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# The Transformation and Professionalization of Political Communication

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## Introduction

In reviewing the literature in the field of political communication produced in the past half-century, one is inevitably struck by the speed, intensity and depth of change in the structures of communication and in the ways in which political communication is carried out. In the case of the former, we have seen the internet force the older media of communication – television, the printed press, radio – to adapt their styles and contents to a new environment. In the case of the latter, we have seen the emergence of ‘spin’ and the birth of the ‘spin doctor’, the growth of the ‘public relations state’ and the growing interest amongst political parties in ‘political marketing’.

In these and other ways it is abundantly clear that things are not what they were and that new arrangements, structures, practices and ways of thinking abound. That, in other words, the nature of political communication – understood here as incorporating the means and practices whereby the communication of politics takes place – has been *transformed* and that there has been ‘a marked change in its nature, form or appearance’ (Compact Oxford English Dictionary online definition). The aim of this book is to explore the meaning of that transformation.

At the same time as exploring the nature and content of that transformation, this book will also highlight one of the dimensions of that transformation, that is, the professionalization of political communication. If transformation implies ‘a marked change in nature, form or appearance’, then the greater degree of professionalization that is now brought to bear on the conduct of political communication is one such transformation. The conduct of political communication in the late 20th century and certainly in the 21st century is an increasingly professional affair: the political parties are now more profes-

sional than ever, as are the candidates for office, party members and the many consultants brought in to advise on campaigning and strategy. Whether such a level of professionalization is part of a developmental process whereby things gradually change 'for the better' is clearly an issue that has to be discussed and more so since it may sit awkwardly alongside the notion of transformation as a *marked change* in the nature, form or appearance of things. Nevertheless, the two notions of transformation and professionalization are suggestive of change at a level that produces a set of arrangements or practices that can be interpreted as being very different from the past. One example of this – and many others will be offered in the book – relates to how political actors have changed their communication practices vis-à-vis the media in order to gain advantage from their appearances, statements and activities. This is discussed more fully in Chapter 5.

In suggesting that such change can be labelled 'professionalization', it is clear that a particular meaning is attached to it. In keeping with the work of Christina Holtz-Bacha, professionalization is seen as:

a process of adaptation to, and as such a necessary consequence of, changes in the political system on the one side and the media system on the other and in the relationship of the two systems. These changes follow from the modernization of society, which is a development that is still going on and will take place in similar political systems sooner or later. Professionalisation in this sense is a general and not culture-bound concept. Its actual appearance and the degree of professionalisation in a given country are however dependent on a country's specific social and political structures and processes. (Negrine et al., 2007: 63)

More generally, professionalization suggests an ongoing process where structures and practices are continually revised and updated in order to make them more 'rational' and more 'appropriate' for the conduct of politics at any particular moment of time. We thus need to understand developments in political communication as part and parcel of a long and continuing process of adaptation and change whereby, for example, the skills of those outside politics are increasingly applied to the conduct of politics. But more than this, those who possess such skills – 'the professionals' – and the practices they advocate, in turn come to influence those in politics. Politics then begins to change from the inside, as it were, as the lessons of the world of commerce become internalized: political parties become more professional in their activi-

ties, as do the politicians who are now much more aware of the needs of proper communication skills, dress and manner.

Professionalization can be seen as a process of continual self-improvement and change towards what is deemed to be a 'better' way of doing things, be it winning an election or ensuring successful governance, that is made possible by technological and communications innovations, as well as a more general process of skills specialization. The idea of professionalization also encompasses the willingness to change, and the motivations underpinning that willingness.

The process of professionalization, however, takes place within societies that are themselves undergoing a process of modernization, that is, a process of differentiation and secularization, that:

leads to growing numbers of subsystems of all kinds that develop to satisfy the specialized demands of particular groups and social actors. The rise of these subsystems undermines the traditional aggregative structures of socialization, authority, community, and consensus, producing social fragmentation and exclusion. (Swanson and Mancini, 1996: 253)

The idea of professionalization takes from the idea of modernization the knowledge that functional differentiation is part of the process of change but it does not see this as necessarily related to specific factors in contemporary political communication only. In this way, the idea of professionalization, as used here, cuts across the idea of modernization and other equally contested concepts such as Americanization and homogenization, since it deals with a more general process of change taking place in contemporary societies. (A fuller discussion of both professionalization and modernization can be found in Chapter 7.)

