Government Communication to Stimulate Entrepreneurship in Germany: A Case Study of Germany Entrepreneurship Week

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Abstract
Little attention has been paid to the role of government communication in supporting entrepreneurship in a nation. This study aimed to explain the government communication process for increasing public awareness of entrepreneurship. It is a case study of the German government’s communication process for Germany Entrepreneurship Week 2012. The findings revealed several positive aspects of the process but also some problems, such as the need for additional clear and measurable objectives and comprehensive evaluations regarding not only the inputs and outputs but also the effectiveness of the campaign. Specifically, this paper proposes a general model of the government communication process.

Keywords: government communication, public relation, entrepreneurship, case study.

Introduction
Entrepreneurs are assumed to generate opportunities for economic development through innovation and the creation of new jobs, products, and services. This assumption was supported by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) in its 2002 report, which indicated a statistically significant relationship between entrepreneurial activities and economic growth (UNCTAD, 2004). Given its importance, entrepreneurship has been studied from several perspectives, including economics.

The importance of the government’s role is an aspect of the holistic model proposed by the GEM in 2009. This model tries to explain the effect of the environment on entrepreneurs in the context of the economic development stage of the country in which they conduct business. According to the GEM, this model has made a unique contribution because it provides detailed descriptions and assessments of the conditions under which entrepreneurship and innovation can thrive. It emphasizes the
government’s important role in increasing entrepreneurship and innovation through its policies and programs. Despite its holistic approach, the model still does not address the importance of government communication, especially the communication of policies and programs to stimulate innovation and entrepreneurship. The importance of government communication, which focused on the role of government support for business policies and programs, was also not discussed at the International Council of Small Business conference in 2011, (Heinonen & Hytti, 2011; Jianzhong & Smallbone, 2011; Mawardi et. al., 2011). This provides further evidence that government communication on entrepreneurship is still a neglected area of study.

Given the lack of attention to government communication in research on the entrepreneurial environment, this paper aims to investigate the government communication process for stimulating entrepreneurship. This research objective engendered research questions such as: (1) Who are the actors in the government communication process? (2) What tools are used in the process? (3) How does a government manage its communication process to achieve its goals?

To answer these research questions, an explorative case study was conducted on the 2012 German Entrepreneurship Week (GEW) campaign organized by the Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology in Germany (BMWi). It is important to note that the GEM recognized Germany as the country with the highest public spending on entrepreneurs (Brixy, et.al., 2010). Given that Germany has been acknowledged for governmental support of entrepreneurship programs (Stenberg and Von Bloh, 2016), the government’s knowledge about communicating its programs to the public could be beneficial.

The paper is organized as follows: The theoretical framework for the analysis will be reviewed in the next section. This theoretical framework originated in the field of communication. In the third section, the research design will be presented, and several institutions that were interviewed for this study will be described. The results will be presented in chapter 5. This will be followed by the findings and the conclusion.

Theoretical Framework

Previous studies on government communication have not provided models that are applicable to the public sphere, such as a public relations campaign conducted by a government. Liu and Horsley (2007) compared one theory and four models of government communication. They identified the following: (1) the synthesis model of public sector crisis communication, (2) the public relations process model, (3) the two-way symmetrical model, (4) the contingency theory, and (5) the government communication process model. The results showed that several public sector characteristics were not included in the theory or the models. Thus, Liu and Horsley (2007) proposed their own model: the government communication decision wheel. This model identifies four coexisting additional microenvironments: the multilevel, intra-
governmental, intergovernmental, and external microenvironments. It therefore highlights the importance of the unique environmental characteristics of the public sector. The model also identifies eight environmental characteristics that can influence government communication and offers suggestions for their functions in each of the four microenvironments. The objective of the current study is to describe the government communication process. Specifically, the study explores the German government’s implementation of a campaign. The aforementioned Liu and Horsley (2007) model was not appropriate because it focuses more on the macro level and has no direct connection with the practical application of public relations.

Because this study focused on the public relations aspect, none of the government communications models were applicable. The RACE (research, action plan, communication, evaluation) model proposed by Marston (1979, in Heath 2001) is a well-known model of the public relations process. However, the model ended with the evaluation process and failed to account for the public relations campaign as an ongoing process and, more particularly, a means for maintaining relationships. Thus, the framework for this study is Kelly’s (1998, in Heath 2001) ROPES (research, objective, programming, evaluation, stewardship) model of the public relations process because it offers a view of public relations activities as a continuous process. In addition, it includes stewardship, which helps to explain public relations as a cyclical process. Thus, the process does not necessarily start at the beginning when a public relations campaign involves a familiar public.

