CHAPTER 1

New Perspectives on Strategic Communication

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Delving into the fundamental meaning of what strategic communication is, easily makes one both confused and dazzled. On the surface communication is easy to understand since it refers to almost everything that happens in everyday life; when we talk and listen, when we write, when we express feelings and emotions, we communicate. Communication then is about making sense of the world around us and making sense of our very being in relation to the world around us. However, one should also take into consideration that individuals, organizations, as well as societies and nations, all communicate at different levels in a myriad of ways, in different contexts, with different desires and purposes. We humans, in addition to communicating with one another, also communicate with things, like buildings, bridges and pictures, and we also communicate with dogs, cats and elephants. A natural question to ask in this publication is what sort of communication are we aiming for?

To answer this question, the point of departure is firstly, something as obvious as the relational quality of any communication, and secondly, the desire to achieve something with human communication. The social world is nothing without situations and contexts in which we engage with others to convey messages with the desire to achieve something. When we give gifts to our loved ones, we aim to convey the warm feelings and emotions we have for them. To put it metaphorically, we choose and wrap a gift for someone with the desire that it will convey our love and warmth, and that the person who unwraps the gift will understand our message of love and

warmth. If the recipient understands our intended message of love and warmth, this indicates successful communication. We act, by wrapping a suitable gift, and if the recipient appreciates the received gift, we have achieved our goal with that specific communication. Stuart Hall employs the terms, encoding, packing in a message, and decoding, extracting meaning (Hall, 1980).

This logic should not be limited to the exchange of gifts. When we give a university lecture, we have the desire to make students learn about something. When a newspaper reports on the war in Ukraine, it intends to provide information about the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine. When Coca Cola makes an ad, the intention is to make people buy Coca Cola. However, one should take into consideration that regardless of who is communicating: teacher, chief editor of a newspaper, Coca Cola copywriter; communication does not take place in a vacuum, to the contrary, it takes place in a social space governed by complex content and structures. For a teacher, being able to teach students relevant knowledge is only possible if students recognize you as a teacher with relevant knowledge. For a newspaper editor, reporting on the war is only possible if readers recognize the newspaper as trustworthy. For advertisers, a Coca Cola ad is only successful if potential consumers pay attention to the ad and act upon it in a buying situation. In other words, the question of communication is firmly linked to the question of power (Hall, 1997), that is, the power to affect, or to have an effect on, a specific communicative situation or relationship.

The question of power in communication is highly evident in the relationship between media practices and society. A review of media history, for instance, indicates two distinct directions regarding media and society and the ways they influence one another (Gripsrud, 2015; Hesmondhalgh, 2008; Morley, 1992). The review testifies to a media evolution, from a collective-oriented era when media was considered to have total power over individual and societies, for instance injection theories, to the present day, where there is a strong emphasis on an individual-oriented media universe – for instance, online media and mobile communication, where individuals are both producers and consumers of media content (Alghasi, 2023).

Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu uses the term symbolic power to describe the relationship between the social world, communication and power. Another core issue raised by Bourdieu regards communication as sharing meaning versus communication as influencing meaning. According to

Bourdieu, symbolic capital is nothing but the power you gain when others recognize your dominance in social relations, for instance in communication when you persuade others that your model of thinking, your logic of action is superior to others (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1995). Communication philosopher Jürgen Habermas has another take; in his theory of communicative action, the force of the better argument is the cornerstone of a democratic setting for communication (Habermas, 2001).

This idea of the power to influence, and perhaps persuade, constitutes a fundamental dimension in the field of strategic communication. The word strategic is often equated with doing something in a planned, organized and goal-oriented way. Ideas about strategy stem from centuries-old military theory, and strategy has advanced as a scientific field in business, organization and management since the 1960s. In contemporary research, strategy is viewed as a process that is continuously created and realized through communication, rather than something an organization has. Marchiori and Bulgacov (2012), for instance, argue that strategy is a communicative practice that occurs at different levels in an organization, and is continuously created and reproduced in communications and interactions between people. Accordingly, using strategic communication means that your communication with others has a purpose. But is it possible not to have a purpose when you communicate? That is a valid question, not least if we replace purpose with its synonym intention. At a fundamental level, we can say that language always has a conative or intentional function – when we communicate something we want to share some form of meaning or at least be understood. This intention can include everything from the experience of being listened to, to convincing someone of an opinion. Christensen and Christensen (2022, p. 33) posit that "although strategic communication is not fundamentally different from communication that unfolds in other contexts, its focus on an explicit organizational purpose naturally foregrounds the communicative intentions of the senders, even when these are not achieved as hoped for or expected".

