

Innovation or Legitimation?

## Consultancy Services and Functions in Political Communication

Abstract: Consultants in political communication offer a broad range of services and fulfill a variety of functions that are seldom compared with one another. Studies on campaigners or lobbyists tend to represent quite separate fields of research. A nationwide survey on consultants in Switzerland contributes to overcoming this blind spot by means of an inductive empirical research design, which allows us to question what services consultants actually perform and what functions they attribute to different services. The results show that lobbying, political PR, and (initiative, referenda and election) campaigns constitute the main areas of service. These service areas are associated with different functions. Lobbyists in particular define themselves as partisan players closely involved in political decision-making. In contrast, political PR and campaigning is understood more in terms of horizontal or vertical mediation. Campaigners mention pragmatic functions, such as the provision of an up-to-date infrastructure, most often. Overall, consultants highlight the ability to facilitate innovations through an independent outside perspective. Reputation is regarded as the most important criteria when it comes to the selection of a specific agency. This underlines the importance of impression management as a common challenge for consultants in different fields of political communication.

Consultants in political communication are generally seen as a product of societal modernization (Swanson and Mancini (1996), Mancini (1999), Norris (2000), Dulio (2004)). In turn, modernization is regarded as a process of social differentiation. That brings up the functional necessity of connecting differentiated social spheres (Alexander and Colomy (1991), M?nch (1991)). Consultants might be able to fill in the blanks and, through various

communication services, contribute to the bridging of gaps between societal spheres (Hoffmann et al. (2007)). But who are these consultants and what are the main services that they perform? The overall picture remains somewhat fragmented. Depending on the research discipline, the cultural and academic setting, research focuses on different aspects of the subject in question. Whereas political science is concerned primarily with processes of policy-making and interest representation - and therefore predominantly deals with policy advisors and lobby consultants, media and communication science focuses on consultants in elections campaigns ('spin doctors'). An overall approach that puts similarities and differences between services and functions in political communication consulting in perspective is rarely seen. Such a perspective would not only provide a more adequate picture of consultants and the services they provide, it could also take account of evidence indicating an integration of different services and functions within consultancies (Novotny (2000), B?sch (2004)). Is the separation between different services and functions in political communication consulting an academic artifact, a mere reflection of differences between academic disciplines and research traditions, or does it mirror empirical reality? If there is empirical evidence of a differentiation in service fields such as lobbying, public relations and campaigning, what does this tell us about different functions ascribed to political communication consulting? Do lobbyists ascribe different functions to their services than campaigners do? Or do they simply display similar functions because they are all commercial consultants, subject to the same economic and political forces? In order to answer these questions, an empirically-based, inductive research design is needed, which remains open to various potential services and functions.

This paper provides empirical evidence on the basis of data from a nationwide survey on political communication consultants in Switzerland. After identifying the relevant services performed by the consultants, we answer the following research questions:

? Why political communication?

What are the perceived reasons that a client is in need

of political communication at all?

? Why political communication as a service?

What are the perceived reasons that a

service provider is commissioned instead of in-house-provision?

? Why this agency?

What are perceived reasons that the own agency is selected instead

of a competitor?

The items we used in the survey are based on a literature review. We selected a range of potential functions that might be applicable to political communication consulting. Before we present these, we begin with a justification for our 'lumping-together'-strategy. The next chapter unravels instructive parallels, especially between the for the most part separated discourses on campaigning and lobbying as potential political communication services.

## 1 Connecting separated discourses

We selected the term political communication consultants in order to highlight the distinction between this line of work and that of the more well established political consultants. The latter are strongly associated with services in election campaigns. From this perspective, a political consultant is 'a campaign professional who is engaged primarily in the provision of advice and services (such as polling, media creation and production, and direct-mail fund raising) to candidates, their campaigns, and other political committees' (Sabato (1981: 8)). Research on political consultants focuses on the roles and techniques of the so-called spin doctors, who are engaged in the (strategic) planning and conduct of communication activities for their clients. Since the 1980s, more and more research has been conducted on the role and the impact of political consultants in election campaigns, discussing the growing relevance of this new branch in somewhat controversial terms. While originally centered on the situation in the



United States, research has increasingly focused on the situation in other western countries, questioning in a comparative perspective the impact of US-consultants on the seemingly worldwide modernization of elections campaigns (Plasser and Plasser (2002)).

