A revised digital media-arena framework guiding strategic communication in digital environments

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Structured abstract

Purpose: This paper refines the Digital Media-Arena (DMA) framework to address the diversity of stakeholders contributing to the production, (re)appropriation and (re)distribution of organisational messages in digital environments. It also presents a case analysis for the purpose of demonstrating the applicability of the revised conceptual framework to a critical situation.

Design/Methodology/Approach: Grounded in key public relations, corporate communication and strategic communication research, this study first extends the DMA framework by introducing six new forms of media-arenas. Next, the study takes a public sector perspective to analyse the revised framework against a critical situation involving the Finnish Prime Minister in summer 2022.

Findings: The application of the revised DMA framework to analyse the critical situation shows the importance of mapping and understanding diverse discourses across multi-arenas and their communication role in a rapidly unfolding scandal surrounding the Prime Minister of Finland. Findings also reveal the diversity of stakeholder voices forming their own versions of organisational messages and sometimes converging organisational messages within and across DMAs.

Originality/value: The revised DMA framework contributes to expanding the field's knowledge of the strategic communicative use of the digital environment in typically highly volatile and multi-vocal situations by offering instrumental understanding of the conflicting challenge between subjugating and liberating organisational messages across the digital spectrum.

Practical implications: The DMA framework can offer practical suggestions to guide communicators to make strategic choices in what, where, how and with whom they can communicate.

Keywords: arenas, digital media-arenas (DMA), digital communication, Finland, organisational message, participatory communication, political figure, scandal, strategic communication management, theoretical framework, voice diversity

Introduction

Communication technology is one of the most urgent development areas for organisations in the 2020s (Arthur W Page Society, 2021) and yet less than half (46.3%) of corporations in Europe have a comprehensive digital strategy for stakeholder communication (Zerfass *et al.,* 2021). The opportunities for communicating with internal and external stakeholders that digital technologies present the communication profession are numerous and have been well-studied in public relations, corporate communication and strategic communication literatures (Knebel and Seele, 2019, Luoma-aho and Badham, 2023; Wang *et al.,* 2021; Werder *et al.,* 2018). Yet, organisations also face several challenges in today's highly digitalized communication environment which has been characterised by seemingly uncontrolled flows of multi-directional polyphonic communications (Christensen *et al*., 2008, Schneider and Zerfass, 2018).

This paper examines communicators' challenges of control over organisational messages, arguing that control has become even more a key challenge since the advent of social media. Although control has always been contested between message originators and recipients (whether intended or not), social media has complicated organisational communication processes due largely to social media dynamics of speed and volume of communication, limited discursive interaction (due to limitations in text length), network clusters (i.e., automatically generated networks linking a high quantity of communicators and recipients), unrestrained information flow, lack of topic and opinion diversity, and cross-media dynamics (Pfeffer et al, 2014). Many organisations still plan and execute their communications as forms of dissemination of messages to one or more target stakeholders utilizing a combination of modalities (visual, text, and audio). Within digital interactive spaces, stakeholders and publics (who may be viewed as potential stakeholders not yet having a contractual or relational stake in the organisation) have a high degree of control over organisational messages because they are empowered to not only re-interpret these messages but also transform them into different messages and subsequently spread these re-shaped messages fast and formatively through, for example, their social media accounts, resulting in crisis arena crossovers (Badham *et al.*, 2022b) and questionable corporate reputations (Etter *et al.,* 2019).

Given that organisational messages are the outcome of a shared meaning-making process (Lemon, 2019; Taylor, 2018), organisational communicators cannot maintain control over organisational messages

in the digital environment. It is generally acknowledged that when organisations initiate communication with stakeholders in a public environment, those stakeholders and members of the wider public can co-create organisational meaning (Botan and Taylor, 2004) and "creatively co-construct or de-construct the meanings of corporate messages in ways not intended by management" (Christensen and Cornelissen, 2011, p. 391). Indeed, they form and disseminate their own versions of organisational messages, which can spread quickly and contagiously through social media. The digital communication environment empowers a plurality of voices to discursively negotiate and contest a multiplicity of interpretations of organisational messages, which often results in message entropy or contextual distortion (Murphy, 2015). Consequently, communication professionals "are not the masters of meaning able to control the reception of corporate messages" (Christensen and Cornelissen, 2011, p. 391).

The traditional sender-recipient framework for planning communication has been challenged by the digitalization of media systems to the point at which today the roles of communication professionals are transitioning from initiators and senders to facilitators and strategic improvisers of organisational messages (Falkheimer and Heide, 2010) communicated by organisations, stakeholders and the wider public. New expressive forms of digital communication that deal with production, (re)appropriation and (re)distribution of organisational messages are also appearing within these digital interactions and content exchanges. Strategic communicators still "play a continuing role—not control, but a role—in shaping their messages, so they can at least participate in issue arenas that determine public opinion" (Murphy, 2011, p. 14). This then begs the question: What theoretical instruments do communication professionals have to address this challenging situation?

This paper aims to address this question in two ways. First, by discussing the macro-level transformations in the digital communication environment that are empowering the engagement of an increasingly diverse range of voices in organisational message (re)production and (re)distribution. Second, by offering a theoretical framework to help communication professionals understand and navigate the chaotic and multi-vocal digital environment in which anyone can be an organisational communicator. In this regard, we propose to draw on Badham et al's (2022a) Digital Media-Arena (DMA) framework. Although much research has examined the challenge of managing organisational messages in the digital environment, the DMA framework offers an analytic tool encompassing a wide range of communication possibilities between minimum and maximum control over organisational messages involving a diversity of participating voices. Accordingly, we propose to extend and revise this framework to include new forms of media-arenas involving digital interactions taken by organisations, stakeholders and publics in the digital ecosystem. This revised conceptual framework is then applied to a critical, real-world situation in which the political leader of a Western democratic nation faced a barrage of diverse supportive and antagonistic voices operating in multiple media-arenas. This illustrative example of the revised DMA framework in

action thus not only serves the purpose of showing the applicability and usability of the proposed conceptual framework, it also offers communication professionals an "opportunity to learn" (Stake, 2005, p. 451) how different DMAs are used by organisations, stakeholders and the wider public.

The paper is divided into six parts. The first part reviews literature conceptualising strategic communication in the digital environment as either (1) organisation-managed communication (*media*) or as (2) spaces of interactions (*arenas*) by a plurality of stakeholders and publics. The second part discusses three main theoretical models that shed light on how polyphonic communication takes place in digital communication environments. The third part presents a revised DMA framework for digital communication with diverse voices. In the fourth section, we conduct a case analysis to demonstrate the applicability of the revised conceptual framework to a critical situation. Next, we present and discuss the findings, followed by a concluding section in which we discuss limitations and possibilities for future research relating to the DMA framework.

