

## Theoretical approaches and definitions in research on public communication: constructing the concept of state public communication

Abordagens teóricas e definições mínimas na pesquisa em Comunicação Pública: construindo o conceito de Comunicação Pública de Estado

Aproximaciones teóricas y definiciones mínimas en la investigación en Comunicación Pública: construyendo el concepto de Comunicación Pública Estatal <



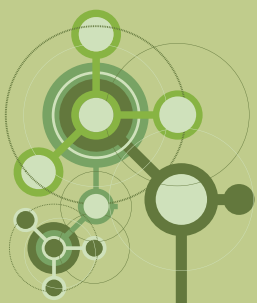
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## ABSTRACT

Public communication is a rapidly developing scientific and professional field despite the persisting perception that it remains a concept under construction. To elucidate its definition, this study seeks to recognize and systematize the contributions of Brazilian research on public communication. The literature review found three aspects that delimit the area: the agents promoting communication, its content and production ethos, and its communication channels. Such aspects constitute minimum requirements for the concept of state public communication, which, in turn, includes a normative-democratic dimension that enables participation, transparency, accountability, defense of social rights, and governance; and an institutional dimension related to links and trust in institutions and democracy.

KEYWORDS: STATE PUBLIC COMMUNICATION • POLITICAL COMMUNICATION • INSTITUTIONAL COMMUNICATION • DEMOCRACY • GOVERNANCE.

## RESUMO

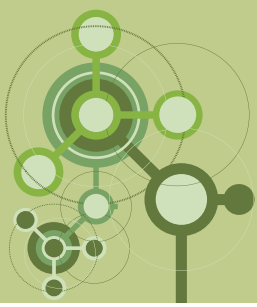
A Comunicação Pública constitui um campo em franco desenvolvimento, tanto do ponto de vista científico quanto do profissional. Persiste, porém, a percepção de que ainda se trata de um conceito em construção. Com o objetivo de contribuir para uma definição clara e fundamentada dos pontos de vista teórico e empírico, este trabalho busca reconhecer e sistematizar as contribuições da literatura nacional sobre o tema da Comunicação Pública. A revisão de literatura identifica três aspectos que delimitam a área, a saber, os agentes promotores da comunicação, o perfil do conteúdo e do ethos de produção e os canais de comunicação. Tais aspectos constituem requisitos mínimos para o conceito de Comunicação Pública de Estado, que, por sua vez, comporta uma dimensão normativa-democrática, que viabiliza participação, transparência, responsabilização, defesa de direitos sociais e governança; e uma dimensão institucional, relativa aos vínculos e à confiança nas instituições e na democracia.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: COMUNICAÇÃO PÚBLICA DE ESTADO • COMUNICAÇÃO POLÍTICA • COMUNICAÇÃO INSTITUCIONAL • DEMOCRACIA • GOVERNANÇA.

## RESUMEN

La Comunicación Pública es un campo en creciente desarrollo, tanto desde el punto de vista científico como profesional. Sin embargo, aún persiste la percepción de que este es un concepto en construcción. Con el objetivo de contribuir a una definición clara y fundamentada de puntos de vista teóricos y empíricos, este trabajo busca reconocer y sistematizar los aportes de la literatura nacional sobre el tema de la Comunicación Pública. La revisión de la literatura identifica tres aspectos que delimitan el área: los agentes promotores de la comunicación, el perfil de los contenidos y del *ethos* de la producción, y los canales de comunicación. Estos aspectos constituyen requisitos mínimos para el concepto de Comunicación Pública Estatal, que, a su vez, incluye una dimensión normativo-democrática que posibilita la participación, la transparencia, la rendición de cuentas, la defensa de los derechos sociales y la gobernabilidad; y una dimensión institucional, relacionada con los vínculos y la confianza en las instituciones y la democracia.

PALABRAS CLAVE: COMUNICACIÓN PÚBLICA ESTATAL • COMUNICACIÓN POLÍTICA • COMUNICACIÓN INSTITUCIONAL • DEMOCRACIA • GOBERNANZA.



## INTRODUCTION

**B**razilian studies in Public Communication have been clearly prominent over the last decades. Several graduate programs and scientific events have granted privileged space to debate concepts and cases related to this specialty, addressing institutional communication strategies, legislations concerning mass communication, or broadcasting systems characteristics.