For this book to argue successfully that there has been a transformation and professionalization of political communication, it must demonstrate that there has been a *marked change* in, say, practices over the past century or so. It must offer a historical review of political communication that is sufficiently full and robust to confirm the nature and extent of the transformations that have taken place. The intention, it should quickly be added, is not to provide a historical account of changes in political communication per se but to draw on historical change as a way of providing a background that helps us understand contemporary events. Rather than take it for granted that there has been a wholesale transformation of political communication, this book will argue that the roots – and routes – of change

are more complex and long-term than is often suggested, that there are both continuities and discontinuities in the changing nature and conduct of political communication and that both the continuities and discontinuities need to be explored.

In approaching the subject from this perspective, this book moves away from interpretations of change that are centred on particular technologies, be it the press or television. Instead, it suggests that there are different and equally valid ways of exploring changes in the content and nature of political communication that foreground significant continuities in the ways in which those who engage in politics adapt their practices to changing conditions in society, including changing media. Those continuities illustrate the extent to which political actors, for instance, are alert to changes in their environments and react to them or even sometimes introduce changes that then impact on the nature and content of political communication more widely. An example of the former would be the widening of the electorate in the early 20th century (see Chapter 2), of the latter, the greater centralization of government communication under New Labour from 1997 onwards (see Chapter 7). Although the focus will be primarily on the interaction between the world of politics – conceived here as governments and politicians and those who work within their orbits – and the worlds of the media – both ‘old’ and ‘new’ – the examples chosen to illustrate the arguments are widely drawn. Inevitably, though, many are taken from political communication at election times because those moments can be taken to reflect the coming together of trends and tendencies in the political culture more widely. Nevertheless, the lessons to be drawn from these, and other examples, feed into the broad historical sweep that is presented in this book as a way of drawing attention to the contemporary within a larger landscape of historical change.

### **Understanding historical change**

As we begin to explore those complex changes, however, it is crucial that we also pay some attention to the way in which we come to analyse *how historical change is itself understood*. To put the matter fairly crudely, how do we make connections between practices in the past and today? Are we justified in seeing a continuous line of development between then and now, or is it more appropriate to see breaks and thus fairly loose connections between them? Furthermore, what sort of evidence would we need if we were to argue for continuity or discon-

tinuity? Whilst these questions may appear esoteric, there are many examples in the book which call on the careful reader to make sense of events or practices across periods of time. Without that broad historical grounding, how is it possible to argue for or against transformation or in support of *marked changes* in political communication over time?

The questions of method and of historical understanding are, therefore, never far from the surface of much that appears in this book. At times, these questions intrude fully in the text, as in Chapter 2, when the discussion considers the extent to which each new medium of communication altered the nature and content of political communication. Does the 'new' completely replace the 'old' or is the process of adaptation subtle and intensive? These sorts of questions are familiar to the historian and the lessons from historiography are worth bearing in mind. As Black and MacRaild point out:

For historians and students of history today, the point about the passage of time ... is that we must strike a balance between judging the past by our own standards and entirely standing the past in its own frozen compartment of history. The problem, then, is one of extremes. If, on the one hand, we adopt a present-minded stance in our approach, we risk overplaying continuities, or indeed manufacturing continuities, between us and our past which do not actually exist. If, on the other hand, we adopt a historicist position, or posit the hermetically sealed epochal approach to history ... we risk removing any thread which might connect our past and our present. This notion of time, of change and continuity, or similarity and difference, is the hardest balance to achieve; yet it is central to our understanding of the nature of history and the dynamics of social development. (2000: 19)

As well as these problems which are indicative of the range of problems that one must confront when studying change *within* a specific political context, for example Britain, there are others that are relevant when studying change *across* political contexts. In the case of the latter, it is a matter of exploring change across time, as well as across nations, and across media. A good example of these sorts of considerations is explored in Chapter 7 when the subject of 'Americanization' of media practices is tackled precisely because it shows how interactions between different systems alter practices across time and space. Such crossings of boundaries in the 20th century are part of what Werner and Zimmerman call for in their propositions for 'histoire croisée', that is, an approach to historical studies that includes explorations of

'comparative approaches, transfers, and, more generally, sociocultural interactions' (Werner and Zimmerman, 2006: 32).