Literature review

Communicators of organisational messages in digital media and digital arenas

The literature on public relations, strategic communication and corporate communication tends to conceptualise communication in the digital environment as a collection of either (1) vehicles of organisation-managed communication (*media*) for organisational messages or as (2) spaces of interactions (*arenas*) where messages about organisations are discussed and debated by a plurality of stakeholders and publics (Badham et al, 2022a). Digital communication technologies have enabled organisations to communicate directly with a large quantity of stakeholders through media predominantly controlled by organisations, such as corporate websites, electronic newsletters, corporate apps, and social media corporate accounts. Because organisations can maintain a degree of control over their messages conveyed through these digital media, these vehicles are more conducive to organisation-driven and thus controlled communication of organisational messages than stakeholders' and the wider public's conversations relating to organisations. Accordingly, communicators typically play a sender role when communicating on behalf of organisations in digital media.

In addition to *digital media*, digitalisation of communication has formed *digital arenas* which have expanded the opportunity for organisations to conduct two-way interactions with stakeholders and for stakeholders to create and co-create their own messages about organisations with or without organisational influence. Within public relations, corporate communication and strategic communication research (e.g., Frandsen and Johansen, 2010, 2016; Luoma-aho and Vos, 2010; Luoma-aho and Juholin, 2017; Vos *et al.,*

2014), arenas are understood as places of interaction where individuals and organisational actors more or less formally or informally communicate with each other and where relationships are formed, maintained and discontinued (Badham *et al.,* 2022a).

Digital arenas are seen as online forums for participatory, two-directional and omni-directional communication with less organisational control over messages. They are online spaces (e.g., discussion forums) where stakeholders come together to discuss, debate and contest opinions. In the interactive process in which arenas empower two-directional communication (i.e., between stakeholder and organisation) and multi-directional communication (i.e., stakeholders-to-stakeholders), conversations form around topics or situations related to organisations and their products, people and activities. In sum, conversational dynamics in arenas are less conducive to forms of organisational control over messages about and from organisations.

We take the view that strategic communication allows for the purposeful use of participatory communication with a plurality of publics for organisational purposes within digital arenas. Thus, we concur with Zerfass *et al.* (2018) that strategic communication is "the purposeful use of communication by an entity to engage in conversations of strategic significance to its goals" (Zerfass *et al.*, 2018, p. 487). These organisation-stakeholder conversations, which constitute participatory communication, may involve an organisation's co-creation of meanings about organisational messages with their stakeholders and the wider public, who may be viewed as companions in creating organisational meaning (Botan and Taylor, 2004). This suggests a facilitator role in which communicators advocate for organisation-stakeholder/public conversations around organisational messages.

Main theoretical models to study polyphonic digital communication

Research in strategic communication, corporate communication and public relations has underlined the value that a multiplicity of digitally-enabled voices brings to organisations. Digital technology has brought about an increase in speed of communication and connectivity of voices that has led to a "dynamization of communication", and this has made communication in digital environments "more indeterminate as it fosters multi-directional outcomes of communication" (Castello *et al.*, 2013, p. 1). Thus, monitoring public opinion and listening to diverse stakeholder concerns (Macnamara, 2018) is an important task for organisations, partly because of the plurality of voices that tend to converge around certain "digital public spaces" and make sense of critical organisational situations in the digital ecosystem.

Different scholars have argued that in today's multi-vocal environment, the mainstream organisation-centred approach should be replaced by a strong emphasis on interaction in networks of organisations, groups and individuals (Raupp, 2019; Vos *et al.*, 2014). Organisations will not survive long without a clear picture of the diverse voices and perspectives that stakeholders may have of them or the situation in which

organisations are directly or indirectly involved. These voices can constitute a big part of and define an organisation's reputation and success. To some extent, 'digital public spaces' of communication have become reputational arenas for many organisations today (Aula and Mantere, 2008) who are constantly trying to balance how stakeholders perceive them while supporting stakeholder-to-stakeholder online engagement.

Understanding how organisations can steer conversations and the formation of opinions about them in such arenas is of great relevance for communication professionals. Issue Arena Theory (Luoma-aho and Vos, 2010) is one of the classic public relations theories addressing the question of which arenas to monitor and which actors are more prominent in discussing a particular issue. The theory suggests identifying and studying four macro elements to better understand issue-effects on stakeholders and organisations. These four elements are a) the loci of interaction, b) the actors, c) the issue characteristics, and d) the course of debate around the issue. Rhetorical Arena Theory, or RAT (Frandsen and Johansen, 2010), which examines how diverse public voices can conflict and agree with one another, was developed to help crisis managers to address the communicative complexity of crises. RAT also has since been used in contexts other than crises. In a similar way RAT looks at public discourses that occur on public spaces and how these change, adapt, and reshape the collective understanding of an issue. RAT suggests studying both micro and macro level interactions. Through a macro level analysis, it is possible to understand how interactions move from one space to another and create networks of conversations around a topic. Whereas through a micro level analysis, it is possible to dig deeper in understanding the mode, form and genre that those interactions take place in and also the purpose and its resonance with social and cultural norms. The micro level analysis thus helps communicators in choosing content and framing of messages that best resonate with the situation and interactions.

While both theories have heavily contributed to our understanding of how stakeholder polyphony takes places, much of scientific literature utilising these theories has focused on monitoring and listening to online active stakeholders (Macnamara, 2016) who vocally communicate opinions about organisations. Some recent scholarly work has tried lately to understand the role of so-called passive stakeholders in issue arenas (as an example, see Hellsten *et al*., 2019 for automated methods of mapping issue arenas on Twitter). Socio-semantic network analyses have become more popular today in studying communicative dynamics in issue arenas, even during the Covid-19 pandemic (Upadhyay *et al.*, 2022).

Despite this emerging scholarly understanding of the role and importance of diverse voices in organisational communication occurring in complex digital communication environments, we contend that neither Issue Arena Theory nor Rhetorical Arena Theory provide normative guidelines on how communication professionals may address the balance between the more controlled nature of digital media

and the less controlled nature of digital arenas. Nor do they help us examine the behaviour of digital publics in framing organisational messages, particularly in digital arenas. To our knowledge, the only existing theoretical framework in strategic communication, corporate communication and public relations research that offers practical guidelines to address this balance is the Digital Media-Arena framework by Badham *et al.* (2022a).