However, reviewing the literature on the subject shows terminological inconsistencies that often require authors first to explain what they understand by Public Communication to only then begin developing their proposed research problem—hindering, for example, the further development of empirical analyses and the development of methodologies that would better evaluate political-media strategies by the State and its Agents. In other words, if the possibilities of addressing the idea of public communication from different angles show the richness of its related phenomena, it is necessary to recognize the difficulties of establishing a minimum grammar that enables a fruitful dialogue without authors having to start “from scratch” when referring to the term in question with each new investigation.

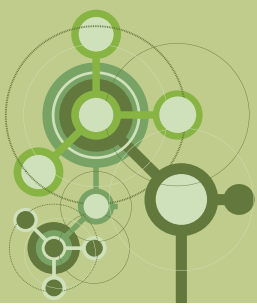
Due to this obstacle, this study aims to systematize the various theoretical contributions and their Public Communication classification criteria and to propose a proper categorization of those experiences that involve State Communication. This study was structured in two main parts, the first of which aims to map the literature on the Public Communication (PC) concept. Thus, this study systematized production in the area according to three questions: (1) who “communicates,” that is, which actors are responsible for PC; (2) the nature of the produced and broadcast content; and (3) which channels are used in such communication modality. Such questions guide the research to understanding the minimum requirements to build the concept of State Public Communication.

Thus, this research argues that the concept of State Public Communication has two dimensions, the first of which refers to the principles dear to the Theories of Democracy since such constructs guide communication practices that aim to promote legitimacy by encouraging social participation, increasing transparency, and accountability of governments, ensuring rights, facilitating the delivery of services to citizens, and improving governance; and the second of which is linked to institutional communication, which, despite its persuasive resources, differs from political instrumentalization by prioritizing actions that favor trust in institutions and the democratic system.

## THE IDEA OF PUBLIC COMMUNICATION: DIMENSIONS AND CONCEPTS

One of the most cited works in the Brazilian literature<sup>1</sup> systematizes the contributions of several researchers by pointing out five PC-related “areas of knowledge and professional activity”; namely: (1) the domain of Organizational Communication, including a marketing perspective; (2) scientific communication, promoted mainly by the State; (3) State/government Communication; (4) political communication as an environment for power disputes; and (5) community or civil society communicative practices and organizations related to the third sector (Brandão, 2012). Brandão, who explores the origins of

<sup>1</sup> The Google Scholar indexer counts at least 600 citations of the article “*Conceito de comunicação pública*” by Elizabeth Pazito Brandão, published in the book on the subject organized by Jorge Duarte. Available at: [https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=pt-BR&as\\_sdt=0%2C5&q=elizabeth+pazito+brand%C3%A3o&btnG=](https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=pt-BR&as_sdt=0%2C5&q=elizabeth+pazito+brand%C3%A3o&btnG=) Accessed on: 9 May 2024.



the concept of public communication, exposing its idiosyncrasies and the limits of ideologically engaged theories, catalogs the prolixity that marks the field without, however, definitively showing the reasons for adopting her definition of it as “a process of communication that is established in the public sphere between the State, the Government, and Society and that proposes to be a privileged space for negotiation between the interests of the various instances of public communication.” constitutive powers of public life in the country” (Brandão, 2012, p. 31, free translation).

Studies on the subject show at least three approaches authors recurrently use in their attempts to delimit or establish parameters to analyze those experiences that claim a “public” character without implying the a priori restriction to the initiatives within the scope of the State. The dimensions in the specific literature this study inventoried consist of (1) who “communicates,” that is, its promoters; (2) the nature of the produced and broadcast content; and (3) which vehicles are used. Next, it examines each of these aspects in greater detail based on relevant cases and studies dedicated to PC.