As an institutionalized academic field, strategic communication is relatively new, with its development mainly taking place during the 2000s, even though strategic communication as such has been applied and researched in different areas for centuries (rhetoric is probably the first strategic communication theory). Academically, the institutionalization of strategic communication emerged as a response to the need for a holistic approach to public relations, organizational communication,

marketing communication and other sub-fields of purposeful communication. Strategic communication is also a trend in the creative industries, where, mainly due to the digital revolution, but also, at a macro level due to a new late modern social order, traditional divisions between functions such as PR, marketing, advertising, corporate communication and management communication have been challenged.

Several definitions of what strategic communication is have been developed. Heath et al. (2018, p. 1) define strategic communication as "(…) purposeful, normative use of functions and discourse processes by organizations to accomplish their missions, visions, and core values". Another definition says that strategic communication is "(…) the purposeful use of communication by an organization or other entity to engage in conversations of strategic significance to its goals" (Zerfass et al., 2018, p. 493). The first definition it a bit limited since it only refers to organizations, while the latter definition has a more open approach, referring to entities, which includes people (such as celebrities or individual politicians) as well as social formations other than organizations. The latter definition is normative, highlighting engagement and conversation, while the first one is more descriptive. In this anthology we combine these two definitions and view strategic communication from an open approach that has a broader focus than just organizations, and from a descriptive rather than normative perspective. In other words, strategic communication may be used for good (such as creating engagement, or positive social or organizational change), or for evil (such as propaganda, disinformation or other forms of distorted communication).

Based on the same reasoning as Falkheimer and Heide (2023), we think that strategic communication can be different things depending on the perspective and context.

First, there is practice. Similar to fields such as organization studies, marketing or social work, practice came first, and academics later. One may ask who executes strategic communication? A narrow answer would be: communication professionals in organizations who are educated and trained to plan and perform strategic communication. But this approach is limiting. We suggest that strategic communication is carried out by a multitude of actors in different social contexts. However, there are limits – strategic communication is conducted in a professional context, not as a private act, and more often than not there is an organization involved.

Second, there is theory. Strategic communication is not a theory, it is an interdisciplinary research field, mainly developed in the social and

behavioral sciences. As a young field, we mainly use and apply relevant theories from other fields or disciplines, such as public relations, organizational communication and marketing communication, but new theories have been developed and more will come.

Third, there is perspective. From an applied and normative standpoint, strategic communication is sometimes interpreted as a quest for managerial integration of communication aiming to increase efficiency. This would suggest that strategic communication is an instrumental approach for corporate communication, and yes, there is research with this in focus, but this is only one out of several possible perspectives. One might just as well apply a critical perspective, analyzing strategic communication as a means for propaganda or exerting power, or an interpretive perspective aiming to increase understanding about how strategic communication actually works. In this anthology, we allow a multitude of perspectives since we think that this will benefit further development of the field.

The anthology is divided into three parts that aim to structure the main focus of the different chapters according to three overall themes: politics and society, markets, and organization and leadership. These broad themes are obviously hard to keep apart, and strategic communication is, in fact, one of the dimensions or forces that connects them. But the themes are still valid as ways of structuring reading and understanding, since they all have different characteristics.

In the first part of the anthology, there are four chapters on societal aspects of strategic communication; two of them use the recent COVID-19 pandemic as empirical cases. First, Sharam Alghasi and Peder Laumb Stampe present a study on immigrants' media consumption during the COVID-19 pandemic in Norway. This topic is of general interest to and high relevance for many institutions at all levels – local, national and global. Through qualitative interviews with 60 immigrants in Norway, and a structured questionnaire, the study explores access to and consumption of different sources of media among the informants during the pandemic. The explorative study reveals that the immigrants use both Norwegian and international media, as well as media from the country of origin. Different from other studies, this study reveals the informants' relatively strong trust in Norwegian media, while they consider "non-Norwegian" media as less credible and reliable. The second chapter presents a study by Audra Diers-Lawsen and Nanna Alida Grit Fredheim on factors influencing vaccine confidence in Norway. They introduce different factors that impact vaccine