Digital Media-Arenas: A framework for digital communication with diverse voices

One of the recent efforts to understand the role of diverse voices in strategic digital communication is the Digital Media-Arena (DMA) framework (Badham *et al.*, 2022a). The authors argue that this framework integrates two seemingly competing functions of digital communication, in which professionals (1) use *media* as more or less controlled one- and two-directional communication tools to disseminate organisational messages but also (2) contribute to communicative interactions among a diverse range of voices in *arenas* thus facilitating two-directional and omni-directional communication in a less-controlled approach. *Digital media-arenas* (DMA) are defined as

> *online communicative spaces ranging between uni-directional communication channels and omni-directional communication discussion forums that can be utilized to varying degrees by strategic communicators adopting blended roles between senders of messages, facilitators of stakeholder engagement in organisational messages, and strategic improvisers of organisational messages gone rogue* (Badham *et al.*, 2022a).

The DMA framework addresses the paradoxical challenge organisations face in communicating in the digital realm, in which communicators have to balance both the free-for-all participatory nature of digital arenas as well as the more message-controlling nature of digital media. This framework is built on the PESO model of Paid, Earned, Shared, and Owned media use (Burcher, 2012; Macnamara *et al.,* 2016; Xie *et al.,* 2018) and integrates other emerging forms of communication.

Owned DMA refers to situations in which organizations are able to control the formation and dissemination of their messages through online spaces or software they have purchased for their own controlled-communication use. Organizations have a high degree of control over the location, length and look of messages disseminated in this way. This gives the organization a high level of control over the targeting of its message to receivers. Accordingly, the organization can expect predominantly positive responses from stakeholders to messages placed on these DMA.

Paid DMA refers to situations in which organizations pay for "traditional advertising and other forms of content commercially contracted between organisations and mass media" (Macnamara *et al.,* 2016, p. 377) and which are designed and produced according to the editorial standards of a media outlet (Wilcox *et al.,*

2015). Examples also include sponsored campaigns, advertorials or branded content. Organisations have a high degree of control over design, placement and timing of their messages through Paid DMA, and can expect predominantly positive responses from stakeholders to messages placed on these DMA.

Earned DMA refers to situations in which organisations attract editorial publicity through media relations activities (Vogler & Badham, 2023). Through the symbiotic relationship between public relations practitioners and editorial staff of news media, organisations are able to negotiate how much of the core organisational message can be embedded in news reports and when this message gets disseminated to news audiences. Organisations have a moderate degree of control over the creation, transformation and dissemination of organisational messages depending on factors such as level of public relations skill, relations with journalists and editors, and whether the organisation is linked to a crisis. However, organisations have less control over news media outlet's own internal communication moderation features. Accordingly, the organisation can expect mixed stakeholder responses (in terms of sentiment) to messages placed on these DMA.

Shared DMA refers to situations in which stakeholders and the wider public can contribute to the formation, reinterpretation and contestation of organisational messages in social media. Typically, hateholders and faith-holders (i.e., fans) of organisations (Luoma-aho, 2015) tend to be more motivated to engage in these processes. Through their own personal social media accounts, they are able to interact with organisational messages such as commenting on them and replying to and sharing these messages within their social networks. Thus organisations have a low degree of control over messages disseminated in this way and can expect mixed stakeholder responses (in terms of sentiment) to messages placed on these DMA.

Advocated DMA refers to situations in which stakeholders close to the organisation and with some level of intimate knowledge about the organisation, such as through relationships (e.g., employees and influencers), willingly and without coercion communicate messages about the organisation via their own social media accounts and the news media. Employees may communicate about their employing organisation with the public in either sanctioned or unsanctioned ways through social media and the news media. These may take the form of employee or influencer stories advocating *for* the organisation or advocating *against* the organisation by posting photos of defective products in social media (e.g., corporate whistleblowers leaking information to the public about corporate wrongdoing). We note, however, that these adversarial occurrences are rare in comparison to the quantity of messages supportive of organisations. Through the internal communication function (Andersson et al., 2023) and more specifically via employee advocacy programs and employment contractual agreements, the organisation has a moderate degree of control over what employees say publicly, such as through communication training and guidelines. However, despite the organisation having less control over communication moderation features in employees' and

influencers' own social media accounts and mainstream news sites, the organisation can expect predominantly positive engagement from stakeholders.

Rented DMA refers to situations in which an organisation enters into an agreement with external social media influencers (Enke and Borchers, 2019; Sundermann and Raabe, 2019; Woodcock and Johnson, 2019) to remunerate them financially or in other ways, inviting them to communicate an organisational message to their own stakeholders. Typically, communication takes the form of a blog or vlog or other social media posts, and thus the organisation has some level of control over the positioning of its message within the influencer's communication outputs. Given the collaborative nature of this DMA and organisations' strategic choice of working with influencers who share similar values, the organisation has a relatively high level of control over its messages conveyed by influencers, including moderate editorial control over communication moderation features within influencers' blogs/vlogs. For these reasons, it can expect predominantly positive engagement with influencers' stakeholders.

Hijacked DMA refers to situations in which stakeholders reappropriate an organisational message to convey a different, often opposite, message, and then share it across their social network. Typically, the organisational message is embedded within a hashtag created by the organisation for public relations purposes and this message is reconverted by one or more stakeholders into an antagonistic message. Accordingly, an organisation has a very low level of control over hijacked messages (Luoma-aho *et al.,* 2018; Johansson et al, 2023). The organisation can expect predominantly negative engagement with stakeholders in these DMA.

Searched DMA refers to situations in which stakeholders and the wider public utilise search engines to conduct online searches for information related to organisations. An organisation has some level of control over its messages discovered through this process, such as through search engine optimization (SEO) tactics. The organisation can expect mixed sentiment-engagement with stakeholders in Searched DMA.

A revised DMA Framework: Newer forms of DMA

As we show below, the current DMA framework contains limitations in addressing some of the more recent digital communicative behaviours of stakeholders and publics. Accordingly, we next introduce six new DMA that take into consideration emerging forms of communication that highlight not just the diversity of stakeholders and publics becoming engaged in communication with and about organisations, but also the tension between organisational and public control over organisational messages in digital environments.

Placed DMA refers to situations in which organizations disseminate messages by subtly positioning their product or brand into content created by others. Typical examples of this audio (Mari et al., 2023) and visual (Valentini & Murtarelli, 2023) communication strategy include product and brand placement in

digital games, TV shows and news reports. Organisations have a low level of control over their organisational messages in this DMA. However, they have strong editorial control over communication moderation features within this DMA because of the typical financial remuneration involved in such practices. Accordingly, the organisation can expect mixed stakeholder responses (in terms of sentiment) to messages placed in this DMA.

