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The co-evolution of public relations and journalism: A first contribution to its systematic review[☆]

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ABSTRACT

There are many research findings and some theoretical models regarding the interaction between journalism and public relations (PR). But only scarce research has been done so far on the historical perspective of this relationship, which is also called co-evolution of PR and journalism. The aim of this article is to make a first step into the analysis of this co-evolution with a focus on the emergence of PR in the German-language area and based mainly on German literature about the history of PR.

The analysis shows that the rise of PR in the second half of the 19th century was, amongst others, a reaction to the development of journalism that had become increasingly biased. Thus, for many societal actors and organisations, the barriers to entering the public arena were increasing. At the same time the importance of the mass media, and pressures on social protagonists and organisations to legitimise their interests in a changing society, were growing.

These results support a theoretical concept that describes the development of mass communication as a process of rationalisation of societal communication, which in addition can be linked with system theory.

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1. Introduction

The relationship between public relations (PR) and journalism is mostly conceived of as between “interdependent systems” (Grossenbacher, 1986, p. 730). In this context, Löffelholz mentions evidence of a “co-evolutionary development of journalism and public relations” that “has not to date been systematically pursued” (Löffelholz, 2004, p. 472; emphasis author’s own). To do so would require a historical perspective of the relationship between PR and journalism, a perspective largely absent from discussions thus far. This is all the more striking as there is reasonable research on PR history in the last years (e.g. Raaz and Wehmeier, 2011; Watson, 2014). But as Lamme and Russel (2009, pp. 356–357) stress, “more research (...) is needed concerning the ways in which the rise of mass media in the last half of the 19th century (...) might have influenced alone or in some combination the motivations and methods of the public relations function”. The following is intended to provide a first contribution to the systematic review of the co-evolution of PR and journalism, with particular

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emphasis on their interaction during the development of PR.¹ This is done with reference to the available discussions on the history of PR, some of which contain valuable pointers. Our contribution here is limited to the German-speaking areas.² This goes along with L'Etang's demand to explore "more deeply forms of public communication within their socio-cultural contexts" (2014, p. xiv). The initial findings gained on this basis are then, in conclusion, put in theoretical context. Furthermore, we refer to several studies regarding other than German-speaking areas that are supporting our findings. To start with, let us briefly outline the current level of professional debate on the relationship between PR and journalism.

2. Approaches to the relationship between journalism and PR

In the 1980s, the relationship between PR and journalism became a topic of sustained interest in communication science, triggered above all by the publications of Baerns (1979, 1985; see also Altmeyen, Röttger & Bentele, 2004; Raupp and Klewes, 2004, amongst others). This is especially true of the German-language area: "This research program received attention and response particularly in German-speaking countries" (Baerns, 2007, p. 43).³ The influence of PR on journalism had been discussed once before, in the 1920s, forming a major part of the 7th German Sociologists' Conference 1930 in Berlin (Brinkmann, 1931 /1985). As early as 1866, Wuttke (1866 /1875, pp. 118–124) had bemoaned the great influence on newspaper reporting of what were known as press offices (*Pressbüros*), of political parties in particular. And in 1952, in a systematic analysis of the use of (written) press releases in media coverage, Sodeikat (1953) ascertained that those were used with a high incidence.⁴ In some aspects, this study resembles the well-known investigation conducted by Baerns (1985),⁵ which triggered the controversial 1980s discussion around what became known as the determination hypothesis.

Baerns' study posits that PR exerts considerable influence on the topics and timing of journalistic reporting (Baerns, 1985). However, subsequent studies, by Grossenbacher (1986), Fröhlich (1992), Rossmann (1993), Saffarnia (1993) or Schweda and Opherden (1995), for instance, arrived at differing results. As Schantel (2000; see also Hoffjann, 2002) has clearly demonstrated by means of a meta-analysis of these and other studies (e.g. Barth and Donsbach, 1992), the determination hypothesis could not in the end be confirmed, being too unidimensional and too undifferentiated. A more recent study by Riesmeyer also refutes the hypothesis that press releases determine the topics of journalistic reporting; the study uses the term "non-determination" (2006, p. 303). A Swiss input-output analysis on the reporting by regional TV and radio broadcasters of official media conferences, however, shows that "a good half of the reporting (. . .) shows no original content provided by the media outlets" (Grossenbacher, 2007). Thus, different studies continue to lead to differing results, depending also on variables such as the type of media or editorial department.