### The agents

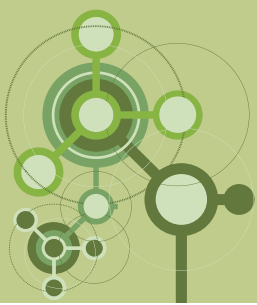
The first cleavage in the literature refers to identifying PC based on the agents promoting it. A recurrent and more restricted delimitation associates it with that which starts from the state vector—that is, communication is public because public entities do it. This means including organizations belonging to all Republic, Executive, Legislative, and Judiciary branches at all levels of the State: municipal, state, and federal (Borges; Weber, 2010; Bucci, 2008; 2015; Duarte, 2012; Gil; Matos, 2012; Haswani, 2017; Koçouski, 2012; Matos, 2006; 2012; Pauline; Guazina; Oliveira, 2016; Weber, 2007). Public companies—as defended by Zémor (2012), a reference of many authors in this study—would also fall within this scope, despite the room to question situations in which their communication is an instrument to conquer the market (Fredriksson; Pallas, 2018), such as the mail service, Infraero (an airport operator), or public banks (Haswani, 2021; Machado et al., 2020; Silva; Lima, 2022).

In addition to the problematic inclusion of competitively acting companies among those that presumably practice PC, such a conceptual cleavage suggests another controversy involving defining the extent to which government communication—which addresses government actions, gives visibility to political agents, and seeks to win the support of public opinion (rather than subject to it)—constitutes public communication<sup>2</sup>.

One possibility would involve differentiating the concepts of State and government in question. For example, the State is taken as a lasting set of institutions that manifests itself as the State of law and as a social State (Bobbio, 1987; Gozzi, 1998), and the government is deemed a group destined to exercise “political power and that determines the political orientation of a given society” (Levi, 1998, free translation). However, such differentiation seems to fail to contribute substantively to the case of communication practices.

To remedy this difficulty, Duarte and Veras (2006) liken the State PC and what is known as “governmental communication” by highlighting the purposes of each of these activities instead of emphasizing the respective promoters of communication (since their agents are often the same). Thus, government communication could overlap with State communication to a certain extent regarding its public nature and informative function. However, the priority objective of governments regarding

<sup>2</sup> Criticizing such positions, Brandão (2012, p. 15, free translation) states: “the focus of the attention of most authors is to emphasize that Public Communication is not government communication and concerns the State and not the Government.” This would be unproblematic if it were not for the patrimonialism that marks the relations of public actors in Brazil. Distinguishing, for example, public, state, and government television is a research problem circumscribed to the Brazilian context (Miola, 2009) since, unlike other countries, the adjective “state” preceding communication is historically associated with the autocratic exercise of power in authoritarian, or merely patrimonialist regimes.



communication would be to disseminate actions, build identities, and promote the image of state institutions in the eyes of public opinion. Duarte and Veras (2006) admit the possibility of even making propaganda through government communication, although they also recognize that the State exceeds the Executive Branch. Therefore, this communication modality would also transcend the relationship between governments and citizens.

Focusing on the aspect of the agent in the communicative process, it is important to distinguish between communication from the government and that from the State. On the other hand, the distinction between these two categories is not in *who* communicates but in the *nature* of such communication—which will be addressed in the next topic. For now, it is only necessary to recognize a range of researchers who argue that the role of PC promoters fails only to entail public entities.

Thus, organized civil society—as social movements or institutions known as the third sector—is the object of a wide range of studies explaining its link with the concept of PC (Garcês; Aggio, 2017; Locatelli, 2017; Matos; Gil, 2017; Peruzzo, 2012, for example). From an organizational point of view, albeit private, public interest associations, identified as the third sector, aim toward public action (Yamaguti, 2006), even when they consist of projects conducted by private companies in association with corporate socio-environmental responsibility (Bueno, 2012; Sathler, 2010).

Therefore, reservations can be made about delimiting PC solely due to the nature of its promoter. Other variables must be evaluated if this definition intends to avoid being restricted to the type of organization or actor promoting due to such comprehensive delimitation.

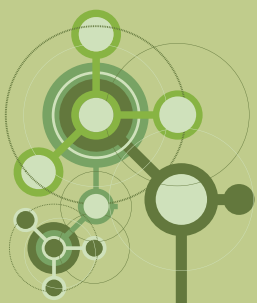
## The content

Detaching oneself from the agents promoting communication confirms the possibility of including spheres beyond State entities in the process of public communication; i.e., it can broaden the concept to include civil society initiatives (as collectives, social movements, and the third sector) and even companies that invest in what is known as social marketing or marketing related to social causes (Mazzon, 1982; Marconi, 2002).