The additional step of stewardship in the ROPES model shows that the public relations process is continuous; thus, this model was privileged. Because in practice, the public relations process does not always start with research which connects with stewardship, the description of the steps in the ROPES model begins with stewardship. Stewardship includes four elements: reciprocity, responsibility, reporting, and relationship nurturing. Through reciprocity, an organization demonstrates its acknowledgement of its supporters. Responsibility means that the organization is socially responsible: it is a “good citizen.” Reporting refers to accountability, and it occurs when an organization informs the public about initiatives for which its needs support. Relationship nurturing means that an organization should recognize that supportive publics are crucial, it should keep them in the hub of the organization’s awareness.

Research, the process through which an organization acquires information to determine whether it can achieve a particular result, is the first step in developing a strategy. Objectives are created to articulate the results that are expected from the programming. They are specific statements of analyzable and measurable outcomes. After clear objectives have been stated, the next step is programming, which is composed of two elements: planning and implementation. Planning can be described as the proposed activities articulated in a written public relations plan. Implementation comprises the entire communication campaign process, as it is the execution of the plan.
with the aim of achieving the objectives. After the implementation step is completed, the programming is evaluated against the objectives. The results of the evaluation are then used for improving any aspects of the campaign as are necessary for the future. The evaluation results are also used for stewardship and further research.

Research Methodology
The qualitative case study method was used because the study aims to explain the implementation of government communication. As was stated by Yin (2009, p. 2), “case studies are the preferred method when ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions are being posed.” The method is appropriate because it allows for the combining of data from multiple perspectives through interviews, documentation, and observation.

Four semi-guided interviews were conducted with all of the parties involved in the program. To guide the interviewers, three sets of questions targeted to different types of parties (coordination board, experts or public relations agency, and partners) were constructed based on the theoretical framework. To gain a holistic understanding of the implementation of German Entrepreneurship Week 2012, direct observations of several events, in addition to interviews and the collection of preliminary secondary data, were done. During GEW, the researchers were able to observe a total of six events conducted by three event coordinators.

Results and Discussion
In this section, four analyses will be presented. First, the actors involved in GEW will be described. Second, the findings regarding the public relations process will be presented within the framework of the ROPES model. Third, the description of the events observed will be presented. Finally, the findings on the communication process among the actors will be explained.

Actors Involved in GEW
Based on the data collected, the actors involved in GEW 2012 included the BMWi, the Competence Center (RKW), the communication agency, the copywriter, the website agency, the regional ministries of economics, and partners. The roles and responsibilities of each actor are described in Table 1:
### Table 1. GEW Actors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Actor</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>BMWi</td>
<td>GEW organizer</td>
<td>Promoting GEW program to general audiences around the country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>RKW</td>
<td>National coordination body</td>
<td>Conducting internal coordination for the GEW project team (with the federal ministry and the agencies) and external coordination (with the regional ministries, partners, media, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Communication agency</td>
<td>Communication expert</td>
<td>Providing creative ideas for event planning, design, and production of printed communication materials (booklets, flyers, etc.) for target groups; and conducting media analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Copywriter</td>
<td>Text editor/scientific writer</td>
<td>Editing text or other content in online information materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Web agency</td>
<td>Web expert</td>
<td>Designing the GEW website, designing the graphics (layout), providing a platform, acquiring a database, and maintaining the website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Regional ministry</td>
<td>Multipliers (to attract partners)</td>
<td>Conducting GEW promotional activities in their respective regions, conducting entrepreneurship-related events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Partners</td>
<td>Multipliers (to attract participants)</td>
<td>Conducting entrepreneurship-related events</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Findings regarding the Public Relations Process**

This subsection presents the results of the analysis of the GEW public relations campaign process based on the ROPES model, which comprises stewardship, research, objective, programming, and evaluation.

