

I, Claudius the Idiot: Lessons to be learned from reputation management in Ancient Rome

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Abstract

Within hours of the assassination of his predecessor, Caligula, Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, henceforth referred to as Claudius, succeeded to the Roman Empire's throne. Even though he was nephew to Emperor Tiberius, he had not even been considered a remote contender as he was widely regarded unfit for the job. Out of despair he had turned to drinking, gambling, and writing history. At the age of 51, he would succeed the likes of Julius Caesar or Octavian Augustus to great success for Rome. What followed next was a unique exercise in personality public relations.¹ Claudius's systematic management of his image holds lessons both for academics and practitioners, suggesting that image making by individual political leaders goes back well into history, predating the modern political era considerably.²

Sir Laurence Alma-Tadema captured the surreal moment in his painting "A Roman Emperor AD 41": A visibly terrified man in flowing toga huddles behind a curtain in the corner of a room, his mouth half opened, his eyes in horror fixated on a bowed guardsman and the assembled courtiers to his left who hail him as the new Caesar. The turn of events on January 24 in 41 ACE that are so vividly depicted in this scene could hardly have been anticipated by anyone except the most astute political pundit of the day. Within hours of the assassination of his predecessor, Caligula, Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, henceforth referred to as Claudius, succeeded to the Roman Empire's throne. Even though he was nephew to emperor Tiberius, he had not even been considered a remote contender as he was widely regarded unfit for the job due to a number of crippling ailments which rendered him a laughing stock at court

and allegedly earned him the mocking name “Claudius the Idiot” among his family who had long been too embarrassed to present him in public (Graves, 1934).

Out of despair he had turned to drinking, gambling, and writing history. None of which marked him as a man who, at the age of 51, would succeed the likes of Julius Caesar or Octavian Augustus. What followed next was a unique exercise in re-vamping a leader’s identity and establishing a new public perception. This image making provides insights that help us understand how, in the course of a 14-year reign, Claudius could command authority in the Senate, the army, and among the people of Rome who generally saw his approach as benign. Claudius’ story and particularly his decision to send his legions across the English Channel and invade Britannia is a seminal lesson of how bold action may generate a positive reputation and secure legitimacy. With Claudius, we witness a case of personality public relations:³

His systematic management of images that shape views of a public persona holds lessons both for academics and practitioners. The concept of image management in a political context appears to be no fashionable fad of recent origin (e.g., Kunczik, 1997; Norris, 2002). There is agreement that the concept dates back to the origins of communications writing. Already in the first decade of the twentieth century Graham Wallas (1910) pioneered concepts of political leadership and image. About a decade later, in the 1920s, Walter Lippmann (1922/1997) argued that pictures were the most effective means to communicate an idea. However, 20 years later, Lazarsfeld (1948) held a view of political images that went beyond the merely visual. Milne and Mackenzie (1954) mentioned the concept of image management within the political arena in their coverage of the 1951 British general election. And, by the late 20th century, it was abundantly clear that communication practitioners contributed to the discourse on image management (Abratt, 1989). What did change in the second half of the 20th century, however, is

the idea of image as something that can be altered and artificially created. In this sense, image became interpreted as something that was shaped by advertisers and marketers who associated it with politicians and political parties (Carman, Johns & Denver 2012). But this chapter points out that the case of Claudius suggests that systematic image making by individual political leaders is not a 20th century phenomenon. Instead, the vita of emperor Claudius demonstrates how the need of, and rationale for, political image making predates the modern political era considerably.⁴

This chapter's purpose is not to review a stream of well-established facts about events leading up to and following Claudius' invasion of Britannia in 43 CE. Instead, I offer a different perspective by raising questions and applying theoretical concepts one would expect to find within a public relations context. In other words I am adopting a communicator's lens to address three issues.

First, Pohlig and Hacke (2008) suggested that theory is instrumental in changing perspectives in history writing as it offers a new interpretative framework of events. Thus, the application of theory in historical studies can make our preconceptions explicit as it has the potential to explain how and why we come to a certain understanding. Therefore, I use concepts of systems theory and two-way communications as a prism to re-interpret the reasons that led Claudius to launch the invasion of Britannia in 43 ACE. The underlying assumption of this chapter's theoretical approach is the centrality of positive reputation and legitimacy for any political leader. This chapter uses notions of reputation management and theories of legitimacy to render explicit how this military campaign was vital for Claudius' survival at the helm of Roman politics.