This is particularly important from the 20th century onwards as technologies of communication not only changed forms and speeds of communication within one political and social system, but enabled speedier communication – and the transfer of forms – across physical boundaries as well as political and social systems. Unlike the printed press, radio and film moved across boundaries very easily and shaped and reshaped the forms of communication that took place within one political and social system: British film-goers could watch American films, as could Egyptian film-goers; British radio listeners in the 1920s could listen to commercial services from Luxembourg as well as the BBC's own output; and television viewers in 1950s Britain would become familiar with the content of American television through imports, alongside growing familiarity with commercial and non-commercial broadcasting. The internet completely breaks down any limitations of a physical or time-based kind.

As important as this 'collapsing of time and space' for the study of transformations in political communication, is the study of inter-media influences and continuities (or discontinuities). We may be familiar with the study of the impact of television on political communication but what of the impact of radio or film on political communication and of the links between one and the other? Did radio establish a framework for political communication that was then used for television? Are there differences between how one medium can be used compared with another, and how do we include them in our explorations? As Douglas Craig has observed, there are some important similarities and differences that one can take into account in looking at media over the past century or so:

Although all national candidates after 1920 used newsreels to reach cinema audiences, few bothered with the time and expense involved in full-scale film production. ... Radio and television, on the other hand, evolved new forms of political advertisements, provided candidates with quick production and distribution facilities, and ... their operators were generally receptive to the needs of those candidates with the financial resources to employ them. (Craig, 2000: 174)

The three examples briefly presented here illustrate why understanding change is so important. The first relates to the changing organizational structures of political parties; the second to the chang-

ing nature of technologies of communication, and the third to the place of 'spin' in modern politics.

### ***Example 1: Changes in the structures of political parties***

In contemporary Western democracies, political parties have become lean organizations primarily directed at gaining political power. They have become, in the eyes of many, professionally run organizations pursuing electoral success, that is, professional electoral parties. The reasons why they have become transformed in this way will be explored in greater detail in later chapters, but it may be useful to identify some of the reasons here because they form an important part of the overall argument of this book.

Modern political parties are, in essence, organizations with particular types of characteristics. They are made up of a collection of individuals who have come together to push forward a particular agenda for the way a country is to be organized and run. Crucially, modern political parties are not loose federations nor are they 'flat' in their organizational structures. They are, increasingly, hierarchical organizations led by a small cadre of permanent employees who serve the political party as a whole and the leader more specifically.

With minor variations, this description would be valid for any of the major parties across Western democratic systems. There are obvious and significant differences between, say, the American and European models of political parties but the essential features remain unchanged, namely, a collection of individuals centred around a leader (or, more simply, an individual in the case of the US) seeking to persuade citizens to vote him or her into office.

But there are two features of the modern political parties that deserve to be mentioned and that are increasingly significant for our analysis of the processes and conduct of political communication. The first relates to funding; the second, to the membership of political parties. In many ways, these features are intertwined.

### **Funding**

In the absence of unlimited state funding for political parties, funds must be collected from individual members, supporters and sponsors. The greater and more expensive the needs of the political party organization – for example in respect of employees, premises, political activities, canvassing, electoral expenses – the greater the amount of funds needed. In the summer of 2006, for example, the Labour Party faced a

cash crisis as it was revealed that it had an overall deficit of £27 million and an operating deficit of £14.5 million in 2005. Jobs, it emerged, were likely to be lost in order to close the gap (Woodward, 2006).

The millions of pounds required to run a party and its activities do not usually come out of ordinary members' party subscriptions. Not only are there too few members for this to be a source of substantial funding, but individual donations from ordinary members of the party are likely to fall short of what may be needed. This can make parties dependent on special 'loans' or large donations from wealthy individuals.<sup>1</sup> But if they do not want to become dependent on a few large donors – whether wealthy individuals or trade unions – parties need to draw on funds from their members.

### Members

Members, however, do not usually want to be taken for granted. In an increasingly centralized political party structure, members are in danger of being seen as little more than fodder, taken for granted but given little in return. The danger for political parties is that members become insignificant *in the policy- and decision-making process of the party*. This has affected the Labour Party in recent years as it has seen its membership numbers tumble to around a quarter of a million (see Chapter 3). But the Labour Party is by no means unique and other parties have also suffered. In his report on the funding of political parties in Britain, Sir Hayden Phillips pointed out that:

Our mass political parties, which sustained our democracy for most of the twentieth century, now seem to be in decline. Fifty years ago one in 11 of the electorate belonged to a political party. Today, that ratio is down to one in 88. (2007: 1)

The danger for parties is that they become centralized, insular and cut off from their core members. They cease to be mass membership parties and cease to be connected in any significant way with the public at large: just over 61% of the British electorate voted in the 2005 election.

