

CALL FOR PAPERS

Evolutionary Perspectives on Public Relations, Strategic Communication, and Organizational Communication: An Interdisciplinary Conference Plus Special Issue of *International Journal of Strategic Communication*

Department of Communication
University of Vienna
July 10-12, 2020
(One week after BledCom 2020)

A call for discussion

The scope of this conference and special issue of *International Journal of Strategic Communication* is to explore the utility of evolutionary theory with regard to the particular fields of public relations, strategic communication, and organizational communication. Our broader goal is to develop a new sub-field within these disciplines and to gather a small but determined group of researchers who already work, or want to work, in that new field. Our ultimate goal is to connect theories of public relations, strategic communication, and organizational communication with the mind and natural sciences in a rigorous way. Within this framework, we want to engender a broad participation from a variety of areas of research.

Submission

Extended abstracts (1.000 – 2.000 words max., excluding figures, tables and references) should be submitted by **20 December 2019** to jens.seiffert@univie.ac.at. Feedback on the abstracts will be provided by **24 January 2020**. All abstracts are to be submitted in English.

Publication

The authors of the best abstracts will be invited to submit their full papers to a special issue in the *International Journal of Strategic Communication* (www.tandfonline.com/HSTC).

Invitation

Therefore, we invite scholars to submit extended abstracts dealing with the following issues:

Theory building

How can evolutionary theory inform theory building in strategic communication, organizational communication, and public relations? What are the prospects of theories informed by evolutionary thinking? How does existing communication theory fit into evolutionary theory? What are the advantages and disadvantages of evolutionary theories? How does evolutionary thinking relate to other approaches like systems theory or the theory of communicative action?

Empirical research and methodologies

How far have the fields of public relations, strategic communication, and organizational communication come in utilizing evolutionary theory, and how does that scale against other fields

that employed evolutionary theories, like marketing? How can theories informed by evolutionary thinking be tested? What empirical methods could be used to research these theories? What results can be expected from the application of evolutionary theories, and how will that help the field?

Application

How can theories informed by evolutionary thinking be applied to communication practice? What value has evolutionary thinking for communication professionals?

Crossroads

How do other disciplines integrate evolutionary theory? What can communication science learn from these fields, and how can it benefit? How do public relations, strategic communication, and organizational communication fit into the consilient synthesis?

Dissent

Finally, we also welcome contributions that take a critical stance toward the application of evolutionary thinking and evolutionary psychology in our fields.

ABOUT THE JOURNAL

The *International Journal of Strategic Communication* is part of a multi-national effort to integrate various communication disciplines into a coherent body of knowledge and facilitate the development of strategic communication as a domain of study. The *IJSC* seeks to define the field of strategic communication, address the application of theory to this emerging field, provide a forum for multidisciplinary approaches and diverse research traditions, and espouse a truly international perspective that gives voice to cross-cultural research and scholars in all regions of the world. The *IJSC* provides a foundation for the study of strategic communication from diverse disciplines, including corporate and managerial communication, organizational communication, public relations, marketing communication, advertising, political and health communication, social marketing, international relations, public diplomacy, and other specialized communication areas. To view an online sample, visit www.tandfonline.com/HSTC. The *IJSC* is edited by Dr. Ansgar Zerfass, Institute of Communication and Media Studies, Leipzig University, Germany / Center of Corporate Communications, BI Norwegian Business School, Oslo, Norway, and Dr. Kelly Page Werder, Ph.D., School of Mass Communications, University of South Florida, Tampa, FL, USA.

Organizers

- Jens Seiffert-Brockmann, University of Vienna
- Howard Nothhaft, Lund University
- Cary Greenwood, Debiasing and Lay Informatics (DaLI) Lab, University of Oklahoma
- Jeong-Nam Kim, University of Oklahoma

BACKGROUND

“Nothing...makes sense except in the light of evolution,” Dobzhansky, T. (1973).