Sponsored DMA refers to situations in which organizations subtly disseminate their messages to wider publics by providing funding or other resource support for an individual, group or charity. Typical examples include sponsorship of community activities, events, buildings, and other spaces. Organisations have a weak level of control over their organisational messages in this DMA and they have moderately strong editorial control over communication moderation features within this DMA. Accordingly, the organisation can expect mixed stakeholder responses (in terms of sentiment) to messages placed in this DMA.

Crowdsourced DMA refers to situations in which stakeholders and publics contribute and edit content about an organisation (e.g. testimonials, reviews) on publicly available crowdsourced sites. Typical examples of such sites include wikis (e.g. Wikipedia) and product and service rating and review sites (e.g. Trustpilot, Amazon and Glassdoor). Sites that operate with an open source approach enable users to collaborate in the construction of published knowledge about organisations and other entities, people and objects. Because these sites are owned by other organisations, an organisation has quite a low level of control over its messages formed through Crowdsourced DMA. Likewise, an organisation has weak editorial control over communication moderation features within this DMA. For example, organisations are very restricted in how they can edit information about themselves in Wikipedia and how they can respond to customers' reviews on external review sites. Accordingly, the organisation can expect mixed stakeholder responses (in terms of sentiment) to messages in this DMA. We argue that it is difficult to identify a single, clear organisational message from this DMA due to its strongly independent editorial principles. Nevertheless, organisations should monitor this DMA and where necessary engage in the editorial process to provide contextual balance to the organisational message portrayed here.

Curated DMA refers to situations in which stakeholders select, edit and publish previously published content about organisations from a wide range of sources for the purpose of supplying a curated and thus reinterpreted form of content. Information-intermediary companies - such as Edelman (e.g., Edelman Trust Barometer), Gartner (business insights and trends), and Nielsen (media industry ratings and analysis) - are a typical example of stakeholders curating content in the form of market intelligence reports. In offering curated analyses of organisations and their products and activities, their reports significantly impact corporate reputations. Individual and business stakeholders subscribe to these reports and opt in to their newsletters and feeds. Organisations mentioned in these analyses have strong control over organisational

messages embedded within content in these analyses but weak editorial control over communication moderation features within this DMA.

Artificial DMA refers to situations in which stakeholders and publics create or manipulate organizational messages via artificial intelligence (AI) algorithms and services that increasingly are becoming available to members of the general public. Typical communicative examples within this DMA include artificially constructed text, images and videos (e.g. deepfakes and bots) in social media, news media, and other digital media. Because organisations also are able to use AI to generate their own messages, they have a moderately strong level of control over their organisational messages and yet weak editorial control over communication moderation features in this DMA. Accordingly, the organisation can expect fairly negative stakeholder responses (in terms of sentiment) to messages placed in this DMA.

Recycled DMA refers to situations in which stakeholders and publics appropriate organizational messages to distort their original meaning or context, often through use of humour. Typical communicative examples within this DMA include memes and parodies created and shared in social media, TV shows and blogs. Organisations have a moderately weak level of control over their organisational messages and very weak editorial control over communication moderation features in this DMA. Accordingly, the organisation can expect quite negative stakeholder responses (in terms of sentiment) to messages placed in this DMA.

Table I describes the types, descriptions and typical examples of each of these 14 DMAs.

Table I. Types, descriptions and typical examples of Digital Media-Arenas (DMA). Shading indicates newer DMA in the revised DMA Framework. Table adapted courtesy of Badham et al. (2020).

Type of Digital Media-Arena (DMA)	Description	Typical examples of DMAs (and communication taking place in them)
Owned	Organization disseminates its own messages through online spaces or software it purchases and thus owns and/or controls	Website, app, social media (organization's accounts), podcasts, blogs, virtual assistants and chatbots (controlled by the organization)
Paid	Organization directly, financially and transparently remunerates owners of other DMA to disseminate its messages to their publics	Advertisements in news media, social media
Earned	Organization attempts to convey its messages via news media applying journalistic principles in production, editing and publication	Digital newspapers, TV, radio, magazines, digital native news sites, news aggregators
Rented	Organization remunerates (financially and/or in other ways) influential individuals to communicate its messages to their publics	Social media influencers' social media accounts, blogs
Shared	Organization, stakeholders and publics communicate messages for/against the organization in social media	Posts in social media
Advocated	Stakeholders with close relational ties to the organisation (e.g., employees and influencers not under contractual obligation to the organisation) willingly and without coercion communicate organisational messages via social media and news media	Social media (through accounts not under organisational control) and news media where employees and other close stakeholders share their organisational messages
Searched	Stakeholders and publics utilize search engines to discover organizational messages via algorithmically collected online information related to products, brands, services and experiences related to the organization	Online search engines
Hijacked	Stakeholders and publics hostile to the organization reappropriate organizational messages to harm the organization	Brandjacking, campaign hijacking, hashtag hijacking in social media
Placed	Organization subtly disseminates its messages by positioning its product or brand into content created by others	Product and brand placement in digital games, TV shows and news reports
Sponsored	Organization subtly disseminates its messages by providing funding or other resource support for an individual, group or charity	Sponsorship of community activities, events and buildings
Crowdsourced	Stakeholders and publics contribute content (e.g. testimonials) about the organisation to publicly available crowdsourced sites	Wikis (e.g. Wikipedia), product and service rating and review sites (e.g. Trustpilot, Amazon, Glassdoor)
Curated	Stakeholders gather previously published content about target organisations from a range of sources and curate this into new content	Opposition reports and market intelligence reports, such as from Edelman (e.g., Edelman Trust Barometer), Gartner (business insights and trends) and Nielsen (media industry ratings and analysis)
Artificial	While organisations use AI to create messages, stakeholders and publics also create or manipulate organizational messages via AI	Artificially-generated and constructed text, images and videos (e.g. deepfakes and bots) in social media, news media, and other digital media
Recycled	Stakeholders and publics appropriate organizational messages to distort their original meaning or context, often through use of humour	Memes and parodies created and shared in social media, TV shows, blogs

These DMAs are important considerations for communication practitioners. Traditionally, organisations have published content on their websites and posted messages in their own social media accounts (Owned DMA), paid for advertisements (Paid DMA), issued press releases (Earned DMA), placed their products within TV shows and other visual means (Placed DMA), and sponsored community causes (Sponsored DMA) for the purpose of subtly presenting their organisational messages to new stakeholders. Increasingly, organisations also are collaborating with employees (Advocated DMA), as well as fans (Shared DMA) and influencers (Rented DMA), to assist in conveying an organisational message to stakeholders beyond direct organisational reach. And yet, despite these more controlled communication efforts, customers can offer and edit opinions about organisations on review sites (Crowdsourced DMA) and activists are able to collectively transform positive organisational messages into negative ones (Hijacked DMA) while other political and organisational actors gather and exhibit content about organisations as reinterpreted organisational messages (Curated DMA), sometimes through AI (Artificial DMA) and at other times though humour (Recycled DMA). However, organisations should not ignore those publics (especially potential stakeholders) who seek information about them through online search engines (Searched DMA), wikis and product review sites (Crowdsourced DMA) and market intelligence reports (Curated DMA); indeed, organisations can strategically monitor and, when deemed necessary, attempt to manage their messages in this search process for the purpose of engaging these searchers in their organisational messages.