**Stewardship**

Table 2 shows that the first GEW was held in Germany in 2008. It was organized by the Chamber of Commerce (IHK) in collaboration with universities. Observing the practices of the IHK, the German government found the initiative very interesting and beneficial for the country. Thus, in 2010, the BMWi signed a contract with the Kauffman Foundation and assumed the responsibility for organizing GEW. The BMWi began hosting GEW in 2010 and subsequently involved the regional ministries of economy, as well as industrial and administrative bodies, to broaden the network and to facilitate the implementation process.
Table 2. Respondents’ Descriptions of the Stewardship Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Respondents’ Descriptions of the Stewardship Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RKW</td>
<td>Germany in 2008: It was like the Chambers of Commerce who started to do it here together with universities. And then in 2000, and I think it was in 2010, the German government, the ministry, came in, and they signed a deal with the Kauffman Foundation USA to be the official host of Global Entrepreneurship Week in Germany. So since 2010, the German government has been involved.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IHK</td>
<td>This was the third time. In 2010, the Federal Ministry of Economy started the Gründerwoche Deutschland, and our network was started in 2002. So, the Thuringian ministry said we have this network, and you as a network have to organize and coordinate in Thuringia.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because of this finding, the German government eagerly seized the opportunity to participate in an international campaign by optimizing an existing national network. This step reflects the stewardship aspect of a government’s responsibilities regarding entrepreneurship. Germany is one of only two countries in which the government is directly involved in this worldwide entrepreneurship campaign\(^1\).

**Research**

To determine the most appropriate and effective entrepreneurship campaign, an organization needs to conduct research to acknowledge the existing situation and to create a program to improve it. The BMWi has access to data from many national and international studies on the entrepreneurial environment in Germany conducted by universities and organizations (BMWi, 2011). Based on the findings of these studies, the government could map the existing state of entrepreneurship in Germany, such as the demographic data on entrepreneurs.

Besides acquiring information from the studies conducted by other organizations, the experts who supported the GEW campaign process conducted their own research, such as focus groups and consultancies to define the practical aspects, such as the appropriate messages to be conveyed through the communication tools. This research process can be seen in Table 4, which presents the copywriter’s statement that research was conducted to create the appropriate message for the target audience.

\(^1\) [http://www.unleashingideas.org/list-countries](http://www.unleashingideas.org/list-countries)
Table 3. Respondent’s Description of the Research Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Example of Respondent’s Description of the Research Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Copywriter</td>
<td>… (in doing research) we talk to them (entrepreneurs). We also talk to consultants. Then you have to look at whether it’s different to write, for example, for students or for scientists who’re planning to start a company or to write for people who are unemployed or have low education levels, so we kind of set up the information differently</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Objectives

Table 4 provides an example of the responses from RKW and a partner regarding the objectives of the GEW campaign. At this stage, the respondents perceived the same goals and target audience. RKW mentioned that the main goal of GEW was to make the audience aware of the campaign and entrepreneurship in general. An additional goal was to have entrepreneurship be included in university curricula to encourage the involvement of young people in GEW and the creation of start-ups. Auftakt, a partner, also shared this objective and indicated that it should be not only for the students but also the entire university community. The interviews also revealed that the goal and the target audiences for the campaign were in line with the findings from the research stage. These findings indicated that there was a relationship between the information collected through the research and the objectives set for the campaign.

Table 4. Respondents’ Descriptions of the Process of Setting Objectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Example of Respondents’ Descriptions of Objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RKW</td>
<td>The goal of GEW is like the goal in any other country: just to get the general public aware of the topic. … GEW target groups … there’s a special emphasis on young people and then there is also a special emphasis. This is why this picture is also composed of people who came to Germany from different countries, like immigrants ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auftakt</td>
<td>Our main target here is to “sensibilize” the students and also the members of TU Ilmenau to show them that founding and owning start-ups is possibility next to working in a big company.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Programming

According to the ROPES model, programming consists of planning and implementation. It must be noted that the interviews were conducted with several respondents to provide a detailed description of this process. The responses presented in Table 6 are only examples of some of the findings. Some respondents stated that the GEW communication process consisted of three stages. In the first stage, the BMWi increased awareness and promoted the campaign in general. In the second stage, RKW coordinated with partners and communicated with the regional economics ministries to involve the contact people in every region. The third stage involved the partners who approached the various target groups, such as young entrepreneurs, start-ups, or potential entrepreneurs. The BMWi, RKW, the public relations agency, and the copywriter met periodically to discuss the main aspects of the campaign.

