

## Book review

**Oliveira, E., Duarte Melo, A., & Gonçalves, G., (Eds.). 2016. *Strategic communication for non-profit organisations: Challenges and alternative approaches*. Delaware: Vernon Press. 308 pp.**

Reviewed by **David Ongenaert**, Ghent University, David.Ongenaert@UGent.be.

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An emerging field of research within communication sciences examines public communication within organizational contexts and the broader public sphere. As its visibility and (societal) relevance have grown in recent years, an increasing number of scholars scrutinizes the subfield of non-profit communication, which is mainly (but not exclusively) performed by civil society. Nevertheless, non-profit communication has often not been theorized accurately within communication research, as most studies in the field have adopted a business- and profit-driven logic to develop theories, models and case studies, largely ignoring non-profit organizations' (NPOs) social values and goals. *Strategic communication for non-profit organisations* therefore aims to provide relevant insights into new, multidimensional approaches on NPOs' communication, thereby adopting a multi-perspective view of the role of strategy. Editors Evandro Oliveira, Ana Duarte Melo and Gisela Gonçalves certainly succeed in achieving this main objective, as their book volume proves to be a significant, original and wide-ranging contribution to the literature and academic debate on NPO's strategic communication.

The book consists of thirteen chapters divided into an introduction and four main parts which provide both a theoretical conceptualization of, and several empirical case studies on, non-profit communication, which itself is divided in six subfields: (1) Development Communication, (2) Civic Relations Communication, (3) Health Communication, (4) Environmental Communication, (5) Science and Innovation Communication, and (6) Religious Communication. Examining all these subfields, *Strategic communication for non-profit organisations* focuses on various dimensions of NPOs' internal and external communication strategies – situated in distinct contexts, channelled through diversified media and/or directed on different target audiences – and their different underlying motives and implications. Although 'non-profit communication' and 'strategy' are throughout the whole book considered as complex and diverse concepts of which specific research findings are difficult to generalize, the editors advance one distinctive element of non-profit communication. That is "humanity and the relations with the fields of life in the public sphere, not



mediated directly or subscribed on the first instance to the logics of an institutionalised organisation” (p. 2).

Looking more closely into *Strategic communication for non-profit organisations*, the first three chapters after the introductory chapter present, alongside several references to practices of the field, mainly theoretical conceptualizations of various relevant subjects. More concretely, chapter two describes public interest communications’ theoretical demarcations, its similarities and differences with related fields and the underlying reasons of its (current) emergence as a new academic discipline. Based on this general outline, chapter three develops a conceptual model about how NGOs and churches acquire legitimacy and simultaneously constitute themselves through four different communication flows, with a focus on members’ representative “nuclear ambassador” role. The fourth chapter, however, starts from a more practical hands-on approach, as it addresses the role of strategic communication in the public health sector with new empirical analyses of a research-action empowerment program that aims to improve public health professionals’ strategic communicative skills.

In the second part, chapters five to ten investigate both theoretically and empirically different forms of non-profit communication performed by NGOs. Chapter five, for instance, discusses the challenges and opportunities of political institutionalization for environmental NGOs’ discursive position and public legitimacy. Environmental communication also constitutes the core of chapter six, which analyses the online and offline public affairs strategies of Greenpeace Germany. Whereas in chapter six governments constituted the target audience of the analysed communication strategies, chapter eight investigates audiovisual storytelling strategies directed at the general public. Chapter nine builds on theories developed in chapter three, by investigating an innovative internal communication strategy of the Portuguese Catholic Church in which specific kits motivate vocational pastoral teams and legitimize their mission at the local level. Chapter 10 also focuses on religious communication, as it examines how religious organizations attempt to construct an online Muslim identity, with a case study about the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs. Chapter seven, however, differs somewhat from the other chapters as it applies an audience research perspective by investigating corporate donors’ perceptions about their communication relationships with NPOs, and the latter’s associated challenges and management implications.

The final three chapters present empirical case studies on various aspects of NPOs’ use of strategic communication. In contrast to the previous part, the focus is now on NPOs rather than NGOs and on digital media as communication tools. Chapter eleven, for example, assesses the citizen participation opportunities of Spanish city council websites and discusses some civic engagement



raising communication practices. The relation between digital media and public participation is also investigated in chapter twelve, which examines public engagement enforcing cultural factors in the context of a public transportation company's open data project. In the final chapter, social media are at the forefront, as it is examined how they can be utilized to enhance a research consortium's internal and external communication strategies.

Although this book has several clear merits, some points of criticism can be raised. Firstly, the book is rather limited in its international scope as the focus is mainly on European NPOs' strategic communication. Secondly, the book's promised elaboration of alternative approaches based on the concepts of the intermediary role of organizations from Carroll (1992) and the communities of interpretation from Berger and Luckmann (1995) feels – although certainly relevant – a bit underdeveloped. Nevertheless, *Strategic communication for non-profit organisations* forms an insightful and comprehensive introduction to a very relevant and topical issue, which is especially interesting for students and researchers involved in communication sciences in general, and media, public communication and non-profit studies in particular. By advancing several new approaches to the concept of non-profit communication which demonstrate the diversity and complexity of this subject, the editors broaden and raise the debate to a higher level theoretically and empirically. As the need for further theoretical and empirical research is explicitly expressed and several relevant frameworks are provided, the editors also attempt to set out lines for further research.