Each DMA demands a different communication approach essentially because each attracts distinct types of current and potential stakeholders and therefore organisational messages need to be uniquely addressed to these stakeholders. As the participatory nature of the digital environment presents both challenges and opportunities for communication professionals and leaders, in practice the existence and role of the different media-arenas may prove helpful to understand and coordinate strategic communication in reality. For example, as shown in Table II, the DMA framework can be used as a planning or evaluation grid to consider an organisation's degree of control over messages and communication features within each DMA. The DMA framework offers organisations insights into how best to manage and facilitate the communication of their messages through the dual functions of *media* as channels for organisational messages disseminated to stakeholders as well as *arenas* for discussion of organisational messages between organisations and their stakeholders and wider publics and between stakeholders/publics themselves.

Table II. Digital Media-Arena Framework planning grid: Organization's degree of control over messages and communication features within each digital media-arena (DMA). Table adapted courtesy of Badham et al. (2020).

Type of Digital Media-Arena (DMA)	Degree of control over organizational message	Degree of control over moderation features enabling & restricting communication in digital arena/platform
Owned	Very strong	Very strong
Curated	Very strong	Very weak
Paid	Strong	Strong
Rented	Strong	Weak
Advocated	Moderate	Weak
Artificial	Moderate	Weak
Shared	Moderate	Moderate
Earned	Moderate	Weak
Searched	Moderate	Very weak
Recycled	Weak	Very weak
Placed	Weak	Strong
Sponsored	Weak	Strong
Crowdsourced	Very weak	Weak
Hijacked	Very weak	Very weak

It is important to note that each DMA determines how much control organisations can have over their message and therefore how much influence they have over the way their messages are interpreted by the recipients. In other words, these DMAs are differentiated according to their ability to enable organisational control over (1) the creation, transformation, and uni-directional dissemination of messages and (2) the digital platform or arena features enabling and restricting moderation of two- and omni-directional communication (e.g., enabling comments and sharing). Figure I below shows examples of each DMA positioned between these two tensions.

Figure I: DMAs positioned between two control tensions: organisational control over (1) messages and (2) digital platform communication moderation features
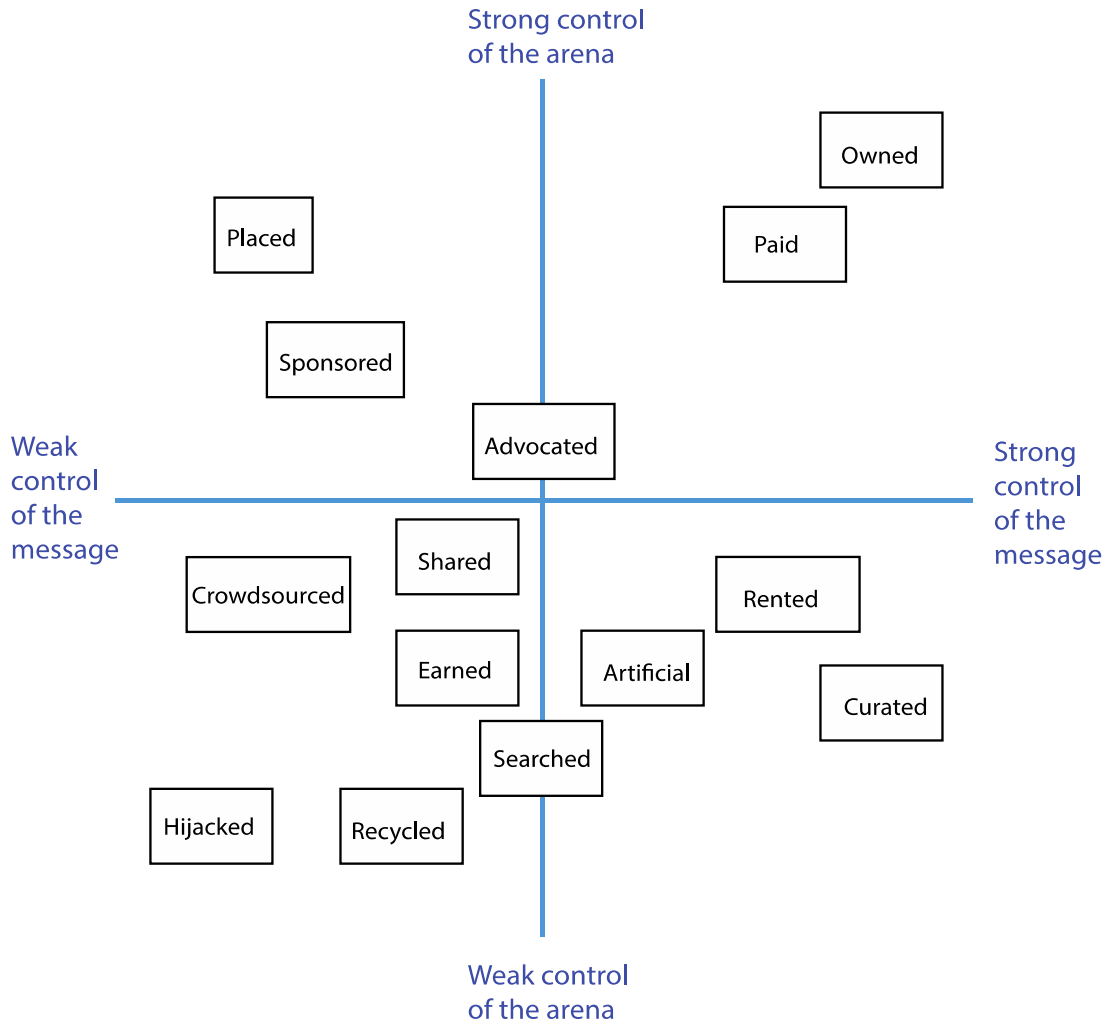

Figure 1. DMAs positioned between two control tensions: organisational control over (1) messages and (2) digital platform communication moderation features.
(Figure adapted courtesy of Badham et al., 2020.)