Table 5. Respondent’s Description of the Programming Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Example of Respondent’s Description of the Programming Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Planning    | RKW  
… as many partners as possible, as many events as possible, so that we make the barrier to entry very very low so that everyone can come: everyone who has something interesting to say about entrepreneurship to the general public, to young people, to the people who are thinking about starting a business or those who just started a business. Everyone can participate. So also the events are very very different. |
| Implementation | RKW  
… what comes to the communication process: You could say it’s a three-stage process because, first, the ministry raises public awareness in general. The next step is that we, the coordination point, talk and attract partners, different partners, and these partners include the potential founders [of businesses], young entrepreneurs, start-ups, etc. We have different stages for communicating with the target groups, partners, and end users: let’s say end users-participants. |
| Evaluation  |  
The GEW evaluation process comprised two stages. The first was an online questionnaire for the partners to learn about the experiences of their counterparts and to identify the benefits and weaknesses of the campaign. The questionnaire contained
a total of 35 detailed questions that sought to determine every aspect of the campaign, such as the partners’ motivations for joining the network, the manner in which they organized their events, and their impressions of the quality of the logo, flyers, press releases, and GEW merchandise that they used as communication tools for the event. The second questionnaire, which was delivered through the GEW website, was aimed at the participants who attended the event. This questionnaire elicited the participants’ demographic profiles, their thoughts about the event and the entrepreneurship theme that they considered the most interesting, and the extent to which they were aware that they had participated in the international GEW campaign.

Another output evaluation was the media monitoring report detailing the media coverage of the campaign. The media monitoring was conducted by the public relations agency. The regional and national newspaper articles that covered the GEW events were collected and analyzed. The media monitoring report for the 2010 GEW campaign indicated that there were 1,229 print media articles or reports, 859 internet articles, 22 radio reports, and 13 news agency reports. The evaluation results were to be used as an input for the planning process for the next GEW campaign. Thus, the evaluation results from that year would inform the research process for the next campaign.

Table 6. Respondents’ Descriptions of the Evaluation Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Example of Respondents’ Descriptions of the Evaluation Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RKW</td>
<td>… we have two different tools for evaluation. One is the partner questionnaire that we submit to other partners and ask them to answer, and we have the feedback questionnaire for the participants in all 2,000 events. So this PR agency, … every year they do do the media analysis, so they know how many newspapers talk about it, how many radio stations, how many TV reports are aware of it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IHK</td>
<td>Most of the participants told us that it is a very good meeting, and they want other information later and want to stay in contact with the network. So I think the campaign itself is very successful because in 2009 only several initiatives took place before the ministry [took part] in GEW. I think in the last year there were 80 partners, and this year there are more ...</td>
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</table>

Communication Process and Proposed Government Communication Model

The communication process for GEW 2012 consisted of several stages involving the various actors. The communication process among the actors will be described below, and a government communication model will be proposed.
The communication process

The analysis of the data obtained in this study showed that two types of communication were used in the communication stage of the process: coordination, which refers to the communication that occurred during the GEW planning stage, and communication, which refers to the communication during the implementation stage. This communication was aimed at increasing the public’s awareness of entrepreneurship.

There was extensive coordination among the members of the project team, which included the BMWi, RKW, the communication agency, the copywriter, and the website agency. As indicated by RKW, there were three stages in the communication process. First, the BMWi raised public awareness. Next, RKW, as the national coordinator, attracted the partners and maintained communication with them. Last, the partners communicated with the GEW participants or target audiences. There was a great deal of communication among the BMWi and RKW with the experts (the communication agency, the copywriter, and the website agency) in the form of the exchange of ideas, as well as the approval of the proposals for the design of and content for the communication materials. In this phase, the BMWi played an important role in approving items that had been proposed and discussed. At a later stage, there was also coordination among RKW and the regional economics ministries. To attract partners in a region, RKW would capitalize on the local knowledge of the regional ministry and cooperate with it to obtain preliminary information on prospective partners. To accomplish this, RKW used a website with a dedicated section for the partners as the main communication platform.