This entails that the type of content and its production *ethos* define public communication, intertwining approaches anchored in diffuse or partially conceptualized ideas. The literature tends to recurrently and substantively associate PC and the principle of public interest. Interchangeably, it has registered terms such as “common good,” “collective interest,” and “general interest.” The difficulty here precisely lies in apprehending the perspective of public interest the authors intend to apply (Bueno, 2012; Koçouski, 2012; Kunsch, 2012)<sup>3</sup>.

Thus, to illustrate, communication on environmental issues—which contributes to educational processes, enables the exercise of legally guaranteed rights, and disseminates scientific knowledge, among many other topics—unequivocally encompasses the public interest (Alvim-Silva; Pereira; Aguiar, 2021; Dornelles, 2016; Matos; Gil, 2012). From a substantive point of view, this case can use the perception that specific themes procedurally receive their importance to the collectivity by the (even if minimal) consensus democratic societies communicatively build (Habermas, 1997). If issues related to health, education, and the environment are consensually considered to be of public interest, this occurs through a transversal and recurrent discursive process in democracies. Thus, the ideal of the public sphere as a space to debate and configure public

<sup>3</sup> At this point, it is inappropriate to engage the necessary discussion about the use of these concepts, but this study recommends studies such as Friedrich (1967).



issues justifies the strong presence of Jürgen Habermas' ideas in PC research (Alvim-Silva; Pereira; Aguiar, 2021; Brandão, 2012; Garcêz; Aggio, 2017; Gil; Matos, 2012; Haswani, 2017; Koçouski, 2012; Matos; Gil, 2017).

For example, Matos and Gil (2013) proposed to distinguish between government communication, public communication, and political communication substantively and procedurally; the first of which would constitute the propaganda of the government itself, the most prominent historical actor of which is Getúlio Vargas; the second would include initiatives favoring social participation as public debates; and the third would necessarily be articulated under power disputes, such as elections and processes containing competing positions in decision-making moments. Notwithstanding the inherent overlapping of the three dimensions the authors discussed, the contribution of their study involves its resumption of the discussion on the distinction between state and government communication. If they fail to differ as an institution—after all, in the Executive Branch, they include the same organizations and agents—that study aims to apprehend the extent to which their intentions and discourses differ based on content.

Thus, government communication would be limited to institutional communication<sup>4</sup> as a set of initiatives that operates especially in constructing relationships with audiences that benefit institutions (identification, approval, adherence, etc.). The origin of this understanding is associated with the public relations activity in the public sector:

For a long time, those who have dedicated themselves to reflecting on public relations have been faced with the challenges of building and maintaining—good—institutional images. First, in the governmental sphere (first sector), a direct inheritance of public affairs practices gave rise to the area. (Machado Neto, 2010, p. 274-245, free translation)

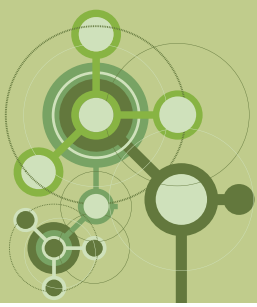
Although recognized as legitimate, especially in considerations of government public relations (Haswani, 2017; Novelli, 2006; Rothberg; Camargo, 2018; Weber, 2017), institutional communication in the public sector remains the subject of controversy among PC researchers. On the one hand, there is the constitutional obligation to publicize decisions and acts of elected representatives, which is fundamental in mass democracies (Weber, 2017); on the other hand, there are the deviations of purpose practiced to favor the actors and parties in power (Bucci, 2015; Jambeiro, 2001; Matos; Gil, 2013)—which, by the way, finds no support from any researcher in this specialty.

