Public Affairs and Communication in the Digital Age

Public Affairs Workshop
organized by GÉANT GCP and EaP Connect
at DFN in Berlin on April 8, 2019

Lecture by Mechthild Bülow
The Digital World …and Politics

1. What can digitalization do today?

2. What are the benefits and limitations of digitalisation for political issues?
   *From attention to astroturfing*

3. How to communicate your issues – and make politicians listen to them
   *Some Tools of the Trade*
The world map of social networks

Social networks with the largest number of registered users, mln people

- Facebook: 640+
- Ozone: 480

The circle's diameters correspond with the figure.

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Linkedin
- Vkontakte
- Odnoklassniki
- Orkut
- Mili
- Zing
- Citrus
- Drugson
- No data

Data for February 2011
Source: Alexa.com
The Digital World: Why do we like it so much?

Digital political campaigns impact directly on our **values**:

‘What do we believe in?’

*Respect for the environment, e.g.*

… on our **normative systems** – our **opinions**:

‘What do we think is right or wrong?’

*A 16-year-old girl who speaks out on a political issue, mobilizing her peers*

… and on our **emotions** + needs
Values? Normative Systems?
What determines our behaviour?

‘The onion’
The Digital World: Why do we like it so much?

Human attention span decreases..

2000: 12 seconds
2015: 8.25 seconds

An average person reads 20 words per page

Goldfish: 9 seconds

Source: Time Magazine, May 14, 2015
Emotions?

Plato: Mind the elephant!

“Rider” – Reason, Rationality
“Elephant” = Emotions

If elephant and rider disagree on the direction, who will win?
But... we are scientists!

Scientists use their senses when solving science problems. They use their eyes to spot details. They use their noses to detect if something is stinky. They use their hearing, touch, and even sense of taste.

How do we involve the emotions of our stakeholders?
The Digital World …and Politics
The Digital World

Facebook user community is bigger than the population of China (1.5 billion)
Germany: 30 million users
The Digital World and Politics
Most popular heads of state and government on Facebook in 2017

Ranking der Staats- und Regierungschefs mit den meisten Followern bei Facebook im Jahr 2017 (in Millionen)

- Narendra Modi: 42
- Donald J. Trump: 22
- Rania Al Abdullah: 13
- PMO India: 13
- Recep Tayyip Erdoğan: 8
- Hun Sen: 8
- The White House: 8
The Digital World and Politics
Most popular German politicians on Facebook in March 2019
The Digital World and Politics
Political parties in Germany on Twitter

- 73% of MPs have a Twitter account
- 30,000 new tweets are being written per month
- Every MP has an average of 10,000 followers
- Twitter is the most important tool for MPs

![Twitter Account Proportion by Party](image-url)
1. What can digitalization do today?

Structure and mobilize communities, spread ideas
Generate interest in a public affairs topic worldwide, activate followers

Greta Thunberg: Fridays for Future Campaign

850,000 abo on Twitter @GretaThunberg
1. What can digitalization do today?

**Give real time information!**
Provide fact-checking tools
2. What are the benefits and limitations of digitalization for political issues?
From attention to astroturfing
2. What are the benefits of digitalization for political issues?

**Structuring**: Sorting, selecting and exchanging information
Installation of communities for relevant topics, documentation

**Mobilization**: Activating followers to act

**Precision**: Less wastage, social targeting, gaining information about profiles, geo-targeting

**Real time**: Direct contacts

→ Attention for political issues: opinions + judgement
2. What are the limitations of digitalization for political issues?

Communication via social media channels cannot adequately

Manage complexity

Give orientation

Prepare decisions

Carry conviction to your target groups

Influence understanding of issues
2. What are the limitations of digitalization for political issues?

Communication via social media channels might even serve to soften the public face of organizations: ‘We are the good guys’.
2. What are the limitations of digitalization for political issues?

Communication via social media channels might even serve to manipulate:

**Astroturfing**, first coined by US Senator Lloyd Bentsen of Texas in 1985, is when companies/individuals mask their motives by disguising themselves as a grassroots movement.

The release of Al Gore’s documentary "An Inconvenient Truth" in 2006 was followed by outpourings of either support or criticism, depending on which side of the global warming theory one chose to take. One man apparently felt so strongly that Gore’s view was wrong -- but more importantly, boring -- that he created a video on YouTube called "Al Gore’s Penguin Army," spoofing the ideas set forth by the film and portraying Gore as some sort of Batman villain.
2. What are the limitations of digitalization for political issues?

- Political campaigns via social media channels rarely reach ‘the system’: political bodies.

  But: In representative democracies, decision-making takes place in political bodies; parliaments and governments

- Social media channels foster the – often anonymous – exchange of opinions (not arguments)

- Users are encouraged to think in terms of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ rather than in terms of different ‘interests’
3. How to communicate your issues – and make politicians listen to them
Some Tools of the Trade
What is it we do in Public Affairs again?

Public Affairs is defined as the political analysis and contact work of organizations.

Using analysis and communication tools, organizations influence political decision-making processes on a strategic level.
Public Affairs: Organization questions today:

What is vital to influencing political decisions?

Up to the 1980s:
Policy change was primarily explained by interacting combinations of
• Interests & Systems
  (pluralistic perspective and institutionalist approach)

Today:
• Ideas play a key role in politics
  (academic knowledge, arguments, convictions, paradigms)

‘Politics finds its sources not only in power but also in uncertainty – men collectively wondering what to do… Governments not only „power“ …, they also puzzle. … Policy-making today entails both deciding and knowing of larger groups of people, a process of social learning.’ (Heclo)
3. How to make politicians listen to your issues
   – and communicate them

   In order to influence political decisions, you have to

   Get into ‘the system’: manage objection

   Mind your language

   Prepare the right ‘product’ for conviction – and communication
Get into the system

Consider emotions!

Please listen to:

The Statue of Liberty Story vs. The Story of the Many Legs
Get into the system

Consider emotions – manage objection

“This is something we’ve never done before!”

“It’s out of the question!”

“You can’t be serious about this!”

“I don’t understand what you mean!”

“We’ll have to discuss this in your organization!”

“We can’t wait that long.”
Mind your language

A small example:

“You don't know the situation. And under no circumstances are you close enough to this issue to judge it correctly.”

Source: Michael Kretschmer, Minister President of Saxony, on ‘Anne Will’ Talkshow, ARD, September 2018
Mind your language

Use respectful language, avoid ‘dangerous speech’

Any form of expression (e.g., speech, text or image) that increases the risk of its audience condoning or committing violence against members of another group.
Prepare the right product for conviction – and communication

Follow a popular scientist and philosopher:

Aristotle

Use argumentation

Thesis

because

Reason why

for

Proof

how

Example

Substantiation

Conclusion

therefore

Stützung des Arguments

Thesis

because

Reason why

for

Proof

how

Example

Substantiation

Conclusion

therefore

Stützung des Arguments
Use argumentation in 5 steps – and ask for it!

I/We _________________________________ Thesis

because _______________________________ Reason

for ________________________________ Proof

how _______________________________ Example

therefore ________________________________ Conclusion

What is the main point of your opinion?
Reasons for your opinion?
Which proof can you give me?
Which example will illustrate your point?
What is your conclusion? Which step do you see next?
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Thank you!

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