Legitimacy for Sale
Constructing a Market for PR Consultancy

Anna Tyllström
Abstract


Categories are semantic objects that create order in markets. By categorization, market actors and products become comparable and understandable to various audiences. This thesis examines the construction of the product category of public relations (PR) consultancy in Sweden; a market that has arisen, become economically successful and gained recognition over the past thirty years, but which still lacks the legitimacy and clarity normally thought of as basic criteria of market categories.

Using a semiotic framework and a mixed-method approach, I explore category construction 1) over time, and 2) in practice. In generalized terms, my findings suggest that market categorization processes cannot be understood without taking into account the characteristics of the product being categorized. Whereas ambiguity surrounding labels, denotations and connotations is normally regarded as incompatible with categorization, such fuzziness should be expected to be intrinsic in markets for professional service products like PR consultancy, where the product itself often thrives on, and continuously creates, ambiguity. For instance, the lack of clarity and lack of legitimacy in the Swedish PR consultancy market are found to be both logical outcomes, and enablers, of visibilization and amalgamation, referring to PR consultants’ conscientious management of visibility, and tendency to span boundaries in constructing their services, respectively. Categorization in the traditional sense is further hampered by the dominant label of “PR consultancy” being stigmatized, i.e. suffering from “sticky” negative connotations.

In the cultural context of Sweden, the emergence of a PR consultancy market has also meant commodification, i.e. the introduction of something hitherto not sold into a sphere of exchangeable things. In this process, PR consultancy seems to have gotten “stuck” between the sphere of salable and unsalable things, as the product is widely sold but continues to be contested across various audiences. Again, my analysis puts this difficulty of PR consultancy finding legitimacy in relation to the product category’s actual content, i.e. rendering legitimacy to others. Finally, I argue that the emergence of PR consultancy, by providing a market place for corporate legitimacy, might be understood as a case of a cognitive-cultural market logic on the rise, characterized by struggles for organizational visibility and semiotic sophistication.

Keywords: PR consultancy, Legitimization, Legitimation, Social Construction of Markets, Public Opinion, Organization Theory, Market Categorization

Anna Tyllström, Uppsala University, Department of Business Studies, Box 513, SE-751 20 Uppsala, Sweden.

© Anna Tyllström 2013

ISSN 1103-8454
urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-198847 (http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-198847)
Acknowledgments

Despite being a lonely endeavor, a doctoral thesis is indeed the result of communal effort. Many people have helped in shaping this book.

My greatest gratitude go to my informants, busy people who have taken their time (in many cases with a very high hourly wage as an opportunity cost) to respond to puzzling questions. A few courageous individuals have even let me in on their daily activities, tolerated me following them around and spoken to me about what they were doing, and why. I have promised not to name you, but without you, this book would never have been possible. Thank you.

My supervising committee also consists of four persons without whom this book would not be. Nils, if you hadn’t bumped into me outside McDonald’s at Norrmalmstorg in May 2008 and lured me back into academia, I might have been working elsewhere right now (as a consultant now, for all I know). Your intellectual curiosity is of a very rare kind; I do not know anyone to whom a beautiful argument matters so much, and academic seniority so little. You always took my arguments seriously, even when I said utterly stupid things. For this I thank you. Lars, you taught me how easy it is to make decisions when you just trust yourself enough to make them. Without your clear directions and extremely good judgment, I would have spent much more time hesitating, and less time writing. Roy, you offered me a second academic homestead in Alberta and in classical Canadian manner, you gave me important lessons in cultural bilingualism. Your love for words and sense of elegance in research has been truly inspiring. (Greimas’ semiotic model is the only piece of advice I ever got from you that was square!) Linda, I do not know how many pages you have read, how many editing tricks you have shared or how many times you have cheered me. Your confidence, in me and in time, has been astounding. I will hold your patience and diligence as an example. Thank you.

Outside my committee, a few people have gone above and beyond the call of duty to help me. Stefan Jonsson has been generous with his time, and given incommensurable input, especially on the commen-
surable stuff. Marie-Laure Djelic provided me with extremely detailed and wise comments on my final seminar; I hope you find traces of them in the next few hundred pages. Mike Lounsbury’s unambiguous feedback on an earlier version of this book made me stand my ground, but also rethink important choices.

My colleagues at the O-sektor in Uppsala and in the MEMAC project have provided a fine research environment. The same goes for SCORE earlier and the SMORG group in Alberta – all different research contexts with different cultural codes. I am thankful for all of them. Handelsbankens Research Foundations have offered me valuable support to conduct research, both here and in Canada.

Special thanks go my fellow PhD Students in Uppsala and in Alberta. To my sisters in research, Noomi Weinryb and Liv Fries; we have shared thoughts and texts since I was in my teens! I hope we will continue doing so for a long time to come. To Lianne Lefsrud, whose grandparents left Småland and crossed the Atlantic some 90 years before I did; thank you for being my good friend and colleague Over There. To Emilia Kvarnström and Anna Ljung; the quality of the coffee, the pressure in the coffee machine and the timing of the arrival of the fruit basket are not petty details when writing a dissertation. We know this.

HAKKA (The Artist Association for Full-time Working Women) has been a candy store of ideas – an experimental arena to discuss them but also to perform them. My closest circle of family and family-like friends, consisting of various individuals (last time I counted there were twenty of you? Or twenty-two?) age 3 to 72, you know who you are to me: a cloud of love and deep roots.

Finally, Rasmus – you have transcribed my interviews, formatted my figures, and made me countless gluten-free lunchboxes. This, in its own right, is excellent. But you also taught me something conceptually more difficult to fathom than most of the theory presented in this book (which, as you readers will tell, is not always easy). Here it goes: Life is what is going on all the time. Even when say, writing up a thesis. Sounds easy? It is not. For sharing that life, and for bringing zen and passion into it, in equal portions each day, I thank you. (And for the gluten-free lunch boxes, of course.)

Uppsala, May 2013

Anna Tyllström
Contents

Acknowledgments ........................................................................................................ 3
List of Figures ............................................................................................................... 9
List of Tables............................................................................................................... 10
Chapter 1. A Market Category Emerging .................................................................. 13
  Lingering Problems: Lack of Legitimacy and Lack of Clarity........................... 15
  Why Markets Emerge .......................................................................................... 17
  How Markets Emerge ......................................................................................... 24
  Aim and Research Question ............................................................................. 27
  Outline of the Thesis .......................................................................................... 28
Chapter 2. A Semiotic Approach to Product Categorization ...................................... 31
  How Products Are Made: Commodification as a Cultural process .............. 31
  Product Categorization and Meaning ............................................................. 33
  A Semiotic Model of Categorization ............................................................... 38
Chapter 3. Designing a Study of Product Categorization ........................................... 45
  Studying Meaning Construction .................................................................... 45
  Data Collection and Analysis ......................................................................... 54
  Media Archives .................................................................................................. 54
  Interviews ........................................................................................................... 60
  Participant Observations .................................................................................. 62
  Industry-Produced Texts .................................................................................... 66
EMPIRICAL PART I Category Construction over Time ............................................ 69
Chapter 4. A New Market Developing .................................................................... 73
  Early years (−1985) ......................................................................................... 73
  Expansion (1993–2000) ................................................................................... 95
  Consolidation and New growth (2001–) ....................................................... 104
Chapter 5. Analyzing Categorization over Time ............................................. 111
  Development of the Label ........................................................................ 111
  Development of Denotations .................................................................. 115
  Development of Connotations ................................................................ 119
  Development of Category Boundaries .................................................... 121
  Contributions to Market Categorization Theory .................................... 123

EMPIRICAL PART II    Category Construction in Practice ......................... 129

Chapter 6. PR Consultancy Discourse......................................................... 133
  Step 1: Identifying Typologies ............................................................... 134
  Step 2: Narrative Structure – a Standard Story Emerges ..................... 136
  Step 3: Vocabularies and Discourses – “Be ‘non-commercial’!” .......... 141
  Analyzing Consultancy Texts: Commodification Through Non-
  Commodification ..................................................................................... 144

Chapter 7. In the Field of PR Consultancy ................................................. 151
  Case 1: “The Independent Denim Expert” ......................................... 151
  Case 2: Almedalen – Lobbying for Bio Fuel ....................................... 165
  Identifying Product Mechanisms: Visibilization and Amalgamation .... 191

Chapter 8. Legitimizing a Market for Legitimacy...................................... 199
  Theoretical Contribution: Categorization in Professional Service
  Markets .................................................................................................... 202
  A Market for Legitimacy ...................................................................... 204
  A Note of Caution: On PR Consultancy and Agency ......................... 208
  Where Marketization and Mediatization Meet: Towards a Cognitive-
  Cultural Market Logic ............................................................................. 211

References .................................................................................................. 214
## Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DI</td>
<td>Dagens Industri, Business media daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC</td>
<td>Corporate Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EIF</td>
<td>Employees’ Investment Funds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR</td>
<td>Human Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICCO</td>
<td>International Communication Consultants’ Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPO</td>
<td>Initial Public Offering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IR</td>
<td>Investor Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>Information Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LO</td>
<td>Landsorganisationen i Sverige, Swedish Trade Union Confederations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MP</td>
<td>Member of Parliament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA</td>
<td>Public Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR</td>
<td>Public Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRECIS</td>
<td>The Association of Public Relations Consultancies in Sweden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSF</td>
<td>Professional Service Firm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAF</td>
<td>Svenska Arbetsgivareföreningen, Swedish Employers’ Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSE</td>
<td>Stockholm School of Economics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA</td>
<td>Veckans Affärer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures

Figure 1.1 Revenues and Employees in the PR consultancy market 1992-2011 ................................................................. 14
Figure 2.1 Semiotic Structure of a Product Category .......................... 39
Figure 2.2 Audience Co-construction of Category Meaning .................. 41
Figure 2.3 Categorization over Time ................................................. 42
Figure 3.1 No. of Search Hits, “PR Consultancy” and/or “PR Consultant” in Business Press 1981-2009 ............................... 46
Figure 3.2 ‘PR,’ ‘Information’ and ‘Communication’ Labels in Business Press 1981-2009 ............................................................. 50
Figure 3.3 Data Sources’ Availability over Time ................................. 55
Figure 3.5a Greimas’ Semiotic Square ................................................ 65
Figure 3.5b Greimas’ Semiotic Square, Exemplified ............................... 66
Figure 3.6 The Object of Analysis: The Parcel of PR Consultancy ....... 68
Figure 3.7 Labels and Denotations on the PR Consultancy Market 1970-2010 ........................................................................ 117
Figure 5.1 ‘PR,’ ‘Information’ and ‘Communication’ Labels in Business Press 1981-2009 ................................................................. 112
Figure 5.2 Explanatory Articles 1981-2009 ........................................... 113
Figure 5.3 Synonyms and Adjacent Concepts 1996-2009 ...................... 114
Figure 5.4 Type of PR mentioned per article 1981-2009 ...................... 116
Figure 5.5 Critical Articles in Business Press 1981-2009 ...................... 120
Figure 5.6 References to Boundary Struggles 1993*-2009 .................... 121
Figure 6.1 Cultural Meaning Assumptions, Basic Structure ................. 147
Figure 6.2 Cultural meaning assumptions, Modified Structure I ............ 148
Figure 6.3 Cultural Meaning Assumptions, Modified Structure II ........ 149
Figure 7.1 Semiotic Meaning Structure of Amalgamation .................... 196
Figure 7.2 Semiotic Meaning Structure of Visibilization ....................... 197
Figure 8.1 Categorization Dynamics in the PR Consultancy Market .... 203
List of Tables

Table 3.1 PR Consultancy Services per Business area............................... 47
Table 3.2 Identified Relevant Audiences..................................................... 51
Table 3.3 Overview of the Data .................................................................. 56
Table 3.4 Articles mentioning “PR consultancy and/or PR consultant”, per source over time ................................................................ 58
Table 5.1 Correlations .................................................................................. 118
Table 5.2 Summary of Findings..................................................................... 122
Table 6.1 Type of Text in the “Perspectives” series................................... 135
Table 6.2 Type of PR in the ”Perspectives” series....................................... 135
Table 6.3 Word Frequency Count, “Perspectives” series ......................... 136
Table 6.4 Archetypical Narrative Structure: The Standard Story.............. 137
STREPSIADES: All right then.
Look over there—you see that little door,
there on that little house?

PHEIDIPPIDES: Yes, I see it.
What are you really on about, father?

STREPSIADES: That’s the Thinkery—for clever minds.
In there live men who argue and persuade.
They say that heaven’s an oven damper—
it’s all around us—we’re the charcoal.
If someone gives them cash, they’ll teach him
how to win an argument on any cause,
just or unjust.

PHEIDIPPIDES: Who are these men?

STREPSIADES: I’m not sure
just what they call themselves, but they’re good men,
fine, deep-thinking intellectual types.

PHEIDIPPIDES: Nonsense! They’re a worthless bunch.
I know them—
you’re talking about pale-faced charlatans,
who haven’t any shoes, like those rascals
Socrates and Chaerephon.

STREPSIADES: Shush, be quiet.
Don’t prattle on such childish rubbish.
If you care about your father’s daily food,
give up racing horses and, for my sake,
join their company.

Aristophanes, The Clouds, 423 BC
Chapter 1. A Market Category Emerging

The former Embassy of Czechoslovakia in Sweden is tucked away in a lush, quiet street of Östermalm, the poshest neighborhood of Stockholm. It makes a stark contrast to the older imperial apartment buildings with ornamented exteriors surrounding it. When built in 1972, it was a state of the art Soviet representation structure. Designed by the renowned architect Jan Bočan, and characterized by concrete walls, extensive window sections and bold angles, the ten-story building is an archetypal example of a style commonly referred to as “East State Modernism.” The interior designs – jacaranda walls, floors in schist and limestone – were carefully crafted by the former Czechoslovakia’s most famous artists and craftsmen, and the house contained staff housing, an open-atrium cantina, garage and laundry. But apart from being a place for diplomatic representation and administration, and perhaps more importantly, the embassy was also a central part of the Soviet Union’s information-gathering web in the West. A massive wall in the lobby hid the wire-tapping equipment. In the large cinema in the basement, Western movies were screened for censorship before being shown in the East. All conference rooms were bobby-wired and had built in surveillance cameras in the ceilings.

More than 40 years after its construction, the house is one of many buildings reminiscent of the Soviet architectural aesthetic in Europe. But in contrast to many of these, the building is not dilapidated, or blown out for reconstruction. Bočan’s details are perfectly restored to their original condition. The jacaranda interiors in the hallway have been meticulously renovated. On the roof, the old antenna once connecting the embassy to the Kremlin – the size of a Christmas tree – is still there, as a reminder of old times.

But some things have changed. Anyone who enters the house today through its brown metal doors is met by an art installation in the form of an immense clay sculpture portraying a life-size cow. The old cantina is transformed into a small restaurant with a renowned chef serving the one hundred or so employees. The ceiling cameras in the conference rooms have been replaced by modern slideshow projectors, and the movie theatre is now used for corporate meetings. Opposite a large LCD screen broadcasting the BBC, a wall is covered with award certificates, most of them reading “Best Agency of the Year.” Just like the former
tenants, the new inhabitants of this building are handling, sorting and choosing information, although within a more capitalist framework. It is the headquarters of one of Sweden’s largest PR consultancies.

The tenant firm is approximately as old as the building in which it resides. Although larger and more established than many of its competitors, this particular firm is in a sense proto-typical of the collective of firms of which it forms an important part. With roots in a political youth movement, it developed in close cooperation with industry organizations. The firm is providing organizational clients with advisory services in corporate branding, financial communications, public affairs and lobbying – a bundle of professional services, which together with product promotion, has become known as public relations (PR) consultancy.

Around this bundle of services, a small but thriving market has come into being. From encompassing only a few companies in the early 1970s, the market today is characterized by a few hundred companies, most of them based in Stockholm. Together, the largest 70 companies employ approximately 1,500 consultants, and earn a total net revenue of EUR 150 million annually. With the exception of two shorter recessions, growth curves have been steep; since market statistics became available in 1992, annual revenue increase has averaged 13% annually, with some

Figure 1.1 Revenues and Employees in the PR consultancy market 1992-2011.

1 These figures only account for industry organization PRECIS’s members (approximately 10% to be added for smaller firms to total revenues).
years witnessing a growth as high as 40%. Two business associations have been established, as well as self-regulation in form of an ethical code. Clients are mainly found in the private sector, private organizations representing 70% of clients, and industry organizations another 10%.

Lingering Problems: Lack of Legitimacy and Lack of Clarity

The rise of this new market has not occurred unnoticed. The number of articles merely in the business media mentioning “PR consultancy” or “PR agency” in 2012 was more than tenfold the equivalent number in 1981. The market has become high profile after recruiting on a regular basis high-profile professionals from other fields such as media, finance and politics. The number of prizes and rankings is proliferating, and industry news is regularly covered in the national business press. But despite widespread use of PR services, attention is not evenly distributed across audiences, and far from all attention is positive. Individuals becoming consultants, notably from political and media fields, have been criticized and accused of being “sell-outs.” Antagonists are often found among journalists and politicians, but surveys have shown that even the general public’s trust in the industry remains low; in general surveys, more than half of respondents express poor or little trust in PR consultants (Larsson, 2007). Politicians have also reacted, and 21 motions appealing for different types of formal regulation have been submitted to the government since 1990. The following parliamentary interpellation, authored by an MP from the largest opposition party in the spring of 2012, is quite representative in its demands for legislation enforcing full disclosure of PR consultancies’ clients. She describes the situation as follows:

…We have a problem in Sweden. PR consultancies have a highly notable influence on the public debate and politics. In this way they become a political power, albeit a secret one. Behind the scenes, their clients are pulling the strings, trying via PR consultancies to turn the debate in a direction that favors their interests. PR firms often make efforts to employ consultants with diverse backgrounds, so that different consultants can take on different types of projects, depending on what image and contacts are likely to give maximum impact in any particular case. These consultants then "pick up" opinion leaders – such as politicians and celebrities – who help out in driving issues, with or without receiving compensation. A lot of the time these opinion builders do not even know who the original beneficiary is, that is, who is paying the PR consultancy. Since PR consultancies influence the content of media and in other ways
play a powerful role in the public debate, it is important for us to know who their clients are.

(Swedish Parliament, Interpellation 2011/12:303)

The interpellation government summarizes the classic criticisms against PR consultants; these are “shady people,” using a grey zone between market and politics to their own advantage, selling contacts and political know-how to moneyed client organizations. Their methods are accused of being too unbounded, too clandestine and amoral.

The response came from the Minister of Justice in a plenary debate a few weeks later. In her reply, she summarizes the main arguments commonly used by defenders of the market: that the government should not interfere with private businesses, that working methods are free for all organizations to use, and that the burden falls on politicians and others to critically evaluate all advocacy proposals presented to them:

As for PR consultancies, I can only conclude that they are private businesses. Imposing an obligation on private businesses to disclose their client database is out of the question. [...] What is very cumbersome if one would go in for regulation of this area is the following: What is a PR consultancy? What is advocacy? Where do you draw line, when writing e.g. a letter to an editor, between being influenced by a PR consultancy, and simply voluntarily engaging in an issue? Discussing these kinds of measures, we inevitably end up touching upon our constitutional rights; freedom of speech and freedom of the press. In my opinion we cannot start to poke around with constitutional rights without raising the question “What would be the next step?” These demarcation problems are of such magnitudes, in my opinion, that it is impossible to restrict or prohibit [specific PR practices]. I have no opinion of PR consultancies’ practices, nor do I possess any in-depth knowledge about them. I rather think that it is about ensuring that public authorities and others, both when using advertising agencies and when receiving information, remain unbiased, practice critical examination, and use more than one source of information.

(Swedish Parliament, Protocol 2011/12:96)

This debate adds complexity to the neat story of market success in form of offices with jacaranda walls and the steep growth curves in Figure 1.1. “PR consultancy” is here described as a commercial product, but it is not always talked about as a product; PR agencies are referred to as a political power, with other potential objectives than production efficiency or maximization of profits. The term seems laden with controversy, activating associations that lie far beyond the normal scope of a business; the
market raises questions of constitutional rights, of freedom of speech, invoking calls for elucidation of public authority mandate. Moreover, the product and its boundaries appear difficult to determine. In her statement the Minister sees herself obliged to ask for a definition (“What is a PR consultancy?”), and she claims to have little knowledge of PR consultancy methods. In her last sentence, she substitutes the term for “advertising agency.”

These two pictures, of a successful new market with steep growth curves and representative headquarters, on the one hand, and accusations of political deceit and infringement of constitutional rights, on the other, present a seeming contradiction. Literature on emerging markets shows virtual consensus around the hypothesis that clarity and legitimacy are necessary preconditions for market growth (Zuckerman, 1999, Kocak et al., 2009, Khaire and Wadhwani, 2010, Navis and Glynn, 2010). Initial confusion surrounding the names and contents of products and roles of actors could be signs of a creative start-up phase, but, over time, such market elements should reasonably be stabilized and socially accepted, or else be punished in the form of lower prices or lower critical esteem (Hannan et al., 2007, Hsu, 2006). So how can the PR consultancy market have grown so fast, and continue to grow, but still suffer from lack of clarity and legitimacy?

This book will revolve around this tension and this question, albeit in more theorized and operationalized forms. It will address the emergence of this rapidly growing market, but also the actors and the products that have come to shape that space.

Why Markets Emerge

A market is a market is a market. The idea of what a market is and what it can do is one of the most central images in modern Western societies, and hardly ever requires any explanation in everyday discourse. To most people, it means a place, virtual or real, where people come together and exchange goods and services. According to the International Encyclopedia of Economic Sociology a market is a “social structure for exchange of rights, which enables people, firms and products to be evaluated and priced” (Beckert and Zafirovski, 2006, p.423). Such a minimalist definition of markets is quite compatible with that of the father of classical economics, Adam Smiths. In his theory, markets are basically a price mechanism; in an ideal market, products are interchangeable, and information flows freely between sellers and buyers, who pursue their own interests independently of each other, guided by the famous “invisible hand.” Under such conditions, a product’s price will inevitably approach its “natural” price level (Smith, 1937 [1776]). In this view, the ideal-type
of a market is a self-regulating, spontaneous order that rises and falls with demand, separated from the ideal-type of politics (Polanyi, 1957).

However, for the past three decades sociological research has come to question this notion of spontaneity (Aspers, 2009). By considering a multitude of actors, researchers have been expanding the notion of a market beyond the seller-buyer dyad by showing how markets are embedded in social interactions. White (1981), for example, challenged a central assumption of neoclassical economics when he asserted that producers do not operate independently. It is not information on consumers’ demand that ultimately drives supply, but rather information on what other firms in that particular market do. In modern markets, White argues, sellers tend to be relatively few, and they seek market information with each other rather than with consumers. “Each producer is guided in choice of volume by the tangible outcomes of others producers – not by speculation on hypothetical buyers to its actions” (White, 1981, p.517). As such, markets are confined and defined by the networks in which they are nested (Granovetter, 1985, Powell, 1991, Padgett and Powell, 2013).

Another strand of research has stressed how markets are embedded in legal and regulatory infrastructure (Fligstein, 1996, Fligstein and Dauter, 2007). This line of theory stresses the role of governments in markets, and stipulates that the need for predictable and stable legal contexts for competition and public infrastructure will “eventually send firms to governments” (Fligstein, 1996, p.229). Yet another body of literature stresses the cultural dimension of market embeddedness: as much as they are physical manifestations of exchange, markets are also cultural myths, embedded in the shared cognition of a society (Meyer and Rowan, 1977, Meyer, 1994). The importance of ‘the Market’ hence goes beyond the material reality of economic exchange; the idea of the market as a rational way of organizing is ascribed a considerable amount of symbolic power in modern Western society (Scott, 2008, Friedland and Alford, 1991).

The particular conceptualization of what a market is influences how researchers address market emergence. While classical and neo-classical economic models are more occupied with market equilibrium than with market emergence, dominant later economic works, following Schumpeter (1934), have come to stress technological and entrepreneurial innovations as a driving force in market emergence. The more constructionist approaches variegate this view; markets could certainly arise out of technical innovation, but also out of regulation. One such is the global market for CO2 emission rights, which is the result of a decided order, constructed by nation-states and transnational agencies (Engels, 2009, Buhr, 2012). In such cases, markets even take shape from an idea of how markets should operate, and they are organized to imitate the ideal-type of markets that economic theory stipulates (MacKenzie and Millo, 2003, Callon, 1998). Yet another example of markets are transformations of
previously non-market activities, an ideological drive to make products out of things or activities that were formerly handled in a different social system of exchange. Obvious example are privatization of state-owned enterprises (Johnson et al., 2000), or the commercialization of academic research (Baldini et al., 2006, Colyvas et al., 2002).

Why a Swedish Market for PR Consultancy?
In the case of the Swedish PR consultancy market, the earlier literature has offered three main explanations for its rapid growth: a broad societal re-orientation towards market-based modes of organizing, the withering Swedish corporatist system of policy-making, and lastly, the mass media’s more prominent role in society (Melin, 2004, Larsson, 2005a-b). On a theoretical level, these three explanations could be represented by three so-called societal meta-processes (Krotz, 2007); the marketization and the de-corporatization of Swedish society, and the mediatization of Western organizational life. Below, I will briefly summarize these processes, and finally explain why they will serve as starting points, rather than as explanations, for my study.

Marketization. During the past two decades Sweden, like many Western welfare societies, has witnessed substantial reform inspired by classic market models (Djelic, 2006b, Brunsson, 1994). Displaying obvious kinship to the culturalist view of markets outlined above, scholars use the concept of marketization to describe how the idea of the market and market competition is gaining ground and driving institutional change in several realms of society. Its diffusion, the argument goes, has been facilitated by globalization, causing templates to spread faster across geographical distances:

Market logics have moved in about a century from reflecting marginal ideas in a few liberal intellectual centres to becoming a structuring force of the trans-nationalizing world. Today we find that marketization permeates and structures policies, reforms, discourses and ideologies in many places in the world.

(Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson, 2006, p.25)

Marketization hence goes deeper than adopting superficial elements of market models, as it is manifested in many realms of organizational life: in the increasing amount of market organizations, in the re-structuring of firms to create internal markets, and introducing market-based methods such as e.g. cost-benefit analyses. Increases in antitrust regulation and corporate law, as well as in the introduction of market-inspired structures
and vocabularies to formerly non-market spheres of activity, such as public sector and civil society organizations, are equally “symptoms” of marketization” (Djelic, 2006a, Brunsson and Hägg, 1992, Brunsson, 1994, Friedland and Alford, 1991).

A particularly popular idea central to marketization is that of outsourcing – the notion that companies should concentrate on core activities and buy support functions from external suppliers. This idea has been paralleled by new professional groups and practices. Adhering to general patterns in the Western world in the wake of marketization, Swedish society has witnessed the birth of many new types of advisory collectives, so called ‘Others’ who instruct and form organizations’ behavior but seldom bear any direct responsibility for actions produced (Meyer 1994; cf. Brint 1994) and temporary knowledge workers (Barley and Kunda, 2004). In late modernity, buying various types of consultancy services – IT consultancy, Human Resources consultancy, management consultancy etc. – has become a part of being seen a legitimate organization in the eyes of others (Reed, 1996, Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall, 2002a, Furusten and Werr, 2005, McKenna, 2006). The new professional collectives of experts have in common that they are structured around commercial conditions rather than professional-ethical ones; the market is the very precondition for their existence (Furusten and Garsten, 2005, Brint, 1994, Alvesson, 1993). From a marketization perspective, PR consultancy hence fits in well with other new types of consultancy as yet another activity outsourced.

**De-corporatization.** Even though marketization is transnational in its character, it has local adaptations. In international discourse, Sweden is commonly described as one of the most corporatist nations in Europe, with a culture promoting “consensus and cooperation among relatively homogeneous interests” (Hillman, 2003, p. 461). Indeed, Sweden has a long history of political corporatism, i.e. a system where the access to policy processes of organized interests – trade unions, business associations, civil society organizations etc. – is controlled by the political system, theoretically in order to avoid power imbalances between interests (Naurin, 2001). Concerning relations between business corporations and politics, the corporatist model offers a given set of fora of direct interaction; labor negotiations between trade unions and business associations, corporate representation on government boards, government hearings with civil society organizations, etc. In fact, in Sweden, this policy of balancing interests of various organized groups, mixing regulated and free-market systems came to deserve its own international label: “the Swedish Model,” alternatively “the Scandinavian Model” (Thullberg and Östberg, 1994, Premfors, 1991, Abrahamson, 1999).
As a marketization wave has swept over Western societies, this strand of literature argues, it has been matched and underpinned by changes in policy, both when it comes to ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ regulations (Jacobsson, 2004). The Swedish political system, and with it the Swedish model, has undergone a significant de-corporatization since the beginning of the 1990s, in which corporatist institutions have lost their influence. Instead, a more pluralistic model has started to take shape (Lewin, 2006, Hermansson et al., 1999). In a pluralistic system, of which the US system is an archetypal example, the political sphere is seen more as an open, market-like arena where ideas and opinions compete with each other, and the best ideas are those that will catch the attention of the political decision-makers (Naurin, 2001a, 2007). Theoretically, in a pluralist model, the sender of the message should not be the main concern, but the content.

As early as in the Swedish State Commission on Power, Carlberg (1989) saw signs of such a transformation: in the previous, corporatist setting, a Swedish corporate manager who wished to affect a political decision relevant to his or her company typically faced two options: either to engage personally in politics or, more commonly, to get their business association to represent them in direct contacts with government officials. In a post-corporatist context, the same manager would most probably choose advocacy, i.e. build public opinion around the issue by the use of mass media (Carlberg, 1989, Naurin, 2001a, Melin, 2004). Also, recent reports drafted by researchers in political communication confirm that direct lobbying of MPs is becoming more important (Möller, 2009a, Svensson, 2012).

This tendency of corporations to use advocacy instead of other routes of influence has been observed in other countries, such as in Norway (Allern, 1997) and Great Britain (L'Etang, 2004, Miller and Dinan, 2008). Moreover, PR consultancies are only one form of organization devoted to new types of corporate-political relations. Think tanks have quadrupled in number in the US since the 1970s (Rich, 2004, Ricci, 1994), and, in Europe, there has been an explosion in think tanks, the majority of which are sponsored by industry organizations or companies directly, and often with neo-liberal agendas (Mirowski and Plehwe, 2009). Fries (2011) shows how Swedish business organizations have re-evaluated their core activities, going from labor market negotiations to pro-corporation advocates. Even in the US, where a pluralist system has long been in place, corporate advocacy has intensified. Barley (2010) describes a veritable institutional field of organizations devoted to political influence having emerged in the US since the early 1970s, among them indus-
try organizations, lobbying firms, think tanks, lobbying firms\(^2\) and PR consultancies. From this perspective, the emergent PR consultancy market is but one sign of a transforming organizational field devoted to corporate-political interaction.

A fact that is often mentioned in conjunction with this type of explanation is the close ties between the new market and the political system. Five out of the seven largest Swedish PR firms were founded by ex-politicians, and approximately one fifth of consultants employed in Swedish PR consultancies have a background in one of the eight parliamentary political parties (Melin 2004; Larsson 2005b). With time, a significant flow of professionals both to and from politics has become established practice; there seems to be an inverse correlation between political majority and PR recruitment. In other words, when political mandates in parliament and larger municipalities change, the PR consultancy market is drained of consultants with known prior sympathies for the parties in power, and replaced by an influx of recruits from the losing parties (Tyllström 2009). Exactly how this flow of people is linked to growing de-corporatization is seldom theorized, but it is worth mentioning as it does have some bearing on the effects of the construction of the market, as we shall see in Chapter 4.

In a de-corporatization perspective PR consultancy does seem, at least in part, to encompass both transformations of old activities and elements that are genuinely new. Corporate activities aimed at influencing policy are not a new phenomenon in the Swedish context. However, using public opinion and the mass media as a channel to do so is fairly new in this particular cultural context. This leads me to the third metaprocess explaining the emergence of the PR consultancy market, concerning mass media.

**Mediatization.** Public relations is normally defined as a marketing method with the main objective of getting corporate messages placed in unpaid mass media channels. In much of the communications literature, a growing importance of mass media is portrayed as a dominant factor behind the rapid growth of PR consultancy market. As early as the early 19th century, sociologists were occupied with the rise of the mass media and the new public opinion mechanisms it offered. Gabriel Tarde in his 1901 work *Opinion and the Crowd* theorized how new technologies such as the printing press, railroad, and the telegraph had changed the very premises of communications between individuals and groups, allowing messages to travel across distances (Tarde, 1969 [1901]). “How often

\(^2\)In the Swedish context, PR consultancy encompasses lobbying services. There are hence no separate lobbying firms as in e.g. the US See Chapter 3 for a more detailed description of what PR consultancy entails.
one sees publicists create their own public!” Tarde exclaimed (Tardep. 282). This separation of physical worlds and belief systems involved a series of mechanisms. A general public replaced the crowd as the largest social mass, for the first time allowing collective identities to emerge without physical encounters. The distribution of Bibles had separated Church from faith, as priests were no longer the sole professors of the gospel. Physical-cognitive separation furthermore allowed for internationalization; Tarde mentions how socialists in France had more in common with socialists in Germany than with their fellow Frenchmen. And perhaps more fundamentally, the preconditions for diffusing, maintaining and disrupting institutions had radically changed, allowing for vast imitation and mimicry but also requiring new modes and means of managing publics and their opinions.

Tarde’s contemporary Max Weber framed public opinion building as a cultural problem and actually outlined a research manifest for a sociology of media organizations in 1910 – a project he never got sufficient support to finish since journalists refused to be surveyed (Weber, 1976 [1910], 1998 [1910]). In the seminal book Public Opinion from 1922 Walter Lippmann described at the very micro-level how opinion is fabricated by using symbols. Since then, the role of the mass media in modern societies has been thoroughly explored in contemporary social theory. Marshall MacLuhan’s works (McLuhan and Fiore, 1967, McLuhan, 1964/1994) pursue an idea similar to Tarde’s, namely that of technological change functioning as a driver in the creation of a global village. Prominent thinkers have theorized how entities in modern society to an increasing extent tend to see themselves, and define themselves, from the outside rather than from inside operations. This research has often taken on a critical perspective, claiming that the influence of the postmodern mass media risks diluting democratic systems (Habermas and McCarthy, 1985, Bourdieu and Ferguson, 1998, Baudrillard, 1988, Habermas, 2006).