The communication for creating awareness about entrepreneurship was accomplished through several actors. First, there was communication among the BMWi or RKW and the media through press releases. Sometimes, it was the reverse because journalists were able to contact the BMWi or RKW as well. Second, communication occurred between the partners and participants through the communication materials delivered at the events organized by the partners. Third, RKW communicated with the public to some extent through its booth at the opening of GEW and information provided on the GEW website. Fourth, the BMWi also communicated with the public through its booth at the GEW opening.

Government communication model

Based on the results of this investigation of the government communication process, a general model of government communication was proposed (see Figure 1). In this model, three actors play important roles in supporting the communication activities between the government and its public: (1) the coordinating body, (2) the experts, and (3) the multipliers. The coordinating body is the organization that coordinates the communication between the government and the multipliers. It works closely with the
experts who support the entire campaign through their skills and expertise. They are able to share their insights or to provide services to ensure the success of the communication process. The multipliers, an organization or organizations with the same aim as the government, then increase awareness of entrepreneurship. The multipliers may have several branches or subsidiaries.

The proposed model can be used by communication practitioners to conduct government campaigns that involve many actors. Practitioners who would like to conduct a campaign for a specific issue could use the model to determine which actors who should be involved. For example, if the government would like to create an HIV/AIDS prevention campaign, it will need to cooperate with experts, such as communication experts, medical experts, or research institutes specializing in HIV/AIDS treatment and research to determine the appropriate communication tools. The government will also need to collaborate with the coordinating body, i.e., the organizations that are already working on HIV/AIDS issues. The coordination body could then approach the multipliers to recruit partners to assist in reaching the target audience.

Figure 1. Government Campaign Model
This paper has several implications for the study of the entrepreneurial environment. Moreover, the recent GEM model in 2018 (GERA, 2018) states that government entrepreneurship programs affect the attitudes, activities, and aspirations surrounding entrepreneurship; however, it does not explain the government’s process for communicating its programs or the effectiveness of that process. Understanding how a government can promote positive attitudes and intentions regarding entrepreneurship could be the key factor in the development of entrepreneurs in the future. The findings of this study, specifically the proposed model (see Figure 1), could be the starting point for further research on this aspect.

Another field that could benefit from this study is government communication. A comparative review of the research on government communication revealed that most of the government communication models have failed to consider many public sector characteristics (Liu & Horsey, 2007). Liu and Horsey proposed a government communication model based on the environmental characteristics that could influence government communication. However, the model does not provide a detailed explanation of the government communication process. Thus, the present study can provide an additional perspective for this field through the proposed government communication model, which is based on the roles of the actors and the coordination process. However, further research is needed to test the reliability of the proposed model (see Figure 1) and its applicability to other types of campaigns or government campaigns in other countries. In such studies, it would be important that the actors be proportionally classified according to their responsibilities and the communication process be correctly mapped in the model.

**Conclusion**

This study aimed to explore and to describe the government communication process in Germany to promote government aid programs for entrepreneurs and to stimulate the public’s awareness of entrepreneurship. To this end, four interviews were conducted with several actors, including members of the coordinating body, experts, and partners, who participated in the campaign process. Additional data were gathered through observations and a review of the literature.

The results indicated that during the communication process, the government gained extensive support from the coordinating body that organized the campaign phases. There were more than 900 partners across the country. In 2017, the number of campaign partners was as high as 1,500 institutions, and there were more than 1,900 events. Besides gaining this support from the coordinating body, the government benefitted from the expertise of the communication experts who worked on the

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campaign. Based on these findings, this study proposed a model for the government communication process. The model maps the process according to the actors’ relationships. It accounts for the communication tools and illustrates the flow of the process within an organization. Future studies on government communication could benefit from and improve the proposed model. It is recommended that other aspects of the process, such as the most effective public relations tools for helping young people to focus on entrepreneurship and the possible communication problems that can occur among actors be further investigated. Another recommendation is analyses of effectiveness by investigating whether a government campaign can increase the citizens’ knowledge and awareness of entrepreneurship or even arouse their desire to become entrepreneurs.

The model has limitations because it is based on a case study focusing on one government campaign; thus, further empirical tests are needed. The results of the study cannot therefore be generalized to other types of government communication. Future studies could investigate the applicability of the model to other types of government campaigns in Germany or other countries. It is possible that other factors, such as culture and political conditions, could differentiate the model if it is applied to other countries. A comparative study of a similar campaign in another country with different cultural dimensions would certainly make a valuable contribution to advancing the model proposed in this study.

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