From this perspective, political consultants constitute a delimitable research object. Political consultancy represents a distinct profession in political communication, which can be clearly separated from others, such as lobbying. Campaigning involves communication directed at the mass media and the public, whereas lobbying is said to occur mainly on an interpersonal level and is directed toward government officials, parliamentarians, and public administrations. Lobbyists as service providers represent, 'temporarily for a fee the views, attitudes or interests of a separate group or organization external to government in the policymaking process' (Wilson (1991: 65)). The clear separation between political consultants as public-oriented campaigners and lobbyists as policy-oriented persuaders reflects the distinction between communication and political science. Communication scientists are traditionally interested in different kinds of campaign and the effects thereof, whereas political scientists focus on the policy process and the interests trying to influence it.

This asserted separation, however, is likely to displace significant links between service fields in political communication consulting, especially between campaigning and lobbying (Herrnson et al. (1998)). First of all, no-one would doubt that in both areas we are confronted with political communication strategies attempting to influence politics. Campaigners try to get candidates into office by influencing public opinion; lobbyists try to influence decisions by persuading public office holders. Accordingly, professionals in both areas are often said to fulfill a boundary-spanning function (Serini (1993), Leichty and Springston (1996), Griffin (2005)) ? for instance between voters and candidates, between the government and the public, between corporations and political actors. Further connections become apparent, when terms such as 'outside lobbying' (Kollman (1998)), 'grassroots lobbying' (Goldstein (1999)) or

`public affairs' (Harris and Moss (2001), Hoffmann et al. (2008)) come into play as a potential collective term. This indicates the expansion of public relations activities in the field of lobbying (Heaney (2004)). Much discussion regarding concepts of integrated communication (Thorson and Moore (1996)) builds on the assumption that interpersonal and mass communication strategies have to be coordinated and harmonized in order to reach political and/or economic goals.

This point of view can be countered by pointing out strong separating features deriving from the clients these consultants works for. Obviously, it makes a difference whether consultants work for candidates and parties, for associations, for corporations or for state players.

However, these separating features should not be overestimated, since certain communication services might involve different types of clients, as is the case, for example, in initiative campaigns where agencies are confronted with parties as well as different interest groups and political action committees (Magleby and Patterson (2000)). Moreover, interest groups also constitute an important target group for fundraisers in election campaigns. Consequently, initiative/referenda campaigns, as well as fundraising efforts in election campaigns, connect the world of campaigning with that of interest groups and lobbying. Accordingly, consultants must be able to adjust to different types of players. Narrow specialization on certain consulting services and stakeholders is likely to constitute a political and economic risk for consultants (Hoffmann et al. (2007)).

Accordingly, flexibility is said to be a key feature of the `new political professionals'. Mancini (1999: 234) describes them as `advertising and public relations experts, media experts, journalists, and pollsters who not only work for the parties but also apply their expertise in fields such as business communications and commercial advertising.' An article by Novotny (2000: 12) in particular offers valuable `thoughts on the blurred distinctions between private businesses, corporations, public relations, the campaigns of elected officials,

and political consultants.' Although his contribution is based mainly on anecdotal evidence, he nevertheless offers some plausible arguments for the 'merging of political consulting with business-oriented advertising, lobbying, and government relations' (Novotny (2000: 13)). There is a need to adapt to governance as 'a multistakeholder process with actors drawn from market and civil society institutions as well as from government.' (Crozier (2007: 3))

This article therefore argues in favor of connecting the hitherto separated discourses on consultants dealing with political communication. In empirical terms this requires a broad access to the field of research. Services may range from classical lobbying to media relations and campaign management. Clients may be governmental organizations, political parties, candidates, pressure groups, social movements, corporations, or non-governmental organizations. Thus, 'lumping together' as a strategy prevents the determination of empirical data resulting from a restricted access to the field. Accordingly, we propose starting with a general understanding of political communication consultants: They are external, commercial agents who assist their clients in the management of relationships with politically relevant stakeholders. Based on this definition, useful differentiations, distinctions or separations are no longer the prerequisite of research but rather its empirical outcome.

