict/war can be seen as a strategic communicator: politicians, military leaders, lobbyists, PR-experts, public authorities (officials), members of a parliament and other political actors (→ see definition “political actor”). However, within WP6’s analytic strategy we solely focus on *organizational* and *institutional* strategic communicators who **represent the official standpoint** of the whole organization, institution or (political) entity they belong to, and who speak in their name. Strategic communicators in this narrower sense can be part of **political spheres, NGOs, (social) movements, the military, think tanks or Public Relations organisations and/or campaigns.**

They can be described as experts who **per definition represent the official perspective of an organization or corporation** (e.g. “public relations/press officer” or “spokesperson”) or **represent a political institution** like a political party/parliamentary fraction (e.g. party/fraction leader) or a ministry (ministers as well as their official spokespersons or press officers) or a political committee (e.g. speaker/leader of a parliamentary defense committee). Their professional function is to publicly distribute professionally planned and designed messages/content on behalf of their client/employer. Lobbyists are a special type of strategic communicators since their professional function often explicitly is to distribute professionally planned and designed messages/content **non-publicly.**

Strategic communication then is the planned (not by accident) and publicly spoken word of strategic communicators and official press releases published/distributed by an organization, institution, corporation, political entity (etc.) as well as statements posted on their official web page. Press releases in principle represent an official standpoint of the sender. Additionally, if an entity is quoted **without being personalized** their message can be seen as the outcome of the whole organization. In this case, the organization as a whole is a strategic communicator.

Furthermore, WP6 also considers publicly delivered speeches of political actors as strategic communication (non-spontaneous, planned communication), while political actors themselves are not necessarily considered as “strategic communicators” in the narrower sense of this definition. Even though every political actor (in the narrow sense as politician as well as in a broader sense as an individual who has obtained at least some measure of political power and/or authority → see definition “political actor”) communicates strategically, he/she is not automatically a ‘strategic communicator’ in WP6’s sense (organizational/institutional), because political actors do not always perform acts of intentional advocacy or actions directed specifically at the media/public. Furthermore, political actors although representing a certain entity (e.g. political party) as a whole might solely follow their own interests. And finally, political actors do not communicate on behalf of a client/employer as part of their professional function. Thus, it is important to point out that there is an intersection between the categories ‘political actor’ and ‘strategic communicator’ as demonstrated in figure 1 below.

Within **NGOs and (social) movements** institutional and organizational strategic communicators speak for the organization as a whole. Hence, all actors that are official spokespersons or representatives of an NGO or a (social) movement are considered as strategic communicators in WP6’s sense. An ordinary member of an NGO/movement (incidentally) picked by a journalist for a brief statement is not considered as a ‘strategic communicator’.

Strategic communicators that belong to the **PR** sphere are actors that are **mandated by an organization** to perform **professionalized communicational tasks** for them. This is why all communicators within the PR sphere are also organizational/institutional strategic communicators. Often their client is not mentioned by name, so these communicators are not easy to identify. They are strategic communicators due to their very nature. An example of this group is a PR agency like *Aspect*

Consulting or *GPlus*. **Think tanks** can also be seen as organizational and institutional strategic communicators. They communicate a joint message and publish their research results as a collective product – usually not by accident but on the basis of planned (= strategic) communication.

Finally, actors that belong to the **military** can be identified as strategic communicators if they represent the official military standpoint. That is the case for official military spokespersons or individual soldiers on duty / in the battle zone, because while the former **per definition represents the official perspective of an organization**, the latter presumably received a briefing by the military's PR department before being interviewed. Additionally, these kind of military actors also represent advocates that perform push-communication. A military person who is not on duty and not in the battle zone, on the other hand, can be considered as a source that is questioned by the media, hence is part of pull-communication and therefore is not considered a strategic communicator.

Within our project's scope we analyze the following questions connected to strategic communicators:

- Which key actors function as strategic communicators?
- What information do they strategically insert into the news?
- By what criteria do media select, validate, disseminate, and amplify these contents?
- How do media transform the information offered by strategic communicators in their coverage?

Hence, the WPs primary dealing with this concept are WP2, 4, 6 and 7. **WP2** analyses political actors in their roles as political and/or strategic communicators. **WP4, on the other hand**, examines NGOs as strategic communicators. **WP6** focuses on the strategic communication of evidential claims, frames, and agendas. Finally, **WP7** analyzes the transformation/dissemination of these claims, frames and agendas in the media. Drawing upon WP7's analysis of this process, WP6 then analyzes how the insertion of specific 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 the debate (**Objective B4**).

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Figure 1: Political actors and strategic communicators