## The channels

As a media company (especially broadcasting companies controlled by State entities), public communication has been debated in Brazil for decades. Abstracting from the generalizing understanding that all broadcasting is public because its transmission uses a common good (the electromagnetic spectrum), research on educational/state/public television contains one of the embryos of research on public communication in Brazil (I Fórum Nacional de TVs Públicas, 2006; Jambeiro, 2001; Jambeiro; Ferreira, 2011; Leal Filho, 2000; Miola, 2009; Marques; Miola, 2021; Santos; Silveira, 2007)<sup>5</sup>. The resumption of the debate on what is, how it is done, who finances, who makes the rules, and who controls public broadcasting, which marked the work on the subject, leads, once again, to disputes between the conceptions of public, state, and governmental communication. For those who have visited the history of broadcasting regulation in Brazil, the negative association of state communication with government propaganda and with instrumentalization, in general, was

<sup>4</sup> In its contemporary definition, the Intercom Encyclopedia of Communication brings the following: "Institutional communication is a process that reproduces and disseminates the identity of the organization, its brand, works on its public concept, saying what the company is and how it wants to be known and perceived. It aims to create, in public opinion, a climate of goodwill toward it, its activities, its products and businesses" (França, 2010, p. 277, free translation).

<sup>5</sup> Brandão (2012) discusses its empirical and epistemological origins in agreement with the view in this study.



so strong that it requires researchers to emphasize the public dimension of communication practiced within the State as distinct from the then known state TVs (Matos; Gil, 2013). Empresa Brasil de Comunicação's creation and susceptibility to government interference failed to significantly change this perception of instrumentalization (Miola, 2013).

However, public media currently inhabits places other than public TVs and radios. It is true that since the Cable Law (Rossetto, 2009), the notion of public TV has grown, including the broadcasters of the other powers and university and community broadcasters (giving rise to the "public field of broadcasting"). However, the digitalization of communication—no longer tied to the limits of public concessions and predominantly enjoyed by commercial broadcasters—introduced other variables and expanded PC's conceptual concerns within the State.

The above join what some authors call "public media" or "media of sources" (Peruzzo, 2009; Sant'Anna, 2009) and to the existing traditional channels, such as the editorial apparatuses of official presses, initiatives such as the creation of news agencies, maintenance of online pages and portals, and the communicative dimensions introduced in electronic government resources (Marques; Pereira, 2015).

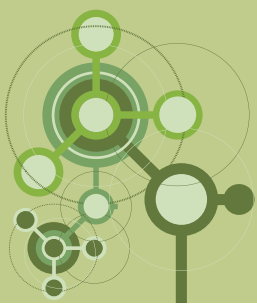
The definition of PC based on the use of public media fails to exhaust conceptual possibilities. Firstly, because not all radio and television stations that claim to belong to what is known as the public field of communication are institutionally linked to the state apparatus—see the aforementioned university and community broadcasters. Secondly, the reason this definition is incomplete lies in the fact that not all State communication is transmitted by public channels. In fact, recent surveys prove that a considerable part of the federal resources invested in government advertising focus on conventional media (namely, television) and commercial broadcasting companies (Miola; Marques, 2017).

Several non-state instances offer their users online content at the service of the State. It is interesting to note the reasonably widespread and varied use of digital channels to transmit audiovisual content and maintain profiles on social media. State organizations often publish materials on their own websites (hosted on government portals), but, at the same time, they use commercial platforms managed by private companies, such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and other platforms, to replicate produced materials or publish exclusive content (Miola; Marques, 2017).

The relations between public entities and private companies in the transmission of State communication evidently fall—as do other strategic initiatives for political actors—subject to distortions and transgressions of the public interest, instrumentalizing content (which can promote individuals and groups), and dissemination investments, in other words, as the most prominent actor in the advertising market, the State represents a fundamental player in the financial sustainability of mass communication companies, which has been used by all governments in their advertising strategies, sometimes reciprocating support, sometimes punishing critics (Miola, 2013).

As with any initiative in the area of communication, effectiveness, and efficiency must guide, in principle, the selection of channels for the placement of advertisements; in other words, the best adaptation of the medium to the message and its targeted audience in a cost-reach relationship optimizing returns on investments. Despite this principle, a justification to subvert this logic (offered as publicly justifiable) would refer to the need to spread public investments to strengthen smaller communication companies<sup>6</sup> and to those in the Brazilian countryside as an incentive to plurality. In the context of

<sup>6</sup> On the idea of "pulverization" and its influence on recent government communication policies in Brazil, see <http://www.meioemensagem.com.br/home/midia/2013/05/20/secom-defende-debate-sobre-controle-social.html>. Accessed on: April 30, 2017.



the proliferation of opinion journalism blogs and social media influencers, the distribution of sponsorship as retribution for political support was also included in the list of instrumentalization practices (Magalhães, 2015).