Second, this historical case study should also assist in widening the scope of public relations research by conceptualizing reputation management beyond the more commonly discussed and widely studied business-related context. This chapter views reputation as an instrument in constructing, preserving, and legitimizing political power (Eisenegger & Imhof, 2008). Finally, this case study's bottom line is to address how a reputation that apparently is beyond redemption can be rescued and restored by aligning actions with cultural values and specific expectations that are held dear among an actor's key publics.

The sources mainly originate from historians of the first and second centuries ACE who recorded both political history and gossip in the early imperial period. Additionally, this study relies heavily on Claudius' life story written by Sueton, who is applauded for this thorough and truthful research (Funaioli, 1931). Robert Graves' work, *I Claudius*, would lack its wealth of detail and historical precision had it not been for the material the author found in Sueton's earlier biographical studies. Yet caution is required as authors in antiquity often held a view of history writing that has little in common with current scientific conventions and bear more resemblance to hagiography than critical reflection. In other words, in contrast to modern historians, ancient Roman writers explicitly used historical monographs to propagate political and moral views and to support or damage political protagonists.⁵ By comparison, Sueton's is a genuine endeavour to work out Claudius' personality as well as the traits that distinguish and differentiate him from his predecessors (Veit, 1995). More critical and robust in judgement is Tacitus who was known as a *homo politicus* (a person concerned with the public good) and author of the *Annals*, a political history that zoomed in on leaders and political deeds ranging from Emperor Tiberius to Claudius' successor Nero. It is therefore most unfortunate that much of Tacitus' work is lost and, of Claudius' 14 years in office, only the final seven are covered in what remains of the *Annals*.

It probably does not come as much of a surprise that the views and opinions about Emperor Claudius vary both among his contemporaries and modern day writers. Leaving aside these particulars, it is safe to say that there is a high degree of consent even among his supporters that Claudius did not fit the stereotypical picture of a venerated Roman leader. Von Domaszewski (1921) called him mentally sick and pondered how much his retarded mind must have tormented his proud family. Kornemann (1946) referred to him as weak and the preeminent historian Mommsen (1992, 157) understood him to be “mildly deranged.” A more vivid summary of Claudius’ condition is offered by Karl Christ (1988) who suggested that Claudius was, at least, partially insane and his dissoluteness was like a wild beast. His own mother called him a creature uncompleted by nature. His grandmother held Claudius in such contempt that she communicated with him through messengers or in writing only (Sueton, 2001). Claudius was marred with physical handicaps: He walked with difficulty, found it hard to talk, his head constantly shook and his facial features were considered grotesque. It had also been speculated that he was at least partially deaf (Veit, 1995).⁶

While Mommsen (2008) bluntly called him the wrong man on the throne, he also credited Claudius for his intellectual pursuits as a historian. Other historians credited Claudius for his political wisdom (Scramuzza, 1940) and his power of judgment that allegedly exceeded Augustus’ (Stähelin, 1933). Malitz (1994) reminds us that Claudius was the most prolific writer and scholar among the line of emperors: He authored 41 books in all. Still the imperial family apparently did not regard him fit for any public job and in adulthood he remained under the patronage of his private tutor (Sueton, 2001). Claudius’ condition worried his family so deeply that Augustus made sure the young man did not appear in public to participate in official functions or else – it was feared – he might turn himself into the capital’s laughing stock (Sueton,

2001). During public entertainments, Sueton said, Claudius was often banned from the imperial box. When he came of age and was due to appear in front of the Senate to be bestowed with the toga as the symbol of Roman citizenship, he was transported to the Forum under the screen of night and dressed behind closed doors; his supporters feared Claudius' sorry figure could provoke boos from the crowd (Sueton, 2001).

Claudius finally gave up all hope of an administrative career and political advancement when, upon his supplication for the promotion to the consulship, the Emperor Tiberius (his uncle) handed Claudius the official insignia, while withholding the actual investiture (Sueton, 2001). Upon this recognition, Claudius retired to his country home and, apart from his scholarly studies, he gambled and drank (Sueton, 2001). In brief, Claudius was seen to be idiosyncratic and verging on madness; this lost him almost all personal authority with the people close to him (Momigliano, 1961).