The consequences of these two factors are significant for how parties act both in political contests and in the way they govern. Insularity will shield them from their members but it will undermine their support overall; it will also undermine their prospects of being able to run a *national* party organization on a day-to-day basis. On the other hand, a lack of a hierarchical and centralized organizational structure

can create havoc and is ill-suited to the modern media age which tends to dislike chaos as it seeks those in responsible positions.

Political parties must therefore continually adapt to changing circumstances, be they in relation to funding, members, organizational needs, different media needs and so on. If they fail to adapt, they are unlikely to maintain a real and viable presence as a source of political ideas or as a potential government. And so, as circumstances change, for example an expanded electorate, a new party forming, a party splintering, political views changing and so on, political parties also need to change to keep in step with supporters and electors. The emergence of New Labour in the 1990s is a good illustration of how a political party changes its position in order to engage with an electorate that has also moved away from more socialist and radical politics (Shaw, 1994) and the Conservative Party under David Cameron similarly moved away from its traditional Conservative pursuit of lower taxes and toughness on crime (Hitchens, 2007). Both examples also illustrate the need to regularly redefine what a party stands for.

To suggest that political parties often behave in a rational way in their pursuit of organizational and electoral survival is not to point to any radical departure from the past. Like all other organizations, political parties need to adapt to changing circumstances. They cannot remain unchanged: that is the lesson of New Labour, just as much as it is the lesson that the Conservatives had to learn after three consecutive election defeats. Importantly, this process of adaptation to external circumstances – however brought about – is not new. Parties, this book will contend, have always adapted to changing circumstances in one way or another. However, the distinctive elements that in some ways distinguish recent adaptations from past ones incorporate the extent to which parties have become more professional in their organizational make-up and the extent to which they seek to alter their political make-up in order to win elections. That is, parties have increasingly shaped themselves as organizations that mirror modern management and organizational theories: lean, centralized, efficient and in control of all aspects of their remit. More than this, they have sought to win votes by engaging in the process of ‘marketing’ politics (Scammell, 1999) rather than pursuing more traditional, ideologically inflected positions.

Whilst this description can be used in the context of New Labour in the 1980s and 1990s and could be increasingly applied to the Conservative Party under David Cameron post-2005, it does have precedents. In the 1950s, as we shall see in Chapter 3, Lord Poole also ran the Conservative Party in ways that sought to maximize the advantages

of a good organization able to make use of research and intelligence to defeat the Labour Party. A good organization, in other words, is one that is able to adapt to circumstances in order to maintain advantage: as did the Conservative Party in the 1950s and New Labour in the 1980s and 1990s.

The reference to Lord Poole and the Conservative Party in the 1950s shows that the logic of organizational adaptation is not new, although the forms it takes may be susceptible to particular and time-bound approaches to how organizations should be structured. Management and organizational theories do, after all, follow particular fads and fashions. But the logic of organizational adaptation remains constant, at least if the organization wishes to survive and prosper. And this is one of the lessons that one can draw from the work of John Gorst for the Conservative Party in the 1870s: the party had to attract new voters from an expanded electorate if it wished to survive and thrive. As E. J. Feuchtwanger notes in his study of the Conservative Party in the 1870s:

The appearance of [National Union and the Central Office] is symptomatic of a parliamentary, aristocratic party, having somewhat reluctantly, to adapt itself to new electoral conditions and reaching out to organize new support. (1968: 131)

Such a process of adaptation took place in a particular context and with a particular set of circumstances at play and although it was short-lived, it highlighted the fact that political parties could not simply rely on 'traditional' and 'loyal' voters if they were to win elections. As the electorate expanded and/or became less strongly aligned with traditional parties, newer ways had to be found to persuade and mobilize them. Similarly, as the rationale and meaning of different political parties in the 21st century gradually shift away from what they once were – does Labour mean the same as New Labour? Does new Conservatism mean the same as old Conservatism? – new ways must be found to persuade voters to come out to vote and to vote for your party.