In the borderland between organization theory and modern communications theory, considerable research has been devoted to exploring how organizations have become increasingly dependent on external appreciation. Western societies have been subject to a mediatization, here defined as “the process whereby society to an increasing degree is submitted to, or becomes dependent on, the media and their logic” (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 114). Like marketization, mediatization is claimed to alter the conditions for organizational life on a profound level: communicating messages and activities through the mass media in order to ensure survival and secure legitimacy (Pollock and Rindova, 2003, Deephouse, 2000, Thompson, 1995, Wry et al., 2006). This affects budgets, recruitment and marketing strategies, and this has been found true not only for political organizations (Strømbäck, 2004) but also for busi-
nesses (Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall, 2002a, Schulz, 2004, Pallas, 2007). According to Power et al. (2009) corporations’ being increasingly apprehensive of their reputation is “both a symptom of late modern intensification of organizational and individual concern with appearances, and also plays a performative role in shaping managerial behavior” (p. 302).

For managers as well as political leaders, basic public relations know-how is today seen as a necessity (Petrelius Karlberg, 2007, Möller, 2009b), and the growth of the field of business journalism has also intensified the mass media’s reporting on corporate actions and events (cf. Grafström, 2006, Kjaer, 2007). As apparent in the empirical chapters of this book, PR consultancies vary in content and kind but most of them bear the common trait of using unpaid media channels to promote their organizations’ own interests, products and brands. In this perspective, the PR consultancy market is just one symptom of an overall intensification of the field of corporate communications.

**How Markets Emerge**

Marketization, de-corporatization and mediatization are hence three explanations commonly given to the emergence of a Swedish market for PR consultancy (Larsson, 2005a-b), but also to the emergence of PR consultancy markets in other national settings. One well-studied example is the British market for PR consultancy that developed during the 1980s and 1990s (L’Etang, 2004, Davis, 2002). Miller and Dinan (2000) found strong correlations between the British government’s privatization of large state-owned corporations (British Airways, British Telecom, British Rail etc.) and the rise of the British market for PR consultancy. However, the authors warn that this correlation – measured as PR agency billings in relation to the magnitude of stock market launches – should not be mistaken for direct causality. For not only did privatization initiatives in the UK provide a burgeoning PR industry with clients, but the PR consultancies actually *boosted* privatization as well by taking an active part in the political processes and promoting the use of PR consultancy services.

One example of this dual relationship was how consultants representing large PR firms sat on the government-appointed marketing committees of every public flotation project, together with civil servants and relevant bankers and brokers. “The PR company often carried out the PR part of the strategy, but it could be contracted to another PR consultancy. [...] In addition, the PR agency appointed for the flotation directed the entire marketing effort, including directing and approving advertising work” (Miller and Dinan, 2000, p.15). Concurring with the marketization paradigm, the authors admit that the “the PR consultancy sector has an
elective affinity with market ideology” (Miller and Dinan, 2000, p.27), but the conditions of their market were initially set by other factors than mere ‘demand’:

The rise of the PR consultancy sector did not occur because of the emergence of new technology or because of a learning process inside business organizations, or because PR professionalism and expertise increased or because the PR industry became effective in marketing itself, although all these things arguably have happened. Instead, PR grew as a result of a decisive political and economic change of direction in government, in the context of the rise of the global power of TNCs.³

(Miller and Dinan, 2000, p. 29)

The point here is as thought-provoking as it is crucial: if one truly adheres to a constructivist approach to market emergence, meta-processes such as “marketization”, “de-corporatization” and “mediatization” do not qualify as satisfactory explanations for the emergence of the PR consultancy market. These meta-processes are not “waves” that “sweep” over societies. Instead, they are truly meta in the sense that they are made up of other meso- and micro-level processes. These, in turn, make up the larger transformation patterns that in turn guide micro-level interactions.

As I continue to explore the origins and practices of the Swedish PR consultancy market, the three meta-processes of marketization, de-corporatization, and mediatization will not be neglected. On the contrary, knowledge about them is an indispensable backdrop to studying and analyzing market emergence. Paraphrasing Miller and Dinan’s reasoning, I will not dispute their existence; marketization, de-corporatization, and mediatization have arguably happened, as ample empirical research has pointed to this fact. What is more, the emergence of a new market for PR consultancy, selling advisory services to corporations, often targeting a third party by using the mass media, should reasonably be expected to relate to these three processes in some way. Still, such claims tells us very little about how this has happened, by what processes those relations came into being, and by what mechanisms the processes were, and are, geared.

This is a fundamental stance in regard to the understanding of the remainder of this book; social reality is here seen as constructed in the interplay between dominant institutional norms that govern social actions and individuals and organization performing actions that either reproduce, create or alter these norms (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006, Friedland and Alford, 1991, Barley and Tolbert, 1997). This position

³ TNC= transnational company.
acknowledges the ability of reality to appear stable and taken-for-granted to the extent that it takes on a rule-like status of independent logic, all while recognizing the fact that actors might work to alter the social relations that define their reality. As they do so, they “produce new truths, new models by which to understand themselves and their societies, as well as forms of behavior and material practices” (Friedland and Alford, 1991, p. 254). The social structures called markets, consequently, must be studied at multiple levels of inquiry in order to be fully understood.

Legitimization of Market Categories

One of the most salient processes in nascent markets is that of the construction of market categories. Market categories constitute a specific type of social entity “that segregate things into groups and impose coherence” (Lounsbury and Rao, 2004) in order to “facilitate market exchange by providing bases for comparison and valuation” (Khaire and Wadhwani, 2010, p. 1281). Without common cues to guide market behavior in the form of categorization, producers and consumers will not be able to proceed to exchange; they risk confusion over what they are exchanging, where and with whom, and with what they are to compare it. To exhibit such clarity, categories should enjoy legitimacy.

Legitimacy is broadly defined as the “generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions.” (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). As such, “legitimacy is not a commodity to be possessed or exchanged but in a condition of reflecting cultural alignment, normative support, or consonance with relevant rules or laws” (Scott, 1995, p. 45). In this book, I will use Aldrich and Fiol’s (1994) division of legitimacy into two sub-types; cognitive legitimacy and socio-political legitimacy. Cognitive legitimization is the process whereby a new category requires cognitive recognition and becomes taken for granted by people who care about the market, while socio-political legitimization is the process in which a category becomes regarded as valuable and right by the same audiences. In practice, category legitimization is the process by which categories become bounded, infused with meaning and gain general acceptance in their environments.

Categories are semantic objects (Negro et al., 2010b), and as such they are constructed in and by language. While many studies have stressed the role of entrepreneurial strategies of meaning construction and category legitimization (Aldrich and Fiol, 1994, Kennedy, 2008, Santos and Eisenhardt, 2009, Wry et al., 2011), research has also shown that new market categories are often dependent on some sort of intermediary – critics, mass media, ranking institutes – to evaluate organizational and product categories in order to receive meaning and legitimacy. Especially
when new category meanings are contested, or radical in relation to existing meanings, category legitimization has proved cumbersome, requiring extensive semantic framing across the audiences (Weber et al., 2008, Rao et al., 2003, Zelizer, 1983).

There are several types of market categories. As markets contain several elements, such as the market place – virtual or real, roles of actors – sellers, buyers and others involved in the exchange, and 3) the product itself, all elements should undergo categorization. Studying the construction of auction markets, e.g., the category of a market space becomes of primary importance; the process of making it a proper auction market category becomes a key object of analysis (Garcia-Parpet, 2007). Studying the construction of labor markets, forming of new professional roles could be an interesting vantage point (Barley and Kunda, 2004). The categorization of organizational forms is another highly interesting avenue of research (cf. Ruef, 2000). Most often when the word “market” is used, however, what is alluded to is product markets, i.e. markets that are defined in relation to a common product (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). People commonly speak of “the wine market,” “the mini-van market” or “the PR consultancy market.” In the case of markets for professional services, such as PR consultancy, product categories are in fact often used as interchangeable with their organizational categories. The product category “management consultancy,” for example, contains information about what is sold, but also who delivers it (management consultant).

I will delimit my study to following the development of PR consultancy as a product category. My reasons are three. Firstly, the category concept provides a vertical connection between micro-level construction processes and macro-level reality; a product category is per se an institution underpinned by categorization processes. Secondly, using product categorization as a proxy for market construction allows me to study how markets come about in language both through time and in practice; it adds horizontal plasticity to my study. Finally, as indicated above, in professional service markets, the product category tends not only to define the market, but also to encapsulate and reveal information about other market elements such as market space and actor roles.

Aim and Research Question

In this introductory chapter, I have described an empirical puzzle; that of a new market for PR consultancy exhibiting several signs of success, but which more than four decades since the first PR consultancies were founded still suffers from a lack of clarity and legitimacy surrounding its products and actors. I have formulated important basic assumptions: that markets are structures of exchange which are socially constructed,
and that stable market categories, especially product categories, are important building blocks in these structures. I have identified marketization, de-corporation, and mediatization as three important concepts that relate to the construction of the market, but it is not yet known exactly how. My research question is hence the following:

**Why and how has “PR consultancy” been constructed as a product category?**

The aim in this book is twofold. Firstly, I wish to describe the development of the product category of PR consultancy, and put it into a broader context of cultural meta-processes. Previous studies of PR consultancy have most often been conducted within a framework of either political science or media and communication studies. But understanding why organizations buy this type of services to an increasing extent, and what they consist of, is important also for scholars of management and organization. Available data suggest that a major transformation of organizational life has occurred, with a focus on visibility, and this transformation cuts into and affects relationships between organizations and their audiences, policy makers, the mass media and the general public.

Secondly, I wish to deepen the theoretical understanding of how markets are constituted in and by language. This aim goes beyond the specificity of the market at hand, hoping to provide theoretical insights into how market elements are constructed in the interaction and contestation between different actors. By using a semiotic approach, I will focus the linguistic dynamics of product categorization, i.e. the process by which the category “PR consultancy” is (or is not) established as a taken-for-granted and legitimate concept to describe a set of services with clear meaning and boundaries. By studying how various audiences use language and practice to construct the market category, to provide it with boundaries and to fill it with meaning – but also to avoid doing so – insights are created on the semantic mechanisms of market construction.

**Outline of the Thesis**

In Chapter 2, I stake out my theoretical framework. I explain how I view market and product construction as cultural processes, and I review contemporary theory on market categorization more closely – its advantages and its shortcomings. By the end of the chapter, I combine these insights with a semiotic approach to build a *semiotic model of categorization* that will guide my empirical explorations. Finally the broad research question above are theorized in the light of the framework chosen, and reformulated accordingly. In Chapter 3, I define the category of “PR con-
sultancy” in greater detail, and elaborate on the research design. I present the types of data collected, how I collected it, and what methods I used to analyze it.

The empirical findings are presented in two separate, but interlinked parts. The first part, *Category Construction over Time*, consists of Chapters 4 and 5. In Chapter 4, I rely on interview data and literature studies to reconstruct a chronological narrative of the roots of PR consultancy in Sweden, complemented by and compared with business media archival data. How services have been labeled, what the labels have been claimed to contain, and what associations and boundary struggles they have evoked, at different points in time, are examples of guiding points in this chapter. In Chapter 5, I analyze the longitudinal developments in Chapter 4 and discuss them in relation to extant categorization theory. The analysis gives some preliminary answers pertaining to the lack of legitimacy and lack of clarity, but it also raises new questions motivating a deeper engagement with PR consultancy practice in Part II.

The second empirical part, *Category Construction in Practice*, focuses on how PR consultancy services are constructed in everyday interactions. In Chapter 6, I show how PR consultants themselves strategically use language to frame what they do as commodities, i.e. products of commercial value. To this end, I perform a discourse analysis of industry-produced texts: newsletters written by consultants. By analyzing textual outputs of PR consultants, the reader will hopefully get a fuller understanding of the “logic” of PR consultancy work. In Chapter 7, the final empirical chapter, I pursue this nearness to PR consultancy practice. In an ethnographic study of how meaning and boundaries of services are constituted in practice, I lend my eyes – the eyes of a cultural outsider – to the reader as I enter the field of PR consultancy myself as a participant observer. Each of these two chapters contains summarizing discussions, serving to identify central themes of the product, and hence of the market as a whole, which helps me further to achieve my aim and answer my research questions.

In Chapter 8, I summarize my findings. I discuss what they might imply in terms of furthering a theoretical understanding of the empirical phenomenon, and how this contributes to theory of market categorization. After this, I go on to discuss the effects of my results in a broader perspective of social theory, and more particularly in relation to marketization, de-corporatization and mediatization literatures introduced in this chapter. The relevance of my findings to contemporary organization theory is at the center of the discussion. I find that the emergence of a PR consultancy market can be seen as a case of all these meta-processes, but also of something new; a new type of cultural-cognitive market logic guiding organizational behavior towards an emphasis on external appearance but also large-scale semiotic manipulation.
Chapter 2. A Semiotic Approach to Product Categorization

Below, I will introduce the two bodies of research, categorization theory and semiotic theory, which I use to build a theoretical framework to answer my research question. But I will start with a much more rudimentary, but necessary question: what things become products?

How Products Are Made: Commodification as a Cultural process

In *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1976 [1915]), Emile Durkheim made a clear distinction between a neutralized state of things, labeled as *profane*, and the *sacred*, a state applying to things that are regarded as exempt from worldly concerns. Departing from anthropological studies of religion in pre-modern societies, Durkheim theorized how cultures tend to construct a sphere of sacred objects, gestures and movements that could not be touched, owned, used or performed by everyone. Sacred objects are regarded as superior in dignity and power to profane things, Durkheim argued, as they are loaded with symbolic meaning. Relics in Catholic churches, the Indian totems in North America, and a monarch’s regal crown are archetypal sacred objects.

The cultural anthropologist Kopytoff (1986) builds on this profane-sacred dyad but extends it to the economic sphere. In his theory of *commodification* he separates that which is common, i.e. exchangeable, from that which is singular, i.e. non-exchangeable:

---

4 Kopytoff used the term *commoditization*. In this context, these two concepts will be treated as synonyms.
To use an appropriately loaded even if archaic term, to be saleable or widely exchangeable is to be "common" – the opposite of being uncommon, incomparable, unique, singular, and therefore not exchangeable with anything and everything else, as the perfectly commoditized world would be one in which everything is exchangeable or for sale. By the same token the perfectly decommoditized world would be one in which everything is singular, unique, and unexchangeable.

(Kopytoff, 1986, p.86)

A masterpiece of art bought by a state museum is a de-commodifying act, in which it is shielded from monetary value. Selling a family heirloom at an art auction is the opposite, a commodifying act.

The main contribution of this version of commodification theory, and what makes it a starting point in this text, is the cultural dynamics that it introduces. In Durkheim’s original theory, categories were absolute: things could be either sacred or profane. In Kopytoff’s adaptation, boundaries between what is saleable and non-saleable, is not so clear-cut. Commodification is not binary but defined as “a process of becoming rather than an all-or-none state of being” (Kopytoff p.73), a spectrum along which a thing’s status as a commodity varies with time, place and over the object’s life cycle.

An important implication of this dynamic dimension is that each society has its own way of constructing sacredness and commonness. For example, whereas dealing in humans, i.e. slavery, was common practice a few centuries ago in the Western world, it is now illegal, and the unsaleability of the body is a sacred principle. Salability varies across quite similar cultural contexts; while selling sperm for insemination in humans is legal in Denmark, it is not in Sweden. The commodification of corporate lobbying is not as controversial in the United States, where it has been practiced for a century, as in Scandinavia, where it is new.

What things become legitimate as exchangeable goods is hence an outcome of cultural processes of commodification and decommodification; collective processes sustaining, altering or constructing anew the ability of a thing to take on commercial worth. In new markets, commodification will involve infusing new products with meaning, or changing the meaning of extant things so that they fit into an economic sphere. But where do these changes of meaning take place? Where, in the cacophony of modern societies, are boundaries re-drawn and meanings altered, allowing new products to come into being?
Product Categorization and Meaning

An assumption central to Durkheim’s theory was societies’ ability to make social order through cultural systems of categorization (Durkheim and Mauss, 1967 [1903]). Without efficient categorization, sacred could not be distinguished from profane; the boundaries of the sacred objects cannot be taken for granted and perceived as intransgressible. This has also been held to be true for markets and products: clear market categories enable commodification, i.e. a thing’s entrance into the sphere of saleable. Commodification is a means of neutralizing a thing’s value (Offe, 1984), making it exchangeable for other things. Suddaby and Greenwood (2001) stress this abstractive element of commodification, in the realm of professional service firms (PSFs), as they define it as the “process by which [managerial] knowledge is abstracted from context and reduced to a transparent and generic format that can be more easily leveraged within PSFs and sold in the market place” (2001, p. 934). Commodification consequently presupposes categorization.

A wealth of studies in organization theory has explored how new market categories form and develop; categories that enable organizations and products to exist and survive in new market spaces (Navis and Glynn, 2010, Hsu, 2006, Negro et al., 2010b, Lounsbury and Rao, 2004). Together, these shed light on market emergence and made important contributions to the understanding of new product construction and commodification.

One such contribution is the central component of polycentric construction of market meaning. According to a classical definition:

> Categories are semantic objects. For purposes of sociological analysis, they can usefully be considered to be social agreements about the meanings of labels assigned to sets of objects. Meanings, in turn, can be represented as schemas that tell which feature values are consistent with membership in the category and which are not.

(Negro et al., 2010a, p. 3-4)

Semantics is broadly defined as the study of meaning, and category meaning, in this view, is not only a result of entrepreneurial efforts to market and frame, but the outcome of political and cultural interaction between multiple actors. More often than not, market meaning is altered by influential intermediaries such as the mass media (Kennedy, 2008), financial analysts (Zuckerman, 1999) or expert critics (Negro et al., 2010a, White and White, 1993). Khaire and Wadhwani (2010) showed how auction houses were very active in framing the new market category of New Indian Art, in deciding what it means and what its boundaries...
encompasses. Rosa and colleagues (1999) demonstrated how meaning coherence of the new product category “mini-van” developed over a longer period of time in a dialogue between producers and customers, mediated by industry media. Also, social movement scholars have identified NGOs as active in shaping categories and market emergence (Lounsbury et al., 2003, Weber et al., 2008, Rao et al., 2003). The term commonly used for actors other than producers is *audiences*, loosely defined as “collections of agents with an interest in a domain and control over material and symbolic resources that affect the success and failure of the claimants in the domain” (Hsu and Hannan, 2005, p.476).

Another forte of categorization theory is the introduction of time as an independent variable in to constructionist perspectives on markets. In a substantial description of category emergence over time, Grodal (2007) describes how the label ‘nanotechnology’ was used and ascribed content over time in a web of meaning, consisting of five distinct communities: scientists, entrepreneurs, government representatives, venture capitalists and social movement proponents. The field of nanotechnology passed through three phases. First, there was a Mobilization phase in which the label “nanotechnology” was launched with a very specific meaning by a specific community. In a second Legitimation phase, more communities joined the field upon which competing labels were launched (nano-science, nano-engineering etc.), resulting in confusion over meaning. In a third Institutionalization phase, there was a convergence around the label “Nanotechnology”, which by then had obtained a much broader meaning than at the outset.

Hannan et al. (2007) also suggest a three-stage model of categorization; in the first stage, audiences ascribe labels to these groups on the basis of similarity. In the next stage, a consensus might develop between audience members concerning which organizations belong to a label. In the third stage, the same audiences agree on the meaning of the label, which can be thought of as a label schema that indicates the specific set of features that audiences expect affiliated organizations to demonstrate. Pontikes’ (2008) study of press releases in the software industry displays a similar pattern; in the beginning of the period many labels existed, denoting the same set of activities, but after a certain point in time, a few labels started to dominate, and the others fell off. Navis & Glynn’s (2010) study of the emergence of the category of satellite radio shows a non-linear pattern of meaning convergence, in which a period of increasing legitimization was interrupted for a short period of time by a jolt, instituting a “legitimacy threshold.”

Thirdly and finally, categorization theory allows for the study of the cultural contextualization of products, elegantly linking macro, meso and micro levels of meaning construction. In the case of introduction of life insurance in the US in the 19th century, the new product category lacked
any proper description and was met by scant commercial interest (Zelizer, 1983). It was only when insurance companies, through marketing efforts, re-categorized the new product as new a type of ritual, compulsory at the time of death, that life insurance became a legitimate product category. This example is a nice illustration of how society-level cultural values act as mediators of both categorization and commodification: by discursively constructing associations to “sacred spheres” of social life, death and ritual, insurance companies contextualized their new “thing” in a cultural context, and legitimated it as a commodity. In the same vein, Healy’s study of commodification attempts of organ transplants (2004) revealed an obvious tension between the de-contextualized practices of a market exchange, on the one hand, and, on the other, cultural values of the human body as sacred, protected from taking on commercial worth. But by framing their cause of commodification in relation to other altruistic practices, and altering compensation schemes (re-labeling payments as a “gifts” or “financial incentives”), pro-commodification actors could get attention and start introducing human organs as a new market category. A third example of such cultural contextualization is how “grass-fed beef” in the U.S in the 1990s was a narrow technical term to describe meat of inferior quality, practically unsalable. By the force of activists’ elaboration on cultural codes, it is today regarded as premium category of meat, associated with healthy and natural meat production processes (Weber et al., 2008).

Knowledge Gaps: Category Fuzziness and Professional Service Categorization

Most studies on market categorization concur on one point: that meaning convergence is a prerequisite for category survival. Failure by organizations to achieve complete categorization, such as straddling multiple categories or remaining fuzzy, will be punished by relevant audiences and yield repercussions in terms of lower prices and/or audience esteem (Zuckerman, 1999, Hsu, 2006, Kocak et al., 2009, Negro et al., 2010b). This so-called categorical imperative predicts that confusion over category meaning will decrease over time: “The formation of consensus among audiences on which label to apply to sets of producers or offers is the seed of categorization systems” (Negro et al., 2010b, p.14).

But despite its documented merits, are at least two theoretical questions that remain unsolved in categorization theory: the problem of lingering category fuzziness, and the problem of professional service products.

Category Fuzziness. As mentioned above, the categorical imperative stipulates meaning convergence as a precondition for, and a consequent
product of, categorization processes. But recent studies have come to question the correlation between market performance and fuzziness.\(^5\) In a study of the military industry, Vergne (2012) shows that if organizations and their products risk being ascribed stigmatized categories, i.e. categories with “sticky” negative connotations, straddling multiple categories is not necessarily negative. In a similar vein, Granqvist et al. (2012) argue that managers in certain ambiguous contexts can hedge against future failure by using multiple category labels. Also, economic growth can has been documented to cause fuzziness. Wry et al. (2011) identified the occurrence of problematic expansion, i.e. a situation where a market category is growing so fast that different members’ growth stories diverge and hence cause confusion across audiences, a mechanism that decouples meaning convergence from financial performance. Pontikes (2012) suggests that the accepted level of category fuzziness in a market differs with type of audience; she divides market actors into “market-takers,” consumers and critics, and “market-makers,” such as venture capitalists and mass media, and argues that market-makers seek higher degrees of category fuzziness, as they themselves see a value in participating in shaping a new category.

Durand and Paolella (2012) take this argument on audience differentiation one step further as they suggest that the categorical imperative relies on a simplified assumption that categories are based on prototypes. Briefly summarized, the core of a prototype is the following: Whether an animal is categorized as a “fish” or a “mammal” depends on how closely it resembles our prototypical understanding of what a fish is and a mammal is, respectively. A dolphin, for example could be referred to as a mammal but also “kind of” a fish (Rosch, 1975, Lakoff, 1990). This might be true for some type of categories, Durand and Paolella argue, but not all. In fact, some categories are causal, i.e. based on causal reasoning (“the dolphin has fins, and swims under water, hence it is a fish”). Yet other categories are goal-based, i.e. depending on the temporary goal of the audiences, who create ad hoc categories that recombine producers according to the goal. A dolphin would for example be categorized as a fish in a public aquarium exhibition where it is displayed alongside various types of fish, but as a mammal in a TV nature documentary on the specificity of breathing functions in mammals. As different audiences have different goals, diversity of meanings and a consequent fuzziness becomes “inherent in the category itself, which complicates the task of

\(^5\) Somewhat ironically, the unwanted state of absent boundaries and high meaning variance has different names in different studies: category fuzziness (Pontikes et al., 2009), fuzzy membership, fuzzy categorical boundaries (Negro et al., 2010b), low categorical contrast (Negro et al., 2010a) and category ambiguity (Fleischer, 2009).
determining categories’ boundaries and permanence” (2012, p. 15). In summary, a further nuanced exploration of the conditions determining the mechanisms mediating the relationship between categorization and fuzziness is still needed.

**Categorization in Professional Service Markets.** Categorization theory is also surprisingly silent on how categorization works in new markets where products-to-be are non-material (Lounsbury and Rao, 2004) and the end consumer typically is an organization, not individuals. The empirical focus has been mainly on consumer products such as wine (Negro, Hannan, and Rao 2010), movies (Hsu, 2006), art (Khaire and Wadhwani, 2010), satellite radio (Navis and Glynn, 2010), meat (Weber et al., 2008) and mini-Vans (Rosa et al., 1999).

Meanwhile, professional service markets have a documented affinity for ambiguity; they are populated by semi-professional collectives of actors that elude clear identities (Alexius, 2007) and characterized by discursive struggles over both product content and professional boundaries (Greenwood and Suddaby, 2006, Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005, Abbott, 1988, McKenna, 2006). Professional service firms have indeed been described as ‘ambiguity-intensive organizations’ whose “abilities to deal with rhetoric, regulate images and manage relationships and interactions with clients [are] central” (Alvesson, 2001, p. 883). Moreover, the spatiality of the product is difficult to discern; management consultants as a collective have been described by vivid metaphors implying mobility, such as “travelling salesmen in ideas” (Czarniawska-Joerges and Sevón, 1996), “carriers of knowledge” (Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall, 2002b), or “brokers of meaning”(Alvesson and Johansson, 2002a).

These characteristics reasonably ought to have consequences for categorization. One is the obvious difficulty in dividing actors into “market-makers” or “market-takers” as Pontikes (2012) suggests; seller and buyers are co-constructors of the product (Grönroos, 2007). Especially the consultant is often considered part of the product sold (Heusinkveld and Benders, 2005). This co-constructing quality also makes products difficult to compare and evaluate *ex ante* (Alvesson, 2001, Alvesson and Johansson, 2002a). Commodification is also documented to work differently in professional service markets; both products and producers have to become codified and categorized, and their categorization is to large extent overlapping, as social links between firm and client and other types of symbolic management become vital (Abrahamson, 1996, Rovik, 2002, Suddaby and Greenwood, 2001, Heusinkveld and Benders, 2005).

Moreover, studies of management concepts have suggested that the convergence of category label and convergence of category meaning are not necessarily positively correlated. Rather, these could be loosely coupled or be reversely coupled (Brunsson, 1989b); widespread convergence around a label might, for example, allow for a higher variance in category
meaning (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996, cf. Cohen et al., 1972). A classical example of a systematic distinction between label and meaning is the widespread diffusion of management concepts such as TQM or BSC. These well-bounded and copyrighted labels have fared well precisely because they allow various audiences to fill them with different meanings and practices (Zbaracki, 1998, Kelemen, 2002, Rovik, 2002). There is hence ample reason to expect that the relationship between ambiguity and categorization might work differently in professional service markets, such as the Swedish market for PR consultancy.

A Semiotic Model of Categorization

Meaning and boundary-setting are at the core of classic theory on how new markets categories emerge. But despite the centrality of meaning to the concept of category, the process of meaning construction has not been seriously addressed, with only a few exceptions (cf. Grodal, 2007, Pontikes, 2008, Weber et al., 2008). In the majority of studies, the views on categories is quite rudimentary; categories are often reduced to mere labels. As my interest lies in how category meaning is constructed and negotiated culturally, I will employ a semiotic approach to studying market category construction. Below I will combine a semiotic theory with category theory to build a model that I will use in my empirical inquiry.

Semiotic Structure of Categories

Semiotics is normally defined as the study of signs, and the cultural systems of meaning undergirding them (Fiol, 1989, Barley, 1983, Greimas, 1990). “Signs” is here used in a broad sense and could be a noun, a gesture or an adjective. By analyzing signs, and their denotations and connotations, it is possible to reveal cultural structures of meaning. Denotation refers to the specific practices and social actions that a sign denotes, whereas connotations are the broader meaning complexes that a sign activates. The sign provides the link between the two. When a label elicits the same denotations and connotations across many audiences, meaning convergence will occur.

But as earlier stated, meaning is of necessity embedded in culture and time. One example is how the sign ‘dog’ evokes different meanings across cultures and time period. Whereas dogs in Europe used to be seen

---

6 TQM = Total Quality Management, BSC = Balanced Scorecard.
7 Semiotic theory is a wider approach to meaning processes, including both linguistic and non-linguistic signs and denotations, whereas semantics is here is understood as the type of semiosis, i.e. processes of meaning production, taking place in the linguistic realm; exploring links between words and their denotation.
as both domestic pets and a source of meat, it is today regarded as “sacred” in the sense that it is exempt from the realm of edible things. In some cultures the consumption of dog meat is an appreciated part of traditional cuisine. In yet other settings, the dog is not eaten, but not because it is culturally cherished as a pet, but because is regarded as *haram*, impure. Across all these contexts, actors invoke the same sign (the dog) and agree on the denotation as (a domestic mammal with four legs, and a member of the *Canidae* family of the mammalian order *Carnivora*). But the connotations inferred differ widely, as the association that the sign of ‘dog’ evokes differs across cultural contexts.

In the three conceptual Figures 2.1-2.3, I outline how I map my understanding of classic categorization theory in semiotic terms. Figure 2.1 maps the semiotic structure of a market category. The signs in this structure is the label. From organizational analyses of semiotic theory (e.g. Fiol, 1989, Weber et al., 2008, Barley, 1983, Grodal, 2007), I derive the following operationalization of *category meaning* as the connotations associated with an established label’s denotation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Dimension</th>
<th>Semiotic element</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MATERIAL</td>
<td>Market Label</td>
<td>boundaries of practice content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Denotation</td>
<td>cognitive legitimacy (frequency, diffusion, adoption)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Connotation</td>
<td>socio-political legitimacy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2.1: Semiotic Structure of a Product Category*

In this structure, *labels* and *categories* are ontologically differentiated. Both labels and categories are semantic objects, and as such they are bounded concepts. But labels are merely names, whereas categories are full institutions in that 1) they carry meaning and 2) this meaning is subject to a certain degree of taken-for-grantedness among a wider range of relevant actors (Tolbert and Zucker, 1999). In other words, all categories are labels but not all labels are categories (cf. Colyvas and Jonsson, 2011). To
illustrate the difference, I use Pontikes et al.’s (2008) example of the label “e-business,” which became ubiquitous around the turn of the millennium:

As the label became part of the public vernacular, businesses increasingly began to claim to be “e-businesses” and that affiliation provided some level of legitimacy from customers and financiers. However, no specific agreed-upon codes emerged to indicate what it meant for an organization to claim an affiliation with this label. Nevertheless, the label is not illegitimate or immature, nor is it a super-category in a nested hierarchy. It is a label that diffused broadly but that did not become meaningful. This type of label is neither a traditional organizational category that provides both legitimacy and constraint, nor is it an emerging category with opportunities for entrepreneurs to define the terrain. It is an established but lenient label.

(Pontikes et al., 2008, p.8-9)

To study labels is hence a sine qua non for studying categorization: a necessary but not sufficient criterion. If product category is to be more than a label, it also must carry meaning.

In Figure 2.2, a market category is conceptualized as a parcel (Rovik, 2002, cf. Bowker and Star, 2000), a physical construct that is bounded, yet embracing something. In the model, this parcel has a name; it is labeled. In the case of a product category, this label might be e.g. a mini-van. But a parcel also carries denotations, here conceptualized as the category’s practical content, i.e. a motor vehicle with five doors and at least seven seats. For a nascent category, different audiences have agreed upon the label and the denotations (otherwise it would be a mere label, see discussion above), but not always on the connotations (the arrows). In other words, views might diverge on what the category labeled “mini-van” actually means. To car-buying families, it might mean a new means of transportation. To regulators, it means a new entity to test and to classify for CO₂ emissions. Furthermore, there might be status implications of a invoking a category label; a mini-van might be regarded a status symbol by some. It is this meaning variance that is high in the beginning of a market, but is expected to subside over time.
As defined above, audience usually denotes actors external to the producing firms, such as clients and critics. I will use the term *audience* throughout this book, albeit with an awareness that the term could be slightly misleading as it easily evokes an image of a passive type of actors, on the receiving end of purposive, strategic action. True to the constructivist perspective staked out in Chapter 1, I wish to underscore that the term *audience* in Figure 2.2 denotes *all* actors that actively participate in categorization processes, including producers themselves.

Figure 2.3 finally conceptualizes how categories become legitimate in a market context over time. There are four dependent variables in the figure: the size, the thickness of its walls, the color of the parcel, and its position vis-à-vis others. As cases from Pontikes (2008), Grodal (2007) and Suddaby and Greenwood (2001, 2005) show, the parcel can increase in size, denoting more practices with time, causing the parcel to grow in *size*. Earlier theory has also suggested that meanings are likely to converge over time, resulting in greater category contrast, manifested by a clearer separation between categories.
Legitimization of a new product category involves activities and mechanisms that establish it as taken for granted, shielding it from constant redefinition; it must be at least temporarily, presented as a tradable product, and its qualities must be stabilized to exhibit durability (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). The most extreme examples of such legitimization are black boxes (Latour and Callon 1981); concepts and things that are so completely institutionalized that you cannot simply think of unpacking them, or question their definition. The thicker walls of each parcel serve as indicators of this increasing difficulty facing actor collectives in adding and subtracting meaning: its boundaries are more firm. The increasing opacity of each parcel indicates the degree of legitimization. Finally, as shown in Figure 2.3, extant theory predicts disbanding of alternative labels over time. In the model, this is reflected by the decrease in the number of labels. The thresholds in the model might either be exogenously provoked by regulation or other external events (Meyer, 1982, Swidler, 1986, Barley and Tolbert, 1997) or endogenously to the field, as legitimizing and de-legitimizing mechanisms incrementally re-shape structures (Djelic and Quack, 2007).