This definition of political communication consultants reveals an affinity to public relations concepts (Grunig and Hunt (1984)). Relationship management is usually understood as the essence of PR (Ledingham (2003)) and it may also function as a common denominator for different service areas in political communication. Following this understanding, lobbying could actually be conceptualized as a 'key public relations area' (Wise (2007: 371)), an assignment that is in line with the self-perception of practitioners, as Wise (2007) has shown. Public relations theories in particular could contribute in future to new perspectives on lobbyism as a form of communication management.

## 2 Research Questions and Method

The claim that there are differences as well as connections between services in political communication demands a response to the following question: According to which criteria?

We believe that a functionalist approach is best suited to our broad inductive method. In other words, service areas are interconnected if consultants attribute similar functions to them;

separation is the case if attributed functions differ. We intend to measure (1) functions of political communication in general: Why political communication? (2) Outsourcing functions

in the area of political communication: Why political communication as a service? (3)

Functions of service providers that allow for the development of a distinct profile: Why this

agency? These three levels of function represent the typical decision-making process of a potential client (Mitchell (1994)), which, from the perspective of an agency, involves the

following questions: (1) How can we convince the client that he needs political

communication? (2) How can we convince him to commission an agency and not to conduct

political communication on an in-house basis? (3) How can we convince him to engage our

agency and not a competitor?

The data come from a larger survey on political communication consultants in Switzerland.

Switzerland, as a half-direct, semi-presidential consensus democracy is a good case to explore

the variety of, as well as the interconnections between, consulting services and functions. The

structural openness of political institutions, which is an effect of corporatism and

concordance, offers many possibilities in interest representation, thereby generating a high

demand for consulting in lobbying. Furthermore, the existence of direct democratic

institutions, such as referendum and public initiatives, offers consultants additional

opportunities to engage in the other fields of public political communication apart from

elections. Finally, the structural context of a small European country like Switzerland makes

it more likely to reveal not only differences but also integrating connections between service areas and functions.

We do not apply any kind of hierarchy with studies positioning assumed American styles of campaigning as the (criticized or praised) point of reference when analyzing consultants abroad. In this case, a deficit diagnosis is almost inevitable. Farrell et. al. (2001: 13) e.g. suggest that 'in other countries political consultancy appears to be still only a sideshow for commercial agencies' (emphasis added). Statements like this reveal the tendency to equate Americanization with modernization, professionalization, and specialization. However, often enough the assumption that political consultancy is a specialized full-time occupation dealing only with election campaigns is simply a methodological self-fulfilling prophecy. Research designs transform the 'ideal' political consultant into the 'real' political consultant by defining the sample a priori according to the 'ideal' full-time campaigner. Thus, in fact, no-one actually knows how many (perhaps very modern and professional) sideshows are taking place every day, even in the United States.

We circumvent this methodological trap by selecting a very broad access to the field. In order to identify our sample, we decided on a multilevel field approach. In the first step, we questioned all public relations agencies offering political communication services. We then extended this initial sample by means of reputation-based sampling. All agencies from the first sample, and 87 experts in politics, associations, and corporations were asked to name the most relevant political communication consultants. The purpose of this second step was to correct any eventual bias towards public relations related services. Furthermore, our wording when contacting potential respondents prevented any bias towards campaigning, lobbying or other distinctive services. Instead, we favored the general term political communication.

Neither the project nor this article is hypothesis-driven. We expect the data to provide information about the underlying structures. For such an inductive approach, factor analysis is



the most appropriate statistical tool when analyzing quantitative data. It reveals differences as well as interconnections between factors. We applied it to four lists of items operationalizing our research questions: (1) political communication services, (2) perceived functions of political communication, (3) perceived functions of political communication as a service, and (4) perceived success criteria of agencies active in the field of political communication.