These references to past structures and individuals illustrate the bigger question of how we come to *understand change* over time. Given these examples, could it be argued that the modern political party is no more than an *evolution* of the party of the 19th century in both its structure and approach to persuading and mobilizing a changing electorate, or would it be more appropriate to see the current state of the parties as different in spirit and kind? Is there something qualitatively and quantitatively different between the party of the 21st century and that of the mid-20th century, say? In respect of understanding of both

political parties and of historical change, is this an example of continuity or an example of discontinuity and radical transformation?

***Example 2: Technologies of communication: new or just different?***

If the discussion of political parties illustrates some fundamental issues about understanding change, the development of technologies of communication emphasizes the significance of these issues. Indeed, in an age of digital communication and ‘electronic glut’ (Seymour-Ure, 1996), it would be churlish to argue that such systems and such abundance are no more than mere adaptations to what had preceded them. Today’s political party – and political actors more generally – are adept at using a range of communication systems to get their messages across and to try and mobilize support. And, in the age of the internet, it is no surprise that it would begin to move to centre stage in political communication: it has in so many respects superseded the medium of mass communication via television, radio and print: the 2008 American presidential election might be seen as a YouTube election given the degree to which the main contenders appear on the web (see [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) and [www.prezvid.com](http://www.prezvid.com)).

Yet, as with the example above, there are reasons to think that the ways in which newer technologies of communication are now being used illustrate nothing more than a strategy, sometimes implicit sometimes explicit, to employ whatever technologies are available to better communicate to an expanding or disparate public. When the press developed, political parties sought ways to control and use it; when the gramophone came into existence, political parties exploited it by recording the speeches of their leaders for distribution (Cockett, 1994); when radio, film and television came into their own, the same desire applied: politicians, and leaders in particular, have sought to use the media to make themselves visible – aurally and visually – to the electorate. Regulatory constraints, particularly in European democracies, may have made it more difficult for the political parties to develop their strategies as they might have wished, for example, by buying airtime on television services as was the case in the US, but there were other ways in which they could promote their leaders. The aims and objectives of the political parties remained constant irrespective of the medium in question.

If this argument has any validity, then the internet is no more than the latest in a long line of technologies being used by political parties and others to spread content. It may differ from other technologies in the way that it can and should be used, but political actors nonetheless seek to exploit it just as they have done the technologies which

preceded it. And this they have done in a variety of settings and ways, such as [www.sarkozy.fr/home/](http://www.sarkozy.fr/home/), [www.barackobama.com](http://www.barackobama.com) and [www.youtube.com/labourvision](http://www.youtube.com/labourvision).

But if one places these different technologies in a long line, one could be accused of minimizing those differences that make each technology unique or even minimizing the significance of the differences and the ways in which the conduct of political communication has been transformed. Pippa Norris (Norris, 2004), for example, sees the post-1990s as exemplifying an era of 'post-modern' political communication with the internet playing a large part in bringing about transformations in the conduct of political communication. The 'post-modern' era is therefore distinguishable from the 'modern' one in which the medium of television was dominant. For Norris the occurrence of change – in respect of media, organization and behaviour – marks one period off from another.

In contrast, if one treats new contemporary technologies as no more than developments in a long line of developments, the differences between 'periods' become more blurred and the idea of difference itself is open to question and analysis. One can illustrate these differences in perspective quite easily by exploring the question of whether television had a more significant transformative effect on the conduct of political communication than the internet. If one argues that the impact of television was far more significant, then one is bound to question the idea of a transition from a television dominated 'modern' period to an internet dominated 'post-modern' one. More so, since television is still the dominant medium of communication in most democracies. This is not to deny that there have been changes in the conduct and nature of political communication brought about by the internet. The question is whether those changes are significant enough to warrant classifying them as transformative (see the discussion in Chapter 4).

Inevitably such questions are open to interpretation and different assessments but they illustrate why it is important to explore how the notion of change is itself an object of study and discussion.

### ***Example 3: 'Spin' and 'spin doctors'***

The third example that illustrates the importance of coming to grips with how change is itself understood comes from contemporary British discussions about spin and the role of Alastair Campbell in coordinating and running the media relations operation of Tony Blair's government from 1997 to about 2005. There can be little doubt that

Campbell was very effective in that role and that he managed to deal with the media in a way that highlighted the level of coordination needed for modern government.