In the wake of this discussion the head of the aforementioned Swiss study, Grossenbacher, demanded as early as 1986 that the relationship between the media and PR be characterised "as complementary systems" or "interdependent systems", and not as a unilateral determination. Grossenbacher used the concepts of "mutual processes of adaptation" and dependency (Grossenbacher, 1986, p. 730), and this is the idea that has informed the subsequent debate since the 1990s.⁶ Approaches such as the "interdependence model" posited by Westerbarkey (1995), the "interpenetration model" put forward by Choi (1995) and the "intereffication model" suggested by Bentele, Liebert and Seeling (1997) assumed mutual influences, adaptations and interdependencies between journalism and PR. Those approaches all use, to a differing degree, Luhmann's systems theory and the concept of structural coupling. According to Hoffjann (2002, p. 187), a structural coupling (*strukturelle Kopplung*) can be understood as a long-term "relationship" of a system with one (or several) environmental systems, leading to the formation of specific structures in the systems affected.⁷ The aforementioned approaches do differ however in terms of their

¹ It needs to be clarified that there are other aspects of PR, especially internal PR, which are not investigated in this paper. Nevertheless, they have been important for the emergence of PR as well (e.g. Bentele, 2015, p. 50; 2013, pp. 209–210; Bentele, 2015; Bentele, 2015, p. 50; 2013, pp. 209–210). Wolbring (2000) has retrieved some first pointers to this for the company of Krupp.

² One reason behind this limitation is technical, as the starting point of the analysis to be developed below refers to the specific situation of the history of the German press. Another is the fact that there is literature available on the history of PR in the German-language area, to be used as a basis here (for an overview see Puchan, 2006). Our contribution focuses on the genesis of PR; naturally, it would be fascinating to also follow the further development of press relations or PR from this perspective and to demonstrate the extent to which this takes place in reaction to or in interaction with changes in the media system and journalism respectively.

³ A preliminary study in Germany by Kieslich in the 1970s was not published. Baerns tracks back the methodological origin of this input-output-analysis to Tunstall 1970, Nimmo 1964, Cohen 1963 and Rosten 1937 (Baerns, 1985, pp. 39, 121). And according to L'Etang (2004, p. 7) another analysis by Tunstall as early as 1964 "demonstrated how the pressures on journalistic practice created a dependency on public relations services". For the research development in the US see Wehmeier (2004).

⁴ Sodeikat analysed the use of press releases by the Lower Saxony Economic and Transport Ministry in 32 papers and magazines overall (daily and business newspapers, business magazines): 95.1% of the releases were used by at least some newspapers. The study also includes evaluations of individual titles and topics.

⁵ This involved analysing the use of press releases in reporting (by daily newspapers as well as radio and TV news) on North Rhine-Westphalian regional politics in 1978.

⁶ This is not the place to review this whole debate, which in this guise informs mainly the German-language literature on the subject (Baerns, 2007, p. 43); see on this Donsbach and Wenzel (2002), Hoffjann (2002, pp. 181–182), Russ-Mohl (2004), various contributions (by Merten as well as Scholl) in Altmeyen et al. (2004), Saxer (2005) as well as Merkel, Russ-Mohl & Zavaritt (2007), amongst others. In these contributions we also find a critical discussion of the approaches discussed below. An overview of the American research on journalism and PR can be found in Grunig (2007).

⁷ Interpenetration may be understood as a special case of structural coupling, where two systems have engaged with each other in co-evolutionary terms to such a degree that one cannot exist without the other" (Löffelholz, 2004, p. 480, based on Esposito). Whether such interpenetration between journalism and PR in fact exists is controversial (Hoffjann, 2002, pp. 191–192, amongst others).

concept of what constitutes a system, something that needs no further discussion at this point (Hoffjann, 2002, pp. 183–186; Löffelholz, 2004, pp. 477–482; Lünenborg, 1999, pp. 108–110; Schantel, 2000, pp. 78–79, amongst others).⁸

What is interesting is the fact that meanwhile researchers formerly criticising the so-called determination hypothesis recognise that Baerns' methodological approach was in fact adequate to investigate the interrelations between journalism and PR (Bentele & Notthhaft, 2004, pp. 85, 98). Moreover Baerns herself (2009; see also 1985, pp. 19, 99) clarified that she did not formulate a determination hypothesis or supposed an only one-sided influence but already referred to interrelations.

The concept of interdependence between the two (sub) systems of PR and journalism forms the basis of the idea of co-evolution put forward by Löffelholz (2004), a concept introduced at the beginning of this article and taken on board for our subsequent considerations.⁹ However, as previously mentioned, the story of this co-evolution or development of the relationship between journalism and PR has not yet been pieced together. This would require a *historical perspective*. In order to get an idea of the origins of this relationship, it seems expedient to start with the research on the history of PR.¹⁰

3. On the origins of PR

Searching the available literature on the history of PR for information on their origins can lead to misconceptions (Szyszka, 2008, p. 382) as will be demonstrated later, e.g. “that modern PR was invented in the United States in the early twentieth century, and later exported around the globe” (Dinan & Miller, 2009, p. 250). In contrast, some authors see the origins or first precursors of PR in Antiquity (Bernays, 1952; Oeckl, 1976, pp. 92–95). In this case, PR is equated with propaganda,¹¹ which, to be consistent, would have to lead to a kind of world history of propaganda, as provided by Sturminger (1960).¹² The problem with this approach is that it yields no proper perspective on the precise specifics of PR and its relationship with journalism.