Additionally, we describe the relevance of all items and analyze correlations between the service areas and functional factors identified.

### 3 Results

#### Services

First of all, we have to `concede' that political communication is really a `sideshow' for commercial agencies in Switzerland. The percentage share of sales in political communication services is only 35 percent. So the full-time-consultant in political communication hardly exists - never mind the 100%-campaigner or lobbyist.

Which services do the agencies in our sample offer, and with what frequency? The results in table 1 show the number of agencies offering services often or very often. Altogether, campaign and media-related services have the greatest significance. We also note the relevance of services related to direct democratic procedures: 29% of all practitioners said their agencies are often engaged in initiative or referenda campaigns, whereas fewer work regularly in election campaigns (23%). The findings indicate that mass media and the public play an important strategic role for consultants. Those services less engaged with the media, such as lobbying, are less prominent, but not unimportant.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics: Services of Political Communication  
Percentage of  
Organizations\*

Media work	50
Information campaigns	43
Crisis PR	30
Coaching / training	29
Initiative / referenda campaigns	29
Image campaigns	28
Lobbying in the area of legislation	25
Election campaign	23
Lobbying in the area of law execution	17
Evaluations	15
Mediations / round tables etc.	13
International PR	10
Lobbying towards organizations abroad	
Lobbying in the area of subsidies / encouraging company set-ups	10
	5
Lobbying in the area of public procurement	2

\* n = 91-101, all figures in percent, on a seven-point scale from 0 (=never) via 1 (= very rarely) to 6 (= very often), 5 or 6 was selected.

This leads to the question as to which services are more likely to be offered together by one agency. The factor analysis first points out an expectable division between campaigning and lobbying services (see table 2). A third factor consists of services oriented towards the public sphere. We refer to this factor as political PR. However, this differentiation should not be overestimated, since factor analysis identifies only the relative distance and the relative

closeness between items. For example, every fourth agency in the sample offers at least one lobbying service and one campaigning service often or very often.

Table 2 Factor Analysis: Services of Political Communication

	Political PR	Lobbying	Initiative / Referenda / Election Campaigning
Image campaigns	.81	-.04	-.12
Information campaigns	.74	-.08	-.24
Crisis PR	.69	.30	-.21
Coaching / Training	.67	-.21	-.04
Media work	.64	-.14	-.39
International PR	.60	-.42	-.35
Evaluations	.57	-.23	-.12
Mediations / round tables etc.	.52	-.40	-.12
Lobbying in the area of legislation	.18	.81	-.06
Lobbying in the area of public procurement	.02	.78	-.30
Lobbying in the area of law execution	.21	.65	-.12
Lobbying in the area of subsidies / encouraging company set-ups	.14	.58	-.34
Lobbying towards organizations abroad	.45	-.46	-.30
Initiative / referenda campaigns	.17	-.12	.87
Election campaigns	.05	-.06	.84
Explained Variance	25,5	18,4	14,6
Eigenvalue	3,8	2,8	2,2

Method of extraction: main component analysis. Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalization. MSA = 0.77

Overall, the agencies represent a wide range of services and do not concentrate exclusively on a particular field. There is evidence of differentiation between political PR, lobbying and

campaigning, but this evidence is far from indicating highly-specialized fields of political communication. This is a prerequisite for the development of integrated communication strategies as part of multi-stakeholder processes. Accordingly, the question arises to what extent the three service areas are interconnected with perceived functions.

## Why Political Communication?

The question of why political communication is necessary at all as a vocational charge has much to do with assumed societal functions and the professional self-perception of practitioners. Table 3 shows that the rather interpersonal term 'trust' is most important to consultants. Three out of four agree strongly or very strongly with the function of building trust between societal players. The concept of the lawyer standing clearly at the side of the client is also important. The middle-range items more or less describe mediating functions. At the bottom end, there are only two functions not supported by a majority. Both describe the consultant's role as a 'real' political actor very close to political decision-making. Obviously there is a certain interest in upholding a distinction between the role of the advising consultant and the role of the decision-making politician.