Yet when it comes to examining Campbell's role in a historical perspective, one also becomes aware of the fact that others may have played similar parts in earlier periods: Bernard Ingham (who worked for Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s) and Joe Haines (who worked for the Harold Wilson government in the 1970s) were, in their time, equally controversial figures. Should we, therefore, see continuity between these three figures or is there a way of judging the Campbell era as significantly different from the other two? At a deeper level, should we see the work of Campbell as part of a process of adaptation to the new era of 24/7 news where an absence of coordination is taken to signify chaos, disorganization and weakness? As more historical work emerges – for example Richard Cockett (1989) on Neville Chamberlain's control of the lobby (political journalists) in the 1930s, or Martin Moore's (2005) analysis of news management in the immediate post-war period in Britain – these questions of continuity and change must be revisited.

The point here, as with the two other examples above, is that it is important to see the broader contexts in which changes take place and the ways in which the incidence of change does not necessarily signify transformation. Change, after all, can be minimal, incremental and superficial; it can also be large-scale and significant. How it is interpreted can therefore be an issue in itself.

If the above examples suggest the possibility of continuity across decades in respect of the ways in which those in politics have conducted political affairs, are there any events or practices, technologies or people that may have brought about the possibility of transformative change? Asking that question risks degenerating into a game of 'any answers', yet the question is important because it can alert us to possibilities and, at the same time, the realization that we need to justify our preferences. Were the Nixon–Kennedy debates significant in alerting political actors to the importance of image and personality? Did Roosevelt's 'fireside chats' introduce a different way of talking to the public? Did Margaret Thatcher develop a whole new strategy to electioneering and image building? Is the internet creating a new network of political communication that is more horizontal than hierarchical? Did the medium of television completely redefine and re-present politics, political actors and political communication? And so on.

Many of these questions are discussed more fully in later chapters of this book, yet they each touch on the issue that has been central in discussions about the changing nature of political communication. As Jay Blumler and Denis Kavanagh asked in their article 'The Third Age of Political Communication' 'how [does] the present situation differ from what preceded it?' (1999: 209). Yet in posing such a deceptively simple question, Blumler and Kavanagh have alerted us not only to the task of identifying change but also to the problematic nature of historical explanation itself. What will hopefully emerge from this book is that simple accounts or descriptions of the changing nature of political communication, particularly in the context of election campaigns, throw up more problems than they resolve. We need a more nuanced and historically informed understanding of change in the study of political communication than is commonly available.

But to call for a more nuanced and historically informed understanding of change is not to deny that change has taken place. It is simply to attempt to situate change in a broader context in which one can better make sense of developments. It also implies that we need to be cautious in the words we use to describe those aspects of political communication that are often employed to signify change and difference. This would certainly be true of words such as 'Americanization' and 'professionalization': the former has been used to suggest that the nature of political communication has become more Americanized, whilst the latter has been used extensively to suggest that things – structures, practices, ways of doing things and so on – are different and more professional than in the past. But without a proper assessment of the meaning of either Americanization or professionalization and the process of professionalization, how can such judgements be made?

### **The structure of this book**

The next eight chapters in this book deal with the ideas of transformation and professionalization in some of the key component elements of political communication, namely, political parties and their members, campaign communications, the technologies of communication, and governmental communication. Cutting across these, there are several other elements that also feature such as the changing nature of the electorate, the global dimension of the changes that are taking place, the increasing use of consultants and other communication professionals, the consequences of all these elements for the future conduct and content of political communication, and the implications of all

these changes for the role of the public or citizen in the conduct of politics. Perhaps inevitably, many of the examples are drawn from recent British political and communication history. One reason for this is that, at times, the nature and details of the arguments require considerable layers of historical and political background. Replicating this in relation to other political systems would have created an unmanageable and possibly unreadable book. As it is, I draw on specific literatures in order to argue the case about the nature of transformation and professionalization in political communication.

The organization of the eight chapters reveals a degree of prioritization of importance.

The main theme of **Chapter 2** is that political parties continually adapt to their environment, including to new means of communication, and that just as newer media help 'condition' the nature of politics, politics too can 'condition' the dominant media of the day. Although this chapter reviews accounts of the changing nature of campaign communications – prime examples of political communication – its main focus is on the ways in which political parties have adapted to changing technologies of communication. Using examples relating to the use of radio, film and television it pursues the argument of adaptation reserving some specific comments for how the medium of television may have had a more transformative power.