Our aim here is to clarify this by means of a short examination of the definitions of PR and propaganda, as well as of what differentiates them. For a long time, *propaganda* was used “as a concept signifying an institutionally organised movement” (Schieder & Dipper, 1984, p. 82), closely linked with the “political proselytising of dissenters” (p. 82) or a “policy of revolutionary change” (p. 93). After 1848 the concept of propaganda found a broader use to mean “political publicity (. . .) in the public arena” (p. 96), and by around the year 1900 it was also used as a synonym for “advertising” (p. 100).¹³ As demonstrated more recently by Arnold (2003; see also Westerbarkey, 2001, pp. 440–442), broadening the concept in this way, or equating the concepts of propaganda and PR (as well as advertising) is inadequate: whilst each are examples of persuasive communication, propaganda is connected not only with ideology but also with a totalitarian claim to absolute truth not present in PR (nor in advertising). In contrast, PR is public representation of *particular interests*, which – in contrast to propaganda – consciously takes into account the existence of rival interests or even responds to them (see also Donsbach & Wenzel, 2002, p. 375; Merten, 2000, p. 151; Ronneberger, 1977, pp. 19–23). In any case PR does have “a strong element of self-interest” (Senne & Moore, 2015, p. 327).

This is a good place to bring in a distinction between PR and *journalism*, which, in contrast to the representation or communication of particular interests on the part of PR, represents – not only according to systems theory approaches – an *autonomous external observation and mediation* of various interests in society (Altmeyden, 2000, p. 133; Arnold, 2003, p. 75; Jarren, 2000, p. 31; Luhmann, 1996, p. 173; Schönhagen, 1999; Wagner, 1991, pp. 51–62).¹⁴ Against this background the

⁸ Thus, Bentele et al., for instance, see the system of publicity (*publizistisches System*) as a subsystem of society, consisting of the subsystems journalism and PR (1997, p. 225); a similar perspective is taken by Ronneberger and Rühl (1992). In contrast, Szyszka (1997a, p. 212, footnote 5) and Löffelholz (1997, p. 188; 2004, pp. 478–479) conceptualise PR as a “system-inherent operation” or “operative characteristic” of societal subsystems such as politics or the economy. Accordingly, Hoffjann (2002, p. 185) conceives of “public relations exclusively as a subsystem of an organisation”.

⁹ As for the concept of evolution, taken originally from the natural sciences, it should be pointed out that it has “long become indispensable not least in the context of theories of social change” (Lübbe, 1977, p. 257). Social evolution describes irreversible processes of structural change occurring in a directional manner. Their directionality arises from the fact that social systems constantly have to adapt to changes in their environment, by making changes on their part, which are effected in principle in a rational, hence targeted way – under the changed framework conditions. The evolutionary processes themselves however may be described as “aimless” as those very changed conditions are arbitrary rather than intended by the social system itself. Their consequences and end may only be understood with hindsight (Lübbe, 1977, p. 257).

¹⁰ Meanwhile, this development attracted some interest from a journalism studies' point of view which deals with the rise of journalism as profession. Kutsch proposes to investigate the co-evolution of PR and journalism because he reckons that press departments offered interesting career opportunities for journalists in the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century in Germany (Kutsch, 2008, p. 309). Also Brettner points to the interplay of the two vocational fields (Szyszka, 2011, p. 26). And according to L'Etang who is targeting the time after 1945 in the UK “a significant number of journalists moved on to become public relations practitioners” (2004, p. 125).

¹¹ For criticism of equating both in such a way see also Bentele (1997, p. 77).

¹² See also the three-volume work by Buchli (1962a, 1962b, 1966) on the history of business advertising and propaganda, which defines advertising as an overall concept for both (1962a, p. 41).

¹³ See also the dissertation by Bussemer (2008) on the history of the concept of propaganda (pp. 25–41) as well as for more detail on the development of theoretical approaches on propaganda.

¹⁴ Saxer's thoughts (2005, pp. 363–365) on the ideal type of distinction between the “professional cultures” of (news) journalism and PR as well as their overlap contain similar characteristics (“autonomy” and “self-standardisation” on the one hand, “ordered communication” and “external standardisation” on the other). At the same time, they are similar to those characterisations developed by Wagner (1991, pp. 51–62) working from the older, ideal type of distinction between journalist and publicist, also with a view to the overlapping elements.

question that arises is how the development of PR as the representation of particular interests is connected with journalism as a system of external observation and mediation.

Saxer, who argues in favour of conceiving of PR “within the framework of a theory of evolving societies” (1992, p. 50), describes PR as a “differentiation (. . .) from the advertising system” (p. 60) in three phases: rudimentary beginnings in the late 19th century,¹⁵ a further flourishing following the First and then Second World War,¹⁶ and the expansion of institutional PR into practically all societal subsystems in the 1970s and 1980s with the transformation into “information societies” (p. 62).