My Research Question Revisited

In this chapter, I have constructed a theoretical framework. First, I stated that the process of commodification, i.e. inserting things into an economic sphere, is a cultural venture. Different societies frame different things as salable at different points in time. When a thing goes from a
“sacred” state where every object is singular, to a profane state, where it is a commodity or vice versa, its cultural meaning changes. I argued that product construction was a good instance to study such changes of meaning.

I then proceeded to review market categorization theory, identifying several valuable contributions; categorization theory conceptually allows for a polycentric view on market meaning, for the study of market construction over time and in practice, and cultural contextualization, elegantly nesting multiple levels of analysis. But I also identified two gaps in extant theory: a continuous need to nuance the categorical imperative, pertaining to the detailing of the relation between fuzziness and categorization, and a lack of literature on how product categories are constructed in professional service markets. Finally, I identified semiotics as a promising approach to explore meaning construction. In the previous section I interpreted the extant theoretical knowledge on market categorization in three figures. The figures are simultaneously theoretical and methodological constructs; they are theoretical hypotheses against which I will test my data in the empirical parts of this thesis, but they also contain an epistemological assumption that the cultural construction of product categories can be traced by studying the relationships between language and practice.

In the light of this theoretical framework, I can now re-visit my aim and refine question of why and how the product category for “PR consultancy” has been constructed. Pursuing an overarching aim of exploring market emergence by tracing the semiotic mechanisms of product category construction, my specified research question is:

**How have meaning and boundary construction processes among audiences affected product categorization in the emergent market for PR consultancy services?**

In each of the three empirical chapters, the reader will find an adapted version of this question. In the next chapter, I will elaborate on the definition of “PR consultancy” and then present the research design chosen to answer the question.
Chapter 3. Designing a Study of Product Categorization

A polycentric view of meaning-making requires a poly-centric research design. Below, I will present my sources of data, my mode of collection and the methods used for analyzing them. I will also discuss challenges, to the extent that I have encountered them. But first, I will delineate the coordinates of my empirical field, by situating the study in time and place.

Studying Meaning Construction

When studying market meaning historically, it is good to know a few things about that market: identifying about 1) what time the market has arisen, 2) what the object of analysis consists of, 3) what audiences play crucial role in defining that object, 4) what arenas market audiences have had for interaction, and 5) how their activities there become available for ex-post academic study in the form of archives or documents etc. (cf. Grodal, 2007). Below I list these five tasks separately, as I have applied them to the Swedish market for PR consultancy.

Determining Market Beginning

Most actors date the beginning of a Swedish market for PR consultancy services to the early 1990s, when the first industry organization PRECIS was founded. This also marks the start of industry statistics (1992). Also, media attention intensified around this time. A search on “PR consultants and/or PR consultancy” in the online news database Affärsdata (eng. Business Data) shows that the total number of hits has been increasing dramatically since then, see Figure 3.1. However, market structures do not emerge out of voids; more often than not, there are institutional antecedents to market elements (Mohr, 2005). The semiotic framework of this book likewise implies that market labels and denotations can be combined in different ways over time, and that this is an important part of meaning construction processes itself. Digitalized business media archive go back to 1981, suggesting that despite a rapid
increase in citations after 1994, the label existed in business media before that.

Moreover, literature studies show that there have been PR consultancies in Sweden since the 1950s, and that some contemporary organizations date back to the beginning of the 1970s (Larsson, 2005a-b). Determining the market beginning hence becomes an empirical problem: should one consider PR consultancy as being born when it starts being labeled as such? Or when it starts spreading? Or when activities that resemble today’s PR consultancy start being carried out in a market mode exchange, regardless of its label? In a case like the Swedish market for PR consultancy, where there is no clear market beginning, the answer will inevitably come to rely on the availability of data sources, which in this case varies over time.

I have solved this dilemma by treating market beginning as an open empirical question to be answered in Chapter 4. There, I trace the antecedents both of the denotations of what today is called “PR consultancy”, and the label “PR consultancy” itself. The point of departure is the category of PR consultancy with its current denotations, as defined as this is written, in an undefined “now” of the early 2010s.

Before I go on to specify this category, I will say a few words about the end point. It is hence also undefined; as it varies according to availability of each data source, see Figure 3.2. My general principle has been to take in as recent data as possible. General statistics on industry revenue and employees are those available upon printing this book; the last available year is 2011. For the specific media study as outlined below, however, the time span is fixed to 1981-2009, since analysis of the set began in 2010.
Defining the Object of Analysis: PR Consultancy.

Indeed, in order to explore the emergence of a market, it is wise to define the market element under scrutiny, i.e. what *epistemic object* (Cetina, 2008) is coming into being.

The most common definition states that PR, or *public relations*, is a marketing method, whose main objective is to get corporate messages placed in unpaid media channels, in contrast to i.e. traditional advertising where corporations pay for exposure (Grunig & Hunt 1984; Imber & Toffler 2000). Modern PR is normally divided into four areas: Product PR, Corporate Communications, Investor Relations and Public Affairs. This division is found in accounts by the Association of Public Relations Consultancies in Sweden (PRECIS), but could also be found in the American professional organization PRSA, Public Relations Society of America, and the international organization Global Alliance. In order to be a so-called *full service agency*, a PR consultancy normally has to provide advisory services within at least three of the four branches. The table below shows how various services are classified according to the degree to which they contribute to estimated total industry revenue.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business area</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Estimated share of industry revenue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Product PR</td>
<td>Product placements, product events, branding</td>
<td>40 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Communications</td>
<td>Press conferences, press releases, media training, crisis communication, internal communication schemes</td>
<td>30 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investor Relations</td>
<td>Annual reports, CSR reports, flotations etc.</td>
<td>Ca 20 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Affairs</td>
<td>Influencing political decision-making either - indirectly (advocacy) or - directly (lobbying)</td>
<td>&lt;10 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: PRECIS*

Within all four business areas, PR consultancies offer both production services – i.e. the actual production of annual reports, publications and teaching materials, writing press releases, etc. – along with advisory services of a more strategic nature. Purchase of production services, where PR consultants actually provide the execution of a service, is about as common as the purchase of more strategic services, higher up in the

---

8 Sometimes also called Market PR
corporate value chain. It is worth noting that the Public Affairs (PA) services, which have attracted much media attention, do not make up the bulk of PR consultancies’ activities today; the large agencies estimate the PA services to represent less than 10% of revenues, and many smaller agencies do not even offer this kind of service. The most controversial sub-type of Public Affairs services – direct influence through lobbying on politicians – is an absolute minority; most Public Affairs projects are concerned with advocacy, i.e. the formation of public opinion on an issue that is important to the client and thus indirectly influencing policy makers. This service is most commonly referred to as advocacy (Swe. opinionsbildning). However, it is useful to keep in mind that "PR consultant" is used synonymously with “lobbyist” in the Swedish setting, unlike e.g. in the US.

Table 3.1 presents business areas as distinct from one another. In practice, however, it may be difficult to separate services, both internally within the PR consultancies and externally. Client contracts often contain elements of several types of PR, and the different business areas often share work methods and staff within the agency. The degree of PR agencies’ involvement in client activities also varies from case to case. Some corporations hire consultants for delimited tasks of communication operations, such as media training and the drafting of crisis communication policy. Other client organizations rely on extensive external assistance, both at a strategic and production level. Similarly, some corporations have established contacts with the press; they write their own press releases and proactively “plant” news with relevant media, while others have retainers with an agency of choice, i.e. continual contracts where a corporate client pays a certain sum for a pre-estimated number of hours of services per month from a specific team of consultants (Larsson, 2005b).

There is no demarcated jurisdiction. There is an overlap between PR and other types of marketing, such as advertising. Especially in the area of social media, the boundary between advertising and PR becomes blurry. Neither are lobbying and advocacy methods limited to PR agencies. There are many actors that make use of PR methods, e.g. NGOs and business organizations are responsible for a large part of vested interest influence in Sweden, with little or no involvement of PR consultants.

There is no first-hand overview information on PR agencies’ clients, as consultancies have no legal obligation to report information on their clients, and most agencies have non-disclosure policies. Corporations do not usually specify PR consultancy expenses in annual reports; this is either a part of marketing or communication budgets. It is however possible to make inferences about them from indirect sources. The PR consultant industry organization PRECIS estimates that the client group is dominated by private companies (about 70%), followed by public au-
thorities (15%) and NGOs (<5%). Business organizations also represent the private sector, but are reported separately, representing about 10%. Political parties represent a very small part of total business, ca. 1-2%. This distribution roughly follows the distribution of total gross investments in PR and information at a national level - with the exception of business organizations, which are not accounted for separately in the national survey Informationsindex (Informationsindex 2005).

Organizational purchases of PR consultancy services cannot be analyzed without relating them to the overall investment within the field of communications. When the Swedish Association of Communication Professionals in 2005 surveyed 200 executives in the Swedish private and the public sectors, 45% of these organizations reported that they bought production services from an external party, and 40% said that they bought strategic advice. Approximately 30% indicated that their organization did not purchase services at all. Remarkably, the purchase of external services seems be positively correlated to the size of corporate communication departments, i.e. corporations with extensive in-house operations thus seem to be compelled to buy more services (Informationsindex 2007).

Another relevant question in defining the object of analysis is the issue of competing labels. In the Swedish setting, mainly two other concepts have been used historically to denote the same type of activities and/or set of firms; information consultant and communication consultant. According to Larsson (2005a-b) who studied the post-war emergence of the field, including in-house departments, the term “PR” was popular in the 1940s and 1950s, whereas public sector expansion in the 1960s led to a rising popularity of the prefix “information,” which was the prevailing term up until 1985. After 1985, a period that Larsson has not studied in depth, he states that the “PR” term has made a comeback as a prefix, together with a constantly increasing emphasis on market-inspired solutions. However, dominant consultancies themselves have lately been trying to promote themselves as “communication consultancies.” Results from a search over 30 years in the two largest business publications, Veckans Affärer and Dagens Industri, are shown in Graph 3.3.

The data suggest that until mid-1990s, all three concepts were equally popular, but that something happened around 1998, where “PR” became by far the most dominant prefix, “communications” only slightly more popular, and “information” virtually died out, with virtually no citations in the selected publications yearly. (This development will be further discussed in Chapter 4 together with other data as the development of the market category is described more in depth.)
In summary, the analytical object of this thesis is the product category of “PR consultancy.” This category label denotes mainly services provided by consultants to other organizational clients who wish to promote their business through communicating indirectly with relevant actor collectives such as owners, clients and policy makers, mainly via raising public opinion in non-paid media channels, but also through direct interaction. Services encompass both routine elements of production (drafting of press releases, newsletters, and annual reports, arranging events) and non-routine tasks such as communication policy drafting and strategic advice to management. Corporations and business organizations account for the vast majority of PR agencies’ revenues, although public authority representation has been increasing recently. Business organizations stand out as a client category; despite the small size of these organizations in absolute numbers of employees, they account for about 10% of the business cases. The most common service offer is Product PR, i.e. activities aimed at profiling specific products or brands through events, product placements and media influence, followed by Corporate Communications, more general media and branding services.

Determining Relevant Audiences.

In order to find out who the relevant actors were, I read literature on PR consultancy markets abroad. I could also draw insights on relevant actors from a pre-study on political PR that I conducted in 2006. As my data is collected and analyzed according to grounded theory principles, I gradu-
ally learned over the period of collection which audiences to look for (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981). I present them divided into four groups: commercial actors, professionalizing actors, regulatory actors, and intermediaries, see Table 3.2. Among the commercial audiences, PR firms themselves are of course pivotal to the construction of services. But clients also co-construct the service, through feedback loops (Rosa et al., 1999). This could be particularly relevant in a professional service setting, where the products are actually processes, consisting of series of events. Interviewing clients was therefore seen as pivotal to this study. Competitors and commercial actors in adjacent fields are relevant to the extent that they interact with PR consultants.

Table 3.2 Identified Relevant Audiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commercial audiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- consultancies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- client organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- competitors (incumbents/other fields)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professionalizing audiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- business organizers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- formal educators (universities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- organizers of market prizes/awards</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regulatory audiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Legislators (e.g. attempts to regulate consultants’ contacts with MPs etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- PR industry organizations (self-regulation in form of ethical norms (ICCO))</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intermediaries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- mass media/journalists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- partner organizations (NGOs etc.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A second group of actors were professionalizing actors. These include business organizations and professional organizations organizing consultancies and/or consultants. Even academia, educating human resources for the market, is a relevant audience.

Among the regulatory actors we find policy makers, of both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ regulation. An interesting note in this context is that corporate-political interaction is not legally regulated in Sweden. PR consultancies are not legally enforced to give out information on their clients, and lobbyists are not required to register their contacts with elected representa-

---

9 PR consultancy, PR agency, and PR firm are used interchangeably throughout this book.
atives as in the US\textsuperscript{10}. Between 1991 and 2007, there were 15 parliamentary bills proposing formal regulation, of which all were rejected (see Appendix for list). Neither has professional mobility been regulated. Between 2005 and 2011, six bills were submitted demanding a ‘quarantine’, i.e. a waiting period for government members going into PR, a system used in e.g. Norway. All of these were rejected. There are also “soft” regulatory bodies, such as the informal industry norms on ethical behavior formulated by the ICCO (The International Communications Consultancy Organisation). The ICCO, according to this definition, is hence both a professionalizing and a regulating actor.

The most important interface with legislative arenas, however, seems to be via personnel flow. Over 20\% of consultants report having a background in national or regional party politics (Hermansson et al., 1999), and a rough 60-80\% of the top 20 firms are found by ex-politicians; several members of the cabinet have been employed in the PR industry, and one former Prime Minister became a PR consultant himself. This relative unimpeded flow between PR markets and politics has even given rise to a new boundary-spanning term of “pr-olitians” (Tyllström, 2009, Ericsson and Kåberg, 2006). This tight coupling between PR and political markets has also been seen in the UK, where the local PR industry emerged as a response to political reform.

Finally, a fourth relevant audience here called intermediaries. The most prominent actor member of this group is the mass media. PR is an indirect marketing method, targeting the media as a communication channel to reach its final audiences, clients and owners. Much of research on PR consultancy has been done in the realm of media studies, exploring the relationship between journalism and PR. Allern (1997, 2002) even defines PR consultancy in relation to the mass media as “professional source organizations.” This special position between PR and the mass media, where PR consultancies are dependent on media organizations, and on understanding journalists and media logic (Altheide and Snow, 1985), is important in understanding how the product is constructed. In the US, the PR consultancy market emerged in the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century as a response to progressive or muck-raking journalism (Ewen, 1996). Another type of intermediary actors is partner organizations. Often, PR consultancy services including advocacy involve the formation of alliances, i.e. of networks contacts with other organizations that share the same goal or interest as that of the client organization. Often these organizations are non-governmental organizations or social movements. One example is how the consultancy of Swedish Railways, who campaigned to impede tax waivers for company cars, mediated the contact with The Natural Step and the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation

\textsuperscript{10} At the EU level registration is partially voluntary, see Svensson (2012).
(SSNC), two environmental organizations who agreed with the overall goal of the campaign but for different (environmental) reasons. (This campaign will be elaborated on in Chapter 4.)

In summary, there are many relevant actors potentially involved in the construction of PR consultancy services. Representatives from all groups have been interviewed. However, for the sake of clarity and analytical focus, the empirical emphasis on three of these is deemed especially important; consultancies, clients and the media. The choice of data sources is justified below.

Loci of Interaction: mass media, client-consultant interactions, market-configuring events.

If professional services are constructed in the interplay between consultant and client, social interaction is what ought to be studied. For real-time data, there are several arenas where product construction might be explored. PR consultancy firms are talk-producing organizations, and as such they hold project meetings, and hold seminars arranged by individual firms and industry organizations. Industry organizations and business magazines organize prize galas (“Best PR agency of the year” and the like). One of the most prominent of such “field-configuring events” (Hardy and Maguire, 2010, Zilber, 2007) is Almedalen week, a week-long political fair taking place each summer in Visby, on the island of Gotland in the Baltic Sea, off the Swedish east coast. For seven days in July, virtually all politicians, industry organizations, advocacy organizations and mass media outlets, and to an increasing extent also industry leaders, meet with each other and the public in seminars, debates and parties. In 2012, 17,000 visitors attended almost 2,000 events. For many PR firms, the Almedalen week constitutes important business, offering Almedalen “packages” to companies. To study Almedalen is thus one entry point chosen, and my observations are presented in Chapter 7.

As for historical time periods, information on the location and nature of these interactions is derived from interview data with clients and consultants. These interviews were complemented by studies of documents (company brochures) and literature from that time period, both academic and non-academic, in order to corroborate the results from interviews. Finally, as mentioned above, mass media has multiple roles vis-à-vis the PR consultancy market; as an intermediary reporting on market events, but also as target for the product itself, as most PR services aim for editorial space for their product. The media are hence simultaneously a co-constructing audience, and an arena, or locus, for product construction both historically and in real time (Hjarvard, 2008).
Documentation.
A final criterion of studying an historical case was that there be researchable documentation. PR consultancies typically do not produce traditional sales materials, in the form of brochures or ads, overtly advertising the product. Nor do annual reports convey much of category construction itself. Non-disclosure policies at the firm level tend to keep much of the discourse on homepages and descriptions quite general. Service content and connotations must hence be derived indirectly through analysis of other industry-produced texts; e.g. newsletters and handbooks (Chapter 6). There are also other “paper trails” in form of the parliamentary bills cited above, and media articles. There are also other parliamentary reports and reports from e.g. state commissions on Power (SOU 1990:44) and Democracy (SOU 1999:121). Furthermore, I have also retrieved and read all parliamentary bills proposing regulation of the market and market actors (n=21), as well as the Constitutional Committee’s rejections of the same (see Appendix 1). An audit report from a Special Commission in the Parliament after a scandal involving a PR firm in 1999 also offers valuable information on the content and meaning of PR consultancy services. These will be referred to in the chronological narrative (Chapter 4) when justified, but will not be the center of analysis.

Data Collection and Analysis
I collected four types of data: media archival data, interviews, ethnographic observations, and industry-produced texts. Figure 3.3 displays the availability of sources over time, and Table 3.3 provides an overview of all data sources.

Media Archives
I have chosen to study the media’s role in categorization for several reasons. Firstly, not only do the mass media serve as an arena for other organizations’ categorizing attempts, they also engage in news selection and linguistic framing, thus actively shaping category meanings beyond the scope of the individual firm (Pollock and Rindova, 2003, Jonsson and Buhr, 2010, Deephouse, 2000, Anand and Peterson, 2000, Vaara, 2002). As Kennedy (2008) writes, actors in nascent fields are dependent on media for diffusion and validation of new market space:

In business, the preeminent forum for abductive inferences (hypotheses) about new categories, the translation that spreads them, and evaluations of their validity arise from the media. [...] As this process associates
firms that are doing something new, it embeds them in categories that make it possible to count them and observe growth, which helps new markets appear real.

(Kennedy, 2008, p. 372)

As mentioned in Chapter 2, various types of media growth stories have been identified as pivotal in granting actors in nascent fields creating both individual and collective market identities (Wry et al., 2011, Navis and Glynn, 2010, Aldrich and Fiol, 2007), power positions (Santos and Eisenhardt, 2009) and capital resources (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001). Moreover, in-depth study of mass media content over time holds considerable potential for identifying definitional struggles, one of the most fruitful epistemological entry points for capturing and studying institutional change (Dunn and Jones, 2010, Schneiberg and Lounsbury, 2008, Earl et al., 2004).

Figure 3.3 Data Sources’ Availability over Time

* Interviews were conducted 2006-2013, covering the time period 1968-2013
Table 3.3 Overview of the Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualitative Data</th>
<th>Number of interviews</th>
<th>Number of Observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnographic Observations</td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultants</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of whom founders</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clients</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Interviews</strong></td>
<td><strong>39</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Qualitative Data</strong></td>
<td><strong>55</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media Data Source</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Number of Articles</th>
<th>Number of Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Dagens Industri</em></td>
<td>1981-2009</td>
<td>259</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Veckans Affärer</em></td>
<td>1981-2010</td>
<td>81</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Media Data</strong></td>
<td><strong>340</strong></td>
<td><strong>691</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry-produced texts</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Number of Texts</th>
<th>Number of Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newsletters</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Royal Library</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brochures</td>
<td>Archives</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR handbooks</td>
<td>Royal Library</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Industry-Produced Texts</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>87</strong></td>
<td><strong>1264</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the case of PR consultancy, there are more specific reasons to study archival data from business media; besides providing categorization cues for other important actor collectives, such as business leaders and potential clients, media are also the target of the very professional services studied; PR consultants often have business journalists as the primary outlet for their activities as they want them to write about their clients’ organizations and products. This “double” role of the media on the PR consultancy market adds complexity, but also relevance, to the study, and will be considered as a variable in the analysis.

The data set consists of all articles that mentioned “PR consultancy and/or PR consultant” \(^{11}\) in Sweden’s two main business publications, *Veckans Affärer* \(^{12}\) (VA) and *Dagens Industri* \(^{13}\) (DI) between 1981-2009. Both are owned by the Bonnier sphere, a family-owned non-traded media group. As the names of the publications imply, one is daily, and one is weekly. DI has a current circulation of ca. 103,000 and a readership of 370,000. VA has a circulation of 21,000. I saw it as justified to have two publications published with different time intervals, since different types of news might be or not be cited.

I chose business publications for several reasons. One concerns the processes I am studying, that of market construction. Since the business press is where the most detailed routinized industry coverage takes place – rankings, results and career movements are regularly reported upon – this is an obvious arena where market construction takes place. National news media would reasonably have been a better proxy for the broader general public’s opinion on PR consultancy, and also potentially more negative towards the phenomenon. But the nature of reporting in regular dailies is more irregular, focused around politics but also less detailed. At the other extreme, more “niched” industry magazines covering PR and advertising industries only, would have given a wealth of such industry-specific information, but would not have said much about the general reach and understanding of the “PR” concepts. To choose two broadly circulated business publications was a compromise between such depth and width. A second reason was related, and concerned audiences. The readers of these publications, business professionals and finance analysts, are also potential clients and intermediaries to PR consultancy, whereas the general public most often is not. A third reason is the comparability of electronic sources; both VA and DI were published consecutively for the longer period, since 1965 and 1976 respectively, and are available electronically since 1981. Finally, the manageable size of the

\(^{11}\) *Swe.* "PR-byrå och/eller PR-konsult."

\(^{12}\) *Eng.* “Weekly Business.”

\(^{13}\) *Eng.* “Daily Industry.”
population of articles (n=340) allowed for a detailed content analysis of a
totality of articles, making the statistical inferences more reliable.

The media archival study therefore starts 1981. Although both publi-
cations have online versions, only the print versions have been selected
in order to avoid time period differences and double postings. A total of
340 articles were retrieved from the national online database Affärsdata
(eng. Business Data).

Table 3.4. Articles mentioning “PR consultancy and/or PR consultant”, per source
over time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>DI</th>
<th>VA</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1981-1984</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985-1989</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-1994</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995-1999</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-2004</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2009</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of Media Archival Data: Content Analysis

All 340 articles were read in depth. In this primary reading I treated the
material as a primary source of ‘real’ information, i.e. the articles helped
me identify important key persons and events in the history of the mar-
ket: firm entries, bankruptcies, scandals and career moves, which served
as good background information and corroboration of and feedback into
interview questions. The articles were coded for date, source, type of
article (news item, article, editorial etc.), and, if mentioned the type of
PR referred to in the text (financial PR, political PR) and type of client
(corporate, industry organization, public sector etc.). This type of coding
allowed me to see trends over time in denotations of the PR label.

In a second reading, the material was analyzed as containing inform-
ation on connotations, i.e. the views that the journalist holds of the ser-
vice category and its practitioners. In this reading, articles were coded for deeper layers of meaning, with the aim of tracing boundary and meaning construction processes more specifically. The central codes were the following:

- **Main theme of article.** In what role or function does the journalist refer to the label of “PR consultancy” in the text? As an expert commentary, as a career background detail, or the ethical dimensions of work methods? Boundary discussions (with media, political and advertising fields) occurred as a recurrent main theme of articles.

- **Journalistic angle.** What seems to be the attitude of the journalist towards PR consultancy? There were four options; Positive, Neutral, Negative or Problematizing. In the analysis in Part I, Negative and Problematizing articles are analyzed together.

- **Level of Explanation.** To what extent does the journalist see herself as obligated to, or having her informants, explain the content of the services? Articles were marked on a scale 1-3, where 1= detailed description, 2= to some extent, 3=not at all). Examples:
  - “Politics is a very good school in packaging messages. The process in PR is the same; listen, explain and convince.”(1)
  - “She hired a PR agency in order to sink the competitor’s stock value” (2)
  - “Tobias left PR consultancy for investment banking” (3)

- **Label Substitutability.** The numbers of synonyms were counted, as were the mentions of adjacent labels in direct conjunction with the mentioning of “PR”. If a high number of synonyms were present in the text, this was treated as a sign of category fuzziness, whereas being mentioned as explicitly different from other adjacent fields was interpreted as category clarity.

Each article was coded separately, and double-coded for Main Theme, in case an article had two or more main themes, and organized in Excel in the form of Pivot Tables. A sample of articles, consisting of one from each year (n=29) were control-coded by an independent research assistant. The coding congruence showed a Cohen’s kappa $k = 0.93$. The results of this study are presented in Chapter 4, where I complement this content analysis data with literature studies, and interview data, to build a narrative of the emergence of the PR consultancy category.
Interviews

Interviews are methodologically useful tools, and central to the analysis in this thesis. Asking people what they think reveals not only narratives of events, but also the meaning that actors have attributed to them; their world view becomes researchable (Czarniawska, 2004). Above I identified four audiences that are relevant to PR consultancy service construction: commercial actors, field organizers, regulatory actors and intermediaries. In total, I conducted 39 interviews across these groups, with an emphasis on consultants and clients, between 2006 and 2013 (the majority between 2010 and 2011).

The interviews were conducted face-to-face, if possible in the informant’s office. Interviews normally spanned between 45 minutes and 90 minutes, with an average of 75 minutes. They were recorded and transcribed verbatim. In a few cases, where the informant expressed a wish to not be recorded I took notes, and interview transcripts were fleshed out from the notes.

All interviews were semi-structured, following a template of ethnographic interviews, starting with a background question, a Grand Tour question and then 2-4 broad questions on specific themes. In an ethnographic approach, the interviewee is not a subject, he or she is an informant (Spradley, 1979). This distinction is important since the two perspectives have different basic assumptions; in the former, the respondent is telling you something, whereas in the latter, he or she is also teaching the interviewer something about the setting, or the culture, he or she is in. In short, this means that the setting, in which the informant receives you, and the way she or she delivers her narrative, is as important to the analysis as the narrative itself (Czarniawska 2004).

Spradley (1979) lists a number of criteria of importance in choosing informants, such as the informant 1) having undergone thorough enculturation in the field, 2) having a current involvement in the field, 3) representing a cultural scene unfamiliar to the researcher, 4) having adequate time to be interviewed and 5) preferably being non-analytic in his or her responses. When identifying informants for my interviews, some criteria such as thorough enculturation, current involvement and adequate timing have been relatively easy to meet. However, criteria 3 and 5, concerning my own familiarity with the scene, and respondents’ time and inclination to analysis, deserve some further comment.

*My position.* As a graduate student from Stockholm School of Economics (SSE), with a specialization in Management and Leadership, I share an educational background with many PR consultants in Stockholm. I also have personal contacts within the PR consultancy, albeit not current or close. If not properly addressed, such familiarity to the context could blind me to important information about the culture and
meaning structures underlying PR consultancy practice (Agar, 1996). On the other hand, this familiarity with the subject could also provide me with useful pre-understanding, facilitating submersion into the field and also grant me access. As Abolafia (1998) points out, if you want to study busy people really closely, you may either be terribly persistent or use your contacts. I have tried to combine these two approaches. SSE is a small environment, with an elite profile, explicitly promoting nurturing personal networking between alumni, and I have referred to this background in a few cases where access has been difficult.

Interviewing analysts. Spradley (1979) also brings up the problem of overly analytical informants. As an example, he takes his study of people in poor urban areas in Seattle, in which one of his informants, a “tramp” going in and out of jail, turned out to be a Harvard graduate with personal experience from ethnographic research. This informant turned out to be the least informative in the dataset, since he presented his answers in the form of an analysis. Instead of making up his own categories, grounded in the data, the ethnographer James Spradley was presented with sophisticated typologies and causal models, which he as a researcher found it difficult to distance himself from.

In my study, I interview PR professionals, journalists and politicians, that is, text- and talk-producing professions. More often than not, these are excellent storytellers – i.e. professional in creating appealing stories narratives, plots and causal relationships (cf. Boje 1991; Czarniawska 2004). They are used to processing large amounts of data and rhetorically transform it into ‘pre-chewed’ analyses for their audiences. Moreover, they adapt this basic story to different audiences, regarding both content and form.

This particularity of the field constituted a challenge in interviewing. In many cases, informants produced analysis themselves, often with academic references. In the example below, I discuss the recent development of PR consultancy services in the light of social media with a consultant and firm founder:

**Me:** Much of [the services you describe] are things that one would maybe expect an advertising agency to take care of... Do you keep track of what the advertising people think of you PR people?

**Consultant:** You could say that when social media came a vacuum emerged, or, if you think in Bourdieusian terms, a new field, where customers only knew that "we must be visible" and were equally perplexed by advertising agencies and PR agencies and just wanted to hear from someone that ‘we'll take care of this for you.’ And that's a change that has enormous implications for both new media and old media.
In such situations it was difficult to know whether informants conveyed their own meanings, or whether they adjusted their response to “fit” my worldview, as an academic. Another example of the challenge in interviewing this type of ‘overly analytical’ story-telling informants was the difficulty in grasping what their services contained, and where boundaries were drawn, merely from an interview. On the contested topic of corporate transparency, one consultant-founder says:

**Consultant:** Transparency is ... In the society that we live in, transparency is crucial. But that does not mean that you that you have to say everything. You still need to keep secrets! It’s still like an integrity that you must not push. After all this is ... You can sometimes end up with difficult trade-offs. But you have to, like, trust your guts.

In my research design, I have addressed this challenge of analytical informants in several ways. First of all, this situation was so frequent and dominant that it emerged from the data as an analytical theme in its own right, as we shall see in the empirical chapters 6 and 7; this constant management of visibility and invisibility, as well as the ability to adapt story-telling to different audiences, are key elements of the services sold on the market.

But I also employed various concrete strategies in the interview situation. One very practical solution was to explicitly ask “opposite” or unexpected questions, such as “Could you please define ‘bad PR’?” instead of the more expected “Could you please define ‘good PR’?”. A second strategy was to conduct serial interviews with the same informant, to deepen the interpersonal relation and gradually hedge against “surface management.” Yet another strategy was to focus on detail and appearances, and read them into the interview, as another type of text (Phillips et al., 2004). A final strategy to hedge against overly analytical interviews was to complement them with observational data, a method that allowed me to ‘climb inside’ the practical world of consultancy work.

**Participant Observations**

Ethnographic data collection methods aim to capture “the social meanings and ordinary activities of informants in naturally occurring settings” (Brewer, 2000, p.10). Although I did not conduct a full-scale ethnography of a specific population, I used field observations to triangulate my other data. Between 2008 and 2011, I conducted 17 full-day observations across a variety of sites, ranging from field-configuring events such as the World Public Relations Forum and Almedalen week (2009, 2010, and 2011), to client-consultant meetings and workshops arranged by PR con-
consultancies. The degree of my participation varied from passive observer in client-consultancy meetings, shadowing senior consultants on the job, to full participation as a junior consultant at a small PR full-service agency during Almedalen week.

Studying PR consultants ethnographically was not an uncomplicated task. Strannegård et al. (2001) have witnessed how financial professional elites are elusive; they are “already elsewhere.” Barley and Kunda (2004) described a task beyond the normally cumbersome study of an organizational culture in a well-delineated social setting. Their ethnographic study of highly skilled technical contractors in Silicon Valley required the exploration of a “sprawling, emergent, loosely coupled and at least partly virtual social system” with subsequent problems of access and being able to “capture” an elusive culture (Barley and Kunda, 2004, p. 26).

The nature of PR consultancy work, with non-disclosure policies vis-à-vis their clients, made a traditional ethnographic setting in one organization close to impossible. Here, too, I used managing strategies. One was of course to visit public events arranged by PR consultancies; seminars, thesis competitions. Another to simultaneously participated and observed, e.g. at World Public Relations Forum in Stockholm 2010, in Almedalen 2009, where I both presented and observed. In a few cases, I could use my own participation to barter access. One such example was my participation in a panel discussion on the Swedish denim market, organized by a Swedish PR consultancy, as is described in closer detail in Chapter 7. I had earlier written a research report on the market for ecological denim in Sweden, and agreed to participate in the panel, which normally would have been remunerated, without monetary compensation, in exchange for a number of interviews and a few days of shadowing of the firm’s founder, i.e. following him in his daily work practice (cf. Czarniawska, 2007). Yet a third strategy was to get permission from clients first. To the extent that clients accepted my participation, I got to sit in on client-consultancy meetings. A fourth strategy was no strategy as such, but serendipity. In the Almedalen case I found a PR firm that was willing to take me in as a PR consultancy intern. The fact that it was Almedalen week, and not a regular work week in Stockholm, facilitated my participation. But the general motivation, I think, was interpersonal trust.

During these observations, I had a general yes-policy; i.e. I said yes to almost everything I was asked to do, in order to see as much of PR consultancy practice as possible. This, at times, made me reflect whether my informants and I got along too readily; if I participated too much to remain a cultural observer. At those times I would recall reading a book on the shadowing techniques, and especially a passage where the author skillfully illustrated how the financial director whom she attempted to shadow used a whole arsenal of tricks to avoid her ethnographer; she
delayed observations, neglected to inform her about the schedule, sneaked out the backdoor, questioned her activities or just didn’t show up (Czarniawska, 2007). Even though this was interesting methodologically, the “object” of study considerably hampered the researcher’s aim to understand how big city management was carried out in practice. In that perspective, I decided not to worry too much about being too active; the cultural differences were there, and they were considerable. (In a few cases, though, when I was asked to perform tasks directly for the PR agencies’ clients, and I did not consider the tasks useful to my understanding PR consultancy practice, I declined referring to my researcher status.)

Please note: in the cases in Chapter 6 and 7, all names of people and firms have been changed, and sometimes even industry and gender if this made no difference. All politicians’ names are real, however, as are newspaper clips, and the sectors clients are active within.