Apart from the deviations above, it is reinforced that PC avoids, by definition, being restricted to broadcast in public media since, in the quest to reach the audience where it is, it is legitimate—respecting the ethical principles of contracting in the public sector—to contract broadcasting services from private companies.

## STATE PUBLIC COMMUNICATION AS A DEMOCRATIC EXPERIENCE

Therefore, public communication is restricted to that which is produced by agents of the State who dialogically participate in the construction of consensus related to the public interest and use public media or channels selected based on republican principles. This specific modality is now treated as State Public Communication (SPC) to better contextualize this characterization in the face of the conceptualizations above.

The construction of the argument so far shows different motivations that lead the state to invest in and highlight its various possible democratic functions. In the following topics, this study details (1) the democratic-normative motivations referring to the promotion of social participation, improvements in administrative processes (especially those concerning transparency and accountability), and efficiency in the provision of public services to guarantee rights and (2) the motivations related to stimulating positive behaviors, creating bonds, and fostering trust in institutions and in democracy itself.

### The democratic dimensions of State Public Communication

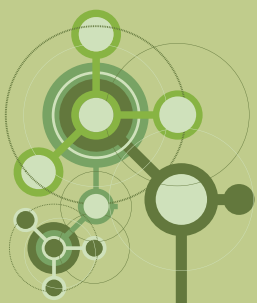
State Public Communication (SPC) plays an essential role in democratic regimes. Therefore, more than delimiting or characterizing the concept of SPC as based on the public interest (Kočouski, 2012; Kunsch, 2012; Monteiro, 2007; Novelli, 2006), it is essential to observe how initiatives in the area collaborate to increase values and practices associated with the democratic game (Bobbio, 2002; Held, 1987; Habermas, 1997).

Thus, a normative SPC task refers to practices that can bring citizens and representatives closer together by encouraging participation (through social media and other digital platforms); improving the flow of information in the bureaucratic-administrative sphere, and the delivery of services (especially by e-government); and increasing government transparency and accountability (opening and access to databases, online transparency portals, and other opportunities that facilitate compliance with access to information laws).

First, different normative models of liberal democracy (Held, 1987) emphasize electoral participatory moments. It is verified, however, that the demands for more frequent interventions beyond the moments of voting are growing. In this context, the participatory function SPC plays can bring citizens closer to the spheres of political decision-making and make public policies more legitimate (Marques, 2010). In other words, the use of media by the State institutions enables the creation and maintenance of participatory spaces in which citizens have the opportunity to know, follow, and occasionally intervene in the available instances of participation—such as hearings, public conferences, public policy councils—especially as their activities incorporate digital communication technologies.

Secondly, SPC should promote public officials' transparency and accountability since, together with authorization procedures, they confer legitimacy on political representation. This means providing citizens with the opportunity to follow, among other





issues, the actions of government officials and the use of public resources (Filgueiras, 2011; Marques, 2014). Unsurprisingly, digitalization and network communication have provided the material resources for the proposition of legislation associated with political transparency in Brazil, whose information supply irreversibly depends on informational repositories and technological communication devices.

The third democratic dimension of SPC concerns guaranteeing social rights as access to public services. From the point of view of public management, the digital transformation of the State offers advantages in terms of governance (Abreu, 2017; Ruediger, 2003) by promoting the integration of information systems, improving tax collection, reducing spending on public procurement, and more conveniently providing public services (Chadwick; Howard, 2009; Marques; Pereira, 2015).

From the citizens' point of view, the application of communication technologies in providing services can decisively contribute to the guarantee of social rights. Having made the reservations related to the reinforcement digitalization brings regarding certain inequalities (Miola; Marques, 2021) and as for the numerous aspects still to be improved given the urgency of implementing distance service platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic (CETIC.BR, 2020), it is possible to say that society has never had so many facilities to enjoy what the State has to offer as a service provider. Communication, along with Public Management, Information Technology, and Law, plays an essential role in introducing a relational and semantic perspective in the digital transformation processes of the State and its institutions.