Claudius' failings become considerably aggravated if viewed against the backdrop of the Roman society and political culture of the time. He is, by common agreement, not thought of as a leader who possessed a courage or physical strength that might have impressed his subjects or peers. He was not seen as a role model in a society whose founding myth was rife with long-standing military achievements that defined Roman identity. The city's mythological forefather, Aeneas, had been a warrior defending the city of Troy. The founding story tells us of Romulus, who single-handedly built Rome's fortifications before he murdered his disgruntled brother, Remus. In Claudius' day, school children read Livy's accounts of the war heroes Coriolanus and Scipio (Livy, 1989). Moreover, Rome laid special claim to its patronage of the divine twins Castor and Pollux, whose legendary appearance on the battle field of Lake Regillus in 496 BCE lifted the Romans from what looked like certain defeat (Livy, 1989). Claudius' own Julio-

Claudian dynasty had a towering war hero among its ranks: Caius Julius Caesar who, throughout the empire's existence, was any emperor's benchmark for military prowess (Plutarch, 1919). Even Augustus, who by all accounts had been a paltry general, boasted in his autobiography about adding Egypt and the Pannonian peoples to Roman rule and extending the empire's borders to Illyricum (Augustus, 1969).

Compared against this family history of political and military heroism, Claudius cut a miserable figure. Additionally, political events provided further evidence of Claudius' eminent reputation problem. Immediately following Emperor Caligula's assassination, the Senate pondered options for the future of government, none of which envisaged a role for Claudius. One possibility was a full-fledged reversion to senatorial rule under the leadership of two consuls who were elected for a year to share power and responsibilities. This approach had been practiced with considerable success for almost five centuries. However – and this leads to option two – it was evident that times had changed and, given the size of the empire, there was a compelling argument in favor of entrusting power to a single man. By common consent, the next incumbent would have to be more able and qualified than Caligula, who had been considered insane ever since he had ordered thousands of legionaries on the beaches of Gaul to collect seashells and appointed his favourite horse as consul (Sueton, 2001).

A vote to re-establish Republican rule would have thwarted Claudius' prospects as much as a drawn out discussion about his merits as a leader. It turned out that the praetorian guard in Rome was quickest to act. The soldiers who had been involved in Caligula's assassination promptly hailed Claudius as successor arguably because he was the Julio-Claudian family's last surviving male adult. The praetorians' desire to protect their dynastic ties made Claudius appear the most obvious choice (Dio, 1927; Josephus, 1983; Sueton, 2001).

However, the somewhat spontaneous decision taken by the praetorian guard would not have silenced persistent doubts about Claudius' suitability. In particular, a number of ambitious generals had been waiting in the wings for their chance at leadership. In Spain, Junius Silanus underlined his bid for the imperial crown by reminding everyone of his Claudian family roots, a claim he could impressively back up with his command of three legions consisting of a total of 15,000 seasoned soldiers. At the helm of two legions, Camillus Scribonianus, the governor of Dalmatia, felt he had a strong claim as he was able to count legendary Roman notables among his ancestry (e.g., Caesar's rival Gnaeus Pompeius the Great and the erstwhile dictator Cornelius Sulla). Sulpicius Galba, who was stationed in Upper Germania in command of an impressive 25,000 legionaries, was the third in this clique of potential contenders.⁷

The second factor ambitious politicians needed to reckon with was the populace. To command broad popular support, potential leaders had to be perceived by the public as being equipped for what was needed to be done politically, morally, and militarily. Leary (1995) identified five essential elements – competence, likability, morality, potency, and intimidation – as a framework for applying to the case of Claudius, who evidently met none of these criteria for charismatic leadership. Weber (1978) defined both extraordinary talents and the audience's devotion as indicators of an individual's charisma. To achieve this supportive resonance, he explained, a leader needed to exude specific exemplary characteristics like sanctity or heroism. This kind of distinctiveness of character is the pillar on which charisma rests (Weber, 1978).

Building a charismatic reputation and legitimacy

To compensate for this lack of natural authority and charisma Claudius initially sought to generate reputation through artificial and symbolic devices. By calling himself Caesar, Koster (1994) noted that Claudius hoped to exploit the association with the first and most prominent

leader in the Julio-Claudian family line. This is in line with Timpe's (1994) observation of Claudius' attempt to tap into the values – family, tradition and political stability - cherished in the Augustean age. Any association with his family's celebrated ancestors therefore was intended to strike a sympathetic chord with the populace. It may not have been a coincidence that, upon spotting Claudius in the imperial box, the crowd in the theatre – reminiscent of the venerated general Germanicus – burst into the chorus, "Salve, brother of Germanicus!" (Sueton, p. 121).