However, on closer inspection, this conception of the development of PR does not stand up to historic facts. To mention only two aspects (which will be explored later), PR (1st) established and institutionalised itself in diverse areas of society much earlier than the 1970s/1980s, and (2nd), by no means did this always happen by way of differentiation from advertising, as can e.g. be seen in communal PR.¹⁷

For a long time, systematic examinations of the (German-language) history of PR were rather basic (e.g. Binder, 1983; Hategan, 1991) and the findings they yielded still “fairly slim” (Szyszka, 2008, p. 382). One push towards paying closer attention to the subject was certainly provided by the conference organised in 1996 by the PR section of the German Communication Association (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Publizistik- und Kommunikationswissenschaft, DGPUK). On this occasion, the central significance of a historical perspective in the defining of PR was mentioned several times. Various participants furthermore expressed the opinion that the *genesis of PR stood in close conjunction with the history of journalism and the development of mass media*. The thesis that PR was as old as humankind was, however, rejected (Fröhlich, 1997; Liebert, 1997). The following year saw the interesting compilation of case studies of German PR history by Kunczik (1997), which is most relevant for the article in hand. Since then, a few more contributions have been published, detailing the history of PR in the 20th century (Heinelt, 2003; Lange, 2010; Szyszka, 2008, 2011; amongst others). The “early history” (Szyszka, 2008, p. 386; 2011, p. 28) or “proto-PR” (Watson, 2014, p. 874) however,¹⁸ which appears fundamental to our central question of how PR emerged in mutual interaction with journalism, has barely been pursued further. Some time ago, the doctoral dissertation of Bieler (2010) targeted this question by investigating several German institutions and the development of their PR departments or activities.

4. First results on the co-evolution of journalism and PR

Interesting pointers to a co-evolution of PR and journalism or mass media can be found in a few publications on the history of PR, most of which refer initially to press relations.¹⁹ To date, these pointers have not been systematically merged. This is the task we aim to perform over the following pages, at least by means of an initial examination of the available literature, taking into account the beginnings of PR in the most varied areas of society. Alongside external representations of the early days of PR, the self-portrayals of early PR protagonists can be particularly illuminating sources.

A first pointer to a connection between the emergence of PR and developments in journalism may be found in the speech held by sociologist Brinkmann at the aforementioned German Sociologists Conference in 1930. Brinkmann refers to the fact that it had been modern newspapers themselves, with their “unstoppable integration of all areas of life in its ‘publicity’ that nurtured (. . .) their own *adversary* or even master”: “the press offices and press departments”, which those days everyone in the public eye, or hoping to be in it, “from state and municipal authorities to the great artists and hospital doctors” considered necessary to establish. Thereby “an unforeseeable competition with the autonomous news production of newspapers, telegraphic and news agencies” has been opened up (Brinkmann, 1931/1985, p. 499; emphasis author’s own). This perspective would make the differentiation of PR a kind of backlash against the development of the press or “autonomous news production” by the mass media. However, Brinkmann’s reference to an expansion of “publicity” of the press does not explain what exactly triggers this backlash.

Taking Brinkmann’s suggestions as a starting point, in the sense of a guiding question or first thesis, and following it up in the historical material, in many cases a typical pattern in the emergence of PR becomes apparent. As we will demonstrate in the following, using various examples, we found *two main motivations* for the beginning of press relations:

¹⁵ These are seen to be connected with the growing industrialisation as well as an increased need for legitimacy in an ideologically polarised public sphere (Saxer, 1992, pp. 58–59). Oeckl creates a similar concept, stipulating a first phase (following the precursors) of PR (1976, pp. 95–96; see also Szyszka, 1997b, p. 113; Szyszka, 1997b; Szyszka, 1997b, p. 113).

¹⁶ This is seen as occurring against the backdrop of established mass markets, the role of electronic media as a mass media advertising vehicle, as well as a de-ideologisation happening in pluralistic societies (Saxer, 1992, pp. 60–62).

¹⁷ For criticism see also Szyszka (1997b, p. 124); Szyszka, 1997b; Szyszka (1997b, p. 124); on communal PR see also Liebert (1997, pp. 87–89).

¹⁸ Szyszka identifies the beginnings of PR from the mid-19th as “early history”, at a time when they did not yet, to his mind, constitute an “independent profession” – possibly a fairly daring conclusion given the little available work on this phase – while discerning a “professional history” proper from the 1950s onwards (Szyszka, 2008, p. 386; 2011, p. 28; Szyszka, 2008; Szyszka, 2008, p. 386; 2011, p. 28). Without focusing the German-language countries Watson is approaching this a bit more sophisticated. He distinguishes between “proto-PR” which he identifies as “public relations-like strategies and actions that occurred before publicity and public relations became discussed entities in the late 19th century, (. . .), and ‘public relations’ itself” (Watson, 2014, p. 874). But “[t]he exact boundary may never be defined” (p. 874). He states that “publicity, press agency and institutionalised communication activities were widely evident in some countries from around 1875 onwards” (p. 874).