Analysis of Interviews and Observational Data: Grounded Theory and Greimas’ Semiotic Square

As in the case with the media articles, I have used interviews in two ways; partly as historical data to reconstruct a chain of events, but also as sources of meaning construction. In treating the interviews as historical material, I have been aware of the risks of informants rationalizing ex post, making projections on historical events using current language (Ventresca and Mohr, 2002). To address this risk, I have used both media archives and documents from earlier time periods to corroborate narratives.

The first ethnographers were anthropologists studying endogenous cultures with little in common with their own. Learning the local language was an important and fundamental step in understanding and learning about the studied culture; without understanding the language, it would have been impossible to explore the meanings that rites, ceremonies, and everyday actions had to the observed peoples. Ethnographies in modern organization are not very different, even though in my case the people observed, PR consultants and their audiences, speak the same national language, they still have culture-specific vocabularies (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005, Ocasio and Joseph, 2005). These vocabularies are excellent loci to look for meaning structures.

Following the tenets of grounded theory, the transcripts of interviews and field notes were coded as they were completed. A first open, or substantial coding phase gave rise to a high number of codes, encompassing

14 In cases where expressions are obvious examples of jargon in Swedish, I have kept the original Swedish quote in a footnote.
all themes and patterns emerging from the texts (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Unlike in the content analysis above, grounded theory processes evolve over time based on the two mechanisms of constant comparison – between analytical themes, and between codes and theory – and selective coding, allowing the researcher to code more selectively with time, meaning that the codes will evolve over the course of data collection. In a second step, the remaining codes were grouped and related to each other through an axial coding phase (Corbin and Strauss, 1990), resulting in over-arching codes such as e.g. “Visibility”, “Time” and “Commodification”. The grounded theory coding was facilitated by the qualitative analysis software nVivo.

These overarching codes were then analyzed within the framework of semiotic squares (Greimas, 1990). In short, this method allows the researcher to unveil culturally embedded layers of meaning by analyzing relationships of opposition in language (Weber et al., 2008, Barley, 1983, Fiol, 1989). The starting point in the model are two contrary signs, S1 and S2.

![Greimas’ Semiotic Square](image)

Figure 3.5a Greimas’ Semiotic Square

A common example is the binary relationships between S1 “cat” and S2 is “dog”. ~S1 then, is the category of which cat is a member, wild animals, and ~S2, is that of which the dog is a member, domestic animals. S (pets), is a sub-category to the more general category of ~S, animals.
Figure 3.5b Greimas’ Semiotic Square, Exemplified

From just one binary pair, cat and dog, the square has helped us uncover an intricate system of meaning and boundaries in language. By singling out $S_1$ and $S_2$ from $S$, and making them distinct, we also a classification in language. These meanings might, of course, differ across culture and communities.

I have used the semiotic square to analyze the dominant themes emerging from my analysis and to help unveil the meaning structures underpinning them. My application of the semiotic square is presented at the ends of chapters 6 and 7.

Industry-Produced Texts

A final perspective on the construction of PR consultancy is to look at the service as consultants themselves wish to portray it in text. As mentioned above, most PR consultancies do not market themselves overtly, but rely on recommendations, and therefore promotion materials, such as sales brochures and traditional ads, are not as plentiful as in other industries. In order to find new projects, consultancies make bids on pitches, i.e. they respond to invitations that corporate clients send out to several agencies, in order to evaluate the options with a general plan of what they would do if they were to ‘land’ the project. But unless the target organization is a public authority, sales pitches are not public documents. Annual reports are useful market information documents but do not convey detailed information on work practices.

Since product categorization is my main interest, I have chosen to concentrate on industry-produced instruction texts. Since PR consultants
are advisors, written trails of their advice should reasonably be a good entry point for studying service content and its connotations.

*Perspectives.* My main data among the industry-produced texts consist of one such body of industry-produced advisory texts, distributed by one of Sweden’s largest agencies, a “full-service agency,” offering services within branding, consumer marketing, crisis communications, and public affairs with its headquarters in Stockholm. The object of analysis, the text series named “Perspectives” is a mix between a newsletter and a memo, borrowing its format from a newspaper column. These are short texts (ca. 1 – 4 pages) texts authored by employed consultants, normally quite well-formulated, witty reflections on a popular trend or phenomenon. Topics range from social media and political campaigning to ecological food marketing. There is a clear address to corporate clients, translating phenomena into practice, often through a bullet-pointed list of “take-aways” or “opportunities,” showing communication managers how they easily could integrate new phenomena into their daily activities and/or what they should think about it. A total of 70 newsletters over the period 2007-2012 were analyzed, amounting to 200 pages.

### Analysis of Industry-Produced Texts: Discourse Analysis

“The limits of my language are the limits of my mind,” Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote in his seminal “Tractates” in 1922. A similar line of thought is echoed by contemporary discourse analysts when they stipulate that social reality is created by and made real through discourses, i.e. “the interrelated set of texts, and the practices of their production, dissemination and reception, that brings an object into being” (Phillips and Hardy 2002, p.3). Words, vocabularies, and genres used in texts inform us of how actors construct the world as well as how they reproduce their worldview (Fairclough, 1992, Vaara, 2002, Alvesson and Karreman, 2000). In the context of the PR consultancy texts, the task became then to identify the discourses that texts draw upon, by identifying institutional vocabularies used in order to construct a logic and to analyze the structure of the documents. Words, phrases, themes and use of tropes such as metaphors are good sources of discourses. A more exact description of the stepwise analytical process is integrated into data presentation Chapter 6.

### Summary/Chapter 3

In this chapter, I have accounted for the fit between my case and established criteria for historical case study. In particular I have identified and defined my object of analysis as the product category, PR consultancy,
which today can be defined as a parcel containing commercial offerings provided by consultants to organizational clients who wish to promote their business through communicating indirectly with relevant audiences mainly via raising public opinion in non-paid media channels, but also through direct interaction. This is the object whose antecedents I wish to trace, and whose meaning and boundary construction processes I wish to map. I have identified Regulatory, Intermediary, Commercial and Professionalizing audiences as the most important audiences. In figurative form, it is represented like this:

![Figure 3.6 The Object of Analysis: The Parcel of PR Consultancy](image)

Moreover, I have introduced my four main sources of data – media archival data, interviews, ethnographic observation, and industry-produced advisory texts – and how I intend to use them in answering my research question. I have accounted for the three different types of analysis that I have identified as most appropriate to help me track boundaries and meaning construction processes in both historical data and real-time data – content analysis, semiotic squares, and discourse analysis – and how I aim to combine them to explore semantic mechanisms of category emergence, at different levels of inquiry.
EMPIRICAL PART I

Category Construction over Time
Part I. Category Construction over Time - Labeling PR Consultancy

When does a thing become a thing? When something starts looking like a thing, or when it is given the name of Thing? According to semiotic theory, an object comes into being in a semantic process whereby a certain label is repeatedly associated with certain content, invokes similar reactions across audiences, and such reactions exhibit stability.

In this first Empirical part, I trace categorization processes in the market of PR consultancy over time. In Chapter 4, I attempt to reconstruct a chronological account of the history of what today is called “PR consultancy” as based on multiple data sources; interviews, literature and business media archival material inform my understanding of market category development. I identify important actors, processes and events throughout for four sequential periods of categorization. A growing consensus about category meaning, but also persistent struggles over boundaries and definitions, is found to be central to the development of the nascent category of PR consultancy. In Chapter 5, I summarize the findings, but I also complement my qualitative findings in Chapter 4 with quantitative analysis of the media material, and discuss the outcome in the light of extant theory on market categorization.
Chapter 4. A New Market Developing

The model by the end of Chapter 3 suggested that the category of PR consultancy today contains four distinct service offerings (Product PR, Corporate Communications, Investor Relations and Public Affairs), defined in an interplay of at least four different actor collectives or audiences: commercial actors, regulatory actors, intermediaries and professionalizing actors. As the story is one of market emergence, audiences and meaning are likely to have changed over time. In this Chapter I study when and how these actors and contents have been active in categorization of PR consultancy at different points in time. In the stream of changing meanings, I have identified four distinct periods or stages, of categorization; Early years (before 1985), Market Emergence (1985-1992), Expansion (1994-2000), and Consolidation and New Growth (2001-).

Early years (- 1985): Public Relations and the Swedish Model

Public relations as a corporate function appeared in Sweden after World War II, in the early 1950s. As in most other European and North American countries, the war had given rise to government organs devoted to “public information.” These organs aimed at informing the public on national safety matters and news from the front, normally grouped together under the umbrella term “propaganda,” a word not yet associated with bad connotations. The first privately employed propaganda experts were typically former journalists, who had worked in media or for the government war information services, who functioned as press agents. Though employed by corporations or large industry organizations, these early experts still defined themselves as separate from the corporate machinery, and true to press ethical code. One of them expressed his task as using “the press as a channel to our clientele, the public, whom we would serve with neutral information, i.e. not commercial” (Larsson, 2005b, p. 72). These early actors used the term “press agents” and “PR men” synonymously to label themselves, borrowing the “PR” prefix from English. Public Relations was a neologism in the Swedish language, introduced to form a clear boundary towards the advertising industry,
which at the time was much better established. Great effort was directed towards explaining the difference between PR and advertising. The endeavor was facilitated by a new organization, Swedish Press Agents, which in 1960 changed its name to Sweden’s Public Relations Association, or SPRA.

At this time, there were a few PR consultancies, normally one-manfirms. However, the consultants were not well regarded by the in-house PR men who excluded them from SPRA membership, as they were seen as diluting the new PR profession by being too close to advertising. The consultancies managed press contacts but also sold what today is called Product PR services, i.e. attracting media attention for specific products, an activity that at the time was referred to as “text advertising” or “institutional advertising.” This did not sit well with the SPRA membership, who wanted to create a new niche around corporate image issues and press contacts, and had defined as one of its main tasks to demarcate professional boundaries vis-à-vis advertising: “There was a lot of informing about what ‘PR’ was, we had to focus hard since what we did was so close to advertising in the beginning,” one SPRA member explained his mission (Larsson, 2005b, p.73). The mass media were even harder on PR consultancies than on in-house agents. Pressens Tidning15, was the house organ of the journalist association of Sweden noted; “The PR firm is simply an advertising firm while PR departments devoted to a specific industry or corporation have much greater chance to act as information entities without being advertising agencies” (Editorial, Pressens Tidning 6/1959). The new PR profession, in its struggle for legitimacy, marginalized PR consultants. As a consequence, by end of the 1960s there were still only a handful of independent consultancies active in Sweden.

Political Awareness

Meanwhile, the Swedish landscape of corporate-political interaction was undergoing significant transformation. The public sector had expanded rapidly after World War II, and many public authorities established information functions; the “information” prefix was seen as more suitable than the Anglophone- and private sector-sounding “PR.” Corporate PR departments followed suit and were renamed “information departments.”

During the latter half of the 1960s, public opinion was turning increasingly anti-corporate; the American war in Vietnam mobilized political opposition, and students at Swedish universities were inspired by the

15 Eng. Magazine of the Press.
student protests in Prague and Paris. Cultural workers and artists were enthused by neo-Marxist ideologies. Leftist interest groups called for the nationalization of corporations and heavier taxation of corporate profits. And the mass media, which before had kept a respectful distance to the business sphere, struck a militant chord by starting to critically cross-examine powerful institutions and corporate actions, according to the principle of ‘shooting iron journalism’ (Swe. skjutjärnsjournalistik).

Political and economic life in Sweden was at the time dominated by two camps of organizations; the trade unions on the one hand and the business organizations on the other, and these made up the two giant counterparts of the Swedish labor market. The trade unions were led by LO (the Swedish Trade Union Confederation), organizing employees on the one side. The business side was dominated by SAF (Swedish Employers’ Association), who together with the Industrial Association organized the employers. Since the 1930s, these two camps had been central to the political arrangement sometimes called “the Swedish Model” (Premfors, 1991, Lewin, 1994), used to denote a mixed economy in which state-provided welfare benefits are combined with capitalistic production sectors.

Despite its name, the Swedish Model is not one coherent model, but rather made up by several arrangements. One of the pillars, though, was the wage negotiations between LO and SAF. In these yearly meetings, the two umbrella organizations, would meet to negotiate about national wage increases, affecting virtually all employees in Sweden. As a consequence, the annual negotiations constituted – without any direct state interference – the largest single factor of influence on the Swedish national economy and national inflation (Lewin, 2006). The trade unions by tradition had had close ties with the long-governing Social Democratic Party, whereas the industry organizations have been associated with the parliamentary right-wing parties17 and especially to the conservative party, The Moderates. Around each camp was a plethora of organizations, sharing not only ideology but also resources.

---

16 Both organizations were founded around the turn of the 20th century, and were umbrella organizations; LO organized virtually all the trade unions for blue-collar workers and SAF’s member organizations encompassing most corporations. As of 2011, LO organized membership of 14 member organizations representing 1.7 million workers and SAF’s successor, the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise, has 49 industry organization members with approximately 59,000 member companies.

17 The Liberal Party, the Center Party and the Right Party (later the Moderates) have traditionally been the three right-wing parties in Parliament. From 1991 also the Christian Democrats.

But the “soft corporatist”\textsuperscript{19} Swedish model included more than labor market agreements; with it came an entire system of corporate-political practices where businesses has representation on the boards of public authorities, and trade union representatives sat on corporate boards. In addition, parliamentary commissions had to hear with a number of pre-registered referees, mostly NGOs, before putting forth propositions to the parliament. This was a radically different system compared to e.g. the American pluralist model where politics is to be seen as a market place where ideas compete with each other and the best idea gains attention (Naurin, 2001).

Until the late 1960s, the emphasis of SAF’s activities had been on the wage negotiations. Targeting public opinion on a larger scale was not widely practiced as a means to influence policy; there were rooms, established fora, where direct influence was exerted, and the doors to these rooms were most often closed to the general public. Direct attempts by corporations to influence policy, in the form of lobbying or opinion-building, was not common.

But as the 1970s were approaching, SAF had started to withdraw ideologically from this model. The anti-capitalist sentiments constituted a new challenge to the organization’s raison d’être. Public opinion support for the member companies’ operations was steadily in decline among young people, and the mass media were increasingly critical in their attitude. Also, according to SAF’s own evaluations, the results of wage negotiation were not honored; wage increases and hence inflation systematically turned out higher than initially agreed upon, SAF argued, calling this phenomenon “wage drift.” Internally, SAF’s member organizations had started to question the utility of collective negotiations, and the legitimacy of the system. The problem of wage drifting, together with the strong anti-corporate public sentiment, made the director of SAF’s newly established Department for Public Contact,\textsuperscript{20} Sture Eskilsson, start to think of how to respond to the changes in the environment. In his autobiography, Eskilsson writes:

A linchpin in the classic Swedish model did not work anymore. SAF could not win LO and other unions over to make agreements that were economically reasonable. [...] What to do? Could SAF affect the bargaining position by disseminating information directly to the employees?

(Eskilsson, 2005, p.101-102)

\textsuperscript{19} Melin (2004) emphasize the difference between the hard-drawn corporatism advocated in Italy in 1930 and 1940s, and "soft corporatism" developed in northern Europe, including Sweden, after World War II.

\textsuperscript{20} Säv. Avdelningen för samhällskontakt.
The main idea was for SAF to start communicating pro-business, market-liberal messages directly to the general public, to use advocacy and public opinion as a complement to the wage negotiations with the trade unions. The Department for Public Contact asked the SAF board for internal funds to cover a more long-term initiative on advocacy – funds which were granted. In an internal PM, director Sture Eskilsson sketched a plan of crucial target groups to influence, and how these should be approached. Journalists, cultural workers and students were priority target groups.\(^{21}\)

A first step in operationalizing this strategy was to increase contacts between students and business leaders by organizing student field trips to industries. These first field trips were not the success SAF had hoped for, since the students turned out to be openly critical, questioning work conditions of employees and financial strategies of the firms. A more fruitful route, then, was educating their own member companies’ leaders in countering the arguments of students with radical political standpoints. In an early project, a group of young men from the Moderate student movement was hired to tour Sweden, visiting industries to stage mock debates in which the student politicians presented arguments for Marxist reforms, questioning the auditorium of business leaders who had to learn the counterarguments for ‘free market economy and capitalism’ (Eskilsson, 2005).

This was the first time business organizations in Sweden used large scale methods of grass-root advocacy, and they bear considerable resemblance to a much earlier campaign carried out by a different organization in a different cultural context. More than 50 years earlier, in 1917, US government’s Committee for Public Information had organized a network called the Four Minute Men, a web of 75 000 local business leaders across the all states, to intervene in local community life; cinemas, fairs and get-togethers to give 4-minute speeches rallying support for the US participation in WWI, and “condemn the heresy of antiwar opinion” (Ewen, 1996, p. 104). Just like the Swedish corporations in the early 1970s, but on a much larger scale, the US government in the early 20\(^{th}\) century had become increasingly concerned about revolutionary tendencies among its general public, especially in the light of the Russian revolution in 1917. The result was one of the earliest full-scale public opinion campaigns, employing visuals and motions pictures in a manner hitherto unseen.

According to mass media scholar Stuart Ewen (1996), the growth of the industrial middle classes of the 19\(^{th}\) century had spurred developments within American media consumption and production. This, in turn, gave rise to the first generation of investigative (or “muck-raking”)

\(^{21}\) As the PM leaked to the press, it caused widespread debate in the media.
journalists, a group of critical writers and thinkers examining exploitive actions of corporate and political elites allegedly, infringing on the public good. The negative effects of industrialization were starting to worry both large corporations and the government. It was in this soil that the seed for the American market for PR consultancy was sown. Anti-corporate sentiment was proliferating, and progressive journalists supported the unions. Corporate elites started to think about how to go about their business. Large corporations such as Standard Oil and AT&T were the first to employ PR consultants, then labeled “public relation experts” or press agents. The first consultancy, the Publicity Bureau, was founded in 1903 in Boston by a group of former journalists, to assist large infrastructure corporations like AT&T and railroad companies in improving their corporate image, and meeting the challenge of the “curse of bigness.” Ivy Lee, known as the first really famous ‘PR guru’ started his first business in the 1910s. In the 1920s Hill & Knowlton was founded, today one of the world’s largest PR networks. True to the rationalistic ideals of the industrial era, this first generation of American PR specialists started to produce and supply the press with facts: surveys, pictures, and numbers. In the spirit of reason, Lee alternately termed himself “a physician of corporate bodies” and “doctor of publicity.” Practical tasks of these early agencies were centered on crisis management; corporations called for help in times of crisis and scrutiny in the media limelight, often in conjunction with union strikes (Ewen, 1996).

The First Modern PR Consultancies: Ad Agencies without Ads

My data does not convey whether SAF was directly inspired by the techniques used by early precursors in the US government during World War I, but the new venture into public opinion formation definitely required assistance. At first, SAF contracted “socially interested” advertising agencies, but soon another collaboration came to dominate the SAF’s advocacy work. SAF found new partners among the same student politicians that had helped in staging mock Marxist debates. These young men knew each other from the Moderate Party’s Free Student Association, where they had dedicated much of their time since 1968 to “combating the Left.” One of them was Peje Emilsson, who had headed the Moderate Party Election campaign in 1970 and was elected the county council representative for the Moderates at the time. He recalls the time as one of ideological upwind:

22 Samhällstillvända
When you went to Umeå at this time you would feel threatened, physically! There were portraits of Stalin and Mao all over. We started the Academic Freedom Front […] to dispel the leftists. We reclaimed the Swedish student unions, one might say.

(Interview, Peje Emilsson)

Political commitment was not enough though, and together with his two peers from the Moderate Student Movement, they started a company of their own, Creative Information Incorporated, or Kreab. They had an idea of how Swedish corporations should start working more broadly with youth and advocacy. Other industry organs did not listen, so they tried SAF. "We felt it was time to start doing something of our own. So we walked up to SAF and asked "Why don’t you do it like this instead?" (Interview, Peje Emilsson 100820). And SAF responded positively.

In the beginning Kreab was doing both information services and art dealing. Later one of the three co-founders dropped off, to start a gallery. Those remaining were Peje Emilsson, the salesman, and Jan-Erik Ander, an artist who was the head of the drawing studio, something that also all advertising agencies had at the time.

But Kreab was not an advertising agency. In contrast to the large ad agencies Kreab did not earn percentages from ad costs in print media. Instead they presented themselves as an “ad agency without ads,” and the client was charged for work hours spent. The main service Kreab provided SAF with was 1970s was information materials: books, brochures, ads, posters, overhead slides, and newsletters promoting business-friendly ideology. One of the first projects Kreab delivered to SAF was a booklet called “Why should businesses inform?” that justified why a private sector organizations should devote time and money to public opinion formation, instead of going through the established channels of corporate-political interaction. Forty years later, Peje Emilsson regards its content as mainstream, but he did not do so at the time. He describes:

I remember we made a pamphlet for them, ‘Why should businesses inform?’ Imagine! The first years consisted of different attempts to get legitimacy, a mandate to inform people at all.

(Interview, Peje Emilsson)

Parallel to producing information material for SAF, Kreab started to take a very active part in political campaigns. Peje and Jan-Erik hired old friends from the Moderate Party’s Free Student Association; among them

---

23 University town in Northern Sweden
Prime Minister-to-be Carl Bildt\textsuperscript{24} who authored another brochure, called “Welfare.” Originally aiming to describe market economics to children, it was printed in more than half a million copies and distributed also to adults, and used in higher education as an example of capitalist market logic. The brochure contained detailed descriptions of central economic concepts such as “GDP,” “Corporation” and “Wage Negotiations,” explaining why and how they contributed to public welfare, illustrated by educational cartoon drawings.

\textsuperscript{24} Party Leader, Moderate Party, Prime Minister 1991-1994, Minister of Foreign Affairs, 2006-
Two of Kreab’s brochures produced in 1971 for SAF: “Why should businesses inform?” (above) and “Welfare” (below). The latter explained how Swedish salaries were set in collective negotiations between trade unions and employers organizations, within the Swedish corporatist model. The brochure is quite critical of the system, as is revealed by the explanation of “wage drift” in box 9; “In the agreement, it is decided how much wages and social benefits should increase. Wage increases, however, are most often larger than what was decided upon in the agreements. This is mainly because companies have to raise wages more than agreed, in order to get labor. This is called wage drift.”
The political dimension was constantly present in the SAF-Kreb collaboration throughout the early years. When the Campaign “Vote to the Right” was launched in 1973 in order to raise funds for the national elections, Moderate Party’s Free Student Association were the formal organizers. While SAF guidelines prohibited direct co-operation with political parties, director Sture Eskilsson joined as private person, activating his professional network of industry leaders (Eskilsson, 2005). Kreab was involved in most of the hands-on tasks. As an example of practical assignments in the campaign, Kreab built a large “machine” in paper mache, with obvious traits from Soviet aesthetics symbolizing the Social Democratic “Power Apparatus” as consisting of LO, Prime Minister Olof Palme, and a group of logos of organizations from the other “camp.” This structure, almost three meters tall, was pushed around the streets of Stockholm as election materials were distributed.

As of 2012, Kreab is one of the largest PR consultancies on the Nordic market. After a merger with an American PR agency network, the company employs more than 300 consultants in 41 countries, working for a vast array of organizational clients across sectors with a focus on financial PR and crisis communications. But during the initial years, the political information materials produced for SAF played a crucial role. Kreab had other clients too – they e.g. drew manuals for hydraulic pumps for the Arab market, as well as graphic instructions for sewing machines –, but SAF was the main client. Some years in the 1970s more than 60% of revenues came from SAF, and never less than 30%.

Throughout the 1970s, Kreab continued to produce more events, conferences and campaigns for SAF following the general right-wing ideological agenda, with titles such as “Invest in yourself!,” “Choose your Future” and “Get Sweden Moving”.

In the field of public opinion and policy, to start a for-profit organization was practically unheard of. Except for a few newspapers owned by private media conglomerates, the accepted organizational form at this time would have been an association, a foundation or to work through the party system. But there were reasons to keep Kreab outside the SAF hierarchy. Some were ideological. Peje invokes ideological reasons to start a private enterprise: "I wanted to start a business! That was my political calling, so to speak.” But the reasons behind the organizational separation were also creative, Peje recalls:

I was actually employed there for 3-4 months, had a room at SAF. But it did not work out, it wasn’t for me! We agreed Sture and I, that it’d be

25 www.jeander.com
26 Sven. ”Satsa på dig själv!”, ”Välj din framtid” och ”Sätt fart på Sverige”
better if I was on the creative side, with the others [at Kreab’s office]. But in many ways, we were an extension of the SAF.

But Kreab’s role as an annex of the in-house Department for Public Contact at SAF caused internal criticism within SAF. Department director Sture Eskilsson was accused of ignoring the internal structure for information, and preferring Kreab. And Eskilsson seems indeed to have identified himself with Kreab; he refers to himself and Kreab as “We” and describes very regular contacts: “We were sponsored by SAF, but not a part of the SAF hierarchy. The idea never struck me at the time, but we were a type of subsidiary” (Interview, Sture Eskilsson). He did not see any need for a formalized procurement process, and in his memoirs, he refutes the internal criticism with the argument that the cooperation proceeded so well:

The established, enjoyable work conditions made the efficiency high. It took considerably longer time, and more money, those times I went to another agency. Actually, SAF saved money by working so much with Kreab.

(Eskilsson, 2005, p. 134)

One of the most important projects of the 1970s was the campaign against the Employee Investment Funds (EIF).27 The funds were a social democratic project, aimed at taxing the most productive companies for their extra revenues produced by “the loyal wage politics” of the Swedish Model. The idea was that since all employees get the same salary increase, there was an automatic redistribution from workers in the more productive companies, who held back increases, to those in less productive companies. More productive companies, according to the economists propagating the model, therefore made “excess profits.” These excess profits, they argued, should be turned into stock capital emitted to all employees (Meidner et al., 1978, Gilljam, 1988). This caused an uproar among corporations and business organizations who considered the Employee Investment Funds an attempt to nationalize the Swedish corporate sector. Years of ideological campaigning, including launching different economic alternatives to the Funds, and massive public opinion efforts, finally resulted in a demonstration in 1983 where approximately 80 000 people28 went out onto the streets of Stockholm to protest against the funds. Kreab produced most information materials and administered

---

27 *Swe:* Löntagarfonderna.
28 Numbers vary according to source in the range from 60 000 to 100 000.
contacts for the campaign, which was modeled upon the classic image of a peasant protest.\textsuperscript{29}

The movement against the EIF became significant in that it helped mobilize Swedish corporations into an array of conservative organizations.\textsuperscript{30} It also raised a considerable amount of money. Eskilsson describes the campaign as a breakthrough in his quest of legitimizing corporate advocacy internally in SAF and among his member companies. After the campaign, nobody in corporate Sweden questioned the need for advocacy (Eskilsson, 2005).

Outside Influences

During the 1970s, media contacts were not in focus among the communication channels. Kreab describes that when the media slowly started to come into the picture by the late 1970s, it was by the influence of foreign clients:

\begin{quote}
We worked for the state Jamaica, for both a conservative and a social democratic government, to get Swedes to travel there. We had British Airways as clients too. And when they came in, every time they did something, there was a press release that said "Contact in Sweden: Kreab"! They had outsourced this long before [in their home countries]. Our role had traditionally been behind the scenes.
\end{quote}

(Interview Peje Emilsson)

Another source of inspiration was Peje’s position as a Chairman for the International Chamber of Commerce between 1972 and 1982, during which he divided his time between Stockholm and Paris. He was also inspired by Disney Inc., for which he had organized a conference during his time at ICC, and modeled SAF conferences on Disneyland Conference templates.

But international influence was not confined to working methods. Eskilsson regularly attended the Salzburg Seminar in American Studies, and the Aspen Institute, both precursors to modern think tanks spreading knowledge on US political and economic life to non-Americans. But SAF and Kreab also interacted with more explicitly neoliberal thought collectives, like the Montpelerin Society (cf. Mirowski and Plehwe, 2009).

\textsuperscript{29} The Funds were later put in place, but in a modified form. They were later dissolved and funds were allocated to the pension system and to various research foundations.

\textsuperscript{30} Näringslivets ekonomifakta, SAF och Industriförbundet, Företagareföreningen, SHIO-Familjeföretagen, Kommittén Rösta Borgerligt, Näringslivets fond, Timbro, Utredningsbyrån för Samhällsfrågor, Handelskamrarna, Aktiespararnas Riksförbund och Folket mot Löntagarfonder.
SAF arranged the Society’s 1981 Stockholm conference, “Beyond the Welfare State.” Another inspiration and partner was the neo-liberal future analyst Herman Kahn’s Hudson Institute. When Kahn’s books were translated into Swedish, Kreab managed the publishing process and marketing.

Besides Kreab there were few other firms selling what today is considered PR consultancy services during the 1970s. One was BNL, owned by the former ‘ad man’ Jerry Bergström. While Kreab’s focus was creative ways to communicate pro-market political messages through hands-on campaigning, BNL’s method targeted the press:

Somewhere around 1973-74, we started to take the shape of a PR firm. And we had a mass media focus, I started to employ journalists, since I understood that media was extremely important in marketing your opinion.

(Interview Jerry Bergström in Larsson (2005a-a, p. 97))

But whereas BNL had a stronger media focus than Kreab, the two agencies shared an emphasis on the political. BNL also had SAF as a client, along with LO and the large national co-operative organization KF (both from the “socialist camp” described above), and often worked directly with lobbying: “...we were more and more focusing on lobbying, we published a folder of 300 pages with facts about various members of parliament that we sold to the companies” (Ibid).

In the early media archival data, “PR consultancy” existed as an established concept with clear denotations. There are relatively few citations, only 10 in total for the period 1981-1984. In these articles, the term is used without further explanation. Jerry Bergström and BNL appeared several times, continuously labeled as “PR consultant.” The standard case was citing “PR consultant as a career background in items reporting on career moves, i.e. “X has been employed as a PR consultant at Firm Y” (e.g. DI, Mar 12, 1981). The few times services are specified, the domain of expertise referred to is unmistakenly confined to image and branding issues: “Philip Morris has hired a PR consultancy in Sweden to promote its message” (DI, Nov 12, 1984). The phenomenon of PR consultancy seems overall unproblematic; articles are rather positive or neutral in their angle towards PR consultancy.

But connotations of the PR consultancy label were not unambiguous in all audiences. Neither BNL nor its founder seem to have any problem with the epithet “PR consultancy”; BNL even promoted it themselves. But Kreab called itself an “ad agency without advertising” and did not want to use the prefix “PR.” On the contrary, they avoided it due to its negative connotations:
This whole time, we have been fighting to be labeled information consultants or communication consultants. We never wanted to use “PR.” [...] Because in Sweden it was understood, when we started out [in the early 1970s], that those were old drunken military officers who occasionally organized a press conference or two. [...] PR was not respectable in Sweden at that time. And that’s why we didn’t choose that. Now it is more established, now everyone knows what Public Relations is... But we still prefer to call ourselves communications consultants.

(Interview, Peje Emilsson)

An information officer at a large Swedish corporation also remembers the label “PR” being a label with negative connotations when he started working in 1980: “To us, back then, “PR” meant ‘At-the-Restaurant’”. In summary, the label’s connotations varied across audiences; whereas it was straight-forward for some, “PR consultancy” evoked a feeling of a lack of professionalism, and acceptance in others.

Summary/Early years

Swedish PR consultancy started on a small scale after World War II, with a few companies focusing on press agency and commercial PR. In the beginning, the legitimacy of the new PR profession was generally low, and within the group, consultants had the lowest status. The other ‘PR men,’ mostly former journalists working inside corporations, accused PR consultancy of being too close to traditional advertising, a market that was seen as too commercial and something from which PR needed to be differentiated. During 1950s and 1960s there was virtually no growth in market size.

During the early 1970s the first signs of contemporary businesses emerged that are still around today. Actors were few and worked closely with the political organizations, using “old school” methods: information distribution, library exhibitions, school tours and pamphlets. Services during these early years consisted of routine tasks, such as arranging and producing events and conferences. The media were not yet dominant. Political organizations, and especially the employers’ organization SAF, were a crucial customer in these early years. In the case of Kreab, which today is Scandinavia’s largest PR network, the founders also had a personal political background that fit well with the projects they took on, promoting free trade and market economy solutions. Still by the early 1980s, there were few actors, and these did not make up a market in a sociological sense, with a collectively organized identity.

31 *Swe. ”På Restaurang”*
These actors performed tasks that today would be categorized as PR consultancy services but which lacked a homogeneous label at the time. There was also an abundance of synonymous labels to denote the work that these actors carried out, most of them with an “advertising” suffix, reflected in alternative labels such as ‘institutional advertising’ or ‘text advertising.’ This suggested that ‘advertising’ was still the dominant label to which actors on the antecedents to PR consultancies had to relate.

My media data from business press show, a bit surprisingly, that by the end of the Early Years, the term “PR consultant” was used as a taken-for-granted category, with a convergence around meaning. However, the meaning inferred was not very broad, and was confined to press agency, and image and branding issues what today is called Corporate Communications and Product PR. The tasks denoted by the label “PR consultancy” were hence close to traditional advertising.

While the media articles do not convey particularly negative values about “PR consultancy services,” some actors and clients on what today is called the PR consultancy market did not want any association with the term “PR consultant,” claiming it has bad connotations, implying a lack of professionalism and seriousness.


The onset of the 1980s was characterized by rapidly growing global financial markets (Davis, 2009); CFOs entered top management teams, and financial de-regulation spurred heavy investments in financial information services. For the few Swedish PR firms around in the early 1980s, financial information or IR (Investor Relations) soon became a profitable offering. Typical tasks were the production of annual reports and arranging annual general meetings, but also administering and informing about an increasing number of corporate mergers. AGMs that before had taken one hour became full-scale events for thousands.

Simultaneously, the global political arena had witnessed substantial transformation. In the US, the conservative politician Ronald Reagan won two presidential elections with the help of massive communication campaigns, and in the UK, the Tories and Margaret Thatcher had come into power after a campaign headed by the slogan “Labour isn’t working.” Thatcher used advanced PR techniques new to British politics (Kavanagh, 1995). All political parties, on both sides of the political center, built substantial in-house PR operations. But the Thatcher government also started up extensive collaborations with external consultants, spur-ring the creation of a domestic PR consultancy market (see Chapter 1).
And the British market did grow; while only 25% of UK top 100 corporations bought services from PR consultancies in 1979, 85% did in 1984. Several studies have documented a correlation between privatization of large British state-owned companies and the growth of the industry; privatization processes created a large demand for financial PR services, which in turn gave rise to unparalleled opportunities for PR consultants (Miller and Dinan, 2000, Davis, 2002).