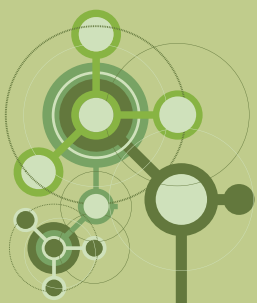
### The institutional dimension of State Public Communication

The second dimension of SPC, which goes hand in hand with its normative-democratic one, is more closely linked to (1) building positive relations with citizens and other populations targeted by the State and of the latter with themselves to project a favorable image of its institutional actors, contributing to the construction of trust in public organizations and, by projecting a favorable image of its institutional actors, even more importantly, in the democratic system itself and (2) playing the role of the State as promoting desirable conducts toward society's development and security, often made possible by educational campaigns (Gil; Matos, 2012).

In their form and content, the messages framed here differ from those identified with participation, transparency, and accountability. On the other hand, they resort to persuasive language, use superlatives and other attempts to create impact, prioritize emotional appeals over rational arguments, and employ the lavish use of images of ordinary citizens in situations that can be positively associated with the action of the State, among other strategies that are typical of the market (Shabo, 2008).

From a certain point of view, it refers to building the legitimacy of governments and other political actors by persuasion rather than citizen participation. It turns out that the public—as well as several PC critics (Bucci, 2015)—is very suspicious of any initiative in this direction and usually receives it and interacts with it differently than it does when it faces a message that genuinely interests it. This happens with educational campaigns in areas such as health: the public looks for information from official sources but rejects it when finds its use as a vehicle to build the image of politicians (Miola; Marques, 2022).

Moreover, under institutional communication circumstances, the spokespersons of the State and those who announce public policies are—rather than the technicians and the bureaucratic body (when present, in the background)—the political actors of the government who use the visibility created as an opportunity for personal promotion. Accordingly, SPC



initiatives are recurrently riddled with attempts at instrumentalization—which fail to go unnoticed by the public (Miola; Marques, 2022).

Thus, arguing that both the democratic and institutional dimensions of SPC contribute to the legitimacy of the State depends on applying the principles of legality, impersonality, morality, publicity, and efficiency provided for in the Brazilian Federal Constitution, which clearly describes the terms under which public entity communication should occur: “The publicity of the acts, programmes, public works, services and campaigns of Government agencies shall be of educational, informative or social orientation character, and shall not contain names, symbols or images that characterize personal propaganda of Government authorities or employees.” (Brasil, [1988]2016, free translation).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

When addressing the state of the art of Public Communication research in Brazil, this study found certain analytical recurrences—concerns that, although not as organized as in this review, indicate questions about who communicates, the nature of its content, what vehicles are used, and what is the place the public occupies in the communicative process. The overlapping and conceptual inaccuracies of these dimensions preclude the constitution of a methodological program.

The reviewed literature can offer valuable contributions when associated with perspectives partly unrelated to work in this area. In other words, rediscussing Public Communication based on democratic-normative principles, on the one hand, and the pragmatic discourse of Institutional Communication, on the other, can result in an innovative conceptual and methodological model.

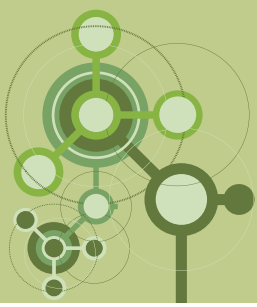
This study sought to identify recent discussions in Public Communication to outline the foundations to define State Public Communication based on contributions from Brazilian researchers. The three dimensions discussed above—agents, content, and channels—are insufficient to delimit the concept of public communication satisfactorily. Together (composing minimum requirements), they normatively delimit State Public Communication.

To recapitulate, several organizations play a publicly relevant role in society, but only the State emerges from the institutional arrangement that manifests the collective will, governments, and other Powers of the Republic. Regarding PC, it is pertinent to consider Bucci (2015, p. 54-55, free translation):

It is not true that public interest communication can result indiscriminately from the public or private spheres. The State and the market are not leveled at the same standard and do not fulfill the same functions. [...] If capital alone could fully exercise the public function of informing the citizen, a function that, it is worth remembering, is the duty of the State, a duty to be provided directly by it, there would be no legitimacy to, in a democracy, employ public resources in pieces, campaigns, or even in broadcasters and social communication networks.