¹⁹ The lack of familiarity with these publications may well be due in part to the fact that some of these publications date from the time of National Socialism (e.g. Sperr, 1939).

- a lack of, or, from the viewpoint of those concerned, falsified reporting, connected with the partiality of the media or journalism at that time;
- the fact that large target groups or sections of the public, or indeed the entire public realm, could not be reached anymore without using mass media.

Both motives have been barely discussed up to now. That is why we focus on them and not on other equally important ones like in-house necessities to differentiate tasks or an increased drive for legitimisation (Bentele 2013). The latter will be touched upon later. Both above mentioned motives can be found in the realm of state publicity²⁰ as well as in companies such as Krupp or Siemens (Bieler, 2010, pp. 204–206, 220–221; Binder, 1983, p. 74; Hategan, 1991, pp. 120–123; Kunczik, 1997, pp. 188–198; Szyszka, 2011, p. 23; Zipfel, 1997) and with associations and lobby groups, such as the Union of German Iron and Steel Manufacturers (*Verein Deutscher Eisen- und Stahlindustrieller*, Kunczik, 1997, p. 273).²¹ There, systematic press relations began or were intensified in the second half of the 19th century. This is also true for municipalities which started working with the press in parallel to stronger local reporting, becoming increasingly institutionalised as early as 1906 in Magdeburg with the foundation of press departments (*Nachrichtenämter*) (Groth, 1929, pp. 353–362; Herbst, 1923; Küppers, 1914; Liebert, 1999; Schöne, 1922/23, pp. 516–525; Szyszka, 2008, p. 385). Bieler (2010, pp. 93–109) retrieved another example from the German city Stuttgart. This shows that PR were neither imported, post-1945, from the US nor institutionalised and extended to all societal subsystems only from the 1970s/1980s onwards.

As for the *first mentioned motive* behind the emergence of PR, i.e. the lack of, or from the viewpoint of those concerned, falsified reporting, the given cause is nearly always a partisan reporting serving vested interests. The background to this is the heyday of the partisan press in the 19th century in Germany. First pointers to this trend can be traced back to the 1848 revolution and prevailed in the 1870s due to the emergence of a national parliament and political cleavages in society (Behmer 2005, pp. 42–46; Wilke, 2007, pp. 50–51).²² Wuttke, for instance, is one source who tells us about the beginnings of the PR work by the German Catholic associations, which had, “[taken] offence at the news reaching the public on the negotiations of their ‘general assemblies’ and (...) [complained] about misrepresentations”. In order to prevent this, in 1865 Germany’s general assembly of the Catholic associations in Trier had “lithographed reports produced and sent to the big papers” (Wuttke, 1866/1875, p. 119) – with some success, as noted by Wuttke, as well as by Lukas (1867). The latter adds that in “earlier years (...) the public papers, the liberal ones in particular, [had] published reports on the meetings that were often distorted to near-caricatures. As there was no reason to doubt the honourable intentions of the relevant editorial departments, if only they were better served, the assembly decided to authorise an ad hoc correspondence bureau (...)” (Lukas, 1867, p. 52; emphasis author’s own).²³

Explicitly stating the same reason – to counter lack of or partisan reporting – the Union of German Feminist Organisations (*Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine*) founded a press department (*Presse-Zentrale*) in 1912 (Bieler, 2010, p. 232; Kunczik, 1997, p. 345). As described by Sperr (1939, p. 30), in the early 20th century the municipal authorities also began public or press relations as they were unable to “effectively counter the false reports” frequently appearing in the press and “[were seeing] significant disadvantages for their work in the current reporting practices of the local newspapers, which had increasingly become the bearer of public opinion and with whom a good understanding was desirable, not least for reasons of common sense”. Liebert (1999, p. 409) also explains that communal PR in the first third of the 20th century had seen itself as a “counterweight to the increasing politicisation (...) of communal life and the ‘biased’ media landscape”.

Again, in all areas of society we find pointers to the *second motive*: those involved in PR were conscious of the fact that large target groups or sections of the public, or the public in general, could not be reached anymore without using mass media.²⁴ Thus in 1920 the German Empire’s Post and Telegraph Administration (*Reichs-Post- und – Telegraphenverwaltung*) stated in its official publication (*Amtsblatt*) that the relationship with the press required “constant and sustained care”. This was more important, as the audience repeatedly turned to the newspapers with complaints about the state of the postal, telegraphic and telephone service: “However, the editorships are only able to counter these complaints in an informed yet restrained manner, if they are informed by a competent authority (...) about the general causes of the complaints. Experience shows, however, that there is often a lack of sustained mutual communication between the postal authorities and the editorships of medium-sized and smaller newspapers in particular. It is those, however, who represent the great majority, *influencing a very wide circle of the population*. This makes it a matter of urgency to create (...) close contact with the local editorships” (as cited in Herbst, 1923, p. 109; emphasis author’s own).