This new popular use of PR in British political and finance sectors inspired actors in Swedish public life. Three of the most inspired ones were young students, who - like the founders of Kreab - had met in the Moderate Youth Movement. In 1985, the three young men newly graduated from business school, with little professional experience other than from party politics. They formed a company called JKL, an acronym of their surnames, and mapped out a business plan based on two assumptions: that politicians were better equipped than business leaders to formulate strategic messages, and that what had happened in Great Britain would soon happen in Sweden. This political transformation, in turn, would increase the visibility of corporate leaders. One of the founders remembers the following:

From [the developments in the U.S and UK] we got an insight, namely that politics was better at strategically formulating messages than corporations. Meanwhile, in Sweden, Scandinavian Airlines had gotten a new CEO who actually used political leadership, in that he spoke through the media, used it as a sort of sounding board with a tremendous ability to create legitimacy. [Our consultancy] was thus based on the hypothesis that the visibility of communication would increase, and that business leaders would need to express themselves.

(Interview Anders Lindberg)

More concretely, JKL founders counted on a change of government in the parliamentary elections of 1985, and that the conservative parties would take power. After that, a wave of privatizations would follow, requiring private enterprise to respond in an aggressive manner.

This, however, did not happen. As the left-wing parties, led by the Social Democratic Party, won the parliamentary elections in 1985, the predicted clients were not there. JKL had to do what their predecessor Kreab had done 15 years before: seek projects with organizations in the ‘conservative camp’. The Moderate Party, from which several board members were recruited, soon became important clients, as well as SAF.

Meanwhile, a conservative sphere was underway in Sweden, but not yet in place. By this time, Sture Eskilsson had left SAF to form a publishing house, Timbro, which with time evolved into the first full-fledged
Swedish think tank promoting long-term public opinion changes in favor of conservative and neo-liberal thought, modeled upon Margaret Thatcher’s household think tank, Institute of Economic Affairs. Ten years before the Internet was popularized, Sture Eskilsson had initiated and financed a computer network, connecting over 400 conservative and neo-liberal opinion-builders, politicians, writers, and clerks across organizations; which spanned SAF, Timbro, the parliament, corporations and other political organizations that had been invigorated by the anti-EIF campaign. According to my informants, this network was popularly called “Sture’s System.” One of the informal aims of this system of semi-political organization was to support young Swedish conservatives in their careers. The organizational sphere around trade union LO and the Social Democratic Party, had by tradition been much larger than the conservative one. Anders Lindberg says that there were few options for young conservatives when he and his colleagues started their careers:

It was either to go into politics [or industry]... The only boundary organizations available were the SAF and the Chamber of Commerce. [Whereas on the socialist] side there was a whole group, with all the popular movements. They had a larger labor market.

Janerik Larsson, Sture Eskilsson’s successor as director of Public Affairs at SAF, and subsequently a PR consultant, paints a similar picture:

Earlier, it was damn hard for young conservatives to get a job. Those are not long periods where we've had, what is it now... 91-94 and 76-83 - a right-wing government. I was on the board of Timbro and we discussed mainly two things: 1) would people dare to work in a conservative government risking that there would be no jobs afterwards? and 2) those who actually went into politics became knowledgeable, but mainly in their fields of expertise. How would they use them? That's why we founded the Market-economic Alternative for Sweden [MAS], to absorb some of these people. Carl Bildt32 and Bengt Westerberg33 got jobs there, for example. […] On the socialist side, they have a large sphere of associations and unions between which people go back and forth. That was what we created with MAS, a sphere, and then the PR agencies.

(Interview Janerik Larsson)

Market-Economic Alternative for Sweden (MAS) was a non-parliamentary foundation, incorporated in 1982 as a collaboration between the three conservative parties\textsuperscript{34} in parliament at the time, with the task of preparing visions for a conservative political future. Supporting JKL during their start-up phase was a part of this strategy, and Larsson hired them to design and run public opinion campaigns for SAF.

During the end of the 1980s, SAF had two main issues on their advocacy agenda: to break the state monopoly on the ether media, and to work for a Swedish membership in the European Union. JKL worked on both of these projects. At the time, there were two state-owned television channels, Channels 1 and 2, and commercial television was the ultimate goal. But television was deemed too difficult and too costly a media channel to target, both financially and politically. SAF and JKL agreed to focus on the radio monopoly, which was regulated by the same legislation as television. The three radio channels of Swedish Radio (SR) had a monopoly on national broadcasting, but Swedish law permitted local radio by non-profit organizations. Since SAF was a non-profit organization, they were eligible for broadcasting licenses. In the void that this loophole opened up, a new local radio station, SAF Radio City, was created. The station played mainstream pop music, and even though there were no commercials, the content between songs focused on local commerce and free market economic policy:

> We were not allowed to advertise, but basically it was one big commercial for the “product” SAF, their message. This was way before iPods and such, and people loved it. We wanted to make people understand that this is how good radio could sound like if it was commercial. And that’s where our fame\textsuperscript{35} began.

(Interview, Anders Lindberg)

By 1987, JKL was running radio stations in Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö with help from university students, while they were also doing “classical lobbying activities.” Larsson also paid JKL to draft a suggestion of what a law enabling commercial radio would look like, and to anchor the issue among the right-wing parties’ youth movements. If the right-wing parties won the next elections in 1991, the paperwork would be there, ready to transform into legal text, having a broad support base.

The diversity in work tasks, ranging from practical to theoretical, straddling both commercial and political realms, made it hard to describe the new services. Just like the PR professionals in the 1950s, and Kreab

\textsuperscript{34} The Moderates, the Liberal Party and the Center Party (Farmer’s party).

\textsuperscript{35} The English word fame is used in the original Swedish quote.
in the early 1970s, JKL found it difficult to explain to other actors what their services consisted of, as they did not fit into any existing market category; "The first five years we spent 80% of the time at explaining what we did." Still, after more than 25 years, the content of services these early years is not very easy to account for concretely:

**AT:** So what did you do?

**AL:** We sold our services as a kind of agile advisors doing public opinion formation, instead of advertising. […] We did the prep jobs within communications, we did the brief. We tried to alert in advance, be analytical, be cunning blighters.36

By the end of the 1980s, the new channels of corporate-political interactions had started to gain external attention. Within the framework of the State Commission on Power (SOU 1990:44), a report titled “Swedish Corporations as Political Actors”37 was published. In this report, a young political scientist mapped the Swedish corporatist model’s disintegration, moving towards a more market-based model of direct corporate-political interaction (Carlberg, 1989). One of the most characteristic events of this development, it was argued, was the emergence of a PR consultancy market.

The report was the first academic report to group a critical mass of companies and label them “PR consultancies”, while critically discussing their influence and boundaries vis-à-vis national politics. Still, this group was still fairly small; only twelve agencies, with 15-20 people working fulltime with Public Affairs, were surveyed. Among those only one was an official representative of an American network, Burson Marsteller, while all the others were partner-owned local agencies. The report provided case study examples of how industry organizations formed new organizations, devoted solely to lobbying and public opinion activities. The report also proposed some explanations to this growth; e.g. the massive explosion in energy regulation, the increasing emphasis on environmental and energy related policy issues and the restructuration of Swedish corporate life, characterized by mergers. Moreover, the communication gap between corporate leaders and politicians had widened, Carlberg argued. Earlier, part-time parliamentarians with an on-going career in industry had been a common sight. But during the 1970s, political positions had been professionalized and more seldom combined with other tasks. Instead of bringing corporate life into the parliament, there was now a growing need to bring the parliament to corporate life.

---

36 Swe. "listiga rackare"
37 Swe. "Svenska företag som politiska påtryckare"
The report acknowledged the political nature of PR consultancy services; “This new category of PR consultants often had a past in the government offices or the parliament” (Carlberg, 1989, p. 21).

But the agencies themselves were still not fond of using the PR label. Anders Lindberg nearly echoes the statement of Kreab’s founders concerning the label “PR consultant”:

We hate that concept. We are communication consultants. But sure. We must distinguish ourselves. Are we journalists? No. Are we corporate representatives? No. We have an academic-analytical approach and try to make use of research in economics, political science, sociology and communication studies. […] ‘PR consultant’ sounds disparaging, as if we were some sort of jesters. Certainly, we have respect for their professionalism, but we do something else. We see ourselves as management consultants within communication.

(Interview, Anders Lindberg)

The media data during this period are still fairly silent on the topic. Only 17 articles mention “PR consultant/cy” between 1985 and 1992. The taken-for-grantedness of a narrow meaning of PR consultancy is sustained; image and corporate branding are still seen as the main PR jurisdiction. There were a few signs of market development. One is the mention of financial PR; a few PR consultants are cited as expert commentaries in this domain. Also, both DI and VA started regularly reporting on industry news on the firm level. A few articles covers a merger of a PR consultancy with an advertising agency, another reports on consultants leaving to start a spin-off, a third describes the new establishment of one agency’s Stockholm office. These reports are anecdotal but new in kind.

*Industry Organization.* Only a few years later the market had expanded to the extent that it was formalized through an industry association, PRECIS (The Association of Public Relations Consultancies in Sweden). According to the long-term secretary Kaj Flick, there were several factors leading to the initiative. In the late 1980s particularly one consultant had become very active in the ICCO, International Communications Consultancy’ Organisation. This consultant persuaded his competitors, among them JKL, Kreab, BNL, and Kreab, that there was a need for a Swedish organization.”

---

38 Eng. “Precisely”.

92
This was in 1990. Several other leading countries had established PR consultancy organizations including the UK, the US and Germany. The founders thought we should have one in Sweden too.”

(Interview, Kaj Flick).

But there was also a second underlying factor, which Flick claims to be at least as important. Until then, the professional association Swedish Public Relations Association (SPRA) had been the dominant organization in the field, and consultants had been disproportionately active. But in 1989 the association had changed its name, to Swedish Information Association. This sparked opposition among several consultant members:

So these guys thought, ‘We're consultants, not employed information officers!’ and so they created PRECIS. The reason to found an industry organization was probably in order not to collide with the Information Association, where membership was individual.

(Interview, Kaj Flick, PRECIS)

In Chapter 3, I spoke of the risk of capturing post-rationalizations rather than “real events” when using interview data as a historical source, and this is a highly valid caveat here. This recollection of a conflict over labels between field organizations is nevertheless interesting; if true, it is the first time that the suffix “consultant” was considered important enough to defend collectively. With the founding of PRECIS, a collective identity around a certain type of services started to take form. And even though some of the co-founders – including Kreab and JKL – were not overtly fond of the “PR” prefix, they indirectly agreed to using it, by letting it provide the first two letters of the organization’s name PRECIS. Also, the official translation into English was decided to be Association of Public Relations Consultancies in Sweden.

PRECIS’ activities were not frequent in the beginning, with approximately 4-5 meetings a year, with only one part-time employee and a rotating presidency among the CEOs of the large companies. Even at this stage, SAF was present in developments. The first few years, PRECIS meetings were held in SAF’s executive floor. The goals of the newly formed organization was, according to Flick twofold and related: to increase legitimacy, to get rid of a “dodginess” surrounding the nascent market, and to obtain the right of interpretation for its own activities.

39 A situation that would come to change drastically over time. In 2009, only 5% of members were consultants (Sveriges Informationsförening 2009).
These problems would be remedied with professional norms and standards of commensuration:

We wanted to create legitimacy for the industry and profession, which both were quite young. Show that these firms are real businesses, no scams. In that area, we started work with the Code of Conduct, within the ICCO. Secondly, we wanted to be the ones that described the industry, who produced statistics and determined how to measure.

(Interview, Kaj Flick)

The bylaws also add a third aim: to promote issues that improve the business conditions of PRECIS members. The Code of Conduct covers guidelines regarding competing client projects, non-disclosure policies and conflict of interests of consultants etc. All codes are voluntary, but some of these will cause debate later on in market development.

Summary/Market Emergence

Between 1985 and 1992, a nascent category of “PR consultancy” emerges for the first time with a coupling between label and denotation reminiscent of that of the contemporary category. This movement towards market meaning convergence was partly constructed by external audiences: by the State Commission on Power, where the market is mentioned as a separate one for the first time, and the mass media, who also started to report regular industry news (mergers, spin-offs, start-ups) during the period, albeit on a very small scale. But categorization was also a result of entrepreneurial actors wishing to form a collective identity, by forming an industry organization to gain legitimacy, a resource that was still lacking. Despite individual firms distancing themselves from a PR label, it is nonetheless chosen as an industry identity marker; adding the first two letters to the industry organization’s name PRECIS (Eng. “precisely”). The nascent market, however, was still very small, consisting of 12-15 companies still largely associated with industry organizations, and a political conservative agenda.

The most relevant boundary demarcation was still vis-à-vis the advertising industry, especially in the beginning of the period. The formation of an industry organization for consultancies in 1990 also set up a clear boundary towards the in-house corporate PR functions who opted for another prefix, “information”. In my data, I find that neither business media nor the political field paid more than scant attention to the nas-
cent market between 1985 and 1992. The few articles that did report on it mostly used the narrow, established meaning of “PR consultancy” as a question of image-building, covering e.g. industry reporting, and reports on prizes. These articles were still written in an uncritical, by-the-way manner, seldom explicating the content of services.


In the beginning of the 1990s a few events happened in the political arena that proved important to PR consultancy market development. In 1991, a right-wing coalition led by the Moderate Party won the parliamentary elections after almost a decade of political opposition. With this victory, the changes that had happened in the U.K ten years earlier, also took off in Sweden. The de-regulation of media markets that SAF and JKL (and others) had worked to obtain opened up for commercial TV and radio. Extensive privatization reforms were initiated in virtually all sectors of society; primary health care, education, energy, childcare, transportation and telecom sectors. Also waste management, public housing and heavy industries saw a considerable decrease in public ownership. The pension system was reformed, and several large corporations became publicly traded companies. When the four right-wing parties lost power again in September 1994, these processes were initiated and underway, and the preparatory work that had begun within the conservative sphere was now coming out “in the open.”

Under the right-wing government years, a formal campaign for Swedish membership in the EU had commenced. The EU campaign ended with a successful referendum in November 1994, where a majority of Swedes voted for the entry into the European Union. The campaign was unparalleled in budget size, and spanned both right-wing parties and social democratic parties. Both SAF and LO were behind it. Virtually all extant PR consultancies worked in the campaign, which also became a nursery for young politically interested people.

The picture painted by media archival data and interviews is one where a new cadre of young conservatives came out of the government offices and the EU campaign at virtually the same time, and needed employment. “The big change came after the EU referendum -94. [...] All key people, regardless of political color, I would say, worked in that campaign.” (interview, Janerik Larsson). Several larger agencies would spring out of that campaign. One of the younger campaigners, with a past in the Moderate youth movement, who today is the CEO-founder of a large PR firm, claims that the campaign was the nursery for a second generation of PR firms:
Our company’s very much built on that, what we did there. [...] All we do is from the EU campaign! This in turn was based on Clinton’s way of working, which was completely channel-independent. The Web did not exist at that time, but it was media, advertising and fax machines. We put out 300 fax machines with pro-EU activists around the country! Like modern grassroots campaigns, that’s how we worked back then. Had our own TV channels. We had huge resources from the business community who thought EU membership was a major issue; they did not want to lose competitive edge in the European market. It was the Klondike for us, we could do everything that we thought of, communication-wise.

(Interview Carl Fredrik Sammeli)

For the first time in the history of the young PR industry, there was also a substantial corporate client base to meet the supply of PR services. As in the UK in a decade earlier, an abundance of newly instigated privatization processes required information services in the realm of financial information. Also, as indicated above, the EU entry brought a transition of the main arena for corporate-political influence, from Stockholm to Brussels. Swedish corporations witnessed a shift in focus from relationships with Swedish politicians to the EU level in Brussels, where many of the relevant policy decisions were taken.

One emblematic example is Scania, a Swedish multinational company, and one of the world’s largest heavy truck producers with more than 30 000 employees worldwide. By the mid-1990s, they employed PR consultants for Investor Relations assistance; for example, consultants did all the visuals for the IPO\(^\text{41}\) in 1996, and translated quarterly and annual reports to from Swedish to English. But the EU entry also had political consequences for Scania. The heavy trucks industry is by tradition circumscribed by regulation: on traffic safety, pollution and emission levels. With the EU entry, all these decisions were transferred to Brussels, and the European Commission. There was a stronger focus on environmental regulation. In Brussels, Scania’s Swedish PR agency’s newly founded Belgian office identified which commissioners to contact, and how to approach them. Consultants booked meetings with commissioners and sometimes went to various events in Scania’s place; “Back then, our executives wouldn’t go. It was not as sophisticated. Often someone from the PR agency just went there with a Scania business card and reported back here what had been said.” (Interview, Corporate Communications Officer, Scania). Later on, Scania executives started to join the consultants in visiting politicians: “And then we started to travel around, once a year with our PR agency and the top management, to visit EU

\(^{41}\text{IPO = Initial Public Offering, or stock market launch. }\textit{Swe. Börsintroduktion.}\)
commissioners, and so on. You know, you will get 10-15 minutes – and they let you plow through some questions. Just to show our presence at the European level.”

Together with the PR consultants, Scania also came up with the idea of regular “road safety seminars” that the company started to host towards the end of the 1990s in Brussels, for EU officials, journalists and industries involved in traffic safety. The contact, facilitated by the PR consultancy in Brussels, led up to one of the most successful PR events, “Young European Truck Driver,” a yearly competition run by Scania worldwide in which young truck drivers compete in “safe and efficient driving”. A former communication officer at Scania remembers how a high-ranking EU official approached him at one of the safety seminars;

He said, "Listen, we [at the European Commission] have run this competition of 'Europe's Best Motorcycle Rider.' Would you at Scania consider doing the same thing for trucks, heavy trucks?" Because he thought it had been such a good seminar. Very quickly he got an answer "Yes, of course we are interested." [...] Since we were defending ourselves against a hostile takeover at that moment... Well, to have the Commission on your side in a situation like that is pretty good. It took a few years before it materialized. But when it did, then yes, it has been a success. It has just grown and grown. All our competitors are mad now because we got that! The Commission doesn't contribute any money or anything, but we get to use their logo. So it's very valuable it for us.”

(Interview, Corporate Communications Officer, Scania)

The Scania example illustrates how politics, regulations and financial developments became intertwined in a new way, and conducted in new places, and motivated new types of corporate-political interactions. The PR agency played multiple roles, from the actual drafting of financial reports to identifying the right politicians and contexts at EU level that could defend Scania from hostile takeovers, and promote long-term legitimacy.

Providing an itinerary in the new regulatory environments of finance and politics seems to have been an overall profitable business; the PR industry expanded rapidly over this period, annual growth of industry revenue averaged 20%. In 1996 and 1998, these figures were around 40%.

---

42 *Swe. Säkerhetsseminarium.*
43 [www.scania.com](http://www.scania.com)
44 A *hostile takeover* refers to the situation where an acquiring bidder (normally a company) pursues a tender for a company, even though that company’s management is against being taken over by the bidder.
But not all macro-level changes were politically or financially instigated. There were also strong technological developments in the form of new media; mobile phones and the Internet. Many of the fastest growing corporations in Sweden, and hence potential client bases, were IT companies, or companies in other sectors wishing to strengthen their presence in this new transnational space called *World Wide Web*. Moreover, these IT companies were often operating in international markets, where PR consultancy services were much more common, ‘importing’ this idea to a Swedish setting. The new PR firms moved in quickly to take command over this new realm, and engaged in legislation and policy decisions. A trade journalist, who started to cover advertising, PR and media industries in the middle of the 1990s, argues that the PR methods were naturally compatible with IT, which gave them a competitive advantage over the traditional advertising agencies;

Advertising people had been rather spoiled, been sitting in driver's seat and able to dictate what communication should look like: "We think this would fit on page 3".\(^{45}\) So the newspaper gets 200 000 crowns and the advertising guys get power. Then all of a sudden it turns out that the thing with the newspaper may not work so well anymore, for now there is all this stuff on the Internet. Which was very cool, cause you could even buy stuff. [...] You just see the thing online, then click, and the deal is done. So the whole traditional model is questioned. This fits PR consultants better, because they're used to fighting to get across in the media, without being able to pay for it. [...] You see this all the time! PR consultants are better at social media than other consultants. Meanwhile, back at the advertising agency, they’re still thinking of what color to put on the sign...

(I interview, Rolf van den Brink)

Expansion as Portrayed by Business Media

The commercial success of the PR consultancies is reflected in the media material. Between 1994 and 2000, 65 articles mention “PR consultant/cy”, an almost threefold increase compared to the previous period. Four patterns are worth special mention. Firstly, and perhaps not so surprisingly, the number of services categorized as “PR consultancy services” increases. Whereas “PR consultancy services” in the two first periods were seldom defined in media discourse, PR is now starting to be broken down into sub-categories: Financial PR, Political PR, Media and Branding Services etc. In other words, the narrow, taken-for-granted

\(^{45}\) Page 3 is the most attractive, and hence most expensive, advertising space in daily print media.
denotation of the label is starting to widen. Secondly, first critical articles appear in connection with the first industry scandals, targeting the behind-the-scenes component of PR consultancy services. Thirdly, the level of explanation rises; the previously well-defined but peripheral category of PR consultancy services is suddenly explained in much closer detail. Fourthly and finally, the use of synonyms to describe PR consultancy seems to be proliferate throughout the period. Below, I will expand on the latter three patterns in the data.

**Critical articles.** In 1994, the first critical articles appear. They concern Kreab’s international operations, describing how the company’s US subsidiary was training China’s government in the methods of Western mass media, and then working for a highly controversial Brazilian presidential candidate, accused of embezzlement, and association with MR-8, a communist group that had strong political connections to Saddam Hussein. Kreab defended the commission with the policy that the firm does not always concur with the views of their clients. The debate is not continued.

But by the end of the 1990s, three major media scandals involving PR consultancies, all having considerable impact on the nascent market. In 1997, Kreab is involved in the first one, the Trustor scandal. The affair is called one of the greatest corporate lootings in Sweden’s history, in which Swedish finance men together with the British Lord Moyne emptied the company Trustor of several hundred million crowns. Kreab was Lord Moyne’s Swedish PR firm, and a Kreab consultant was caught trying to prevent articles on the scandal from being published in newspapers. This act made journalists question the ethical standards of Kreab, but also PR firms on the whole. Kreab later said that they were fooled by Lord Moyne, and they made a mistake by not checking his credentials before taking him on as a client.

Another media scandal in 1997 was a series of articles appearing in *Dagens Nyheter*, Sweden’s largest newspaper (*Dagens Nyheter*, Mar 26 – Apr 1, 1997). The articles covered a campaign that JKL had run for the Swedish Railway, SJ. This campaign aimed at stopping a new political decision to lower taxes on company cars, a decision that would disfavor the railway, which potentially would lose customers. In favor of the decision were the two Swedish domestic car producers, Volvo and Saab. JKL helped SJ to map the opinion landscape, to identify parliamentarians, and partner organizations, and decision processes where impact could be made. In the end, the campaign was framed as an environmental issue, fronted by two environmental NGOs, The Natural Step and the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (NSF). The articles provoked debate, as state-owned companies are prohibited by law from working with public opinion formation and lobbying. But also the hidden nature of JKL’s
work methods was a scoop in itself, unfamiliar to both the general public and mass media. When interviewed for this study, one of the authoring journalists\textsuperscript{46} says:

Back then this was completely unknown; to the very extent that I got to I travel around and spoke about these things to other journalists. The insight did not exist, lobbyists did not exist, [they did not know] that journalists could be systematically manipulated, that media storms were orchestrated through agents who worked several arenas simultaneously, in multi-stage rocket campaigns. As JKL did on the issue of company car taxation; SJ wasn’t visible, but it was the NSF that was visible, a management professor, some MPs, and The Natural Step. All had their personal interest in the issue, but had been identified, in touch with or got information from JKL.

\begin{flushright}
(Interview, Ingrid Carlberg)
\end{flushright}

A third scandal involved the government itself, and would have repercussions for a long time. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs had in 1999 contracted the upcoming PR consultancy Rikta to coordinate a weeklong cultural manifestation called the “South Africa Project,” an enormous project involving cultural exchange and exhibition in the various fields of sports, civil society, local government, corporations, unions, academia and arts. More than 600 Swedes were flown to South Africa, among them several government members. However, the project turned out a huge disappointment. When several of Sweden’s greatest artists joined together in a concert that was visited by only three paying audience members in an arena with a capacity of 30 000 spectators, this caused negative press in practically all Swedish news outlets. The producers, formally Rikta, had missed the local derby football game in the same neighborhood on the same day, which attracted a total of 80 000 spectators. This drawback was followed by others, like the Prime Minister introducing an Ambassador that had not yet presented her credentials to the President of South Africa. Swedish media published extensively on the story. The government blamed Rikta for the failures, and refused to pay the final bills, after which Rikta went bankrupt.\textsuperscript{47}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{46} The same person that wrote the 1989 report within the State Commission on Power.
\textsuperscript{47} When the whole project was later revealed to have had strong connections to the Swedish military industry which was simultaneously preparing for the largest arms deal in modern history, worth more than EUR 1.75 billion and promises of Swedish investments of more than EUR 8 billion, to the South African Government, the picture was rendered even more complex. A parliamentary investigation unveiled an intricate affair where partly state-owned company Saab had been involved, and the whole South Africa
\end{footnotesize}
But even though the press was critical and the story fit the media logic perfectly – the powerful government contrasted with poor Johannesburg citizens, innocent artists tricked by “villainous” PR consultants – the story this was not unequivocally negative for the PR consultancy industry. A journalist describes it as a crucial event for bringing the industry together:

This [Rikta] scandal was very important. For PR became a concern of international politics. [...] It was an eye-opener. Suddenly TV would do half hour programs about the mere existence of PR consultants! Some journalists knew about it already before that, but quite a few didn’t! It created awareness about the PR industry, outside the PR industry. Then there was the fact that this Rikta firm was a large Swedish PR consultancy that was crushed during dramatic circumstances. And out of that many new creative teams were shaped.

(Interview, trade journalist)

Another indicator of the event as supporting a nascent collective identity is how at PRECIS’ yearly gala dinner in November 1999, Rikta’s founder stood up and apologized to the whole industry; “It is important to be able to look you in the eye and say I’m sorry” (DI, Nov 25, 1999). The attention had made an important fact clear; there was an industry identity to protect.

**Rising Level of Explanation.** My archival data also displays an overall increase in the level of explanation of what PR consultancy is and what PR consultants do. The label “PR consultant,” which during previous periods had been taken-for-granted now began to be explicated, and defined on a new level of detail. To large extent, this seems correlated to the critical articles on the scandals described above; if a writer criticizes something, this normally requires him or her to define the target of and the reasons behind, the criticism. But there are also articles reporting on the growth of the industry, of the phenomenon of “PR consultancy services” as something new, and hitherto unknown: “More and more Swedish corporations hire professional communicators and PR consultants to take care of their financial information and communication” VA writes in a special feature in 1998, and pedagogically describes the main target group (mid-size public corporations), the most popular services (annual reports) and a list of the 30 most popular PR agencies. Hands-on instructions for corporations wishing to publish financial communication project was found to be a sales campaign for Saab’s fighter Saab JAS 39 Gripen (cf. Swedish Parliament, Constitutional Committee Report 2000/01:KU2).
on the Internet are also provided. Another journalist in seems equally obliged to provide a large picture of the new phenomenon “PR consultancy” in a VA article from July 1999:

Approximately 600 people work as PR consultants in Sweden today. Overall, they earn 700 million crowns in fees, distributed among forty companies. Between 1000 and 2500 crowns per hour, is what customers fork out for the good advice. It's a motley crew of consultancies that constitutes the still quite immature PR industry. A few major consulting firms, offering a full repertoire of services – PR, IR and lobbying – dominate strongly. The ten largest take two-thirds of the market. Half of the companies are small, with fewer than 10 consultants. Over the past year, several new companies have been added and a number of established consultants have jumped from larger firms to start their own business.

(“Where good advice is expensive”, VA, Jul 5, 1999)

The first intra-industry discussions on codes of conduct in relations with journalists also appear in 1997, which also provide detailed explanations, as do the first articles on individual successful entrepreneurs.

**Label Synonyms.** The final pattern during this period is that the use of synonyms is still common. The label “PR consultant/cy” is almost always mentioned together with another noun: “professional communicators and PR consultants” or “financial information and communication” without further distinction. Synonyms such as “financial advertising,” “text advertising” and “information” are still recurrent in the media material. The same firms are also called different things in different articles. In 1998, JKL is awarded the title “Best PR Agency of the Year,” but in the articles on the Swedish Railway case, the firm’s representatives are consecutively referred to as “lobbyists” or “information consultants.” Yet other articles speak of ‘perception management,’ and several PR agencies want to be called “management consultants.”

In the Swedish parliament, five member bills were written by the same MP on the topic of regulation of lobbying during the Expansion period, but none of them use the label “PR consultant” (see Appendix 1). They refer to “lobbying firms”, “entrepreneurs who manipulate on a consultancy basis” or “influence consultants”. That it is the same set of companies that is referred to is beyond doubt, as the texts mention PRECIS, and takes the Swedish Railways case as an illustration of this new tendency called “marketing of opinions” that needs regulation;

The marketing of opinions has been increasingly professionalized over the years to become a highly skilled and specialized industry. The Big
Lobbying Day and the election of Lobbyist of the Year are exponents of this. [...] Gradually also a rich flora of lobbying firms have emerged who on consultancy basis undertakes ‘planting’ their clients’ opinions with media and politicians – often first among the former in order to then exert a pressure on policy makers.

(Member Bill 1998/99:K207)

From the consultants’ perspective, “lobbying” and “lobbyist” seem to be even worse labels to be ascribed than “PR consultant.” In fact “PR” was also starting to be taken up by the younger generation of agencies. One informant who founded his agency in 1998 says that adopting the “PR” suffix in the firm name was a way to surrender to the external labeling of media and other critics, but also try to influence the content of it in order to create a competitive edge versus the more established “first generation” firms:

We even called ourselves PR, included it in our firm name. Back nobody wanted to call themselves that. It was like something the cat had dragged in. But then we thought if we can’t do anything about it then we might as well go all in. We wanted [PR] to signal something new: more “digging in,” more rolled up sleeves, more creativity. At that time we were still called lobbyists.

(Interview, CEO-founder)

In other words, during this period there were struggles both around labels, but also about connotations, and there was still not full convergence around the labeling of PR consultancy services by the end of the expansion stage.

Summary/Expansion (1993-2000)

During this expansion phase, many things happened affecting market developments. Events on the political arena, such as right-wing government rule and the campaign for EU membership, proved important. Such events set the conditions for the industry in several ways: by creating corporate demand for new types of services but also by providing the market with human resources in the form of young entrepreneurs with a (conservative) political background. By the end of the period, technological developments in the form of a mushrooming IT sector also contributed to favorable business conditions, and brought with it international practices. The market grew rapidly, both in size and in types of offerings.
During this expansion phase, the PR market continued to exhibit signs of classic institutionalization, a development initiated during the previous period; processes of professionalization and ethical norm development continued, industry organization intensified, and there was a maintained effort on the part of PR consultancy entrepreneurs to differentiate their services from other fields. The label “PR consultancy” was picked up by business media, who start using it much more frequently than before. A few consultants also started using it.

But growth also had other consequences. One such consequence is how it attracted media attention to both PR consultancies and their clients, in the form of more reporting but also more contestation. The increase in criticism also makes descriptions of the services more detailed. The label “PR consultancy,” which during the first two periods was a narrow category, taken-for-granted by the business press, now started to expand both in denotation (number of services included) and connotation (associations of label). Still, despite the increased ubiquity of the “PR Consultancy” label the use of synonyms was still frequent throughout this period, both in mass media material, parliamentary motions and interviews. Connotations were in flux; meanings of industry growth were not yet stabilized.

Consolidation and New growth (2001–): Mixed Messages

With the attacks on World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001, the dot.com bubble finally burst. Billions of crowns in investments disappeared overnight, along with a number of companies with high goodwill values on their balance sheets. There is a mass exodus of IT companies from the Stockholm Stock Exchange.

This had immediate consequences for the PR consultancy industry and its employees in terms of stagnation; revenues stopped growing, and people were laid off. Between 2001 and 2002, total industry revenue stalled for the first time since industry statistics began in 1992. Several firms disappeared and for the first time, international players come into the picture, many agencies entered international advertising and PR networks in the first few years after.

This drastic turn is highly visible in the business media material. Interestingly enough, the financial crisis did not lessen industry coverage; the total number of articles shows only an insignificant decrease. What changes is the content, a trend displayed in a number of ways. A first content change concerns a shift towards industry reporting. Even though reporting on individual firms became routinized during this period and started to follow a standardized template – reporting on firm results, recruitments etc. – this type of articles remains stably low over the time
span. By contrast, reporting on industry-related issues mentioning three firm names or more, i.e. articles on industry’s financial situation, industry recession mergers and acquisitions, increases disproportionately. In these articles, “PR consultancy” is mentioned as an independent concept, distinct from e.g. advertising. The tone is one of habitual reporting, reflected by a quite stable taken-for-grantedness. The air of newness is gone, and market roles seem to have been set. In other words: much in the same vein as the Rikta scandal earlier, the financial crisis seems to entrench, rather than dissolve, the new market space of PR consultancy.

A second content shift is how, as the air of “newness” subsides, boundary issues are becoming more conspicuous in the data. This nascent boundary awareness is manifested in internal industry debates, where consultants start to discuss their own conduct versus politicians, and journalists, on the pages of DI and VA, but also in journalists’ own accounts.

The first article where a journalist openly reflects on the mass media’s relations to PR consultants appears in November 2001. In a satirical column, an editor of business daily DI lists the number of challenges that his younger colleagues face when they start out as business reporters. The text is full of business reporting lingo and internal jokes when listing the young reporters’ compulsory toils, such as “Your First Commodity Market Job” or “Your First Call to the Stock Exchange’s Rate Monitor.” The last two among the challenges concern PR consultants, and the tone is quite scornful:

-Your first piece of "news" from a PR consultant. Your old friend from college calls you and says he has a good story about ‘a new company that would interest DI readers”.