**Chapter 3** deals with political parties and how these have adapted to changing circumstances in their pursuit of electoral victory. Political parties represent coalitions of interest and are very much at the centre of a democratic political system. They organize interests and offer citizens alternatives. Without the possibility of choice and alternatives, there is a poverty of political debate. But political parties – like almost everything else – change over time. While there may be linkages between the present and the past, those linkages cannot necessarily be treated as continuous ones. The political parties in the 19th century were very different from what they are today, both ideologically and organizationally. Similarly, the role of the public or citizen has changed over that period. Appreciating the importance of that change means that it becomes necessary to adopt a framework for understanding change which allows one to grasp similarities, and continuities as well as discontinuities. In this respect, although political parties have changed enormously from what they were in the late 19th century, the pursuit of electoral victory is one of those eternal truths that link them together. As with the saying that 'in defeat one plans for victory', political parties are always pursuing some particular objective.

**Chapter 4** develops more fully ideas initially presented in preceding chapters by exploring in some detail how a variety of professional advisers have come to play an increasingly important and often central role in the lives of political parties, especially in respect of electoral contests. If anything, professional advisers have become increasingly central in the conduct of politics and in political communication. As with other chapters in this book, the historical context of this discussion is important since there is evidence to show that paid consultants were in use in US elections in the 1920s although their use in Britain and elsewhere came later. By drawing attention to historical details, this chapter once again raises the question of whether there has been a transformation in the way consultants are used or whether there are lines of continuity.

While previous chapters explored the questions of adaptation, transformation and professionalization of political communication at the level of the political party, the changes that have taken place at that level cannot be seen in isolation from changes that have taken place, or are taking place, at a more local level or at the level of the individual politician. **Chapter 5** turns the focus onto the way individual political actors, mainly prospective candidates for Parliamentary seats and Members of Parliament, have changed their practices alongside changes in technologies of communication and different understandings of what does and does not work in the media.

The primary theme of **Chapter 6** is that changes in the communication of government information in the British context have accelerated in recent decades as governments have had to confront more ubiquitous media. These changes can be likened to transformations as new refined practices and ways of looking at communications issues have become embedded. Once these changes have taken place, this chapter argues, it becomes difficult to undo them. The secondary theme of this chapter is the extent to which changes brought about since New Labour came to power in 1997 represent a transformation per se rather than a greater professionalization of practices that have been in use in previous decades. As with other chapters in this book, this chapter explores not only the present configuration of forces but also the broader historical and political context so as to give a better understanding of the significance of change.

The aim of **Chapter 7** is to explore some common accounts of transitions and transformations in political communication and to look at these in the context of a number of country-specific studies of transformations in political communication. The first substantive part of the chapter looks at different accounts of change and, in particular, at

accounts that privilege the idea of 'modernization', whilst the second part looks at transformations of political communication in three quite different countries: Germany, Greece and Italy. In reviewing accounts of change and 'modernization' this chapter connects with ideas presented in Chapter 2 where different accounts of changes in campaign communications are presented. In this way, it is useful to look at Chapter 7 in the context of ideas also discussed in Chapter 2.

**Chapter 8** focuses specifically on the internet but looks at it in the context of discussions about the transformation of political communication. In this way, there is a clear attempt to make connections between 'old' and 'new' media and between ideas that envisage radical and transformative change and ideas that highlight elements of continuity.

**Chapter 9** concludes with a review of the key themes presented in this book and tries to answer the main question that is posed throughout, that is, has there been a transformation and professionalization of political communication? In seeking to answer this question it is inevitably forced to confront another one that features less often in such discussions, namely, what role, if any, has the public – as voters, electorate, audiences, citizens or consumers (Lewis et al., 2005; Livingstone, 2005) – played in respect of the changes documented in the chapters of this book?

In the following chapters, a case will be made to the effect that there has been a transformation as well as a professionalization of political communication. Neither of these ideas is presented as hypotheses that can be tested in a quantitative way for a simple reason: when endeavouring to do historical work tracing changes in political communication, one is struck by continual change so that what is considered to be professional in one period may be very old-fashioned in another. Attempts to test such hypotheses must, therefore, take into account those sorts of changes. To give one final example: when fax machines were first used for sending political literature to constituents sometime in the 1970s it was hailed as a momentous leap forward from what had gone on before. By the late 20th century, fax machines were being moved out of offices and into cupboards as email took over. It does matter, therefore, at what points one makes judgements about what it means to be professional and when transformations took place.

As this book seeks to show, there have been many transformations and many changes at numerous levels throughout the past 100 years or more. It is up to the reader to decide how significant each of these sets of changes has been.

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