²⁰ Kunczik refers to state publicity at the time of Frederic the Great (II.; 1712–1786), who, as well as using “ruthless methods of exerting influence in the media”, also ran press relations (Kunczik, 1997, p. 69; see also Hategan, 1991, pp. 117–118). The recurring main figure of reference however is Bismarck (Binder, 1983, pp. 69–71; Herbst, 1923, p. 9; Kunczik, 1997, pp. 89–95). For more detail see also Groth (1929, pp. 3–217, 308–335). Of great interest, also with a view to an institutionalisation of official press relations in Germany before the start of World War I, is the relevant dissertation by Schmidt (2006). For more information on state-run news policy in Austria, see Dörfner and Pensold (2001) and Nessmann (2000, pp. 214–223).

²¹ In Buchli’s work (1966, p. 407) one can find, unfortunately without specifying the exact point in time, a mention of a press service of the Centre Party (*Zentrumspartei*) reportedly created “early on”, apparently in the 1860s at the latest.

²² The development of the “political opinion press” (Meier 2008, p. 250) can be observed at the same time in Switzerland.

²³ However, no decision was taken at the time to establish a permanent central “press bureau” (Lukas, 1867, p. 10).

²⁴ For more on this, see also Blöbaum (1994, p. 298): “These press departments are an immediate reaction to the increasing significance of journalism”.

What we see here is an obviously increased drive for legitimisation as another motive that Hoffjann (2002, p. 184) explains with the “increasing differentiation of society and the proportionately rising number of observers’ perspectives”, and that he considers as trigger for the “emergence” of PR.²⁵ This shows that the second motive is no mere reaction to developments in the press sector. It is also a consequence of developments in society and economy, which changed the relationship that companies and organisations had with the public and which for its part is again linked in a reciprocal way with the development of the press sector (Wilke, 2008).²⁶

By the way, the statements in the aforementioned official publication of the German Reich’s postal system are proof of a fairly modern view of press and PR: it recommended cultivating contacts with the newspapers and the publication of news as well as “inviting representatives of the press to view large transport facilities” (as cited in Herbst, 1923, p. 110).

Another good example illustrating the second motivation comes from the mid-19th century: a Protestant theologian by the name of Johann Hinrich Wichern, who would go on to found the “Inner Mission”,²⁷ was already using press relations in a targeted way as far back as 1832 to bring his social rehabilitation project for neglected adolescents, the “Rauhe Haus” (rough house) in Hamburg–Horn, to the attention of a broader public. In this way he attracted best potential donors (Döring, 1997).

Furthermore, there are indications that PR consciously was oriented towards journalistic routines from the start. This means we are already looking at the typical “effort by public relations to adapt to journalism” (Donsbach & Wenzel, 2002, p. 377). In 1924, for instance, the later head of the press office of the I. G. Farben chemical company, Hans Brettner, points to the fact that a representation of industrial interests had to know “the journalistic routines, which had over time come to form an important and [as he put it at the time] ‘painstaking code of honour’ of the editing profession, as to not expose themselves to a backlash in the choice of their means” (as cited in Binder, 1983, p. 73; see also Zipfel, 1997, p. 213).

Alongside press relations, advertisements and in-house media have from the start been means of PR. For instance, when in 1914 the Swiss firm Maggi was subjected to a massive press campaign against its role in the Paris milk trade, and not given the chance to communicate its views on this issue in Parisian daily newspapers, the company resorted to posters and flyers (Kunczik, 1997, pp. 215–217). Incidentally, Maggi had established an office for advertising and press relations, “Reclame- und Presse-Büro” as early as 1886 (p. 209).

However, advertisements and in-house media were expensive and had limited effect. As explained, again by Wuttke, using the example of official publications, there was an awareness of the credibility issue associated with such publications early on: he described how governments, after the introduction of freedom of the press in 1848, “all of a sudden realised to their horror that their official newspapers no longer enjoyed any attention and that readers were not prepared to believe in its assurances and representations. (...) There was little confidence in the veracity of issues discussed in the governmental publication for the very reason of where it was published” (Wuttke, 1866/1875, p. 136; see also Kunczik, 1997, p. 84). This problem is once again highly topical today, given the new opportunities to spread everyone’s own media on the Internet.

The two key motivations described serve to underline the fact that PR did indeed emerge, if not exclusively, as a reaction from societal actors who did not (or no longer) see their interests adequately represented in the mass media. Brinkmann’s statement may be cast more precisely, in that this backlash was not only brought about by the *autonomy* of mass-media news production, but by *access barriers* to mass-mediated communication or the media based public sphere. To a certain degree, these barriers emerged due to the autonomy of the mass media and its intrinsic constraints of selection and concentration, but most of all because of the partiality of the media at that time.²⁸

The emergence of PR contributed to changes in journalism and therefore the press; this constitutes a first indication of the mutual influence of PR and journalism: PR then was one of the reasons behind the increase in journalistic material, which together with technical innovations and other changes in society enabled the emergence of the modern mass media as well as leading to the differentiation of editorial structures (Wilke, 2008, pp. 265, 291–292). Blöbaum describes in detail these processes of journalistic differentiation, taking place from the mid-19th century onwards. But he only refers explicitly to the influence of PR in the context of local reporting, as well as briefly in connection with the gathering of information and role differentiation (Blöbaum, 1994, pp. 212, 231–232, 290).²⁹