-Your first castigation48 of a PR consultant. Your buddy calls the following week with the next new company. You hang up before he gets to say the word "exclusive".


In similar an editorial column, another journalist makes fun of “PR niceness.”;

Previously, there were only two kinds of niceness. Niceness and non-niceness. Then came professional niceness, the dishonest (American?) niceness. Recently, the business sector has witnessed the emergence of a subcategory of the latter – PR niceness.

48 Såve. sågning.
We financial journalists have begun to encounter PR niceness in reactions from businesses and people we write about. Still, silence is the most common reaction from the business community to a critical article. The few who previously got in touch, however, did not often watch their tongue. Now, when you write an article that drags a company through the mud, you’ll hear a CEO’s voice on the phone the next day. By reflex, you move the phone a few inches from your ear, but there is no cascade. Instead, he or she opens the conversation by praising the newspaper and/or the reporter for our excellent work (“You really do your job!”). A reaction that would be really nice, if only you didn’t get the feeling that the person on the other end desperately squeezes a stress ball to avoid exploding in honest fury over the unjust aggression against his beloved company.

The question is whether the actual course of events wasn’t the following: the CEO wakes up, reads the newspaper and becomes ballistically furious. Calls his PR consultant and screams into the handset that the reporter should really be reminded that he’s alive. The PR consultant soothes the CEO, explains the less intelligent aspects of letting the reporter know he’s alive and recommends the opposite strategy. It works at first, but after Mr. Unimaginably Friendly CEO no. 22 you begin to smell a rat.


This sort of informal, bantering tone indicates that interactions between business journalists and PR consultants seem to have become regular and routinized, but also uncovers the low esteem of the profession. In other articles, journalists who had left the media for PR consultancy are scorned in editorials. These snippets of cultural jargon reveals a lot about PR consultancy practice at the time; core tasks are using contacts and “format” executive behavior.

Also, the formerly almost osmotic relationship between PR and politics is now starting to become explicated. The flow of people moving back and forth between politics is mapped by the media in a more systematic way than before. And when the PR consultant Nyamko Sabuni becomes an MP for the Liberal party in 2002, she is interviewed, and the reporter’s skeptical attitude is reflected in questions such as “as a PR consultant you have worked with lobbying, something which is controversial in politics. What is your view on this?” or “How will you act when you, as a Member of Parliament, become subjected to lobbyists?” (DI, Sep 24, 2002).

In the beginning of the Consolidation stage, most consultants still come from a right-wing political background, and PR industry still acts as a depository for a conservative political labor force. The industry press
starts making lists of ex-politicians having left the political sphere, advertising it as the “B List of Politics”.

One must not forget that PR agencies play a role for conservatives to "hibernate," to work deal with social issues [even when out of political majority]. Imagine if all had gone out of business and industry after 1994, how difficult it would be to muster resources. Now we have Resume\textsuperscript{50} that keeps track.

(Interview, Consultant affiliated to the Liberal Party)

Winning against Advertising

Sharper boundary demarcation becomes especially flagrant when, after losing the government majority in 2006, left-wing government clerks start to flow into the PR industry for the first time. When JKL recruits the former Prime Minister Göran Persson in 2007, quite a few people are surprised especially, as he just a few months earlier had exhibited adamant opposition to “lobbyists.”

Several informants take this recruitment as an example of legitimization, a proof that PR attracts much more skilled people compared to other industries, especially advertising. “If you’re Göran Persson, you won’t exactly choose an advertising agency,” one journalists says. Göran Persson’s new employer, Anders Lindberg at JKL, confirms this juridictional “victory” over advertising: “We no longer need to explain what we do. We have gained power from the advertising agencies. No executives today would say that he has taken the help of an ad man for the strategy.” For the first time, advertising people are hired by PR agencies, especially by a third generation of PR consultancies oriented towards Product PR, lifestyle and fashion. These firms often have a different background than a political one. Jung PR for example started as an underground DJ collective around the turn of the millennium. These new firms never had any problems labeling themselves “PR consultants,” since they “communicated with consumers through direct unpaid channels” but had some trouble identifying themselves with the rest of the industry:

PR then equaled lobbying, but that’s not where we were coming from. We come from a completely opposite place, one can say. Many brands that we worked are brands that are part of a popular culture.

(Interview, founder Jung)

\textsuperscript{50} Weekly magazine covering PR and advertising industries.
Over the years, this third generation of firms has integrated into the industry, and become members of PRECIS. The advertising industry’s business association has started up a PR branch, and some firms have dual membership. There is even talk of a hybrid category of services, *preklam* (Eng. “PR-advertising”). The hierarchical order where “advertising” was the strong category, and “PR” the challenger, seems to be long gone.

Interestingly enough, this victory over the perhaps historically most important nemesis of PR consultancy, advertising, was a quiet one, at least judging from the business media; conflicts between PR and advertising are much less visible in the media material than boundary conflicts with e.g. journalism or politics. Perhaps my data source, the business press, is the wrong place to study such struggles; debates between advertising and PR consultancies might be more observable in other arenas, such as the trade press, or in industry organization documentation. Another explanation for the seemingly easy re-drawing of boundaries between PR and advertising is the increase of total market space as provided by social media, relaxing the competition for old clients. One PR consultant-founder explains:

> For the longest time, we thought advertising agencies would succeed in taking over this share. That didn’t happen. During the first ten years I worked with this it was, after all was after all the great struggle: who will take care of the strategy? [...] Where in the food chain should you be? [...] You could say that when social media came a vacuum emerged, or, if you think in Bourdieusian terms, a new field, where customers only knew that "we must be visible" and were equally perplexed by advertising agencies and PR agencies and just wanted to hear from someone that ‘we'll take care of this for you.’ And that's a change that has enormous implications for both new media and old media. First there was the strife [between advertising and PR agencies] about who would take care of the strategy, and then came this thing that first was a fringe thing but that quickly proved to be the greatest.

*(Interview Consultant-founder)*

On the same note of legitimization, a journalist who has reported from the field since the 1980s (actually the same person who wrote the scoop on JKL in the 1990s) says that there has been an overall improvement in the reputation of PR consultancy:
They are more visible now, more proud of their profession. [...] You can even have a certain respect for certain names, you know who they are. They don’t try to hide their role as much, they say that ‘I work at the PR agency so-and-so.’ I usually ask what clients they work for. An answer to that question inspires a certain respect.

(Interview, Ingrid Carlberg)

But despite an image of increased legitimization, far from all audiences subscribe to this picture. In 2006, when a new economic upsurge began, reflected by the most rapid growth in industry income so far, there is increased overall coverage. But just like the data from the late 1990s, the economic success coincides with a sharp increase in both explanatory and critical articles (see Chapter 5 for further analysis).

The clients, when asked, say that they do not care much about labeling at all. A communications officer in a large Swedish MNC says: “We seldom talk in terms of [PR consultants] Since we have consultants whom we know by name we call them their company names, or personal names.”

The consultancies labeled PR consultants are continuously ambivalent vis-à-vis the “PR consultancy” label. Even though some use it, and accept being ranked (most rankings are made by the business press) and organized under a “PR label,” not one consultant among my informants, except those specialized in Product PR, wants to call him or herself “PR consultant.” In the last of my interviews, from the winter of 2012-2013, a CEO-founder states, in a slightly disillusioned manner, that consultancies have repeatedly lost struggles over labeling, over the decades that they have existed: “We in the industry have not managed to put a find a good name for ourselves. It’s a third party that decides, and that’s why we’re stuck with ‘PR consultant’ and ‘lobbyist.’” He adds: “It’s a bit odd really, to have such a scolded industry with such a high density of brainpower...”
Summary/ Consolidation and New Growth

As a result of the burst of the dot.com bubble, and the global economic downturn after the 9/11 attacks in New York, the market cooled down after the intense Expansion Phase. On the industry-level this was manifested by a restructuring of companies; the first international actors bought themselves into the market and many smaller agencies disappeared, or were merged with larger ones. In the media material there are several signs of legitimization; the reporting takes on a more routinized tone, and no longer treats PR consultancy as something new. Neither does the focus on the industry decrease with the recession. On the contrary, when the economic recession hits PR consultancy, the reporting on firms reporting remains stable on a low level, and articles tend to focus relatively more on the industry as a whole than on specific firms. Moreover, an inter-industry debate over methods and relations to journalism and politics is sparked off, on issues of ethics and methods – also signs of market maturity. During this phase, boundary conflicts become visible.

As the first three stages of Early Years, Market Emergence and Expansion have shown, connections between PR and political organizations and the media have been close throughout all previous periods, but during these years they are “externalized,” i.e. they become the subject of public attention and debate. Moreover, the most important boundary battle seems to have been won; PR consultancies believe that clients know the difference between them and advertising agencies.

By the end of the time span, those called PR consultants by the media and in parliament, still reject the PR consultant label. Even though dominant in business press, the label is still often used interchangeably with other synonymous concepts, and is still systematically criticized and explained, rendering the picture of progressing legitimization simultaneously one of continuous de-legitimization.
Chapter 5. Analyzing Categorization over Time

The research question in this book is the following: *How have meaning and boundary construction processes among audiences affected product categorization in the emergent market for PR consultancy services?* The chronological overview in Chapter 4 has provided a rich story of audiences, processes and external events. In order to understand the category construction, and answer my question, I have chosen to break it down into four sub-questions, for the sake of analysis:

1. *How have PR consultancy services been labeled over time?*
2. *What practical elements have PR consultancy services been claimed to contain over time?*
3. *What has PR consultancy services meant to relevant audiences over time?*
4. *What boundary conflicts have PR consultancy services activated over time?*

I will summarize the findings in Chapter 4 by sorting them into these four streams of development: labels, denotations, connotations, and boundaries. I will also add a quantitative analysis to the qualitative observations in Chapter 4.

**Development of the Label**

After World War II, the English epithet “public relations” entered the Swedish language. The label was fresh, and not established. Many of these early “PR” people were former journalists who had worked with government information during the war. The term was used interchangeably with “press agent.” With time though, “information” became the dominant label to describe in-house corporate communication function. In parallel, “PR consultant” seemed to have evolve into a category, in the sense that it had a taken-for-grantedness around what it referred to: an agent representing a person or corporation and assisting them in improving their “image.” In the early 1980s, when my media archival data begins, the term was even used metaphorically, e.g. “No PR consultant in the world dream of a campaign this good” or “this CEO
could really use a PR consultant”. This category was established, but peripheral, with narrow meaning, and the number of consultancies, as well as the number of citations, was low.

The diffusion of “PR consultancy” remained moderate throughout in the 1980s, and presumably equally popular as the two other competing labels “information consultancy” and “communication consultancy.” In the early 1990s however, “PR consultancy” starts to stand out, and since 1997, it has been dominating the other two. This domination of the PR label as a category is also reflected in the names of field organizations, prizes, and rankings.

![Figure 5.1 ‘PR,’ ‘Information’ and ‘Communication’ Labels in Business Press, 1981-2009](image)

Diffusion in itself, though, is not a sufficient criterion to infer legitimization; according to the definitions outlined in Chapter 2, a label that has been transformed into a category must also convey meaning in an efficient way. One way to measure meaning convergence is to look at the extent to which the concept is explained, in the media and elsewhere; a taken-for-granted social fact should hypothetically require little explication. The results here support the qualitative reading of the media clippings: In the 1980s no business reporters seem to see themselves obliged to explain the phenomenon of PR consultancy, i.e. describe what it is, why it exists, and what consultants do, in any detail. Then, suddenly, in the early 1990s, as the industry starts to grow, the phenomenon starts becoming explicated in the news coverage, in the very same media outlets that only years before had treated it as taken-for-granted. Large industry growth in the years of 1997 (and later 2006) are accompanied by
peaks in explanatory articles (see Figure 5.2). In fact, the number of articles per year in business media exhibit strong positive correlations with industry growth, as do levels of explanation and levels of criticism in the material throughout the period, see Table 4.1. Strong industry growth in the years of 1997 and 2006 is accompanied by peaks in explanatory articles (Figure 5.2).

Moreover, the correlation between industry revenue and explanation is significant. In other words, the taken-for-grantedness of the “PR consultancy” label seems to vary with changes in 1) the extent of reporting and 2) changes in industry revenue. By the end of the time span, in 2009, more than 20% of articles in business press mentioned “PR consultancy” and/or “PR consultants” contained explanations of what “PR consultancy” is, alternatively what “PR consultants” do in great detail (Figure 4.2), suggesting that is far from taken for granted.

![Explanatory Articles, % of total](image)

**Figure 5.2 Explanatory Articles 1981-2009**

Another way to explore the development of the label is to analyze the number of synonyms and adjacent concepts. According to the hypothesis formed from previous categorization theory in Chapter 3, the number of synonyms used in conjunction with a label should hypothetically decrease, and the label should become more distinct and independent. But with time, it is also reasonable to suppose that the label should be often mentioned in conjunction with other, distinct labels. In the case at hand,
legitimization (and to some extent professionalization) ought to be re-
lected in fewer citations in the style of “Corporation X increases their 
budget for PR, communication and event marketing” and more in the 
style of “Company A hires new PR consultancy. The new agency [X] will 
complement the Company A’s new advertising agency [Y], and also col-
laborate with its media agency [Z]”.

The data shows no such clear pattern over time; the number of articles 
mentioning synonyms and adjacent concepts fluctuate. The two variables 
have a negative but insignificant correlation. Neither do the two variables 
correlate with the other variables (Table 4.1).

What emerges from the data, however, is that the number of articles 
in which authors use synonyms in direct conjunction with “PR consul-
tancy” label is consequently higher than articles using adjacent concepts, 
and that this use peaks in years that both industry revenues and number 
of articles increase dramatically, such as 1997 and 2006. 52 This is coun-
ter-intuitive since, these are the same years that explanatory articles are 
peaking, and explanatory articles should be expected to be defining in

52 Except for a slightly significant positive correlation between synonym use and reve-
nue, and a slightly significant negative correlation between adjacent concepts and reve-
nue.
nature. But the correlation between the number of explanatory articles and share of article using synonyms is non-existent, suggesting that the overlap is not significant and that these are two different groups of articles.

Since the mid-1990s, the share of articles containing synonyms averages 38% and never falls short of 18%. In 2009, when my exploration stops, 30% of articles mentioned one synonym or more in direct conjunction with “PR consultancy,” and in only 5% of articles mentioned adjacent concepts were used as distinct from “PR consultancy,” i.e. the opposite situation of what was described in Chapter 3 as a sign of legitimation. Despite the increased frequency and use of the word, this could be an indication that, at least in the business press, “PR consultancy” does not hold a clearly demarcated jurisdiction.

Development of Denotations

The second question I asked was how the denotations have developed; how audiences have referred to the actual content of the product. My data shows that the label has inferred different content at different points in time. In the 1950s, the PR consultant was a person who was an agent, or representative for a corporation or famous individual, helping him or her in market their products in non-paid media channels. This narrow definition remained throughout the 1980s, but in a more general sense; the focus was here on image rather than on products. By the end of the 1980s, the PR label started to expand. First, in the mid-1980s it started to be mentioned in conjunction with communications services in the financial domain – drafting financial reports and arranging AGMs – and then a few years later in the early 1990s in the political domain, mentioning PR consultants facilitating corporate-political interactions, either directly via lobbying or indirectly via public opinion. Consumer PR, the sub-offering that is closest to advertising, as had been closely associated with the label in 1950s, now came back. With time, as the market grew, there was a fragmentation; the sub-offerings and tasks included in what business media referred to as “PR consultancy” became more numerous. In the graph below, media and image Services, today commonly labelled Corporate Communications, nor are the dominant base of services, which become complemented by several other types of PR.

But concluding that the size of the PR consultancy ‘parcel’ has grown as more services have been added, is not equal to saying that these are new.
Here, the qualitative data set in Chapter 4 serve as a good guiding point, showing show that these services existed before, but were not labeled as such. Some services are new, an outcome in reforms and events of financial, business and media sectors. For example, CSR reports were not drafted before the 1990s, and corporations in general did not demand media training to the same extent before 2000. Other services did exist, but as outputs of other organizational forms. Product PR is witnessed to have “won” the battle of online marketing from advertising, and assistance to help corporations navigate in the political landscape existed before, even though this was channeled through business organizations. In fact, a majority among the largest firms labeled PR consultancies have roots in party politics, and in the beginning these organizations offered services that they did not label “PR” but instead used synonyms such as text advertising, public contact, or idea advertising. Often, they did not label their work at all. This tendency is strongest with clients – in interviews, client informants tended to refer to their consultants by individual names or the firm’s name, implying that for them, the service was not a consumption good substitutable for other products but a personalized relationship.

In other words, the category was gradually constructed in a complex process where denotations of the contemporary category and “PR consultancy” label first matched into a combined category just before 1990. Figure 5.5 illustrates the gradual constructing of coupling between label and denotations. The remaining high number of synonym labels is characterized by overlapping grey boxes to the right.
Figure 5.5 Labels and Denotations on the PR Consultancy Market 1970-2010
Table 5.1 Correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Industry Revenue</th>
<th>Articles (total no.)</th>
<th>Explanatory Articles (no.)</th>
<th>Critical Articles (no.)</th>
<th>Synonyms (% of year)</th>
<th>Adjacent (% of year)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Industry Revenue</td>
<td>Pearson Corr.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.885**</td>
<td>.676*</td>
<td>.754**</td>
<td>.492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.885**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.907**</td>
<td>.863**</td>
<td>.154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articles (total no.)</td>
<td>Pearson Corr.</td>
<td>.676**</td>
<td>.907**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.839**</td>
<td>.199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanatory Articles (no.)</td>
<td>Pearson Corr.</td>
<td>.754**</td>
<td>.863**</td>
<td>.839**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.534</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Articles (no.)</td>
<td>Pearson Corr.</td>
<td>.492</td>
<td>.154</td>
<td>.199</td>
<td>.120</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>.426</td>
<td>.300</td>
<td>.534</td>
<td>.697</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synonyms (% of year)</td>
<td>Pearson Corr.</td>
<td>-.485</td>
<td>-.219</td>
<td>-.166</td>
<td>-.229</td>
<td>-.075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td>.253</td>
<td>.389</td>
<td>.232</td>
<td>.697</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
Development of Connotations

The analysis above suggests there is evidence that the “PR” label has diffused more widely and faster than other alternative labels, and that the category has gradually grown to incorporate both new elements and elements from other categories. But little has been said about what people have thought of the market category over time, how various audiences have valued the category.

The clients seem to have the least complicated relationship to the category; as mentioned above, they often did not care about the labeling, but focused more on the consultant, team or possibly firm assisting them. Field organizers also quite unanimously adopted the PR label. The two industry organizations in the field also quickly adopted the PR prefix in their names, and ethical codes.

The two audiences that seemed to have the most complicated relation to the category are journalists and consultants themselves. There is also much variation, both within the audiences and over time. Some consultants, often with roots in politics express strong negative views about the concepts. “We hate that concept.” was one of the first market actors says about the label, a statement declaring that the connotations are bad, and disparaging: “We never wanted to call ourselves that.” The PR Consultancy label was still at the end of the 1990s something that “the cat had dragged in”. This group of consultancies prefers to identify with management consultants or the broader “communication consultants”. Few of consultant informants would call him- or herself a “PR consultant”. A minority considered the term neutral, and used it for their own purposes. Especially consultants within the sub-offering of Product PR seemed to have a relaxed attitude towards the label.

The business media’s relationship to the PR industry is highly ambivalent. During the Early Years, the label is used by media, in a taken-for-granted-manner but on a small scale; the media do not play a large role. As the market grows, however, business reporters start scrutinizing it, and explaining it. This trend does not subside; in the last period of Consolidation and New Growth, business media again reports on the PR industry in a routine manner, reminiscent of the taken-for-granted attitude in the 1980s. Still, on a regular basis there are “scoops” of “hidden” consultancy methods, and reports on continued growth. Still in 2012, a VA headline read: “the number of PR consultants and communicators has exploded. The industry grew by 8.9% last year and had a revenue of 2.46 billion crowns” (VA, Nov 1, 2012, p. 34). The interviewed journalists also differed in their accounts. In interviews journalists admit that the PR consultant has earned more respect over time. In the early days, by the
end of the 1990s, the tone is scornful, and there are “scoops” “unveiling facts” about PR consultants’ doings. By the end of the time span journalist respondents admit that consultants are becoming more professional. Still by the end of the time span more than 20% of articles were critical, and the label is used in a pejorative way, as the higher share of reflexivity of media representatives, see Figure 5.6.

According to extant theory, critical statements in the media should reasonably subside as the category institutionalizes, or the category would disappear. This, however, is not the case in the case of PR consultancy; Instead of a linear decrease, the number of critical articles shows an almost a cyclical pattern; there is a significant correlation with the number of explanatory articles and also with rapid changes in industry revenue. Again, this supports the emerging hypothesis that as a market grows rapidly, it attracts attention and starts to be “explained.” But it adds information on the type of attention; the attention in this case is mostly negative. The signs of legitimization are hence tainted by a negative effect; as the category grows, it receives criticism. Without making strong assumptions about causality, the following conclusions can be proposed: on the Swedish market for PR consultancy, growth in industry revenue has been very closely related to the amount of mass media coverage. Moreover revenue growth has been systematically paralleled by an upsurge in explanatory articles, of which a majority – but not all – have been critical in attitude towards the concept. Revenue growth and taken-for-grantedness of the label (the inversion of explanatory articles) hence seem to be negatively correlated.

Figure 5.6 Critical Articles in Business Press 1981-2009
Development of Category Boundaries

In extant theory, clear category boundaries are theorized as a prerequisite for meaning construction; if we as social actors do not know where a social object ends, we cannot define its meaning. Over the four periods in my qualitative dataset, the traditional advertising industry seems to be the main “significant other”; the category from which PR consultancy strives to be distinguished. The conflict seems to be unidirectional, as representatives of the category of traditional advertising do not comment on PR emergence. The fact that the organizational ties are so indisputably close with the political field, but boundary conflicts are not overtly discussed in the media until the last period (New Growth), is another interesting phenomenon.

As the market consolidates (2001–), boundary conflicts with journalism also become more open; reflective pieces appear in which editorials discuss the methods and interactions with journalists. Judgments are harsh on colleagues that leave to become PR consultants; these are considered “sell-outs.” Not until the last period does the relationship mature somewhat, allegedly as a result of increased transparency on the part of the industry, and better knowledge about PR consultants among journalists.
## Table 5.2 Summary of Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Labels?</strong></td>
<td>PR consultancy</td>
<td>Corporate advertising</td>
<td>Lobbyism</td>
<td>Lobbyism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Text advertising</td>
<td>Business information Communication consultancy</td>
<td>Communication consultancy</td>
<td>Communication consultancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Institutional advertising</td>
<td>Information consultancy</td>
<td>Information consultancy</td>
<td>“Communication department store”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Product PR</td>
<td>Information consultancy</td>
<td>Financial Communication</td>
<td>Media consultancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Idea advertising</td>
<td>Public Contact</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Denotation of ‘PR consultancy’?</strong></td>
<td>Product PR (1950s)</td>
<td>Corporate Communications</td>
<td>Corporate Communications</td>
<td>Corporate Communications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corporate Communications</td>
<td></td>
<td>Investor Relations</td>
<td>Investor Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Political Affairs</td>
<td>Political Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Product PR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Connotation of PR consultancy?</strong></td>
<td>“Type of advertising”</td>
<td>“Type of advertising”</td>
<td>“A new industry”</td>
<td>“New profession”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low status</td>
<td>Low status</td>
<td>Questionable status</td>
<td>“Part of the ‘marketing mix’”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Improved, but questionable status</td>
<td>“Improved, but questionable status”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Boundary struggles</strong></td>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>Journalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Journalism (50-69s)</td>
<td>In-house “information officers”</td>
<td>Journalism</td>
<td>Politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In-house “PR men” (50-60s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Taken-for-grantedness</strong></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Low in 50s-60s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Audiences</strong></td>
<td>&lt;5 consultancies</td>
<td>Business organizations (incl. SAF)</td>
<td>25-45 consultancies</td>
<td>&gt;70 consultancies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SAF</td>
<td>12-15 consultancies</td>
<td>Mass media</td>
<td>Mass media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SPRA</td>
<td>SPRA</td>
<td>PRECIS</td>
<td>PRECIS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In-house PR officials</td>
<td>PRECIS</td>
<td>IT sector</td>
<td>Advertising</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Contributions to Market Categorization Theory

In the beginning of this book, I outlined a theoretical framework that operationalized market emergence in terms of product categorization. This was also an ontological position, stipulating that markets come into being as categories in them are shaped as semantic objects, well-known labels with taken-for-granted denotations and connotations. If fully legitimized, a market category should enjoy both cognitive legitimacy, by being well known, but also socio-political legitimacy, being regarded as right and valuable. With increasing legitimization, a new product category will require less explanation with relevant audiences (Navis and Glynn, 2010) and “render both synonym and metaphor dead” (Powell and Colyvas, 2008, p. 294). Meaning and boundaries will become taken for granted. As my object of analysis, I chose the product category of “PR consultancy services.”

Indisputably, a product category has come into being. The category exhibits signs of legitimization: the ubiquity of the “PR consultancy” label, an increasing number of prizes and rankings, and market organization in the form of industry organizations and self-regulation. But chronological analysis also reveals that many characteristics of category legitimization are still missing by the end of the time span. There is still a dispute concerning labels, and denotations, resulting in multiple connotations. In Aldrich and Fiol’s terminology, the market categorization could be described as a process characterized only by cognitive legitimization, but where complete socio-political legitimization has not occurred; PR consultancy is known, but not necessarily regarded as or good desirable. Even more puzzling is that industry growth and survival does not seem to be unequivocally negatively affected by the lack of legitimacy, a decoupling that extant categorization theory deems highly implausible over a longer time (Zuckerman, 1999, Hsu, 2006, Hsu et al., 2009, Kovács and Hannan, 2010).

For in the case I am studying, label convergence does not equal label unanimity. The dominance of the “PR consultancy” label over other competing labels seems to be exactly a case of domination: a stabilized long-term equilibrium in an on-going power struggle, rather than an institutionalized category, embedded in deeper meaning structures. In this power struggle, PR consultancies themselves do not have the primary right of interpretation. Labels launched by the mass media and other critics seem to trump those labels launched by the consultancies themselves. If they had the right to choose, many of them would use other labels, with more positive connotations. The result of the power struggle is lingering category fuzziness, partly constructed by consultants them-
selves who show evidence of **category resistance**, i.e. the act of repeatedly refusing a categorization attempts ascribed by another audience, causing incomplete categorization. The question arising then is why this power struggle is so prominent in the market? There are at least two plausible explanations for this lingering occurrence of category resistance, following the literature review in Chapter 2.

A first explanation holds that the market itself, as well as the categories associated with it, is controversial or contested, that it is **stigmatized**. A stigmatized label, according to Devers et al. (2009) is a label that “evokes a collective perception that an organization possesses a fundamental, deep-seated flaw that de-individuates and discredits the organization” (p.157). Devers et al. see stigmatization as the result of a labeling and attribution process that links a particular organization to a category negatively evaluated by one or several audiences as having values that are expressly counter to their own. Empirical studies have shown how such illegitimacy spreads easily within categories, as members are expected to share the same attributes (cf. Jonsson et al., 2009), and such illegitimacy can be “sticky.” Zelizer (1983, 1994) and Kealy (2004, 2006) demonstrate how markets for controversial product categories, such as life insurance, prostitution, human organs, and human blood are more difficult to commodify, as they have commonly been associated with connotations that hinder them from taking on commercial value.

In the dataset, there are several signs of PR consultancy suffering from stigma. In practically all geographical and cultural contexts in which it has occurred, the product category has been accused of being immoral, clandestine, and capitalistic, and sometimes even threatening democracy (Dinan and Miller, 2007, Ewen, 1996, L'Etang, 2004, Habermas, 1991, Davis, 2002). My empirical inquiry shows similar results; the behind-the-scenes component of the services, and the interdependence between the mass media and PR consultancy constitutes a breeding ground for such claims, and lingering illegitimacy.

If PR consultancy were to be considered (at least partly) a stigmatized product category, this would have explanatory power pertaining to the fuzziness of the category. For as Vergne (2011) argues in his study of the defense industry: in stigmatized industries, straddling several market categories is not necessarily negative, as such straddling dilutes negative connotations attached to the stigma, and diverts attention away from it. Consultants’ active distancing from the “PR consultancy” label also finds support in Granqvist et al. (2012), who write that executives “actively engage in disassociation in order to avoid inclusion in unwanted categories” (Granqvist et al., 2012, p. 14).

A second, but not incompatible, explanation concerns audience differentiation. Pontikes (2012) argues that audiences view category ambiguity differently. Audiences with little potential influence over categoriza-
tion, “market takers,” are in greater need of distinct categories while more active audiences, or “market makers,” such as venture capitalists, prefer ambiguous categories since this allows them to be active in shaping the category themselves. This is especially so in nascent, rapidly changing or “ambiguous” contexts like the software industry or the nanotech industry. Durand and Paolella (2012) further strengthen the role of audience differentiation as they propose that “audience members’ cognitive attention is driven by specific intentions” according to their own goals; i.e. categories are goal-based.

One way to interpret this goal-based view of market categorization is to see categories as political entities. Such a perspective shows obvious kinship with the Bourdieusian view of categorization as a process of symbolic coercion, in that it includes the power to identify, name and to state what is what and who is who. According to Bourdieu, the power to classify and distinguish, i.e. to determine the dominant characteristics of each category, is the most powerful force in constructing and reconstructing social orders (Bourdieu, 1984, Brubaker and Cooper, 2000). Symbolic power, therefore, is fundamentally the ability to impose categories of thought on others. As such, there is an imminent tension between categorization on the one hand – as an exertion of symbolic power – and legitimization, dependent on consensus across audiences, on the other – which must be resolved in order for fully legitimate, institutionalized categories to emerge. In the case of PR consultancy, label fuzziness becomes a logical consequence of audiences having different but opposing goals with categories (organizers, consultants, politicians, clients etc.) In this interpretation, by refusing to categorize the consultants in the way these wish (as communication consultants, or management consultants within communication etc.), and instead labeling them “PR consultants,” the mass media exercise symbolic power, and also contribute to the de-legitimization of the category. The occurrence of a stigma could strengthen such tension; as it provides further motives for audiences to de-legitimize labels that are not preferred.

Another possible, less politicized, reading of the goal-based view to my case is that categorization simply matters less to market-takers in professional service markets. As mentioned in Chapter 2, most studies of market categorization have focused on markets for consumer goods. In such markets, category clarity should reasonably expect to be of the utmost importance, and the valuation of judgment of critics or analysts crucial to consumption decisions. However, in professional service markets, where both producers and consumers are market-makers, and marketing is conducted largely indirect in form of recommendations and hearsay, one could expect different legitimacy effects. Intermediary evaluations in e.g. the mass media may matter in regard to what is written about a particular person or firm, rather than the product category to
which the services of that particular agency or consultants is attributed. This could explain why buyers of PR consultancy in my data are the audience that seems to care the least about product categorization; they evaluate possible commercial offerings ex-ante partly according to other criteria, related more e.g. to personal networks (Alvesson, 2001). Another fact strengthening this hypothesis is that consultants do not launch an unambiguous alternative to the PR consultancy label. In fact they mention many alternatives (communication consultancy, management consultancy within communication etc.). To them, it seems, the ultimate concern of labelling is not agreement on a universal label, but to evade undesirable ones.

This difference in audience salience could also explain the seeming paradox of economic growth and lack category clarity. The example of Scania’s relationship with its PR agency in Chapter 4 provides a nice illustration of these points. The consultancy worked simultaneously on EU lobbying and financial communication tasks related to an IPO, both practical and highly strategic. The projects fed into each other and, in turn, created new PR ventures such as the “Best Truck Driver” competition. In that case, it was more important what firm, and perhaps also what individuals Scania used. The level of legitimacy of the industry as a whole was subordinate to the relationship between client and consultancy in justifying the purchasing the service.

If this is true, the tolerated fuzziness around professional service categories should be greater and individual firms’ reputation more important than the industry’s. Moreover, meaning variance within professional service categories such as “management consultancy,” “executive coaching” or “HR consultancy,” could be expected to be wider than markets for consumer goods such as mini-vans, wine or beer, without particular firms in that category suffering financial consequences.

Concluding Remarks/Chapter 5

Analyzing chronological data on market category emergence has helped me understand this emergence, and how interactions between audiences have shaped meanings and boundaries over time. I have also found three potentially viable explanations as to why category legitimizing was impeded: the stigmatization of the category, a political power struggle explanation in which audiences struggle with each other based on different goals, and a third explanation, suggesting that clients are market makers in professional service markets, and purchases hence less dependent on mass media evaluation. However, none of these explanations provide a full explanation as to how these situations have come about, by what mechanisms. They all point in the same direction, however: namely to the product “PR consultancy” itself. Is the product itself an object of stigmatization? Or is there something else in the way that the product is constructed that
makes it difficult to categorize? In the following two empirical chapters, I will explore what is sold by Swedish consultants, in real time.
EMPIRICAL PART II

Category Construction in Practice
Part II. Category Construction in Practice – Opening Up the Parcel

“As an advisor you sell talk. You do valuations, presentations, you develop thoughts.” (Consultant)

“[They] constantly become better in providing malnourished editorial boards, primarily within the press, with suitable half-chewed material. Good for the [them], and for their clients, who get access to channels bringing out their messages to large target groups.” (Industry journalist, Editorial blog)

“Everything. They do everything that we don’t give to other consultants or don’t have time to do ourselves, basically. I used to be one myself and was quite disillusioned by the lack of actual content.” (Senior press officer, Paper Pulp Company)

“You pay a lot for their network. And just for the fact that they can throw in many consultants if something happens. Crisis consulting and things like that. It’s not that they know so goddamn much! They mostly sit in a corner humming. But management feels reassured when they have the best on it. [...] It is a lot about making management feel safe.” (Communications Officer, Manufacturing Company)

“[PR consultants] are advisors to companies and organizations that want to influence policy decisions in secret” (MP, Green Party, Member Bill 2005/06:K338)

“PR consultants? They do advertising…, they engage in… uh… advertising activities maybe?… No, I don’t know exactly, sorry.” (Random person stopped at Stockholm Railway Station, January 21, 14.09, 2009)

In the introduction of this book, I defined the ontological object under scrutiny as the product category “PR consultancy,” conceptualized as a parcel. I asked a straightforward question; Why and how has PR consultancy been constructed as a product category? The chronological analysis of longitudinal category construction in Part I added some crucial pieces to this puzzle; a series of actors, events and interests contributed to forming a category called PR consultancy, invoking certain associations and encompassing certain offers called Product PR Corporate Communications, Investor Relations and Public Affairs.
But these offers are also parcels, sub-labels with their own connotations and denotations; they, too, are cultural constructs. In fact, the cases cited in Chapter 4 show that boundaries between the four business areas are not so easily distinguishable. Scania’s account with Kreab involved both political contacts and drafting of financial reports. Furthermore, the sub-labels do not seem well known outside the industry itself. But the analysis over longitudinal category construction in Chapter 5 raised new questions whether something in the products’ denotations causes the fuzzy and sometimes politicized use of categories, visible in the market?