These efforts to be associated with the mainstays of Rome's military and tradition afforded Claudius legitimacy which, is of core relevance for maintaining a position in a hierarchical system (Ashcraft, 1991; Sternberger, 1968; Weber, 1978). Legitimacy is a concept not regularly referred to in public relations which normally emphasizes reputation (Waeraas, 2009). This may be due to public relations' focus on businesses, entities which customarily regard reputation as being more pertinent. In a political context, by contrast, the management of relationships has a distinct focus on building legitimacy. We see this in Claudius' case as running the country and commanding loyalty both hinge on public approval and support.

Reputation and legitimacy may be reconciled by arguing that reputation serves to justify a leader's position at the top of the political hierarchy. This in turn creates compliance among the masses or powerful elites which is referred to as legitimacy (Dahl, 1971; Weber, 1978). Weber pointed out that compliance is not always voluntary and publics need to be worked on to achieve their adherence which, in turn, cements the individual's dominance. Legitimacy is primarily aided by a leader's charisma; that is, the leader is supported if he displays exceptional powers and qualities not accessible to ordinary mortals (Weber, 1978).

This need to establish legitimacy was pivotal in Rome because of its lack of a hereditary monarchy. The succession of the principate – Rome's unique type of informal imperial

constitution – tended to be contentious and open to rivalry between factions and individuals. A convoluted constitutional arrangement accorded the incumbent a non-formalized set of powers and privileges that were largely based on personal relationships and recognition. Momigliano (1961) said that, to assert one's position at the apex of this precarious system of government, legitimacy had to be gained and secured by building relationships with the institutions and factions that had a say in the making – and breaking – of the principate and the selection of the emperor. The emperor, therefore, found himself in a position that was not dissimilar to the role of senior managers in modern organizations who create rapport with their relevant publics. In both cases, we expect that political and managerial effectiveness hinges on the leader's ability to identify and satisfy his or her publics' expectations. In the context of the Roman principate, Osgood (2011) explained, attempts to garner public approval included legally adopting supporters and successors; placing imagery in coins, statues, buildings, and wills; and achieving military victory. He specified that:

... consent and support had to be elicited constantly from critical groups across the empire, from the old senate and people that met in the city of Rome, to members of the towns in Italy, leading provincials and the armies stationed on the edge of the empire as well as the praetorian guard. (Osgood, 2011, p. 22)

Here we see the power of publics when it comes to conferring legitimacy. That is, because publics are people who face a similar problem, who concur in their recognition that a challenge or issue exists, or who organize to do something about it (Blumer, 1966; Dewey, 1927), their stake and interest in affairs of government may vary, as does their respective political clout. Both may be expressed in a power-interest-matrix that renders explicit the focus of

communication management activities (Johnson & Scholes, 2002). Looking at the distribution of power and interest on the eve of Claudius' succession, it appears that while both the army and the Senate were engaged in the transitional process and keen to influence its outcome, it was the military – primarily the praetorian guard – that held the key to political success. Claudius knew that the praetorian guard, to whom he owed his power, would remain his constitutive public. In response, he made immense financial sacrifices to assure himself of their loyalty by paying each guardsman a one-time premium equivalent to five years' annual wages (Tacitus, 2008; Sueton, 2001). The total payments to soldiers cost him the equivalent of financing the entire army for one year (Duncan-Jones, 1994).

The gold and silver coins he issued to pay were also carriers of highly sophisticated iconography that was instrumental in shaping the record Claudius intended publics to associate with him. Peace, Concord, and Good Fortune were the gods he had pictured on the coins. These values evoked the era of Augustus who – albeit lacking as a general, excelled as administrator – had engineered lasting peace, the Pax Augusta, that generated unprecedented prosperity and growth. The coins' reverse side showed depictions of the praetorian guard: A token of Claudius' gratitude towards the Roman garrison that had been instrumental in establishing this reign. Finally, Claudius – by now a man in his 50s – was depicted on the newly issued coin as a dashing youth, the ideal man who can shoulder the burden of running the city and the empire. The iconography chosen by Claudius appeals to the fundamental publics that he needed for success: The praetorian guard and the populace of Rome.