Evolutionary thinking

Charles Darwin famously stated at the end of *The Origin of Species* (first edition 1859): "In the distant future I see open fields for far more important researches. Psychology will be based on a new foundation, that of the necessary acquirement of each mental power and capacity by gradation." (2017, p. 525)

More than 150 years later, evolutionary biologists, anthropologists, and psychologists are exploring one approach to the human mind that is very much in line with Darwin's visionary claim: Evolutionary psychology. Two of its founding figures, Leda Cosmides and John Tooby, defined this new field of enquiry as an approach in which the "mind is a set of information-processing machines [modules] that were designed by natural selection to solve adaptive problems faced by our hunter-gatherer ancestors" (Tooby & Cosmides, 1997). Admittedly, there is a heated debate about one of the central tenets of evolutionary psychology, e.g., the massive modularity hypothesis. However, few researchers disagree with the field's core proposition. The human mind is not a universal thinking organ bestowed on humans by an accident of nature but a product of evolution.

Today, evolutionary psychology has made several inroads into the social sciences and humanities. It is applied in diverse disciplines such as marketing (Saad, 2011), political science (Hibbing, Smith & Alford, 2014; Fukuyama, 2011; Orbell, Morikawa, Hartwig, Hanley & Allen, 2004), anthropology and the study of human conflict (Gat, 2006), political psychology and the study of human conflict (Orbell & Morikawa, 2011), philosophy (Rosenberg, 2008), and sociology (Dietz, Burns, & Buttel, 1990). Inevitably, there is also criticism (Goldfinch, 2015), which ranges from total damnation to nuanced doubts (see Confer et al., 2010).

Cary Greenwood (2010) was the first scholar to systematically introduce evolutionary thought to public relations and organizational communication. She proposed evolutionary theory as the metatheory for public relations and adoption of E. O. Wilson's (1998) idea of consilience, in which biology grounds all thought, all disciplines speak one language, and all scholars pursue similar goals, as the framework. In a slightly altered version of Dobzhansky's dictum that "nothing in biology makes sense except in the light of evolution" (1973, p. 125), Greenwood argued, "Nothing in public relations makes sense except in the light of evolution" (Greenwood, 2010, p. 471).

In recent years, a few scholars have followed Greenwood's lead. Charles Marsh is perhaps the foremost contributor, having published works on evolution and mutual aid (2012; 2013), indirect reciprocity and reputation management (2018), and the relationship between cooperation, justice, and public relations (2017). Nothhaft, like Greenwood, calls for a conceptual integration based upon Wilson's (1998) idea of consilience. Specifically addressing strategic communication, he suggests that for "the field to mature, leading researchers need to work towards a consilient synthesis, i.e., a theoretical framework that contains nonrelativistic conjectures about the world which form a nucleus for research to accumulate around," (Nothhaft, 2016, p. 69). Building upon the works of Griskevicius and colleagues (Griskevicius & Kenrick, 2013; Griskevicius & Durante,

2015), Seiffert-Brockmann suggests the concept of fundamental motives as a framework for strategic communication (2018).

These suggestions remain exceptions to the rule, however. Currently, relatively few communication scholars are working directly with evolutionary theory. Historically, public relations, in particular, has developed from a variety of fields and disciplines, including communication, economics, microeconomics, behavioral economics, social psychology, behavioral psychology, philosophy, management, and sociology, among others (e.g., see Grunig, 1992; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Ihlen & van Ruler, 2007; Miller, 2000). What presents itself now is the opportunity to utilize the capacity of evolutionary theory's middle range theories to shed light on many different concepts that are important to strategic communication, public relations and organizational communication. These include cooperation (Axelrod, 1984; Gintis, Smith, & Bowles, 2001), mutuality (West, Griffin, & Gardner, 2007), (self-)deception (Hippel & Trivers, 2011; Seiffert-Brockmann & Thummes, 2017), reciprocity and altruism (Trivers, 1971; Nowak & Sigmund, 1998), affiliation (Cosmides, 1989), kin selection and inclusive fitness (Hamilton, 1964), group selection (Wilson, 2019), and status (Zahavi, 1975) – to name only a few.

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