### Table 3 Descriptive Statistics: Functions of Services

Amount of  
Organizations\*

We try to build trust between societal players. 76

We see ourselves as lawyers asserting our clients' interests. 64

We contribute to a high quality communication of politics towards citizens. 59

We contribute to the reconciliation of various societal interests. 55

We contribute towards citizens' interests reaching politicians. 52

We support politicians in decision-making. 49

We improve the quality of political decisions. 42

\* n = 95-99, all figures in percent, on a six-point scale from 1 (= do not agree) to (= agree strongly), 5 or 6 was selected.

Based on a factor analysis these functions can be summarized into three role models

representing the overall functions of political communication (see table 4):

? The first factor stresses the key term `trust' and a mediating role between societal players. We call it horizontal mediation.

? The second factor connects the role of the lawyer with the two items indicating a

distinct political self-perception. We call it political advocacy.

? The third factor stresses top-down and bottom-up communications between politicians

and citizens. We call it vertical mediation.

Table 4 Factor Analysis: Functions of Services

Horizontal  
Mediation

Political  
Advocation

Vertical  
Mediation

We contribute to the  
reconciliation of various societal  
interests.

.91      -.01      -.04

We try to build trust between  
societal players.

.83      -.20      -.16

We support politicians in  
decision-making.

-.13      .72      -.25

We see ourselves as lawyers  
asserting our clients' interests.

-.09      .71      -.27

We improve the quality of  
political decisions.

-.24      .70      -.30

We contribute to a high quality  
communication of politics  
towards citizens.

-.04      -.19      .80

We contribute towards citizens'  
interests reaching the politicians.

-.26      -.03      .78

Explained Variance

23,7      22,7      21,5

Eigenvalue

1,7      1,6      1,5

Method of extraction: main component analysis. Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalization. MSA = 0.64

Based on these results a certain conflict seems to emerge: the ? horizontally or vertically ?

mediating role of political communication on the one hand, and the advocate as a distinctive partisan player on the other hand. Therefore, it is instructive to see how these role models correlate with our three service areas political PR, lobbying and campaigning (see table 5).

? Consultants who mainly provide services in political PR stress the role of the horizontal mediator.

? Lobbyists stress the partisan role of the advocate close to political decision-making.

? Consultants who are involved predominantly in initiative, referenda, and election

campaigns stress the vertical mediator function.

Table 5 Simple Correlations: Services and Functions

Horizontal Mediation			
Political Advocation			
Vertical Mediation			
Political PR	-.30**	.17**	.09**
Lobbying	-.01**	.24**	.00**
Initiative / Referenda / Election Campaigning			
	-.20**	.02**	.37**

n = 83, Pearson's r, \*p < .05; \*\*p < .01

Campaigners in particular stress the vertical mediating role. This suggests compatibility with the idea of 'deliberate priming'. Medvic (2001) proposed this as a democratic role model for campaigners. The concept aims to reconcile the antagonism between much strategic top-down-communications and participatory bottom-up-communications. This is supported by the outcome that both the top-down- and the bottom-up-item loads on the same factor. It indicates that practitioners do not perceive a conflict between the two communication directions.

Furthermore, it has to be mentioned that vertical mediation is the only role model with an explicit link to the citizens. Against that background, the lobbyist's role as a lawyer close to political decision-making is more likely to be considered problematic with regard to democratic responsiveness.

Why political communication as a service?

In general, the role models identified here can be shared by both internal staff and external service providers. Consequently, service providers must provide evidence of an added value

of their commercial external service as such. Discussions on political consultants in the United States stress the technical expertise and infrastructure, which seemingly cannot be

provided by political parties (Farrell (1996), Kolodny (2000), Farrell et al. (2001), Kolodny and Dulio (2003)). In contrast, literature on management consulting stresses arguments such as the innovative and independent outside view provided by consultants (Simon 2002) or a legitimizing function vis-?-vis internal or external stakeholders (Jackson (1996), Sturdy (1997), Fincham (1999)). It is the role of the 'acceptant legitimizer' (Broom and Smith (1979)) that becomes a normatively problematic issue, when both the consultant and the client construct the illusion of independence. Then, the supposed independence of the yes-man becomes a legitimizing tool to persuade critical stakeholders.