One way to address these new questions would be to ask people what consultants actually do. But as the interview quotes above testify, views on the content, aims, and merits of PR consultancy services diverge widely across audiences. Like a kaleidoscope, they give but scattered pieces of information on the actual content of services or what drives demand. Conducting my interviews I found that asking did not necessarily increase my understanding of what type of services “PR consultancy” denoted.

In this second empirical part of the book, I therefore turn my attention to how PR consultancy products are constructed in practice; I will open up the parcel of PR consultancy to see what is in there, what the “PR consultancy” label denotes. This shift is a shift in tense, from past to present, as products are constructed in real time. But it also a shift in scope. Whereas I in Part I was painting an overview in broad strokes, drawing from many data sources, investigating audience interaction on the market level, the readers will find the coming two chapters more narrowly focused on the empirical situations from which they are drawn. As the thesis proceeds, I hence draw closer to the product both in time and in physical terms.

I have argued that categorization and commodification are intrinsically linked. In Chapter 6, I will analyze texts authored by consultants to see how language is used to construct their activities as commercial products. In Chapter 7, I contrast these insights with two cases of PR consultancy services in which I observe two client-consultancy interactions, one from a market-PR setting and one from the political lobbying week in Almedalen. I climb inside organizations and professional roles as I observe and shadow sellers and buyers of the product PR consultancy.
In Chapter 2, I argued that the cultural processes of commodification and categorization were closely interlinked. Clear categories are normally seen as a prerequisite to commodification, i.e. the insertion of a thing into the sphere of exchangeable things. As things are grouped and categorized as commodities, they become neutralized in value, comparable to and exchangeable for other product in a profane world of markets (cf. Durkheim, 1976 [1915], Durkheim and Mauss, 1967 [1903]). I also stated that these two processes are largely carried out on a semantic plane. By exploring how language is managed to make links between symbols and contents, it is possible to trace processes of categorization, and hence commodification.

In this chapter, therefore, I will focus on how one specific audience to the label, namely PR consultants themselves, contribute and linguistically frame their product commercially. Adapted to this specific aim, my overarching research question on audiences’ influence on product categorization could be re-written as *How do PR consultants use language to frame their activities as commercial products?*

My main data consists of a text series called “Perspectives”53 distributed on a bi-weekly basis to a mailing list by Principal PR, one of Sweden’s largest agencies. The firm is a “full service agency,” offering services in branding, consumer marketing, crisis communications, and public affairs with its headquarters in Stockholm. This text series is a mix between a newsletter and a memo, borrowing its format from a newspaper column. Sent out on a bi-weekly basis, as an e-mail, the newsletter had approximately 15 000 subscribers in the winter of 2012-2013, whom mainly been added after being in touch with consultants at Principal PR or its subsidiary polling institute Common Cause. The list contains politicians, journalists, students, and all clients of Principal PR. To Principal, the publication of the series serves multiple aims; communicating the firm’s creativity to clients and possible clients, but also internal goals, e.g. improving incentives for junior consultants’ writing skills, and providing a nice packaging to other, more regular corporate messages from Principal (interview, Principal CEO).

53 Siv. Spaningar.
Texts are short (ca.1-4 pages) and are normally quite well-formulated, witty reflections on a popular trend or phenomenon. The format is not unique; other Swedish PR agencies also distribute chronicle-type reflections to external audiences, some only to clients but others to a wider readership. However, Perspectives is the text series that has existed for the longest time consecutively and is therefore most readily analyzable over time. A total of 70 newsletters, written 2007–2012, were analyzed.

In discourse analysis, as introduced in Chapter 3, the focus is both on what is said – themes, words, phrases, in the analyzed texts, and how it is said – the structure of the text and metaphors used. But equally important is what is not said or referred to, and the combinations of various discourses. The outline follows Hernadi’s hermeneutic triad (Hernadi, 1987); the aim is not only to explicate and describe the material, but also to explain it, its context and its rationales, and also to curiously and scientifically explore the material; to deconstruct it and come up with possible theories for why it the texts look the way they do. The presentation of my findings follows a three-step process: 1) organizing the material according to typologies, 2) analyzing the structure of the material and 3) analyzing discourses in-depth – identifying the vocabularies and metaphors used throughout the focal material. After this, I discuss the findings in a summarizing discussion.

Step 1: Identifying Typologies

In a first step, all 70 texts were organized according to type of text, type of PR mentioned, national language, author and word frequency. Five sub-categories were identified; Trend analysis (38%), Guidelines (29%), Political Analysis (17%), Survey Reporting (8%) and Travelogue (%). Trend Analyses dealt mainly with a new media or societal phenomenon, a typical title being “A new pro-American wave” or “The millionth .se domain soon to be registered.” The second category, Guidelines, also typically dealt with popular phenomena, but with a strong emphasis on hands-on advice to corporate clients on how to manage a specific problem. Titles were in the imperative: “The Football manifesto – arrange games you win and stop being commercial!” or “Clean up you press department for Christmas – 12 simple pieces of advice”. Political analyses were real-time reports of events in the –predominantly Swedish or American – political arenas. One text analyzing Barack Obama’s presidential campaign was called “Swedish parties must dare to let go.” Another title in this category is the rather opportunistic “Do you want to be able to explain the results on election night?”, a text expanding on various possible outcomes of the Swedish parliamentary elections, providing the reader with a ready-to-go explanation in case the conservatives win –
or the social democrats. Survey reports shared results from consumer surveys and opinion polls, most often conducted by Common Cause. Travelogues were travel journals sent home from places visited by Principal consultants.

Table 6.1. Type of Text in the “Perspectives” series

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trend Analysis</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Analysis</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey Reports</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travelogue</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Moreover, the type of public relations expertise alluded to in each text was coded for, as well as who had authored them, in-house consultants or guest writers. New media was the most popular issue, followed by consumption patterns, general corporate media strategy and political campaigning. Only a minority of texts (12%) were authored by guest writers, such as marketing masters students or foreign PR “gurus”; the rest were authored by employed consultants/partners either Principal PR or Common Cause. Eight out of ten texts were written in Swedish, the remainder in English.

Table 6.2 Type of PR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of PR</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Media</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumption patterns</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Media Strategy</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Campaigning Methods</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis communication</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the word frequency count, the most common words are the name of the two firms themselves, and references to Stockholm and to the US, with ubiquitous reference to the Internet and new media. The word “company” was the most frequent non-proper noun, placing the texts well within two discourses.
However, word frequency counts often give an indication, but do not fill in the lines between the dots. Is “public” a bad word to consultants, or good? Is Obama hailed or criticized? Is there something in the consultancies’ use of language that is omitted? In order to get closer to the question above, not only frequencies must be analyzed but also modes: how language is used, and how texts are structured.

Step 2: Narrative Structure – a Standard Story Emerges

Beyond doubt, the Principal Perspectives are borrowing the format of a journalistic column, a witty elaboration on a popular topic or trend. But it is also clear that a Perspectives text serves a commercial function. It is openly directed to communication managers, as clients or possible clients. In this respect they are corporate sales materials for Principal. But they are not as bland as corporate sales materials; there are no “on the other hands”; the Perspectives texts are direct, and not seldom both provocative and poignant.

From a primary reading of all texts, an archetypical narrative emerged, a Standard Story, constructed of a number of distinct “building blocks”; 1) Preamble, briefly summarizing main points. In element 2) What used to be, today’s or yesterday’s practice is contrasted with 3) What is now. Together these form a “major change narrative,” from which a 4) Corporate Dilemma is deduced, a problem which is emphasized by 5) Exemplification with good and/or bad cases. This is followed by a discussion, in which a 6) Theory of how to tackle the problem is developed. In a typical case, this theory is then translated into practical, hands-on 7) Guidelines for corporate readers. All memos end with a 8) Byline, with photo, name and work description of the authoring consultant(s), and contact details.

Since this is an archetypal structure, few texts follow exactly this order structurally. The length and emphasis may vary. Guidelines may be stated explicitly in a list or bullet points, but may also be integrated into the prose of the text. However, most texts contain most elements (a more extensive sampling of coded quotes is found in the Appendix 2). In or-
In order to create an understanding for the material, I will guide the reader through a close-to-archetypal text, “The Best Communication Comes Gift Wrapped” (Dec 1, 2011). In the center column is the slightly abridged original text, and comments to the rights. Italics are added:

Table 6.4 Archetypical Narrative Structure: The Standard Story

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story Element</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Preamble</td>
<td><strong>2011 has been a bad year for bad boys. Berlusconi between jobs, Mu-</strong></td>
<td>Short general abstract, loosely linking to world politics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>barak out of office and Gaddafi no more. Granted, their levels of bad-</strong></td>
<td>Moral language; bad boys are losers, because they use the wrong communica-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>ness vary, as do their motives for stepping down. [...] Apparently, not</strong></td>
<td>tion techniques.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>even owning every media channel or gun in the country can help you.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What Used</td>
<td><strong>Historically, the role of information departments has been to control</strong></td>
<td>This element normally serves as a background to the main point, showing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Be</td>
<td><strong>the unit and transmitter of information (read: corporate propaganda).</strong></td>
<td>why current practice is obsolete and ought to change. To change is im-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>This used to work when controlling channels also led to control over the</strong></td>
<td>perative; it must be done.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>message. I assume that most people working in communication have realized</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>that attempting to exert control is futile. [...]</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What Is Now</td>
<td><strong>Information or communication. Inevitably, what must follow the indus-</strong></td>
<td>“Reality” is described and explained to the reader. This is the most rec-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>try’s loosening of control is the realization that the terms ‘information’</strong></td>
<td>urrent code throughout the material. Together with Element 2, this ele-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>and ‘corporate propaganda’ are very different to ‘communication’. Firstly,</strong></td>
<td>ment normally constructs a picture of “a brave new world,” a chaotic but</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>information is rarely left unchallenged. People <strong>triangulate</strong>, Google,</strong></td>
<td>fun place for a corporation to be: there is a Construction of Chaos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>ask friends, <strong>compare sources</strong>, and then make up their own mind. Sec-</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>ondly, information is free and supply plentiful.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Corporate</td>
<td><strong>To conclude, the marginal value of</strong></td>
<td>This is the main point of the text, the</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dilemma

your information is pretty low. You simply need to offer something extra.

perpeteia. It is stated how the corporation “simply needs” to change in order to fit into the new chaotic world.

5. Exemplification

Everyone appreciates a gift. [...] For example, some of the biggest awards this year went to communication projects that had either helped to save their customers time, enabled them to express their opinions or earned them more money. In the US, American Express is continuing to pursue the Small Business Saturday-concept to support local small businesses. [...] UN’s special prize in this year’s IPRA Golden Awards went to Electrolux and its Vac from the Sea-project. In this campaign, the company had gathered plastic debris from the world’s oceans and used it to build vacuum cleaners, thereby making vacuum cleaning a bit more worthwhile, and helping green communities by drawing attention to an environmental issue.

Theorization of how to solve the dilemma begins with examples. These could be either bad examples – stressing the danger of current conduct or neglect of the issue at hand – or good examples, as here.

The examples serve multiple functions; a mix of cases with respect to both industry and geography establishes Principal as an agency for many. Also, the mention of certain corporations in the examples is flirtation; Principal could be pitching for business. But they are also promoting their own client projects without directly taking the credit for it, such as the Electrolux CSR initiative. This is simultaneously entertainment highlighting a good client-consultant relationship and marketing for Principal. Electrolux is probably happy to receive attention among other readers of Perspectives, and
other readers will potentially be impressed with Principal’s award-winning creative skills.

6. Theorizing

**Start the bribing.** Offer something and you get something back. *The cynic may call it a bribe; others may prefer to call it an exchange.* It is pretty intuitive and similar to how any healthy personal relationship is built. Yet, when people put on their work outfit, enter the office and start up their slideshow software of choice, this intuitive logic tends to get thrown out the window. This is a mystery. […]

The theorizing of a solution continues.

In this specific text: note that the quite blunt examples of market logic – bribe, exchange, risk-taking – is contrasted with “healthy personal relationships” and “giving.”

By using a personal approach, a direct rapport is established between author and reader.

7. Guidelines

**Not another marketing model.** Theorising about something that should really be intuitive feels a bit awkward, and if you pardon my language, “smartass”.

Anyway, I have customized a classic. McCarthy's four P's. I tend to ask four questions more frequently than any others during planning and concept development stages to make sure we look for valuable insights and solutions in the right places, just as you would while shopping for any other gift.

=>**Personality.** […] Is what we put out there confirming the receiver’s emotions, values, mood and situation?

=>**Packaging.** […] Can we make this visually attractive?

Hands-on advice, normally just in a bullet list with subheadings, here a classic marketing model elegantly rephrased.

Note how the allusions to the personal sphere – emotions, love and pride – are mixed with a corporate discourse.

Proof of active discourse management, putting words in the reader's mouth; “you might say something along the lines of…”
Predictability. Predictability should be kept to a minimum if you really want to wow people. Control: Is what we are offering already half-expected, the same or similar to what others are doing?

Pride. Perhaps the greatest thing about having been given a gift that you love, is that you can show it off to the world. Control: Would someone who saw or heard about this then pass it on with pride?

*If you want to make an impact at meetings, you might say something along the lines of* “I believe the best communication is not predictable but personal, well packaged and instills a sense of *pride*”

8. Byline

Good luck!

[face portrait] Johan Bodén⁵⁴ is an earned media specialist who works as a Creative Director at Principal. Johan.boden@Principalgroup.com +46 704 525 767

Personalized approach, paraphrasing a personal e-mail from a colleague or friend. Direct number and hyperlinked e-mail address to the consultant; he or she is accessible to the reader. It is possible to e-mail an immediate reply, if need be.

Even though most texts in the series do not employ the kind of overt economic discourse as the case memo above (“exchange,” “marginal value”), the Standard Story is structurally deeply ensconced in market logic. Using skillfully crafted stories that describe reality as chaotic, ever more rapidly changing and unmanageable without help, these actors also employ discursive means attempt to construct the very need of their commercial services. Below, I will continue to explore the sophisticated discursive methods embedded in the vocabularies and words used.

⁵⁴ All personal details, including names, are altered.
Step 3: Vocabularies and Discourses – “Be ‘non-commercial’”

Commercial Vocabularies
Thornton et al. (2012) model their “market logic” using words such as transaction, price and exchange. Fairclough (1991) includes a broader array of words and metaphors alluding to sub-streams of an umbrella of capitalist discourse; consumption, finance, risk, management, and marketing discourses, and generalizes all these as “market vocabularies.” More specifically, the aim of this chapter is to study micro-level category construction and commodification. I hence expected to see traces of market vocabulary, as signs of commodification. And indeed, there are traces of market discourse. “Company” is the most frequently used word, and references to marketing discourse – brands, branding, innovation, consumers, value added and marginal value – position the text series as well within the realm of a market logic discourse.

However, use of strictly economic and financial languages is not as common as I had first expected. Except for a few provoking exceptions (as The Gift example above), only a handful of texts explicitly use “capitalist” vocabulary. In general, words such as money, resources, efficiency, and productivity are surprisingly absent.

An illustrative example of this avoidance of economic “reality” is how none of the 12 texts authored between October 2008 and September 2009 touches upon the global financial crisis during that period, a crisis causing severe financial depression throughout the Western and parts of Southern and Eastern hemispheres. Even though Sweden’s economy was less affected than that of many other countries, it is unlikely that the crisis had left the clients of Principal unaffected. Many of the clients are MNCs operating in a global arena. Several Swedish banks made use of the bank guarantee from the Swedish state, and real estate prices plummeted. For the Swedish PR market, the financial crisis of 2008 constituted the single most negative external shock in revenue since industry statistics became available in the beginning of 1990s (cf. Figure 3.1). Instead, during this period, the texts in the series find two new foci of interest, both steering – consciously or unconsciously – attention away from stern financial hardship: political campaigning (with a focus on Barack Obama’s election campaign) and a discursive focus on anti-commercialism and authenticity.

“Non-commercial” vocabularies
Throughout the texts, there is ample linguistic allusion to spheres that are traditionally exempt from economic value: metaphors and references
drawn from non-commercial vocabularies – arts, literature, science, sports, religion, music, film, food and love. Three main topoi, or ideational places for rhetorical inspiration, are especially popular in the material: non-commercialism, personal life, and politics.

I. “Non-commercialism.” Non-commercialism and authenticity are two largely overlapping themes frequently referred to in the Perspectives series. It is not, however, a question of actually urging Principal’s clients to stop selling things, but more about telling them not to say that they’re selling things. Consultant writers use concepts such as “authenticity,” “genuineness” and “non-commercialism” as means to emphasize their arguments, as a form of amplifier. One Perspectives text (March 2, 2009) has the subheading “Genuineness – the Continuation of Natural”:

Winning concepts of the future will be characterized by genuineness. Synonyms for genuine are authentic, pure, real, untarnished, unaltered, distinctive and traditional. […] Marketing officers love the Obama campaign because it feels so real. Genuineness has taken up a lead position on brand strategists checklists!

In other words, authenticity is portrayed as the perfect USP, a unique selling point. Perhaps this dialectic is even better illustrated by a text titled “The Football55 Manifesto – arranging games you win and stop being commercial!” (Jan 28, 2009):

Is it possible to combine the commercial with a larger, more important context? There’s actually a genre where almost religious loyalty and commitment merge with the commercial – football. Most football club supporters are more than brand ambassadors. They are fans who consume and stimulate each other to more consumption.56

Here, authenticity is created by allusion to sports and religion, by combining words such as “commitment” and “loyalty” with the everyday expressions of the corporate audience – “commercial,” “brand ambassadors” and “stimulate consumption.” Following this, the sacred allegory of football is then expanded upon for another three pages – Steve Jobs is compared to a famous football coach, managers are encouraged to identify the “enemy clubs of their customers,” and be inspired by how football supporter clubs “loyalise”57 people. The tone is rather Machiavellian when the author goes on to evoke a social movement metaphor for the sake of branding:

55 European football. US Eng soccer.
56 See Appendix 2 for full text.
57 Swe. lojaliserar.
A prerequisite, almost a synonym, for loyalty is "Community." A movement of loyal, cooperative people requires a "Cause Greater Than Self" and this you acquire by working both for and against. Like a good book, community is based on protagonists and antagonists. Only by using such markers can one define a style, an identity. So, what are your brand's good intentions and what is the evil you are fighting?

Again, there is a mix of marketing vocabulary with strong allusions to non-economic spheres, to social movements and community, but also to books, and ancient Greek drama (protagonists and antagonists). There is also a strong sense of religious morality discourse here; the brand is the good that will undo evil. Towards the end of the text, there is an outright admonition for corporations to be “non-commercial” within quotation marks:

- Be "non-commercial". [...] If your business acts in a way that is perceived as authentic, i.e. non-commercial, do not make the mistake of communicating that action in a commercial way, for example by traditional advertising. [...] People would think, "what costs more money - helping the environment or advertising the helping?" Instead of boasting and bragging about your own excellence – let your fans be the messengers. When your company is focused on the action and let the supporters do the talking, the message will come across as much more credible. It's hard to be credible when you speak in your own cause.

While stressing the virtues of “non-commercialism,” the author also succeeds in doing PR for his own industry, public relations, by discrediting the effect and worth of the services of the rival advertising industry. Again, these are sophisticated discursive strategies constructing market logic— even when it is overtly using discourse to speak against it.

II. Emotion. Another dominant discursive object is corporate pathos and emotion. “How can your spokesmen express themselves so that all fans get emotional?” seems to be the ultimate question here. To feel, and to make other people feel, is framed as of vital importance to readers. Texts recommend clients to give their products “emotional value added,” enabling firms to “review their pricing policies.” It is furthermore important to build a “safety feeling” for visitors to the corporate homepage, and to create “exclusivity, mystery and adventure” for consumers. Love and love relations are other common tropes: “A really good joint venture is a love story, not simple groping!” (Apr 11, 2009).

Client-consultancy relationships are never mentioned explicitly. Direct allusions to the agency’s operations, in the genre of “this is what we can
“do for you,” are never made. Instead, the straightforward tone in the texts has an air of invitation to friendship rather than to economic exchange. All abstracts end with the standard phrase “Have a Nice Read!/Your friends at Principal”. Informal postscripts occur frequently, written in the lower case without punctuation in an otherwise perfectly edited text: “ps don’t hesitate to send me more links.”, as to simulate an informal e-mail conversation between close colleagues. Another text, “Sell The Lamb You’ve Got” (Oct 30, 2008) concerns the growing eco-food industry’s tendency to use story-telling, and ends on a similar note, with a direct address to the reader:

Finally, I wonder – what is your opinion? Is it ok that the lamb on the local menu really was from New Zealand? Mail me and let me know. And come to Slussplan [Principal’s address] for a cup of coffee if you want to search for your company’s stories for a while.

III. Politics – “Consumers in all places, unite!” A third arena is political life; 25 out of 70 texts are somehow related to politics. These are in most cases classical political analyses: how Barack Obama’s presidential campaign was been covered by the Swedish media, or travel journal entries from field trips to his 2012 Chicago campaign headquarters. In some ways, these texts seem to be the least commercialized, as it is hard to see the direct commercial utility for Principal’s clients in e.g. surveys about news coverage on American politics. Perhaps the disproportionate focus perhaps mirrors the personal interests of consultants, or yields commercial benefits in the long term by showing the agency of being “up-to-date,” able to keep up with the world and American political culture, and to translate it for Swedish corporations: from Barack Obama being accused of breaking his “brand promise,” leaving Hope and Change as “spent, empty slogans” (Nov19, 2011) to political slogans being ripped and recast in a highly capitalistic paraphrase: “Consumers in all places, unite!”, paraphrasing Karl Marx’ famous imperative “Workers of all countries, unite!” (Jan 28, 2009).

Analyzing Consultancy Texts: Commodification Through Non-Commodification

This chapter set out to explore the micro-level construction of PR consultancy. Operationalizing product construction as the linguistic dimensions of commodification, i.e. bringing something into the economic sphere, the adapted research question was: *How do PR consultants use language to frame their activities as commercial products?*
With the results at hand, perhaps a more adequate phrasing would have been: *How do PR consultancies use language to frame their activities as non-commercial products?* For my analysis of an extensive series of texts suggests that PR consultants employ several discursive strategies to commodify their services, but that these strategies are seldom explicit. Mention of the client-consultant relationship is taboo, as was overly straightforward commercial discourse. Information about the services for sale was communicated only indirectly, through the analytical skills of the writers, their ability to be up-to-date with goings on in a general societal environment, and their ability to keep track of things outside the reader’s ken.

One such strategy was to **construct reality.** An abundance of theories of the reality was displayed throughout the texts. But texts did not merely reflect the news flow. The omission of the financial crisis of 2008, the absence of strictly economic discourse and an apparent focus on political campaigning methods suggest that the texts had other purposes: filling a function of distraction, or inspiration. Corporations do not turn to PR consultancies for analysis of ‘harsh’ economic conditions, but for other versions of what reality is. Judging from the texts, corporate clients do not want discussions about profit maximization or cash flows from PR consultants. Instead, they want impulses from other fields, useful snippets of facts about politics, sports, social media – things they cannot keep abreast of themselves, combined into an understandable entity. A more critical analysis of the tendency to construct reality is that it serves as a sense-making device. Consultancies translate an overwhelming plurality of the world by telling How It Is. But this overwhelming reality is itself constructed.

A second discursive strategy of non-explicit commodification was **to manage form.** By adopting the “non-commercial” format of a journalistic editorial piece, the Perspectives texts offered ‘content’ rather than ‘products.’ Furthermore, in the archetypical narrative, the Standard Story, that emerged from the dataset there was a clear dramaturgy; after constructing the necessity of change, these stories offered moral guidance. By borrowing elements from religious moralizing, consultants depicted the world as a chaotic place in which the clients need help getting oriented; they need to know what is good and bad. In this vein, in the form of stories consultants manage to provide both problems and solutions.

A third strategy was **instructing how language ought to be used.** Many of the quotes above are explicit instructions on how to phrase something or understand language by deconstructing and re-constructing links between words: “A prerequisite, almost a synonym for loyalty is ‘community’” or “Synonyms for genuine are authentic, pure, real, unaltered, unaltered, distinctive and traditional.” In this sense, analyzing the
discursive strategies employ becomes a meta-experience, as they themselves are such avid analysts of language use.

A fourth strategy was to **combine commercial and non-commercial language**. Vocabularies used were seldom strictly commercial, or drawn from the economic sphere. Neither were they strictly ‘sacred’; a commercial dimension permeated all argumentation. Instead there was a pervasive tendency to combine economic vocabularies with traditionally non-economic vocabularies. Throughout the material, metaphors and imagery from “sacred” spheres such as art, love, religion, film, music, sports and science were coupled with economic vocabularies such as ‘brand,’ ‘consumption,’ and ‘exchange.’ By tapping broader discourses on ‘non-commercialism’ and ‘authenticity’, consultants constructed more credible commercial offers, both for themselves and for their clients, trying to push their services up the axis, from profane to sacred. Somewhat paradoxical, there was hence a **commodification through “non-commodification”**; i.e. rendering something saleable though stressing its uniqueness.

**Semiotic Replacements**

This commodification through “non-commodification” is a semantic action that is possible to analyze within the framework of Greimas’ Semiotic Square (Figure 3.5). The square is designed to unveil underlying meaning processes, and builds on the assumption that meaning is constructed in opposition (Greimas, 1990). There are three possible relations in the square. The dotted lines mapped vertically are **implications**, and the horizontal and diagonal relationships represent two kinds of oppositions: **contrariety**, and **contradiction**.

Meaning, as defined in Chapter 2, is always culturally defined, and attempts to form new meaning, of which commodification is a case, must relate to extant cultural meaning systems. When consultants talk of authenticity, this is bound to relate to deeply embedded cultural assumptions, or codes, in the Western societies stipulating that whatever is authentic is not commercial, and whatever is commercial is not authentic; it is fake. In that cultural frame, **authentic** typically invokes connotations as sincerity, honesty, transparence and connectedness (Weber et al., 2008).

Moreover, squares can be connected, latched onto each other. In the texts, a connection is being made between commercial value and authenticity, and the cultural base relation discerned is the following: that which authentic is non-commercial is exempt from economic value; you cannot buy it for money. It is sacred. Putting these two connections of meaning together, you will get the following figure. Figure 5.1 is a semiotic square illustrating these semiotic cultural “base values.”
Considering the positions in Figure 5.1, adding brackets to non-commercial is a significant cultural action, interrupting semiotic relations of contrariety, contradiction and implication. Through an operation of what I will call *semiotic replacement*, the meaning structure is altered. By semantically redefining that which is commercial as “non-commercial,” the “commercial” accesses semiotic relationships enjoyed by that which is con-commercial, as shown in Figure 5.2.
Figure 6.2 Cultural Meaning Assumptions, Modified Structure I

Similar squares could be mapped of other sacred values, letting other opposing pairs used in the Perspectives texts replace the authentic/fake dyad above; love/hate, professional/personal, loyal/disloyal. The goal of the attempts is the same, to iterate cultural connotations and access a linguistic “shortcut” to the connotations one wants to invoke. The semi-otic replacement attempted in text “The Football Manifesto…” could be mapped in the following way:
Figure 6.3 Cultural Meaning Assumptions, Modified Structure II

Similarly, sentences spanning sacred and profane tropes such as “Genuineness has taken up a lead position on brand strategists’ checklists!” or “your brand’s good intentions” dissolve taken-for-granted connections between words and tropes.

Consequences for Categorization

By dint of such semiotic replacements, commodification takes place in the texts but at a deeper semiotic level; by working with sophisticated mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion of topics, with combination of economic and non-economic discourses, the texts appear to speak to readers’ underlying perceptions of meaning, rather than using concrete linguistic manifestations of commodification. This semantic manipulation potentially has consequences for connection between commodification and categorization. For taken-for-grantedness of boundaries between categories such as community and commerce, and perhaps more importantly, sacred and profane, are semantically dissolved by the semiotic replacements. If such semiotic manipulations are a central part of what PR consultancies do, this would have bearing on the difficulties of categorization. In the next chapter, I go on to investigate this centrality further.
In this chapter, I enter practice of PR consultants, taking part in their everyday activities, and asking questions about them. This exercise substantiates the themes emerging from Chapter 6, by giving them more flesh, but also contrasts them; studying practice crystallizes partially other dimensions of the product than text analysis does. The chapter consists of two cases, one from the field of Product PR, and one from Almedalen, a political fair.

Case 1: “The Independent Denim Expert”

**People**

Minna, *consultant and showroom manager*, Prod PR
Johanna, *showroom assistant*, Prod PR
Olle, *TV/radio host*
Daniel, *senior consultant and co-founder*, Prod PR
Kim, *market director*, Denim Inc.
John, *Kim’s assistant*, Denim Inc.
Monica, *market director*, Sports Inc.

**Thursday, November 11, 2010**

It’s a normal Thursday morning when I come back to my desk at the university after a seminar. There is a missed call from an unknown number on my cell phone, and a message on my voice mail. The message, recorded at 10.51, by a woman presenting herself as Johanna calling from a PR agency, here called Prod PR. She asks if I want to participate in a panel discussion, a “press breakfast” for four of their clients, all jeans brands, the coming Wednesday. Just as I finish listening, Johanna calls me up again. On the Internet she has found a research report on the Swedish market for environmentally friendly jeans titled “Blue Dreams in Denim.” Writing this report in 2009 within the research project “Organizing markets” at the Stockholm Center for Organizational Research,
my focus had been mainly theoretical, on market construction. The empirical choice had not been mine, but my co-writer’s. In fact, I don’t even own a pair of jeans. But somehow Johanna had found the report, and reckoned I was an expert on denim. She did not know that I am writing my thesis on PR consultancies.

Johanna explains the idea of the event: to invite journalists and bloggers, but not only to have product representatives on the panel, as obviously is customary, but also to have a moderator, and an external commentator. And that external commentator would be me.

My first instinct is to say no. I don’t want to spend more time on side projects; I should focus on my thesis fieldwork. I tell her that I will try to think of names of other scholars who might be better suited for the task, and that I will call her back. After hanging up, I start thinking that maybe this is not such a bad idea after all. The last couple of months, I had been struggling with access to PR consultancy processes, and a few requests had recently fallen through. And here a PR agency lands right in my lap. Perhaps this is a good way to get access into the PR world? And to a new type of PR firm? Prod PR is known to be among the largest among the new generation of PR agencies specialized in Product PR, a niche closer to advertising.

So after lunch, I call Johanna up again after lunch and say that she can count me in, on the condition of a ‘trade’: Prod consultants agree to be interviewed about the organization of the event and shadowed for a couple of days. In return, I can talk a little about the background and history of denim markets. She checks it up with her bosses, then calls back to confirm. It’s a yes. I spend the rest of the days in meetings, quite satisfied with the “deal.”

**Friday, November 12, 11.09 am**

The next morning, I get a call at 11.09 am. It’s Johanna again asking me about a preparatory meeting she is planning the following Monday morning. We settle on 9 a.m.

When I open my inbox for the first time in 24 hours, I have received three mails from Minna, Johanna’s boss, since Johanna and I last spoke: the first only 50 minutes after my confirming call, i.e. Thursday 12.55 p.m., with discussion questions and an outline for the breakfast. Then a second e-mail Thursday 14.32, in which Minna asks me more specifically about the Monday meeting. At 15.25 same afternoon, i.e. 2.5 hours after my confirmation, I had the formal invitation forwarded to me, a very nice flash-designed invitation in the form of a hyperlink. When I click on the link I come to a website showing only the back pocket of a pair of jeans. Instead of a brand seam, the name of the PR agency is “sown” in orange. There is an invitation to click at the top of the pocket. When I do, a virtual piece of paper, supposedly meant to simulate the torn and
ragged condition that arises from having paper in your pocket for a few days, pops up with the invitation text on it: “Together with [brands], the denim expert Anna Tyllström will discuss the Swedish jeans market and its future, moderated by Olle Åberg”. The invitation was sent simultaneously to 25 bloggers and fashion journalists.

The Denim Workshop invitation.
First and second page.

“Together with [brands], the denim expert Anna Tyllström will discuss the Swedish jeans market and its future, moderated by Olle Åberg.”
As a PhD student in organization theory, not owning a single pair of jeans, my new epithet as “denim expert” is somewhat amusing. Also, as someone working in an academic environment where most seminars appear on a regular basis and are planned months, sometimes, years ahead, and most “visuals” are crammed with text following bullet points, the pace and performance appears striking. How did these people have time to swing this in 2.5 hours? And had they really planned my participation, or was that a spur of the moment decision, and they just changed the text in the last minute? If I had said no, would they have found someone else, or just dropped it?

**Monday, November 15: Preparatory Meeting, Prod PR**

On Monday I arrive at the agency’s office a few minutes early. The receptionist buzzes me in and asks me to wait. I hang my coat on a two-story clothes rack by the toilets. Offices are located in the industrial outskirts of a residential area in inner Stockholm. Later it is explained to me that the building is called “The Industrial Central” and was designed by Ragnar Östberg, a very famous Swedish architect in 1929 who designed Stockholm City Hall and other famous buildings. The facilities definitely have an industrial feel, a bit New Yorkish. The impression is that of an old workshop, with high windows, and approximately four or five meters to the ceiling. But today there are no manufacturing industries left in the building, and it has become a hub for advertising agencies and a number of high-end art galleries. And apparently, PR agencies.