Claudius communicated to the senatorial elite in a very different way. Once the repairs of the Pompeian theatre were completed, he decided to attend a theatrical performance. The new emperor's entrée was astounding: He wore the emperor's toga, crowned with a laurel, carried a

sceptre adorned with the imperial eagle, and took his seat on a raised platform (Dio, 1927; Sueton, 2001). Such a staged appearance was a political approach used by the imperial family to demonstrate respect for the people, to gauge their mood, and assess the sentiments they showed towards the emperor (Schnee, 2011). This particular demonstration of support served Claudius as a calculated message intended to silence a still skeptical senate that only recently had been considering the possibilities of re-establishing the Republic at the emperor's expense.

Still, Claudius could expect the memories of his predecessors to reverberate in any comment and judgement about his achievements. In other words, Claudius' legitimacy as emperor rested in "the cries of the ancestral voices" as Osgood phrased it pithily (2011, p. 86). Whatever secondary motivations he may have entertained, the concern for his reputation and need for popular support may well have been the commanding reasons for Claudius' most courageous decision, one that would ultimately place him at par with Julius Caesar and fully establish his authority. Claudius was about to offer what both his supporters and detractors would find an irresistible proof of character: War. But not just any military campaign. The destination was Britannia – an enemy and location that promised immense glory to the man who would overcome it. Caius Julius Caesar (1869) had described the tribes on the island as savage . The Roman army was heading for lands known to be inhabited by mysterious Druids, ferocious warriors and, so it was rumoured, monsters. Even the great Caesar had called off his attempt to turn the island into a Roman province and, earlier, Caligula became exacerbated when his legionaries balked in terror at his command to cross the channel (Malloch, 2001; Woods, 2000).

A triumph in Britannia, said Osgood, would impress not only "peoples on the edge of the empire, but critics back home" (2011, p. 86). Claudius could not have expected this campaign to be smooth sailing. He took a gamble that he desperately needed to pay off politically back home

so as to establish his “reputation for posterity and secure a stronger image for himself, as a ruler of the world, among the soldiers, their commanders, senators back in Rome, citizens more generally, and provincials,” said Osgood. “It was an attempt to gain a more charismatic authority,” he said (Osgood, 2011, p. 87).

Cassius Dio detailed how the invasion was launched when an army assembled in the spring of 43 ACE on the coast of the channel under the command of the experienced general Aulus Plautius. The general found his legionaries most reluctant and afraid to venture outside the perimeter of the known world (Dio, 1927). Clearly, the official reason given by the government for the invasion – the rise of increasingly defiant local chieftains on Britannia who threatened trade and commercial relationships with the empire – were little more than a pretext for Rome’s military actions. According to Dio, Claudius made his appearance in Britannia only after commanding officer Aulus Plautius had managed to establish a safe Roman foothold and then overwhelmed the enemy. Claudius landed in Britain accompanied by a war elephant, a detail that reveals his particular sense of the importance of presentation. He may have stayed on the island for about two weeks, and invested considerably more time in the communication of his triumph than actual warfare.

Dio (1927) reported how, upon his return to Rome, the Senate proclaimed Claudius triumphant. It announced annual games to commemorate his achievement and awarded him the honorary title *Britannicus*. The crowds flocked to the circus to see fights between wild animals from Africa, a spectacle staged in the name of Claudius who also had his victory re-enacted on the Field of Mars, the traditional assembly square (Sueton, 2001; Coleman, 1993). A few years later, the triumph was complete when news spread that Caratacus, Rome’s fiercest foe in Britannica, had been captured. The British chieftain was sent to Rome and paraded down the

streets in honor of the emperor. As a token of clemency, but even more a symbol of his authority and Rome's superiority, Claudius called off Caratiacus' execution. In honor of the emperor's victory, an arch was erected in Via Flaminia, one of the main senatorial roads that connected the capital with the north of Italy and the provinces beyond the Alps. The arch, typical of Roman iconography, narrated the emperor's political and military record and served as potent reminder of his virtue and fortune (Wallace-Hadrill, 1990). While the invasion of Britannia surely did not mark Claudius as an ingenious general, it presented him as the man who was ready to take courageous decisions and oversee major developments that promoted the empire's expansion and added to the glory of Rome.