Methodology

To meet the research objective of this study, a qualitative research approach was chosen to explore stakeholder polyphony in a concrete, yet limited situation utilising the revised DMA framework. Since our interest is in exploring communicative interactions in the digital ecosystem and public behaviours related to the use of organisational messages, the analysis is rooted in a qualitative and interpretivist approach in which we "interpret" reality through a "sense-making" process by carefully collecting and studying "digital

content" produced during the critical situation. To illustrate the applicability of the revised conceptual framework, we chose an example addressing a contemporary and yet real-world situation (Cutler, 2004). The chosen example dealt with the Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin's highly-publicised scandal involving a leaked video of a private party she attended in summer 2022. This example was chosen because it offers a critical situation with multiple and conflicting voices interweaving their own versions of organisational messages within conversations and content produced and distributed across many different DMAs, thus allowing us to use and reflect upon the applicability of the refined DMA framework. The example also dealt with a challenging situation which can be useful to stimulate managerial reflections on how to best navigate the plurality of voices contesting organisational messages in the 'wild west' of today's digital communication environment.

We collected texts and images (still and video) from news media, social media, blogs and websites published between 16 August 2022 and 4 November 2022. We used this data initially to gather background information on the situation and to understand the chronological order in which this case unfolded. The analytical process consisted of a close reading of the data to extract information that would help identify, classify and analyse each DMA according to the core elements described in the revised DMA framework. The coding included identification of the organisational message and main groups of stakeholders/publics involved in each DMA. Illustrative examples of the DMAs were found and saved for further qualitative analysis. Two of the authors cross-referenced their initial findings and subsequently revised their interpretations of some of the DMAs (e.g., to make clearer the difference between Curated and Recycled DMA). Because much of the material was published in Finnish, one of the authors translated Finnish text into English for the purpose of analysis.

The Situation: The Finnish Prime Minister's Controversial Party Videos

To identify, examine and illustrate each of the DMAs and their role in a critical situation, we focus on the highly publicised and controversial case of a private party which the Finnish Prime Minister attended in August 2022 (See, for example, Greenall, 2022). In early August 2022 leaked videos of the 36-year-old Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin singing and dancing exuberantly at a private party held on the evening of 6 August went viral. The initial version of the video appears to have been posted as an Instagram story and includes various clips taken at different times during the evening. Words such as "flour gang" and "Damn this feels good" can be heard in an uncut version of the video.

For a PM who had cultivated a public image of a serious and measured political leader, this was devastating. The imagery of Marin dancing and singing unrestrainedly in the video is a jarring contrast to the calm and serious prime minister known to the Finnish public. Amidst public accusations of intoxication and drug use at the party, particularly from her political opponents, Finns questioned her

work ethic and her commitment to her job. In response to these critiques, Marin voluntarily took a drug test which later proved negative. This, however, was not the first case in which she was under the media spotlight for questionable private behaviour. A month earlier she had been involved in another scandal that tarnished her reputation as a serious political leader; an image of two of her female friends topless and kissing at a party at her official residence was posted on TikTok and went viral on social media. Finland's parliamentary ombudsman subsequently received multiple complaints alleging her excessive alcohol consumption at the party and thus that she was unable to carry out her official duties. However, Finland's chancellor of justice investigated both events and concluded that she had not neglected her official responsibilities.

The August video sparked controversy within Finland and abroad, raising questions about whether her behaviour should be considered appropriate for an elected world leader, particularly during a period in which Finland and its EU partners were heavily invested in the Russia-Ukraine war and its citizens were beginning to suffer the economic after-effects of an energy crisis. Furthermore, Marin was elected in 2019 as the world's youngest head of government and her youth and relative political inexperience was often a target of criticism.

Findings

We next explore and discuss our findings showing how each DMA played a communication role in the development of this critical situation. Though these connected events occurred on several different DMAs somewhat chaotically and simultaneously, they are explored here in the approximate chronological order in which they appeared related to this situation. To provide a broader contextual understanding of this complex and constantly shifting situation, we also point out the diversity of stakeholders disseminating certain messages in each DMA and highlight thematic links between organisational messages to make clearer the role played by stakeholders and DMAs in linking and morphing some organisational messages with others.

Shared: On 16 August 2022, the party video was leaked on a private Instagram account called @rayharautio belonging to one of Marin's celebrity friends. Multiple versions of the video clip, many of which have since been deleted from Instagram, were widely circulated in social media. The video immediately went viral, with multiple versions of organisational messages being formed and debated in social media. For the purposes of illustration, we interpret the organisational message created and disseminated by her celebrity friends (as stakeholders) as 'Video of Finnish PM shows a contradiction between a rare image of a PM dancing and drinking privately with friends and a carefully managed public

image of a serious and measured world leader'. As shown in Table III, this is the first organisational message (OM) in this case analysis, which we refer to as OM1. During the ensuing hours following the release of the first party video, a second organisational message formed and disseminated by her opponents (as stakeholders) on social media, and which had been circulating throughout her time as PM, was (OM2): 'The Finnish PM is too young and inexperienced to lead Finland through the Russia-Ukraine war and the resulting energy crisis'.

Earned: The leaked video was first published as a mainstream news story the next day (17 August) by the Finnish tabloid *Iltalehti* (Harju, 2022) with the headline: "The videos started to spread on social media: Sanna Marin is celebrating and dancing wildly in a group of celebrities" (translated from Finnish). That same day *Iltalehti* tweeted about the story: "Sanna Marin celebrates and dances wildly in a group of celebrities" (translated from Finnish). This tweet boosted the spread of the story online. Within days the story began attracting global news attention (e.g., BBC, The Guardian, DW, France24).

In response to the organisational message circulating about Marin's youth and inexperience (OM2), Marin's women supporters formed and disseminated their own message in social media and via the news media. *The Guardian* newspaper published a story on 18 August 2022 with the headline: "Supporters defend Finnish PM Sanna Marin's right to party after video leak" (Henley, 2022). The main organisational message embedded within this story, which was distributed by Marin's female supporters (as stakeholders), is that (OM3) 'A political leader is entitled to enjoy private time away from her public duties'.