attitudes in Norway. Like Alghasi and Laumb Stampe, they emphasize a high degree of institutional trust in Norway under the pandemic. Third, Øystein Pedersen Dahlen looks back at the history of Norwegian strategic communication, or more specifically public relations, with an emphasis on how the Norwegian Public Relations Club was established in alignment with the state in post-war Norway. Dahlen describes how the Club was established as a kind of independent think tank for the Norwegian state in order to control, discuss and define public relations in Norway after the Second World War. This means that many of the core actors had backgrounds from war propaganda, and that this influenced their views on PR, which was argued to be something different from propaganda, a tool for the free world – against authoritarian communism. In the final contribution to this first part, Helge Hiram Jensen and Sigmund Valaker examine social movement communication in a historical conflict situation in Norway, the Alta Dam Conflict 1970–1982, in an area where the Norwegian state overlaps with the Sápmi homeland. This chapter demonstrates that strategic communication does not by default need to be a practice that is used by already powerful actors such as major corporations or governments. Instead, the study analyzes how strategic communication can be used as a tool for the empowerment of the disempowered. By connecting social movement theory and strategic communication research this study integrates both perspectives by one shared approach, "empirically grounded critical theory", applying the empirical method comparative historical analysis, and suggests some empirically grounded amendments to existing theoretical concepts on social movement communication as democratic innovation.

The second part contains three chapters focusing on markets and business logic in strategic communication. In the first chapter Lene Pettersen and Faltin Karlsen enter the world of dating applications in the contemporary digital business ecosystems that saturate most of our social relations. The study applies critical discourse analysis to explore what 50 dating apps promise users and through which discursive means, as a form of strategic communication. The study reveals two main discourses: a romantic discourse, a narrative about finding the right one, and experiencing great and long-lasting love; and a discourse that presents an optimistic and magical image of technology that will assist the user in finding the "One" with reference to the apps' successful "matches" in the past. In the second chapter in this part, Anders Nilsen, Jens Barland and Bård Blytt

Sandstad tackle the world of marketing communication and advertising in an analysis of how an advertising movie takes advantage of the public debate. The study analyzes the commercial campaign for the intimate soap Asan, which is linked to the public debate about whether porn on the Internet destroys the natural erotic intimacy of young people. Using theories of strategic communication, marketing and visual storytelling, the study analyzes how such an advertising campaign is developed in accordance with ideas of societal responsibility and social norms. The study analyzes both the strategic level and the more tactical means used in the visual storytelling. In the third and final chapter in this second part, Ester Conings Vanvik writes on sustainability communication and how the Norwegian energy corporation Equinor has tried to build and maintain trust through strategic communication in a time of increasing demands on contemporary corporations to adapt to sustainability goals. In the case study the legitimacy strategies of Equinor are analyzed by using critical discourse theory focusing on Equinor's annual reports from 2015 to 2021. The analysis shows how Equinor communicates paradoxes, disclaims liability for the current state of climate change, frequently uses modality (forward-looking statements) and presents an intertwining of performance-focused and sustainable development discourse.

In the final part the main focus is on organization and leadership dimensions of strategic communication. First, Lasha Kavtaradze and Bente Kalsnes deepen our knowledge about how solutions by AI-powered services may be used for countering mis- and disinformation, the dark side of strategic communication in our digital era. In the chapter they explore how six companies working on AI-powered services strategically frame mis/disinformation issues and what sort of moral judgments they use while making diagnostic inferences to find solutions to "information disorder". By applying Entman's framing theory, the study qualitatively analyzes the textual data from the websites of AI-powered services for information verification. The study finds that companies recommend using services identified as automated fact-checking, automated credibility assessment, and automated authenticity assessment. In the second chapter in this part, Tonje Merete Viken and Arne H. Krumsvik examine how various capital forms affect the influence of Norwegian NGOs on Norwegian policies and positions in international processes. As a result of a deductive-inductive process, nine distinct capital forms have been identified that may influence how successful an NGO is in influencing Norwegian positions and policies. Informants in senior

government and political positions have been interviewed to identify and reflect on the relative importance of competence/expertise, field projects and results, size, member activities, media visibility, personal relations, political stance and organizational form. A key finding is that competence and expertise seem to be the most important factors for successful advocacy. There are, however, also indications that government officials and politicians value capital forms somewhat differently. In the final contribution to this part and the anthology, Magne Johannessen and Lene Pettersen present a chapter on management communication from a complexity perspective. Management communication is defined as a form of strategic communication from managers to internal and external target groups where the goal is typically to create visions and establish trust in management. In the chapter they argue that the field of management communication rests on a positivistic foundation inspired by scientific management and system theory thinking, and that there is a need for another approach, found in the perspective of complexity theory. By employing complexity theory, management communication may promote communication themes that nurture people's sense of belonging to and identification with the organization.

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