The items we used in our survey cover all of these arguments (see table 6). The three most emphasized outsourcing functions reflect the consulting ideal in management literature: the idea of an independent actor coming from the outside and not being caught up in structural restrictions of the client system. As a result he is able to see blind spots and alternatives. This is considered to be the main added value of the external consultant.

Table 6 Descriptive Statistics: Functions of Agencies

Agencies...

Number of

Organizations\*

... have an alternative perspective.	75
... bring new ideas into client organization.	75
... ensure the independent evaluation of clients' communication strategies.	64
... support problematic decisions.	51
... have a specialized infrastructure.	46
... assume mediation functions vis-?-vis critical stakeholders.	43
... can be replaced more easily in the event of poor performance.	32

... are commissioned because in-house provision  
would be too expensive.

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\* n = 98-100, all figures in percent, on a six-point scale from 1 (= is not the case) to 6 (is very much the case), 5 or 6 was selected.

The respondents also concede functions that can be regarded more critically. As discussed  
above, the external support of problematic decisions does not require `real' independence;

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instead, it requires a supposed independence. With external support it is easier to overcome the resistance of organizational members to decisions and changes intended by the management as the client. This illustrates a more instrumental use of consultants, which might also function with respect to critical stakeholders outside of the organization. The consultant shifts from being a `real' mediator to being a make-believe-mediator who represents the interests of the client only.

In contrast to the normative ideal of the independent consultant or the instrumental use of consultants, more pragmatic functions of outsourcing, such as a specialized infrastructure, greater flexibility or the reduction of costs, are considered to be less important. Indeed, pragmatic functions based on the idea of a continuing division of labor over time may be overrated in the literature on political consultants.

These different perspectives on outsourcing functions are also reflected in the results of a factor analysis (see table 7):

? The first factor represents the consultancy ideal; it consists of the three most important outsourcing functions. We call it innovation.

? The second factor aggregates two items that could be evaluated more critically. In accordance with the `acceptant legitimizer' discussed above we call it legitimation.

The main goal here is to legitimate decisions already taken by clients.

? The third factor consists of items stressing pragmatic reasons for outsourcing political communication. They emphasize the provision of a certain infrastructure or claim that in-house provision would be too expensive. We call this resources.

Table 7 Factor Analysis: Functions of Agencies

Agencies...	Innovation	Legitimation	Resources
... bring new ideas to client organization.	.82	-.01	-.01
... have an alternative perspective.	.79	-.13	-.07
... ensure the independent evaluation of clients' communication strategies.	.75	-.32	-.05
...assume mediation functions vis-?-vis critical stakeholders.	-.02	.86	-.01
... support problematic decisions.	-.32	.78	-.09
... can be replaced more easily in the event of poor performance.	-.02	-.49	-.41
... are commissioned, because in-house provision would be too expensive.	-.03	-.15	.85
... have a specialized infrastructure.	-.49	-.08	.54
Explained Variance	27,4	21,5	15,1
Eigenvalue	2,2	1,7	1,2

Method of extraction: main component analysis. Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalization. MSA = 0.73

When examining interrelationships between these factors and service areas, there is only one significant correlation. The outsourcing function legitimation is particularly important for practitioners working in the area of political PR ( $r = .25$ ). One might think here of information campaigns or crisis communications trying to convince the public of the necessity of certain decisions. However, even this correlation is weak. Obviously, the outsourcing functions

identified represent universal frames that apply in very different contexts: (1) they constitute a general consultancy ideal, (2) they question the ideal by pointing out the possibility of its instrumental use or (3) they refer to pragmatic economic reasoning.