The historical context in which PR developed, which needs to be substantiated further by more in-depth historical studies, also serves to emphasise the view that PR by no means represents a possibly illegitimate, ‘objectionable’ attempt to gain undue influence or even a threat to free reporting. On the contrary, PR is a legitimate means of securing the participation of individual interests in public communication. Following Ronneberger (1977, p. 19), PR may even be perceived as a “consti-

²⁵ See also Szyszka (2008, p. 383), who relates the development of PR with “the beginning of a society of organisations”, which in Germany manifested itself “in the emergence of pluralistic structures in society and the differentiation of various types of organisation in the mid-19th century”, enjoying “wide consensus”. See also Bieler 2010, p. 53; Saxer, 1992, p. 58; Szyszka, 2011, pp. 19–20 footnote 15.

²⁶ This goes beneath the scope of our contribution but needs definitely to be investigated in-depth in further research as suggested e.g. by L’Etang (2014, pp. xiii–xiv).

²⁷ The “Inner Mission” (*Innere Mission*) was an evangelist movement to aid the poor and sick.

²⁸ What is also interesting in this context is that the development of PR in the USA is associated with attacks on “muckrakers”, i.e. investigative journalists, as “a weapon in the hands of American big industry fighting back for public opinion” (Kunczik, 1997, p. 2; see also Emery & Emery, 1996, pp. 300–301).

²⁹ As detailed in footnote 2, we lack the space here to deepen the further co-evolutionary development of PR and journalism.

tuting factor” (p. 20) in pluralistic societies, in facilitating expression and thus the discourse between the various interests in society.³⁰

Taking these results as a base, we suggest the following *definition of PR* that tries to do justice to the specific co-evolutionary character of its genesis: PR is the expression of a rationalisation and professionalisation of the communicative behaviour of societal actors or organisations in the light of access barriers to the media based public sphere, in order to make their interests heard in the public discourse. Thus, it is oriented towards the principles of the autonomous mass media. Concomitantly, it is a reaction to an increasing need for legitimisation in society.

5. Discussion

The results detailed above seem to indicate that PR emerged as a process of adaptation of communicative behaviour on the part of societal actors or organisations. This was triggered by the performance of the journalistic system, perceived by them as limited. At the same time we see an increasing social pressure on organisations to legitimate themselves. What is interesting is that this process of adaptation is theorised in the mediated social communication (MSC) approach (Fürst, Schönhausen & Bosshart, 2015). Wagner (1980) conceptualises the development of communication in society, on the basis of work by Riepl (1913) and Knies (1857/1996; see also Hardt, 2001, pp. 67–83) and others, as a succession of processes of rationalisation. Thus, mass communication constitutes the temporary conclusion of these processes and, in modern complex societies, enables comprehensive social communication through intermediation of mass media and journalism. The latter publishes the statements of various societal groups and actors in a concentrated and compact form. This makes the statements and views of the various stakeholders and organisations observable for the entire society, thereby enabling further communication. This constant intermediation of communication is performed autonomously, i.e. not serving particular interests but the public discourse as a whole (Schönhausen, 2004, pp. 117–130; Wagner, 1980).

For its part, journalistic intermediation provokes processes of “counter rationalisation” (Wagner, 1980, p. 23), PR being one of them.³¹ The autonomisation and concentration of mass media and journalism lead to the fact that the communicative partners are dependent on – and thus at the mercy of – the intermediation of the autonomous mass media. Over the course of their development, mass media and journalism have increasingly tended towards partisan mediation. In order to safeguard or optimise their chances of participating in public discourse under these circumstances, communicative partners within society reacted by establishing their own, alternative media or by what is known as “message politics” (Wagner, 1980, p. 25) including PR.

This in fact models exactly the co-evolutionary events surrounding the emergence of PR, as demonstrated above using historical examples. As this concept of rationalisation processes forms part of a comprehensive theory of communication in society, it opens up the opportunity, as demanded time and again in the relevant literature (e.g. Schantel, 2000, p. 86), to integrate PR into the context of the entire mass communication process. Hence, also the public can be taken into consideration. Since the 1970s there has been a corresponding model of mass communication (Wagner, 1978, pp. 39–47),³² allowing to specify the role of PR therein. In this model groups or organisations and their spokespersons (acting as representatives) are conceptualised as communicative partners with changing roles as sources and addressees. Their statements are mediated by journalism. In this perspective, those involved in PR are communicative partners that can be sources as well as addressees in mass communication.³³ Thus, PR is providing vital input for the ongoing social discourse which is mediated by journalism (Ronneberger, 1977).