Thus, the first requirement for public communication refers to public organizations promoting it—which, moreover, is far from a controversial statement in international contexts (Luoma-Aho; Canel, 2020; Strömbäck; Kioussis, 2011).

The following requirement addresses the type of content or its production *ethos*. Therefore, PC not only gives visibility to issues of public interest but can also construct consensus based on public debate. Broadly understood, this debate—rather than restricted to spatial or temporal terms in addition to the previous requirement—must count on the participation of the State as a partner in this interaction. If this communication especially contributes to actualizing



democratic principles, such as those in this study—transparency, accountability, participation, guarantee of rights, and service provision—or if it exercises its institutional function of creating links and fostering trust in institutions and in democracy itself, it can be called SPC in both circumstances. This is not to be confused with personal promotion and that of political groups, although political instrumentalization is mainly used in association with public interest strategies (Miola; Marques, 2022).

The third fundamental characteristic of typifying public communication is not precisely restricting the spaces in which communication is conveyed (public property), although it concerns communication channels. In this case, it means arguing that the media selection, when necessary to use privately owned commercial spaces, must also follow effectiveness and efficiency principles and transparent and auditable objectives. Even so, when available and able to deliver the intended reach, public media remains the preferred form as it falls subject to the internal and external controls in force throughout the public sector.

The association of these three requirements sustains the concept of State Public Communication, which, in turn, unfolds in two dimensions. Its first normative-democratic dimension aims to promote participation, transparency, State political representatives and other agents' accountability, and access to social rights in the form of services to contribute to governance, whereas its second institutional dimension focuses on citizenship, appealing to the construction of social ties, stimulating solidarity actions, and fostering trust in institutions and democracy.

Identifying a minimum concept of public communication applied to the State only configures a preliminary step in the theoretical-methodological discussions on the subject. Far from exhausting the issue, this study aimed to contribute to the theme based on the parameters to be applied in selecting objects and evaluating practical experiences. For example, it is also necessary to discuss the challenges of integrating the communication efforts conventionally established in the public sector in the communication offices with the structures established in these institutions based on the legislation on transparency (Law no. 131/2009), access to information (Law no. 12.527/2011), and the institution of ombudsman offices (Law no. 13.460/2017). Another area that deserves attention is the status of public officials as social media users and the extent to which the affordances of these platforms stimulate personal (instead of institutional) communication. Moreover, phenomena such as platformization and the ever-current concerns about disinformation require rediscussing public communication policies and the role of the State as a regulator of media communication. These and other issues related to public communication deserve to be further problematized and are shown here as an agenda for future research.

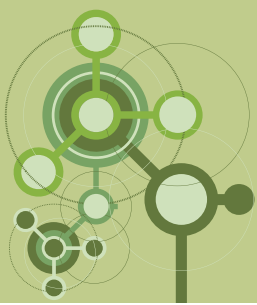
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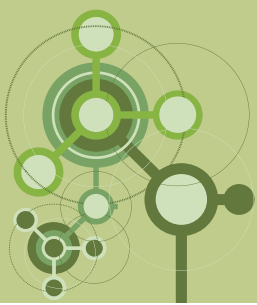
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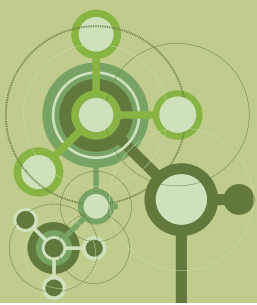
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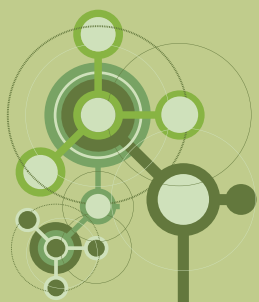
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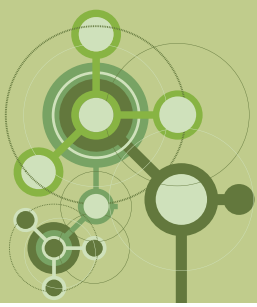
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