While the triumph in Britannia may not have made Claudius the legionaries' darling to the degree his brother Germanicus had achieved, it may have brought about a feeling of mutual gratitude and recognition between the emperor and the army. Veterans brimmed with pride for their share in the victories and were keen to display the honorary medals they had received at the hands of Claudius and his generals for their participation in the invasion (Kent, 1966; Smallwood, 1984; Tacitus, 2008). His political backing grew broadly and extended beyond the army as is evidenced by the public portrayal of Claudius. Throughout Italy, statues were commissioned that likened him to Jupiter. This suggests that people who commissioned and produced these works of art were willing to ignore the emperor's visible weaknesses. For example, the statues downplayed any ungainly aspects of his facial expression. In provincial towns, statues were erected, and reliefs constructed depicting Claudius as god of war overcoming Britannia. Local officials and dignitaries printed his image printed on coins (Erim, 1986; Kent, 1966; Smith, 1987). Thus, even the remotest backwaters not only espoused the empire's mission, but also accepted Claudius as a leader worthy of their support and veneration. His popularity was

such that ordinary people fell into a state of despair when on October 12th, 54 CE, news broke that the emperor had been poisoned (Cavendish, 2004; Marmion & Wiedemann, 2002; Sueton, 2011).⁸

Conclusion

These popular reactions are reminiscent of a phenomenon we touched upon earlier in this chapter: Charismatic leadership that followers perceive as superhuman and therefore attribute to a savior who is seen as godlike (Willner, 1984). Such sentiments resemble the quasi-religious awe, reference, blind faith, and emotions that Bendix (1998) observed within a charismatic leader's audience. The leader makes a pivotal political decision that meets his publics' culturally-founded expectation and elicits reactions of charismatic loyalty. The leaders' ability and willingness to take his environment into account and reflect specific popular interests echoes a concept of public relations that is informed by a system approach (Broom, 2011).

Katz and Kahn (1978) contended that organizations tend to strive both to adapt to their environment and to control it. This requires what Gregory (2007) described as an ongoing and genuine dialogue between the organization and its publics. This approach acknowledges that survival and success hinge on constant interaction and the ability to take into account changes in the environment, and it informs an approach to understanding the behavior and communications that helped bolster the survival and stability of the Roman government system. In the early imperial era, this system afforded the emperor an informal leadership role that was hedged in by flexible agreements with key stakeholders whose collaboration and support were critical for the leader's political survival. This precarious state of government required the emperors in the first century ACE to concentrate their efforts on securing support and legitimacy (Schnee, 2011).

Claudius, as history writer, knew of episodes in Rome's past when the relationship between leadership and populace became overstretched and untenable. The governing elite during the republican period was confronted with popular uprisings. They were grounded in vested interests and grievances that were institutionalized by the introduction of people's tribunes - similar to ombudsmen - that soon became part of the mediating mechanism between the government and governed (Abbott, 1911). The sociologist Peter Blau (1976) uses the terms adjustment and counter-adjustment to describe disruptions in a system's equilibrium. When it comes to managing such disruptions, Grunig and Hunt (1984) maintained that public relations can help manage them through a two-pronged approach: adaptation to external expectations, and attempts to alter and shape these expectations. Since Augustus' reign in the early first century CE, the princeps – who we generically, and not entirely accurately, refer to as emperor – was at the helm of an informal governing coalition whose survival hinged on its ability to reflect the pre-existing power structure, respond to demands by critical stakeholders (e.g., the aristocracy and the army) and adapt to evolving expectations. Claudius, due to his well-documented physical deficiencies and his precarious position in the imperial family, had reason to be even more sensitive to explicit and implicit demands nurtured by stakeholders whose support or, at least acquiescence, was critical for his grip on power.

At this point I should probably plead guilty for stretching the conventions of traditional history writing: The notion lingers on that theory goes against the nature of historical work, which more than anything else calls for understanding. As Leopold von Ranke noted, there is still the residual positivism that enthuses the historian with gathering odds and ends which help compose a mosaic of how things must have been – to paraphrase (von Ranke (1824), as quoted in Evans, 2001, p. 17). Indeed, Pohlig (2008) privileged the collection of facts, calling it a

historian's core contribution, one that runs deeper than any theoretical reflection. Historians, he said uniquely search for, identify and collect the seemingly marginal details of human existence. They dig up even peripheral anecdotes, and recognize them as valuable in their own right. Moreover, they place them into context, question them, reflect, explain and ultimately narrate them (Pohlig, 2008).