Searched: From the moment the news broke on social media and then in mainstream news reports, people began searching for information about the event on Google and other search engine and social media platforms. As an example, a Google search on 21 February 2023 using the keywords "Finnish PM party video 2022" found 157,000 mentions. Each of these diverse organisational messages emerging in this case can be found using key words associated with each organisational message.

Hijacked: The Finnish word "Jauhojengi!", which could be heard 50 seconds into the video, divided opinions on social media right from the start. The word means "flour gang" or "powder gang" and suggests illegal drug-taking at the party. The words "Damn this feels good" followed 38 seconds later. People began debating whether someone in the video can also be heard to say: "Come here and test it, it feels good". However, many Finns also thought the word referred to a type of drink known to Finns. These illicit drug-taking, excessive alcohol drinking, and unrestrained dancing insinuations were amplified on social media, particularly by far-right and anti-government accounts (Henley, 2022), suggesting Marin's right-wing critics (as stakeholders) were promoting these insinuations. This points to a fourth organisational message spread through social media by Marin's critics from 16 August 2022 onwards (OM4): 'Video of Finnish PM at private party implicates her in illegal drug-taking'.

The lack of certainty about whether the video provides evidence of drug-taking fuelled the controversy in social media. On 18 August, two days after the initial video emerged on social media, *Iltalehti* published a statement from sound technology expert and linguist Janne Saarikivi confirming that, based on his careful analysis, the Finnish word "Jauhojengi!" can indeed be heard in the video. The #Jauhojengi hashtag then started trending. Thus, through this news story, the fourth organisational message (OM4) morphs into a new one (OM5): 'Sound expert confirms references to drugs in video of Finnish PM at private party'.

Although Hijacked DMA refers to stakeholders and publics hostile to the organization reappropriating organizational messages to harm the organization, suggesting that they 'hijacked' or 'reappropriated' a message typically initiated by an organisation, we argue that this is an example of Hijacked DMA because Marin's right-wing critics were particularly forceful in pushing a drug-taking narrative that took the scandal to a new level of intensity.

Earned: As OM4 and OM5 began spreading in Hijacked DMA, Marin defended herself mostly through statements given directly to the news media rather than publishing controlled statements on her official websites and social media accounts. On 19 August 2022 she told reporters that to the best of her knowledge no drugs had been consumed at the party. "As far as I know, I have never been in such a situation," she said. "On the night shown in the video footage, I didn't see anyone using drugs" (Henley, 2022). In sum, her message thus was (OM6) "I am innocent of these allegations."

Curated: Political opponents curated this and previous controversial situations into mounting evidence of a leader who attracts scandals. Their statements in parliament, social media and news media reminded audiences of a video leaked in July 2022 showing two topless women kissing at a party hosted by Marin. Thus, the organisational message disseminated by Marin's opponents (as stakeholders) was (OM7) 'The Finnish PM's constant partying with controversial celebrity friends affects her ability to lead the nation as a serious political leader'. Curating multiple events into this controversy empowered them to publicly call for her to take a drug test to prove her claims of not taking drugs that night. As a result, multiple complaints to the Finnish parliamentary ombudsman alleged that excessive alcohol consumption at the August party would have made her unable to carry out her official duties.

Advocated: Social media influencers who knew Marin, such as Hillary Clinton and Dr Carolina Brum, Senior Research Scientist at the Machine Intelligence Sensing group at Apple, came to her defence via their own social media channels, supporting her behaviour and her right to privacy and free recreational time. On 28 August 2022 Clinton tweeted "keep dancing @marinsanna", to which Marin replied "Thank you @HillaryClinton". The message emanating from these influential supporters was (OM8) 'You did nothing wrong and we support you', which is a version of Marin's own message (OM6) in which she claimed her innocence.

Shared: Female supporters around the world shared on social media videos of themselves dancing and celebrating, hash tagging the videos #SolidarityWithSanna and #DancingWithSanna. A video of many of these women dancing in support of Marin was tweeted by BBC reporter Megha Mohan on 20 August and received almost 92,000 likes in five days. Collectively, the message conveyed by Marin's fans was (OM8) 'You did nothing wrong and we support you'.

Earned: On 4 November 2022, some news outlets, including the *BBC*, reported that after an official investigation into Marin's alleged drug-taking at the party, Finland's chancellor of justice concluded that Marin was cleared of misconduct (BBC, 2022). The chancellor's message (as a stakeholder) therefore was (OM9): 'The Finnish PM did not consume illegal drugs at the private party and thus is exonerated from the allegations'. Accordingly, this message legitimises Marin's message (OM6) and her female supporters' message (OM8).

When the news media asked Marin on 4 November 2022 about the video, she stated in a succinct message: "I am human, and I too sometimes long for joy, light and fun amidst these dark clouds" (BBC, 2022). Thus, we interpret her message to be (OM10) 'We all need to take time out to enjoy life during these tough times', which is her own version of the message disseminated by her women supporters (OM3). She also told reporters she hoped that "in the year 2022, it is accepted that even decision-makers get to dance, sing and go to parties".

Recycled: Memes began circulating comparing younger politicians and older politicians, with the Marin party images recycled into new content and meaning.

Owned: The main examples of Marin's owned DMA include her personal website as an individual politician (https://sannamarin.net) and the Prime Minister's Office website (https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en). These owned DMA remained minimally engaged in the ongoing controversial events in this cas, reporting merely two official statements by the Prime Minister. On 22 August 2022 the PM's Office published a press statement with the headline "No drugs were detected in the Prime Minister's drug test" and a tweet from its Twitter account (@valtioneuvosto) stating "The drug test taken from the Prime Minister @MarinSanna on 19 August 2022 has not found any drugs." Marin retweeted this from her own Twitter account (https://twitter.com/MarinSanna). Thus, her message (OM11), summarised as 'I am innocent of all drug allegations', reiterates her earlier message (OM6) as well as the previous messages of the Chancellor of Justice (OM9) and her women supporters (OM8).

Crowdsourced: A new entry ('Private Party Videos') was added to Marin's entry in Wikipedia. Text describing Marin's party video scandal in the Wikipedia entry underwent multiple editorial iterations, as evident in the site's 'view history' feature.

Placed: We did not find evidence of Placed DMA in this case.

Rented: Despite Marin's extensive personal connections with social media influencers, we did not find evidence of the PM's use of Rented DMA (i.e., of her actively harnessing their support).

