

Book Review:
The Routledge Handbook of Strategic Communication

The Routledge Handbook of Strategic Communication. Edited by Derina Holtzhausen and Ansgar Zerfass, First published (2015) by Routledge: 621 pp. ISBN: 978-0-415-53001-9

The phenomenon of strategic communication means communication as intentional, planned, goal-oriented and planned by professionals for a specific purpose and it emphasizes that, no matter how much strategizing and planning take place behind the scenes, the ultimate aim is to communicate in the public sphere. Further, the concept of strategic communication is a communication process that follows from an organization's plan and focuses on the role of communication in enabling the organization's goals and objectives, its success and impact.

The Routledge Handbook of Strategic Communication provides insights into ongoing discussions that build an emerging body of knowledge of strategic communication. Comprised by 37 chapters, the editors explore what the different communities of communication practice can learn from each other, offering complementary perceptions and, to some extent, opening new fields for interdisciplinary research.

As a wide-ranging book, it is divided in four parts wherein the first part deals with conceptual foundations of strategic communication and it provides insights about the arising of the expression "strategic communication" and sheds light on the appropriation of some concepts and theories from communication studies.

Part II elaborate the institutional and organizational dimensions in the discipline of strategic communication and explore the organizational factors that inhibit excellence in strategic communication. This part defines the institutional structures where strategic communication is a result of regulative, normative and cognitive structures where communicators conform with certain professional competences and tasks. The book further explores the organizational culture and knowledge; discursive practices and polyphony in management messages; organizational interaction and social practices that involve communication and language, and contribute to the construction of strategic practices; the role of executives in good governance and building communication capital and the impact of executives' roles, competencies, identities and legitimacy in strategy and strategizing.

The third Part of this book is focused on the communication between strategic communicators and their stakeholders, as well, as it highlighted some key concepts, like strategic messaging, persuasion, image repair, semiotic analysis, visual literacy, relationship cultivation and participatory culture. In this part the book proposes theoretical framework for strategic communication messaging and highlights the persuasion disciplines, mostly message framing, in the production of effective messages. This part further discusses the image repair strategies in crisis situations and emphasizes the use of strategic communication and visual means to reinforce cultural values. The book appraises the extent to which relationship cultivation strategies traditionally studied in the context of public relations' organization-public relationships theory may be relevant to strategic communication outcomes.

The final portion of this book deals with domains of strategic communication practice and it is explored that how strategic communication is practiced in areas such as: public relations, advertising, political communication, and government communication, health

communication to change perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors in the population in the field of strategic communication. The final portion discusses the strategic activism for democratization and social change, while highlights the role of strategic communication in public diplomacy and also elaborates the strategic communication performed by international nongovernmental organizations through the use of international public relations literature. The last part also examines the role of strategic communication in terrorism, crisis communication, risk communication, organizational change, digital communication and global strategic communication considering the lens of coordination, control and standardization.

The book provided a comprehensive review of research in the field of strategic communication which has become a major discipline of communication studies since the second decade of the twenty-first century. Considering that strategic communication is at the main component of communication studies, the book informed about some omissions, particularly in the area of branding, consumer behavior and marketing. They justify this omission with the need to focus strategic communication in the “soft” disciplines where it is much harder to determine and measure outcomes. The book offers a wide-ranging picture of an emerging and pervasive domain that encompasses various goal-directed communication activities.

By: Sardar Hamid

sardarroghani@gmail.com

PhD Fellow of Creative Arts & Communication

Riphah International University Islamabad