## Why this agency?

After asking questions about political communication as a societal function and as an external service, the third and most important question to a service provider is: Why this agency? Why are we better than our competitors? The most important criterion is the reputation of the agency (see table 8). It is followed by items indicating that political communication as a service is very much a people's business relying on social networks: personal contact in media and politics are considered important selling points. Recommendations are relevant, as are personal acquaintanceships. Again, it is interesting to see that pragmatic reasons like the infrastructure or rates are neglected. Furthermore, it seems to be irrelevant whether the agency is publicly known.

Table 8 Descriptive Statistics: Selection Criteria for own Agency

We ...	Number of Organizations*
... have a good reputation in our field of activity.	73
... have good media contacts.	66
... were recommended by third parties.	64
... know the client personally.	58
... have good contacts in politics.	56
... have basic political beliefs similar to those of the client.	50
... have a specialized infrastructure.	41
... are affordable.	38
... are publicly known.	33

\* n = 100-101, all figures in percent, on a six-point scale from 1 (= unimportant) to 6 (= very important), 5 or 6 was selected.

In this regard, however, the factor analysis produces some striking connections (see table 9):

? The first factor connects personal contacts with similar political beliefs as a common

ground. We call it ideological social capital. In these cases, the agency functions as an integral part of e.g. a conservative, left-wing or liberal political milieu.

? The second factor is interesting for two reasons. First, reputation as the most important criteria and publicity as the least important load on it. Secondly, there is a negative

value on the cost-item. In other words, in this functional context it is not helpful for agencies to be affordable. On the contrary - they appear to have a competitive advantage when they are expensive. We call this factor high-end image transfer.

? The third factor is a combination of third-party recommendations and a specialized infrastructure that competitors cannot offer. We call it infrastructural support.

Table 9 Factor Analysis: Selection Criteria for own Agency

We ...				
Ideological				
Social Capital				
High-End				
Image				
Transfer				
Infra-				
structural				
Support				
... have basic political beliefs similar to those of the client.	.79	-.01	-.07	
... have good media contacts.		.71	-.35	-.03
... have good contacts in politics.		.68	-.41	-.07
... know the client personally.		.64	-.26	-.25
... are publicly known.		-.09	.71	-.07
... have a good reputation in our field of activity.		-.22	.64	-.09
... e are affordable.		-.33	-.60	-.38
... were recommended by third parties.		-.15	-.05	.76
... have a specialized infrastructure.		-.23	-.17	.71
Explained Variance	24,9	18,4	14,6	

Eigenvalue	2,2	1,7	1,3
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Method of extraction: main component analysis. Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalization. MSA = 0.65

The factor high-end image transfer comes closest to the assumption that impression management is particularly important for external service providers (Clark, 1995).

Accordingly, it is plausible that the main function here is to transfer reputation from the agency to the client. Being expensive seems to be an accepted shortcut for assuming a high-end reputation. Due to its low rating, publicity is more of a side-effect of the reputation the agency aspires to, but it is not an end in itself. This is the most plausible explanation as to

why there is a negative load on the costs-item and why reputation as the most important item and publicity as the least important item load on the same factor.

The relevance of this factor illustrates that political communication as a service cannot be explained by mere cost-benefit-calculations and market mechanisms. In these cases, the competitive advantage does not lie in being more affordable than other agencies. The secret of success is less the performance itself but a convincing (and expensive) presentation and communication of a high reputation.

The reputation factor significantly correlates with the service fields political PR and lobbying (see table 10). In contrast, ideological social capital and infrastructural support are more relevant to the campaigner. The latter counts on his ideologically-rooted social capital and he perceives the infrastructure needed for conducting campaigns as an added value compared to competitors. Again, this confirms our assumption that the Swiss spin doctor in campaigning is anything but a mighty strategic freethinker. Instead, his operating sphere is rather restricted by ideological boundaries and he runs campaigns in a very operational-technical way.