Paid: We did not find evidence of the PM's use of Paid DMA. In other words, there was no evidence of Marin's communication team engaging in traditional advertising in this case, probably because of the constantly shifting narratives developing and spreading hour-to-hour across multiple DMAs, which would have left very little time to plan, produce and execute an advertising strategy. Indeed, new versions of organisational messages would likely have morphed within hours of placing an advertisement, rendering the advertisement ineffective and even counter-productive. Defending an organisation (or in this case an individual representing an organisation) in a fast-developing scandal in DMAs with traditional advertising practices would not be advised because it would be seen as an obvious attempt by the Prime Minister and her supporters to control the narrative. We argue that trust can be built more effectively through use of third-party communication intermediaries (see Valentini and Badham, 2022). However, contemporary and organic advertising practices (such as sponsorship of Facebook posts) are difficult to detect by the public (and scholars) and thus may be more effective in fighting a mounting crisis situation.

Sponsored: We did not find evidence of Sponsored DMA in this case.

Artificial: We did not find evidence of Artificial DMA in this case. However, we note that since AI-generated content is designed to appear natural and that bots are difficult to detect, it may be possible that some AI content circulated and that we did not notice it because it was not disclosed as AI-generated. Thus, a qualitative, human-based analysis may not be the best tool to identify Artificial DMAs.

Table III shows the diverse organisational messages (identified and numbered in mostly chronological order), the main stakeholders disseminating and contributing to them, and the main themes in evidence within the DMAs to shed light on how some of the organisational messages were linked to each other. There were other organisational messages we could have extrapolated from various DMAs in this case, but we chose these eleven organisational messages based on their ability to illustrate unique features of each DMA. Although Table III highlights the relationships between organisational messages, DMAs and stakeholders in this case, it only summarises some illustrative examples of organisational messages and certainly does not account for the many other organisational messages and stakeholders involved in this case.

Table III: Finnish Prime Minister's controversial 2022 party video: Diverse organisational messages (identified and numbered in mostly chronological order), main stakeholders disseminating them, and main themes in evidence within DMAs. This table is the property of the authors.

Organisational message (OM) #	Organisational message (OM)	DMA	Date	Main stakeholder disseminating OM	Main theme
OM1	Video of Finnish PM shows a contradiction between a rare image of a PM dancing and drinking privately with friends and a carefully managed public image of a serious and measured world leader	Shared	16 August 2022	Marin's celebrity friends	Contradictory images: Partying vs. serious PM
OM2	The Finnish PM is too young and inexperienced to lead Finland through the Russia-Ukraine war and the resulting energy crisis	Shared	16 August 2022	Marin's opponents	PM as young and inexperienced
OM3	A political leader is entitled to enjoy private time away from her public duties	Earned	17 August 2022	Marin's women supporters	PM should enjoy life
OM4	Video of Finnish PM at private party implicates her in illegal drug-taking	Hijacked	16 August 2022	Marin's right-wing critics	Illegal drugs
OM5	Sound expert confirms references to drugs in video of Finnish PM at private party	Hijacked	18 August 2022	Iltalehti newspaper	Illegal drugs
OM6	I am innocent of these allegations	Earned	19 August 2022	Marin	Innocence
OM7	The Finnish PM's constant partying with controversial celebrity friends affects her ability to lead the nation as a serious political leader	Curated	16 August 2022 ongoing	Marin's political opponents	Controversial PM
OM8	You did nothing wrong and we support you	Shared Advocated	20 August 2022 28 August 2022	Marin's women supporters Influencers	Innocence
OM9	The Finnish PM did not consume illegal drugs at the private party and thus is exonerated from the allegations	Earned	4 November 2022	Finland's Chancellor of Justice	Innocence
OM10	We all need to take time out to enjoy life during these tough times	Earned	4 November 2022	Marin	Let's all enjoy life
OM11	I am innocent of all drug allegations	Owned	19 August 2022	Marin	Innocence

Conclusions

The increasing use and consumption of digital content, coupled with the wide spread of misinformation, pranks and alternative facts that have characterised digital communication over recent years, has brought even more attention of communication professionals towards their loss of control over organisational messages. This rising concern is posing both theoretical and practical questions for the planning and management of digital communication. How should organisation-driven communication be constructed and shared in such a digital environment?

In responding to this concern, the paper makes two main contributions. First, it revises and advances our theoretical understanding by expanding the DMA framework to include other types of DMAs capturing diverse novel digital behaviours. Second, this study presents a case analysis in which the revised conceptual framework is applied to a critical situation with a public figure in focus, thus expanding its applicability not just to organisations, but to any individual actor who may or may not represent organisations and who is publicly visible and active in the digital ecosystem. The analysis of the Finnish Prime Minister's party case shows that the DMA framework can be used as a theoretical tool to identify, describe and understand public opinions and digital public behaviours in situations not involving corporations, such as a political situation.

The DMA framework, including the planning grid (Table II), offers a heuristic tool enabling communication professionals to make decisions about which DMAs to engage with, according to each of

the 14 DMA's characteristics, in proactive and reactive ways, within the two control tensions of organisational control over (1) messages and (2) the digital platform features enabling and restricting moderation of communication of these messages. The practical value of the framework is that it may assist communication professionals to make strategic choices in what (messages), where (DMAs), how (considering tensions between control over message and over moderation possibilities in digital platforms), and with whom (key stakeholders and publics) organisations can communicate.

Although this study demonstrated the instrumental applicability of the conceptual DMA framework to analyse and understand complex dynamics occurring within digital interactions during the Finnish Prime Minister's party case, it acknowledges no intention to provide generalizability across other critical situations, nor a complete analysis of the critical situation described in this study, nor a quantitative account of all digital content circulating in the period concerning the critical event.

One of the limitations of this framework is that the boundaries between different types of DMA are not always rigid. Instead, strategic communication must acknowledge the ambiguity related to each DMA and the blurred boundaries between them. Another limitation of this framework is that it does not show the different phases that organisation-driven communications undertake to adapt to diverse DMAs. For example, future research could consider examining how organisational messages adapt and change according to different DMAs, at what speed, as well as how they change in this process.

Another fruitful line of inquiry could be conceptualization and measurement of how engagement in these DMAs shapes varying levels of stakeholder perceptions about the organisation (e.g., trust) and its messages. Research has shown that until recently stakeholders place a high level of trust in messages reported in the news (Earned DMA), although this has significantly decreased in many Western societies. We would expect high levels of trust in messages conveyed through Rented and Advocated DMA and lower trust in messages conveyed through Hijacked and even Paid DMA. Trust in organisational messages emerging from individuals' searches for organisation-related information (Searched DMA) would prove interesting, given public concerns and debate over Big Tech's powerful influence over search algorithms. This issue of DMA trust is important to communication professionals handling digital communication for their clients and organisations and planning how to effectively manage stakeholders' perceptions of and responses to organisational messages.

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