Therefore, in Claudius' case, it is critical to ask what the public relations perspective can add to the study of history. The case of Claudius' principate is likely best described and explained in terms of a responsive or two-way communicative effort that attempted to adapt to dynamic external expectations. An awareness of Claudius' strengths and weaknesses, as well as an evaluation of relevant publics and their likely demands and aspirations, informed the selection of actions to enhance the emperor's reputation. As such, Weber's theories of charisma and legitimacy offer a compelling explanation for Claudius' ability to establish authority, satisfy expectations held among the senate, the military and the populace of Rome, and secure his position at the helm of the political hierarchy for almost 14 years. I contend that the culture of Roman society, the expectations raised by the senate, the need to excite or placate the crowds, the relevance of the army in domestic politics, and concern about Claudius' personal predicaments needed to be managed. Claudius' political survival was conditional on the relationship between the emperor and his key publics.

In this context, my concern has been to explore reputation management as a recipe to stay in power. This requires writers of history to consider political processes primarily as a reflection of protagonists' needs to gain legitimacy. In other words, historians may want to consider reputation management as an interpretative framework that can be deployed in history writing to reconsider causes of, and motivations for, major political decisions. The insights gained through

the study of Claudius and an understanding of the relevance of reputation may help revisit previous historical investigations. The reason for the longevity and executive prowess of the so-called good emperors in the early and mid second century may have a reputational component, just as the rapid succession of military leaders on the throne during much of the third century. We can see that power and latitude to operate -- as well as the level of public and institutional support -- relate directly to the reputation an emperor is able to establish and defend early on in his reign. Therefore, we may, by implication, use our knowledge about a leader's willingness and ability to engage in reputation management techniques as a prism to interpret and predict an emperor's operational efficiency and effectiveness. Over time, Roman history writing on the fourth and fifth century is essentially following Gibbon (2010) who, in the 18th century, strove to answer the question as to how and why the Empire could have failed and vanished (O'Donnell, 2009; Goldsworthy, 2009). Mass migration, Christianisation and economic decline have been blamed for the breakdown of central power and the Empire's ultimate demise in 476, when the Barbarian leader Odoacer deposed the last emperor, the 16-year-old Romulus Augustulus. But long before that decline Claudius displayed that central power and authority to command stakeholder allegiance was largely dependent on his reputation, which, in turn, was enhanced by his ability to pick up and respond to external demands and aspirations.

For now, historians more concerned with the exploration of antecedents to the discipline and practice of public relations, may interpret the case of Claudius as evidence for an early pre-corporate, pre-institutionalized kind of practice. In other words, personal public relations, as described by Nessmann (2010a, 2010b), appeared to be both a natural and a vital preoccupation for political leaders whose internal political power and support depend on popularly-gained recognition and support rather than an overreliance on institutional structures and military power.

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¹ For further reading on Personality PR turn to Nessmann (2010a, 2010b).

² For a detailed and comprehensive account of Claudius' life the reader is advised to turn to Momigliano's seminal biography *Claudius. The emperor and his achievement* (1961) or Scramuzza's *The Emperor Claudius* (1940) whose inferences by and large hold their own when compared to much more recent contributions to the subject such as Levick's (1990) *Claudius* and Osgood's (2011) *Claudius Caesar. Image and power in the early Roman Empire*.

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⁵ In *Bellum Catilinae* Sallust (2007) uses Catilina merely as an instrument to point at what was allegedly faulty with Roman society. Polybius (1927) saw history writing as an opportunity to persuade his Greek compatriots of Roman superiority and the Jewish historian Titus Flavius Josephus – to name just three - in his accounts was clearly taking sides in the ongoing Jewish-Roman conflict (Fergus, Emil, Geza, 1973).

⁶ There has been speculation that suggests these symptoms may have been the result of an insufficient oxygen supply to the fetus related to brutal treatment in childhood (Osgood, 2011).

⁷ He would one day actually use force to conquer Rome and name himself emperor in the civil war that ensued Nero's death in 68 ACE (Wiseman, 1982).

⁸ Admittedly, the cause of death is still debated among historians and while natural causes may not be excluded, the Roman populace at the time was quick to accuse the emperor's wife Agrippina of murder.