Table 10 Simple Correlation: Services and Selection Criteria

Ideological Social Capital High-End Image Transfer Infra- structural Support			
Political PR	.17**	.32**	.16**
Lobbying	.18**	.42**	.07**
Initiative / Referenda / Election Campaigning	.25**	.11**	.23**

n = 88, Pearson's r, \*p < .05; \*\*p < .01

#### 4 Conclusion

Modernization is a complex dialectical process of differentiation and growing interdependence between social spheres. This also holds true for players in political communication. They specialize their expertise and at the same time face the challenge of

taking on boundary-spanning functions. External service providers are particularly well suited to bridge-building functions, because they are able to confront clients with fresh, creative and irritating outside views when managing communication with politically relevant stakeholders. These ideas are well developed in the literature on management consulting, but they are seldom applied to the field of political communication. Instead, a picture in which political consultants offer highly specialized technical services and spin doctors try to persuade the relevant public in a more or less one-sided manner dominates.

This narrowing can be explained by a theoretical focus on differentiation processes, which is often unquestioned, and the empirical focus on campaign and media effects in the context of elections. In contrast, the present article focuses on the various aspects of political communication consulting, taking into account a broad range of possible services ranging from lobbying to campaigning. Consultants may then fulfill diverse functional roles from the acceptant legitimizer to the critical court jester. In methodological terms, an inductive empirical field approach not only allows for the identification of different services and functions attributed to political communication consulting, it also uncovers interrelations between services and functions. In the present paper, we analyze the relevance and structure of services and perceived functions on three levels: (1) Why is political communication needed? (2) Why is political communication needed as an external service? (3) What are the functional selection criteria when commissioning a specific agency?

The data is derived from a larger nation-wide survey of 101 political communication consultants in Switzerland. The expected low degree of specialization in a small country is not considered to be a professional deficit. Instead, we regard it as an opportunity to focus on functional interconnections that are often neglected by academic research. Consequently, our sample consists of all service providers in Switzerland that potentially deal with issues of political communication.

By means of factor analysis, we identified three distinct service areas: (1) political PR, (2) lobbying, and (3) initiative, referenda, and election campaigns. With regard to the general function of political communication, consultants in these areas favor different roles. Political PR prefers to mediate between different spheres of society on a horizontal axis, campaigners prefer to mediate between politics and citizens on a vertical axis, and lobbyists prefer to represent political interests as a partisan player who participates in political decision-making.

There is not much difference between consultants from all service areas when demonstrating their distinctive added value compared to in-house practitioners. The majority of consultants highlight their ability to facilitate innovations through their independent external view. They also concede the legitimation function in the sense that external consultants can promote particular interests or decisions by legitimizing them in the name of an external authority.

Infrastructural support as a distinctive outsourcing argument is considered to be less relevant.

The technical infrastructure seems to work at the most as a competitive advantage for initiative, referenda, and election campaigners. Additionally, service providers in this field point out the benefit of an ideologically-based personal network. Overall, reputation is seen as the most important shortcut when evaluating market participants and making decisions in favor or against certain suppliers. Impression management and the transfer of an (expensive) image is stressed in particular by consultants in the area of political PR and lobbying.

The empirical findings show that our 'lumping-together'-strategy did not result in an indistinct melting pot. The data reveal differentiations as well as interrelations between different services and functions that usually remain unseen in academic research that narrowly focuses either on election campaigning or lobbying. The comparison deconstructs the myth of the spin doctor in elections as a strategic player dangerous to democracy. Instead, campaigners are more technically oriented and they display the strongest links with responsive governance.

Naturally, many research questions remain unanswered. A study in a large country like the United States could test the hypothesis that political communication consultants dealing within a major market are more specialized. Qualitative organizational case studies could explore how the integration of different services in agencies really works in practice, if indeed it does work. A comparison between perceptions of consultants and the perception of clients would also be worthy of some research effort. There are a few indications in the literature that clients often reject self-perceptions of consultants as strategic players (Kolodny (2000), Hoffmann et al. (2007)). They tend rather to reduce service providers to helpmates. Once more, impression management theories might be capable of explaining such differences.

Overall, whether or not to mandate a political communication consultant is much more than an antiseptic business-like cost-benefit-calculation. Even in small-scale Swiss 'sideshowes' political communication reveals itself to be a complicated thing, and, like everywhere else in the world, social issues are at the core.

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