In fact, the MSC approach also offers links with concepts of systems theory central to (German) discussion of journalism and PR. This may be shown using the example of the specific concept of audience. According to the MSC approach, the audience of mass media is identical to the communicative partners, whose statements – or rather those of representatives of groups they are belonging to – are (potentially) mediated by the media. This in fact correlates with the idea of systems theory, locating the primary function of mass communication in allowing society to observe itself – or to mediate “discourses of self-reflection”, as Jarren (2000, p. 23) puts it. In this way, the members of society – as an audience – observe in mass media the communication of representatives of diverse (groups of) interests that they themselves are a member of, for instance as members of a political party, as employees, and so forth. Thus, the members of society form both the audience of the mass media and their sources.

If we look at the matter in this way, the central issue of the relationship between PR and journalism takes on a different perspective, too: it is no longer primarily about the extent to which PR releases are mediated or what share they have in media coverage. The central issue at hand is much more *whose releases* or in other words which communicative partners

³⁰ For criticism of Ronneberger see Kunczik (1993, pp. 125–133), amongst others.

³¹ Another counter-reaction would be e.g. buying advertising place. But in contrast to *press* relations those measures do not require obeying to journalistic routines as shown above.

³² Both Bentele et al. (1997) and Schantel (2000) are referring to similar but less elaborated models providing for non-journalistic “communicators”: the model created by Westley/MacLean (in 1957) and/or the arena model developed by Neidhardt & Gerhards (from the 1990s). Incidentally, in terms of content the latter bears striking similarities to Wagner’s aforementioned model of mass communication, developed much earlier.

³³ Instead of the term “sources” sometimes “speaker” or “actor” are used as well; the latter lacks precision in that it comprises both the subject and object of statements. It should be emphasized that mediation here refers by no means to a mere transference, but rather comprises the selection of both the mediated communicative partners as well as their messages and the transformation of the latter.

or groups (i.e. normally their representatives) are mediated and thus made accessible for self-observation and subsequent communication in society, and *how* this is done. It is less important whether this mediated communication is based on PR releases or other sources: as Schantel (2000, pp. 72–73, 85) mentions, within the aforementioned function of the mass media system, the opinions of journalists or the reports they have researched themselves do not necessarily have a higher value than reports from PR sources. However, this leads us to the next question, whether communicative partners or interests that are *not organised*, respectively do not run PR and do not have representatives, might have reduced chances, or no chance at all, of mediation in mass communication.³⁴ If so, this would be a limitation of the function to enable self-observation by society and discourses about self-understanding. Journalism's use of PR might then lead to a situation where “the chances of mediation of those with plenty of opportunities for communication are becoming ever greater, and those of the ones already with little opportunity become ever fewer, reducing their chance of making themselves and their interests heard at all” (Wagner, 1980, p. 26). Both issues can be investigated with appropriate content analyses incorporating the level of mediated communicative partners (Schönhagen, 2000).

6. Conclusion

To summarise, this first historical analysis shows that the development of public relations (PR) in Germany is linked with the establishment of autonomous mass media and the dominance of partisan journalism. In its origins, PR seemingly represented a reaction on the part of the communicative partners against access barriers to mass communication and the public sphere. Concomitantly, an increasing social pressure on organisations to legitimate themselves as well as the growing importance of the media-based public sphere – due to stronger differentiation of society – contributed to the rise of PR. These results of historical analyses can be integrated into the context of a comprehensive theory of mass communication, i.e. Wagner's (1980) approach of rationalisation of social communication as part of the mediated social communication (MSC) approach. As mentioned above, these ideas may also be related to concepts of systems theory.

Apart from these preliminary findings for the German-language area, there are some studies concerning the history of PR in other countries, where we can find hints towards similar motives and developments. Especially the emergence of PR in the wake of expanding mass media has been observed in several countries, irrespective of time. There is e.g. evidence from Japan in the 1960s (Yamamura, Ikari & Kenmochi, 2013, p. 150) and the United Arab Emirates in the 1970/90s (Badran, Turk & Walters, 2009, pp. 201, 210; Kirat, 2006, pp. 255–259). In addition, there is some evidence for the first motive stated by Brinkmann that PR emerged due to biased reporting or the neglect of certain interests in media coverage: following Yamamura et al., this motive also applies to the case of Japan (2013, p. 151). It can also be observed in Turkey later on in the 1970s (Bıçakçı & Hürmeriç, 2013, p. 95). Eventually, the second motive which states that large target groups or sections of the public, or indeed the entire public realm, could not be reached anymore without using mass media was found in literature concerning Russia and the USA (Guth, 2000, p. 197).

In conclusion, it is to say that more intense historical research into the early days of PR in the entire German-language area, as well as beyond, is urgently needed. To achieve this, further studying of the historical sources, in particular the archives of companies, associations and syndicates, as well as other organisations, is essential.

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³⁴ This is why comprehensive journalistic investigation is indispensable. It serves to include a wide range of voices, not only those present by PR. Therefore it is important “to make the silent voices heard” (Hansen, 2013, p. 678).

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