Right inside the main entrance on the second floor, there’s a reception desk. Sitting along the wall opposite the reception, I get a glimpse of what seems to be a large office room to the right; many people are moving. Almost all consultants seem to be in at 9 a.m. Monday morning, though some are still dropping in. Between the reception and the office room, there’s a confined space of maybe 70 square meters – a large room without windows with three walls; where the fourth should be, towards me, the room opens up. At first glance, it actually looks like a regular sports store, with clothes, bags and sneakers in different colors and patterns hanging on two-story racks around the room, bathing in intense light. The only thing that distinguishes it from a store is the absence of cashier and the bombardment of impressions; the fact that every product only comes in two or three exemplars, as opposed to 8 or 12 as in a normal store, renders the large room slightly cluttered.

When the receptionist calls, two young women come out of the “sport store.” They approach me, present themselves as Minna and Johanna and quickly show me to a conference room. Even though the building itself has a unique timbre, the interior design of Prod is not more stylish than any average PR agency. Or better phrased: it is just as stylish.
as any PR agency. The last couple of months I have been conducting interviews in quite a few PR consultancy offices, and the conference rooms all seem to follow the same unspoken color formula for interior design; a baseline of classic Scandinavian design, and white, black and red. Prod PR’s meeting room is no exception: white walls, a large black table, red chairs and a square-shaped painting with a stripe pattern. The blend of simplicity (white), seriousness (black) but with bit of energy (red) and creativity (artwork) seems to signal that “we’re not as far out as the advertising agencies, but we’re certainly not your average IT consultancy either.” It’s a smart choice: classy enough to signal taste, but neutral enough not to upset anyone.

The staff is stylish, too. Minna is in her mid-twenties and dressed in garments that are I presume are so trendy that they actually look a bit weird; a top-cardigan in asymmetric draping and shoes so high they look difficult to walk in. Johanna is a bit younger, and has a more attenuated, but still hip, style.

Johanna brings me espresso, and I get the impression that she is the lowest in ranks. At the same time, she is the one that found me, the independent denim expert, the new element in the commercial offer, so I feel that she is very favorably inclined toward me.

After five minutes or so, a young man age sweeps into the room followed by a dog. He introduces only the dog: “This is Floyd,” and points to the black schnauzer trotting along. I shake the man’s hand, he says his name, “Olle.” I tell him mine. He is tall, maybe 30, and wears designer wear in modest colors. He is good-looking in a Stockholmish, sort of hipster way. By the way, aren’t they all? I review all the faces I have seen since I entered the offices fifteen minutes earlier and confirm that all the people I have seen so far have been good-looking. Good-looking in the same way the interior designs are good-looking; handsome but not too handsome, if that makes sense. The meeting starts:

T: The aim with this workshop is to establish Prod PR as a Denim Block. We have several denim brands, and we’ve been talking for a long time about doing this. Normally, it is just a matter of coming here, getting your goodie bag and going home, but this time we wanted to do something special. This is when we thought of having an independent expert, which is you [pointing at me]. Hopefully the companies will bring some products,
and there’ll be a “sneak peek” on AW 11.59 One person from each company.

O: What people?
T: From Sports Inc. it is the designer; from Lion it is the designer. Choo and Denim Inc. and are international so they might have a bit more difficult time sending someone from overseas. So they might send national company reps.

O: Good! Cause that’s the people you want to have there.

I realize at this point that I have no idea who this person is, other than a guess that his is the second name on the flash invitation. So I ask.

A: Who are you?
O: I’m Olle Åberg, and I am a show host for commercial radio and TV. I have worked with Prod PR before, on stuff similar to this.

T: There are 25 people invited, journalists from the greatest fashion magazines, bloggers and stylists, to get a good mix.

O: Of course.
T: They’ll be here at 9.30.

We discuss the venue. Apparently, the panel will take place in the showroom, the sport store-like room I had seen when I entered. I will later read on Prod PR’s homepage that this room is presented as a place where “all products are heroes”:

“In a time with more and more mobile media, availability is the keyword when it comes brands’ opportunities to be seen in various types of media. With established relationships within fashion and lifestyle Prod PR Showroom is an inspiring meeting place where the brand will meet its media audience on neutral territory. By starting from the concept of lifestyle important synergies are created in a room that provides space for both fashion and technology.

More concretely, the idea is for client companies to deposit a few exemplars of each product in the latest line of clothes/accessories/mobile phones, and let journalists come in and look at them and possibly borrow them for media shootings.

Back in the meeting, we are still discussing the details of the panel discussion.

A: Are we sitting/standing?
T: Standing.

59 Minna used the English expression “sneak peek”. AW = Autumn Winter Collection.
T: I am going to ask each company if they have a heading [for their presentation].
O: Good because they won’t have much more than 5-7 minutes per brand. I’ll write the questions today, and I’ll send them over. Cause it is hard for me to know how much they talk etc., if they’re nervous, you know. But after all, they are representing big brands so they must be used to talking in front of people.
T: The designer from *Sports Inc.* at least I know she is NOT shy (laughs).

We go through my part; I describe my background, the report and what I have to say. Briefly, I summarize the history of jeans, as I have pieced it together from a few hours of googling and reading a nonfiction book from the Stockholm City Library. From a popular scientific point of view, the development seems to be quite straightforward, characterized by three transitions over 140 years: from America to Europe, from masculine to feminine, from working class to high-end consumption.

The dog is very quiet, as is Johanna. Olle leans back in his chair a very relaxed masculine pose, occupying a good square meter. Both young women are leaning over the table. I become aware of my own posture, and I try to take a neutral pose, sitting straight in my chair.

O: Good to give the people something useful,\(^{60}\) not just the ordinary thing. Do you have an e-mail address?

I write my e-mail address, anna.tyllstrom@fek.uu.se, on Olle’s notepad. He takes it, looks at it.
O: “Fek” what is that?
A: *Department for Business Studies.*\(^ {61}\)
O: Of course (laughs). You know, I never went to college.

Was that a hint of an academic complex? I don’t know; I am not familiar with the professional world he is from and am not very familiar with *Prod PR*, either. I am surprised though that he has not gone to college, at least for a few months; he works as a professional moderator, and he uses academic language. Maybe it is just the British gentlemen’s clothes that fool me. Minna looks like she’s ready to round off.
T: Any other questions?

---

\(^{60}\) *Swe. Matnyttigt.*

\(^{61}\) *Swe. Företagsekonomiska institutionen.*
No questions. We leave the meeting room to get a tour of the showroom. Olle and his dog go off. I start talking to Minna about the interviews promised to me in our “trade” deal. She takes me to Daniel, a senior consultant and co-founder of the firm. On the way I go through the large office rooms; there are maybe 20 hotspots in rows of two and two, all occupied by rather young people working on Apple computers. I see an old study-mate from Stockholm School of Economics, and we say hi. Daniel does not fit the average consultant type: he’s not as trendily dressed as the others. He wears Birkenstocks, jeans and a t-shirt, comes across as shy. He’s in his mid-30ies - at least 5-10 years older than most other people here. We agree that I would e-mail him to set a date for interviews. Minna and Johanna wave me off.

Wednesday November 17: The Event

I arrive at 8.50 am, ten minutes before the journalists. Olle is already there, as are Johanna and Minna. I have been up since 6.30 am, finishing my script. I have also researched my new team. Through a quick internet search I’ve found out that Olle is one year older than me, i.e. 30, has recently published a book on men’s wear called “Ol’ man – a love story,” had been elected MTV Sweden’s “Spring Hunk” in 2007. I know from his girlfriend’s blog that he got engaged in Paris just two days before. Minna has two inactive fashion blogs online, showing pictures of her and her friends dining out. Through Facebook, I have also found out that she knows one of my good friend’s little sister. These media people’s lives are very public. Too public? Anyway, it feels strange to know so much about a person’s private life.

The metamorphosis of the showroom is spectacular. Only two days ago, the walls were full of bags and clothes of different colors. Now, white curtains cover all the racks, floor to ceiling. Instead of a bombardment of impressions, the room gives a calm soothing impression, almost like floating in air. Only a few denim garments are out on display, from the four presenting brands. In the middle of the large room, serving as a partition, there is a small bar counter full of breakfast foods – coffee and tea, freshly cut fruit and open-face sandwiches with different toppings. Mugs, plates, glasses and thermo flasks are designer wear. In front of the counter there are four small round bar tables. This is where Olle, the four corporate representatives and I are supposed to stand during the panel discussion. Between this constructed balustrade and the entrance, 12 chairs of different colors are arranged to form a square. Why, I wonder? There is plenty of room in this space, and 25 bloggers and journalists are invited, I thought at least 15 were expected to come. So why only 12 chairs? Maybe they want to simulate scarcity? And thereby make the event more appealing? Or are people simply not coming?
Slowly, people start to pour in. If I found the PR agency a bit intimidating the first time I was here, it is even more so now. The stylish environment and the stylish people make a stark contrast to the quiet corridors of the university, and it makes me unusually self-conscious. At first, I had worried about whether I knew enough about denim, but not anymore. It is by now pretty obvious that that no one in the room would be interested in a post-structuralist analysis of denim discourse anyway. No, my new worries concerned my own appearance: Was I right not to wear denim? Did I brush my hair? I’m wearing a jacket, but that seems too formal. Should I take it off? I take it off. But then, is it really ok not to wear sleeves?

I decide to take a cup of coffee and introduce myself to some people. I start with a tall blonde woman. She says she is Kim, that she is from a denim brand called Denim Inc., and she says she knows me. Apparently, I had been involved in as an undergraduate in a student project at SSE ten years earlier that had received sponsorship from Denim Inc. I feel ashamed that I don’t recognize her.

I talk with her sales assistant, a young man named John from Gothenburg. He is very friendly in a sort of unforced way, which makes a stark contrast to the rest of the crowd. We stand talking when two other guys, in their mid-thirties, come in. They wear jeans, of course, and rockabilly haircuts. One of them has his both arms covered with tattoos. The three men give each other hugs, then the other two kneel before John and enthusiastically start pulling the fabric in his jeans. One of them says, enthusiastically:

“So this is the new shit, huh?”

They sound impressed. I understand that they represent the other two brands [Denim brand 3] and [Brand 2] Jeans. The situation is absurd, yet somewhat exotic; two adult men inspecting – and literally pulling - another man’s legs 9 o’clock in the morning in what is supposed to be a professional setting. No one else seems to find this strange. Diesel has apparently introduced a new denim fabric, making the jeans age faster (!) so it doesn’t have to take a whole year before they can be washed. Real denim “nerds,” such as Marcus explains, are of the opinion that it is not until the first wash that you know what shape your jeans are going to have. The three of them are loud, occupying a lot of space in a classic “boy” way. In general, the division in the room is clearly gendered; four out of six people standing up by the balustrade are men, while the audience consists of 100% women. (If the idea behind the chairs was to simulate scarcity it was right; people are standing up, giving the impression of this portion of the big room being crowded.)
It’s 9.30 and we start off. Olle introduces us all; it is Marcus and his two buddies, a female designer from Sports Inc. and myself. He then goes on to interview me. The interview runs smoothly, but Olle interrupts me too early, so I have to take up the thread again. Olle doesn’t look happy, but I feel I want to repeat my mantra; from men to women, from USA to Europe, from workers wear to luxury wear. I hear my own voice, I sound like a parrot. I get a final question from Olle:

O: So, Anna, who is wearing jeans today?
A: Take a look at the panel… I would say men. All surveys show that men are still dominating denim design and denim consumption.

Suddenly the self-consciousness strikes again; was I too sharp now? Pushing this gender analysis feels apparently out of place. I get no questions. I think to myself: *I am so a part of the product. I am the product.*

After this, Olle continues to interview the brand representatives on the qualities of their products and jeans in the coming season.

After the panel discussion, we stay on and mingle. The market manager of a famous Sports Brand, Sports Inc., comes up from the audience to me and said that she absolutely LOVED it. She herself is an old business student from Uppsala University, and I ask her if I could interview her about buying PR services. She is very positive and I get her business card. This is good news. Generally, if the client says yes, many doors open to PR consultancies. Another woman in the audience comes up to me and says that we have a mutual friend and that we met in Paris long ago. As chief editor of a hipster fashion magazine, she is one of the few fashion journalists representing traditional print media attending. I ask her about this type of event, she says she is ambivalent about the fact that PR agencies arrange seminars. She sometimes visits them to check out what’s happening, she says, but seldom reports. I regret taking my jacket off as the guy from another denim brand approaches me by stroking me on my bare arm, which he apparently sees as an invitation to physical contact: “So… what book are you writing?” Or maybe body contact is common in the fashion industry? After all, the same man did kneel before his competitor to inspect his legs.

Around 10.30, people start to disperse. Olle hurries off, and soon I am out of there as well.
After the Event

Over the following month, I interview different actors involved in the event; Minna, who organized the event, Daniel, who was responsible for the account, and Monica from Sports Inc, one of the four clients behind the Denim workshop.

I return to the offices for the first time a few days after the workshop, and the offices look exactly like they did the first time; there is no trace of the special arrangements made for the workshop. I meet with Minna, the showroom manager consultant who was responsible for the denim workshop. Among the type of PR agencies that Prod PR represents, doing product PR for clothes and lifestyle brands, having a showroom is common. Minna, who herself is a former stylist and fashion editor, thinks that there are only advantages to combining multiple brands in the common showrooms:

[ we] facilitate, help. We’ve got good contacts, which makes people turn to us. And it is clear that the brands in our showroom will be helped by one another other, many of them hanging together. Of course they draw different types of people here like that, so it’s good, you pool many people here.

The PR agency plays the role of meeting place, in this case, even in the physical space. Even in organizing the event the PR agency had a coordinating function. It started with one of their old clients, a denim brand, wanting to do some kind of press conference for journalists and bloggers. Then Prod PR’s team came up with the idea that they could turn it into an industry event, which also included three other clients that produce denim garments. The initiative of the press breakfast came from Prod PR themselves, who saw an opportunity to market themselves. The demand for novelty is constant, she says. In this case the novelty was my participation, as a researcher.

This is also where the boundaries between activities start to become blurry. Borrowing the format of a panel discussion, and calling the event a “workshop” and aiming to give “knowledge,” blurs the line between event marketing and an academic seminar. Also, there is a slide down the axis from working for the clients only to actually advertising the PR agency itself. I recall the opening phrase at the startup meeting; “The aim of this workshop is to establish Prod PR as a Denim Block.” The invitation was also clear that it was Prod PR who was the host, not the brands. Minna’s boss Daniel, who is ultimately responsible for the brand accounts, agrees that there are multiple aims to organizing an event like this:
Of course, it’s about attracting attention to the brands, that people write that they’ve attended this event, that it was interesting and fun and all of that. But for us [at Prod PR], it’s also about establishing this dive as a Mecca for denim, in the longer run. So that, when something is written on denim, Prod PR will be very high up on that cognitive ladder.

(Interview, Daniel)

Monica, the market director from Sports Inc. is aware of this “double aim” of their PR agency, but it doesn’t bother her;

M: Honestly, it’s just as much advertising for Prod PR as anything else. A hell of a lot of great bloggers, stylists come to them and they see Prod as a hub for this type of news.

A: And that’s fine with you?
M: Yes, it is, because ultimately we want them to watch our end consumer and the media like hawks. And if this is the way they get that, then that’s totally fine.

Again, this is a recognizable theme from the text analysis in Chapter 5, where one of the aims of newsletters seemed to be the ability to keep abreast of developments in multiple sectors, and provide the client with a synthesis of “reality.” In this case though, it’s not politics or communication trends, but the type of audience and what media channel suits that audience:

D: Sometimes it could be an event, so you think that a fashion show is actually the way. Or maybe we would hit the town on mopeds in order to sell this product. Sometimes it may even be to create a new product to push for that product.

A: How?
D: OK, here’s one example: we worked with "Spiced," a portfolio of spiced schnapps, you know, the kind that people like to drink at midsummer. There the idea was born that we wanted to talk about how these beverages could be enjoyed best in small doses. […] We thought: what if people could drink 20 ml and have it with their meal, instead of, as on Midsummer, vomit after taking 80 ml [on an empty stomach]? That was a message in itself; “Drink less, and by the way, you can eat this stuff with it.” So we got in touch with a couple of talented chefs who created dishes that fit well with the different varieties of schnapps. Then we thought, how can you visualize this even more? It ended up with us consulting a famous glass artist at [one of

---

62 Såv. ”jobbar in det här tillhållet som ett mecka för denim”
63 Såv. ha örnkoll på
the country’s best glassworks] to design a schnapps glass that only holds 20 ml. So we created a product! Then that product became so strong in itself that the glassworks decided to manufacture it. And it is now sold in hundreds of stores and outlets throughout the world. So there could be a product of another product; they help each other, so to speak.

(Interview, Daniel)

The varieties of output seem to be difficult to foresee. Sports Inc., for example, is working with Prod is on a number of projects. When asked, both Prod PR and Sports Inc. say that PR projects are thoroughly evaluated in quantifiable terms; common measures are numbers of journalists per event and numbers of clips in blogs and non-paid media. Sports Inc. says that a standard goal is 25 or 30 journalists per event, and a certain number of news clips. Another way to measure is option cost, i.e. estimates of how much an ad with the same distribution would have cost. Prod PR has its own model of evaluation of impact or “impressions”:

There are several services that allow you to see if what’s been written about the brand. For blogs you can get statistics from Google Analytics tools, for example. For print media, there’s Infopaq that scans the papers and send the clips over. For online channels, it is a little different. FindAgent is the one we use. The first mainly monitors the traditional media’s online presence. [...] Personally I think the most fun thing is when you see a direct result in sales.

(Interview, Daniel)

The denim workshop, however, was not subject to evaluation according to these criteria. Only 15 people attended, at least five of whom came from the four brands. Only two bloggers wrote about the event, and no traditional media. Despite this, the event was not considered a flop. On the contrary, all actors involved seem very happy with it. When asked, Monica at Sports Inc. says that she didn’t evaluate it along normal criteria because it was such an unusual event. The other three brands with which Sports Inc. co-hosted the denim workshop were much more established in the denim market. Hence the spillover effects had a value in itself:

For us the purpose of the activities was, from being in that context, to create credibility as a ... well, an adequate denim option. There was in itself a signal value, a symbolic value, to be included on the invitation, even though not all those invited came. To see "ok, Sports Inc. makes jeans now." So for us that was half the thing, that we even got to be in on it.

(Interview, Monica)
Monica then expands on the difficulties of actually measuring PR outcome “who says two clips is a good result?” Moreover, the exercise was so cheap, 20 000 crowns, that it was a good investment anyway, she reasons.

M: On a pure cost-effectiveness basis, it was definitely worth the money! Because we’d never gotten out that message out [in paid media]... we would have bought banners on these blogs, and that would be… about hundreds of thousands of crowns. Thus, it was clearly effective and most importantly for us, it was effective from a credibility aspect which is very difficult to quantify in monetary terms. The event gave us very, very large value-added, you could say.

A: And to be associated with these established brands?
M: M-hm. But it is often ... it's also very much the core of what PR is all about. You will have a credibility that you can never get in a paid media channel! ‘Here’s something so interesting that an independent person wants to write about it in some way’ – that, in itself, makes people listen more carefully.

(Interview, Monica)

Even Prod PR, who ought to have made an approximate SEK 80 000, minus costs for food and Olle’s compensation, does not see the need to evaluate the event according to strict quantitative criteria; the goal was not to get a “100 news clips,” Monica says, but rather that people were at ease. Prod PR’s task, in this situation was “to create a kind of atmosphere that everyone thinks is good, serious and stuff.”

64 Ca. EUR 2 000.
My second observation is the Politicians’ Week in Almedalen. Taking place every year for seven days in the beginning of July, it constitutes Sweden’s single largest political event. The week was originally instigated by former Prime Minister Olof Palme in 1968, who did not want to leave his summer residence on the island of Gotland in the Baltic Sea to deliver his yearly summer speech. From this single speech, the week has developed into a political fair, centered on the political parties; each parliamentary party has one day where the party leader holds a speech in the Almedalen Park in Visby, Gotland’s medieval capital. From the park, the week has taken its popular name of just “Almedalen.”

But the Almedalen week is no longer for politicians only. From a purely political event, the week has grown to be a hub of Swedish opinion building. In 2001, there were 52 pre-arranged events with fewer than 5,000 visitors. In 2012, 1,800 events attracted 17,000 visitors. Besides the national political parties, an abundance of actors participate; practically all industry organizations, public authorities, advocacy organizations, mass media outlets, and to an increasing extent also industry leaders, as well as the general public, of course. In Almedalen, they meet, discuss, mingle and party together, under informal circumstances. Most of the activities stick to the main format of a “seminar,” a panel debate on a specific issue, normally with a few politicians and industry organizations on the panel, normally with a Q&A session towards the end.

The week has often been called a “politicians’ office party,” and there might be some truth in that. For many politicians, the week is combined with a private vacation; you can see the Minister of Integration walking by with kids and husband, or the secretary general of the Secret Service line up to buy burgers on the corner of the harbor. This direct access to the political elite is not specific to Almedalen but to Sweden in general. However, foreigners are often surprised, explains one informant that works regularly in Almedalen:
When you say this, that everybody who is somebody in Swedish public life spends one week together in the same location... International clients are shocked. When they come here, they’re like "How do we do this?!" I say, I book a hotel room and then it’s just a matter of waiting for an appointment. "But what should do we do, should I take something with me?" And I say it's just to come, but perhaps the meeting will be over a wonky café table, and the politician might come in shorts, maybe they will bring their children.

(Interview, Swedish Public Affairs Consultant)

Not surprisingly, Almedalen is also a central event for Swedish PR consultancies. Even here, the increased legitimization of “PR consultancy” is visible (cf. Chapter 4). Whereas in the industry’s early years some consultants would come to Almedalen as lobbyists and work discreetly to set up appointments between their clients and politicians, the largest PR agencies today have a very visible presence; the secretive lobbying pitches to politicians are complemented by agencies putting up their own tents with large logos, where they have debates and “mingles,” i.e. semi-informal gatherings serving snacks and free drinks. In fact, to many PR agencies, the Almedalen week constitutes a commercial offering in its own right, represented by separate tabs on their homepages advertising “Almedalen packages” sold to companies who wish to influence policy.

To me, the Almedalen week hence constitutes a unique opportunity to study consultant-client interaction, especially within Public Affairs. The first time I went to Almedalen was the summer of 2009. As a new PhD student I was invited to present a research report on the flow of professionals between the political sphere and the PR sphere. The seminar was organized by a local art center, and I co-presented with Erik, a young PR consultancy founder working with Public Affairs, i.e. lobbying and corporate advocacy. After the presentation, I was invited to a party that his company threw together with a political journal. This contact turned out to be essential. The following two years I would come back to serve as an unpaid intern with his PR agency, taking an active part of the consultancy work.

My arrangements

The PR agency that I observed is founded by Erik and his colleague, Magnus. Neither of them has ever worked within their field of education: Erik is in his mid-30s, and a former law student who never worked as a lawyer but went straight into PR. Magnus is Erik’s senior by almost 20 years, and took a degree in chemical engineering but then had a long career as a trade journalist within the high-technology sector before he joined a PR agency a decade ago. The two had met when they worked
together in the top management of a foreign PR agency’s Stockholm office. In 2006 they left that company to start their own. When I started observing them, they had 12 employees and worked with most types of PR, except financial PR. The client base was evenly distributed between the private sector, industry organizations, and public authorities. Like most Swedish PR agencies, the agency (in this text is called Strat PR) was run as a partnership where Erik and Magnus owned a majority of shares.

During the spring of 2010, I had also interviewed Erik several times for my research, and had been invited to the agency’s parties etc. for observation. I had also made attempts to shadow him; i.e. to follow him around in his daily activities. He had been positive about the idea but had not been able to bring me a concrete date, as he had been “crazy busy.” As summer approached I e-mailed him and asked if it would be OK if I served as his assistant during the Almedalen week, supposing that the informal setting of the work might open up opportunities for observation. He was very enthusiastic about the idea, and we met for a briefing in mid-June on clients and projects. I also sat in on two preparatory meetings.

However, as Almedalen drew close, Erik disappeared. He answered neither calls nor e-mails. One day before my boat left for Gotland, I started calling his colleagues. I got hold of his co-founder Magnus, whom I only had shaken hands with earlier, at Strat PR’s office during one of the preparatory meetings. He took me on. During the following week I would work with him on three projects, two main client missions and one large party.

The first client was the State Delegation of Technology, a temporary public authority set up by the government in order to encourage high school graduates to apply for higher education in science. The Delegation was about to be dissolved and now presented its final report to its principals, the government. Strat PR and a partnering advertising agency were hired to arrange seminar to present the report and to advertise it in a creative way. The strategy chosen was to have teenagers from the natural science program at the local high school push around a bike wagon up and down the slopes of Visby. The bike wagon was built especially for this task and involved technological gadgets like a portable hydraulic bike pump, recharging stations for cell phones, and free strawberries. The teenagers would park the wagon in busy pedestrian passages, help people passing by to charge their cell phones, pump their bikes, and offer them strawberries. While providing these simple services, they would advertise the seminar; where it would take place, and which education policy experts and politicians would participate in the panel. Throughout the week, Magnus and I trained the youths in presentation technique. We took turns buying strawberries, surveying the teenagers’ schedules and approach, so that all details were right.
The second project was a lobbying project for a European munitions manufacturer. Recently, a parliamentary decision had been taken on buying new submarines, robot missiles and combat helicopters worth a total of SEK 4 billion, approximately EUR 470 million. The manufacturer, who didn’t have previous close relations to the Swedish Armed Forces, now wanted to ensure that there was a proper public acquisition process, and that special clauses in the defense laws, that allow government buy from certain preferred manufacturers of war materiel, were not activated. Such a procedure, they thought, would be to their disadvantage. The project was a classic lobbying case as it involved long-term measures to influence a policy process. To this end, Magnus had booked meetings for two client representatives flown in from Central Europe with MPs from three political parties, all specializing in defense issues. I was not able to attend the meetings with the politicians, but I attended a luncheon with the client representatives and a series of seminars on the defense industry in which Magnus looked for clues about the acquisition process.

The third project was to organize a party for 400 guests in an open-air medieval church ruin. The party was co-hosted by the PR agency itself together with a Swedish think tank, an American TV channel and the same political magazine as last year. The goal was explicitly to be the “de facto party” of the Almedalen week; the party everyone talked about and wanted to get into. On a practical level, my tasks involved booking a screen projector, picking up computers and playlists, keeping in touch with and, most importantly, checking and updating the guest list.

In this first year of participant observation in Almedalen, I was on a steep learning curve. The constant mix of tasks was overwhelming: one minute, I took notes from the minister of defense’s talk on war materiel purchase; the next minute I would chase around central Visby looking for fresh strawberries, or a rental TV projector so that the former minister of culture could see a World Cup soccer game during the “de facto party” – otherwise he threatened not to come. Over the week, my role had rapidly gone from shadowing Magnus to participant observer to responsible organizer. When Erik, a few days into the week, had to cancel his appointments in Almedalen altogether, I was left alone with the responsibility to co-host the party myself, and coordinating the collaboration with the other host organization.

My experiences from this first year of participating in the hands-on production of PR consultancy services circled around two main observations. The first was precisely the constant mix of things; it was remarkable how Magnus and his junior consultants moved so easily between types of tasks (from hyper-strategic to hyper-practical), between interacting with different types of people (high school students, politicians and advertising agencies) and organizations (think tanks, magazines, TV
channels and a PR consultancy organizing parties together), and handling different types of clients (state delegation and munitions manufacturer).

The second observation concerned the ad-hoc relation to time; many things just seemed to “happen” out of the blue; meeting were suddenly set up, dinners were arranged, participations were cancelled. Other things, like meetings or attendance lists, for which several consultants had spent hours preparing, could be thrown overboard with just a few minutes’ notice. I was startled about this relation to time. To me this was the ultimate representation of unpredictability, but no one seemed shocked. Together these two observations merged into one impression: chaos.

When I later interview Magnus on the outcome of the week, he says that the ad-hoc planning is a central element to the service he provides. Almedalen is a particular case, but changing plans at short notice is standard procedure, he says: “We are used to it. We must be open to it. Our clients are not always able to plan ahead. And besides, we work with media where things happen suddenly. We must always be prepared to do things suddenly so to speak.” The mix between practical and theoretical is also “central to PR,” a reason to “why it’s fun.” Having analyzed these primary impressions, I do not find them chaotic anymore, but see them rather as logical and recurring patterns of another type of work – PR consultancy work.

Lobbying for Bio-Fuel

As I plan for a second year of observations in Almedalen, I consider myself hence a bit prepared. In May 2011, Magnus does still doesn’t know if the agency’s clients want him to go. In mid-June, I receive an e-mail saying Strat PR will be going after all and that he’s fine with me “shadowing” him this year too.

As the Almedalen week approaches, I try to get hold of him. I e-mail, I call, but there’s no response. Just as Erik had disappeared the previous year, Magnus is nowhere to be seen. But this time I don’t panic; I know now that this is how it’s done. I buy my ferry ticket and plan to show up, reckoning I will find either him or someone else from Strat PR in Visby. After all, it’s a small town, the center occupying no more than a couple of square kilometers. Three days before going, June 30, I finally get hold of Magnus on his cell. He’s in a car, all busy with two kids in the backseat, driving around Gotland supervising a private summer house construction project, and preparing for the Almedalen week. He says I can follow him during the week on an energy project. We agree to meet the following Monday morning on a seminar about bio fuel.
Day 1: “A Good Person”

It is raining and quite windy, as we meet up a few days later outside a white plastic tent in the harbor. Even though the week has just started, the transformation of the normally quaint, medieval town of Visby the first week of July each year has already taken place: every corner of the town is invaded by organizations trying to get their message across, to someone. Every hotel, bar, office, school building or public facility is rented or occupied, and there is a plastic tent on nearly every lawn. The inhabitants of Visby sublet their gardens and homes, sometimes both, to an invading opinion elite clad in blue shirts and khaki shorts.

We say our hellos, and Magnus briefly summarizes the situation. One of his clients, a Nordic petroleum company, has bought an extensive network of gas stations, previously owned by Shell. Now they have advanced plans of rebuilding all these stations into providing only bio-fuels, re-inventing their company as “the environmentally conscious gas station” in the Swedish market. The most advanced plans are for E85, a fuel that consist of 85% ethanol, an alcohol produced from grains. But the plan also includes biodiesel, i.e. diesel that is not a bi-product of petroleum processing but distilled from various types of organic fats. Initially, there had been tax waivers to buyers of ethanol-driven cars, tax subsidies per liter, and a also discount when buying a new one, along with exemption from car tolls and parking fees for vehicles in many major Swedish cities. However, this system of fiscal advantages had recently started to be dismantled; tax discounts per liter had disappeared for ethanol, and they had been heavily reduced for biodiesel. The aim for Magnus this week, he explains, is to map the regulatory landscape around bio fuel, and to identify opportunities to influence policy to the company’s favor, before the client enters the Swedish market. Pave the way, so to speak. I will assist him in this.

The Swedish Farmers’ Confederation (LRF) is hosting this first seminar of the week. Judging from the audience, agricultural policy seems to be a male-dominated field, as there are quite a few middle-aged men in sailing jackets in the audience. I see the Oscar Jacobson brand in several places – a Swedish, preppy brand for men above 45. The second smaller distinguishable group is young women, probably activists and corporate CSR officers. Magnus and I are hence quite representative of the profile of the group. There are presentations by various people, an engineering student doing his master’s thesis from Lund, presented his masters thesis on the use of bio-fuel. In the panel after the presentations, there are only men, representing business organizations (Swedish Energy, Swedish Forestry etc.) and corporations (Scania, Volvo). I can’t really tell them apart. As they speak Magnus listens attentively while making sparse comments
to the ongoing debate on his notepad. About one farmers’ union representative I can see that he writes “good person.”

The following Q &A session is busy. A woman in her late 50s stands up. In a very blunt, but down-to-earth, she starts to speak: “Why is ethanol so degraded in public discourse?” She is referring to recent claims that ethanol, which is predominantly extracted from various crops requiring land and farming resources that could be used for food production. “Why is only ethanol said to compete with food? What about T-shirts, golf courses…? As she continues it becomes clear that this woman is used to speaking in public, backing up her rhetorical question with commensurable facts; “Reports say that we can increase ethanol production yet another 15% before it starts intruding on food. This really upsets me!”

While the woman is still talking, Magnus takes up his smart phone and starts writing a text message. Over his shoulder I can see the two words: “Well spoken!” He scrolls in his Contact list until he finds the number, and sends it off. The lady finishes her inflammatory speech, and sits down.

Once the seminar is over, Magnus moves fast towards the exit. It has stopped raining, and while we linger outside the entrance, we see Anitra Steen, CEO of the Swedish alcohol monopoly, and wife of the former Prime Minister Göran Persson pass us. We remain quiet.

When the lady with the ethanol question comes out, Magnus approaches her and gives me a wink to come along. He says: “Hi! Did you get my text?”

She looks startled, as if recognizes him, but can’t remember his name. “Yes, I just replied, but I didn’t know who it was from. Thank you!” “No but I mean it”, Magnus says. “You spoke extremely well. I was just lucky to still have your number. “Thank you. I just get so angry when I hear ethanol being discredited like this.”

Magnus explains his mission for the petroleum company and introduces me, without affiliation; “This is Anna, working with me this week.”

The lady presents herself as Annika, and suddenly I understand who she is; she is Annika Åhnberg, the former social democratic minister of agriculture. She explains to Magnus that she has abandoned politics completely and also her top management position in a large Swedish MNC in the energy technology field. She now serves on the board of the Royal Swedish Academy of Agriculture and Forestry and runs her own consult-

---

65 Swe.”Väl talat!”
ing company. Magnus asks, with an air of it being the most natural ques-
tion in the world:
“Maybe we could work together somehow?”
Annika is positive.
“Yeah sure, just call me. I am very eager to do something about this. I
support all initiatives for this cause.”

While we’re walking towards the inner bay of the harbor, Magnus com-
ments on Annika Åhnberg.
“It’s funny, that woman talking…”
”Annika Åhnberg?”
“Yes, you know her?”
“Well, she used to be in the government…”
”Yeah but in what department?…”
I am a bit astounded. Does he really not know this? He just asked her to
work with him! Or maybe he’s testing me? I decide to express myself
diplomatically.
“Agriculture, I think.”
“Well at first I didn’t recognize her, but then when she presented herself
in the seminar, it just rang a bell. We used to work together, ten years
ago or so. After leaving politics, she had a room in our [PR] agency. She
is so sharp. She has such a good way of expressing herself, factual and
clear. You get a feeling that her mind works faster than everybody else’s
in the room. A very good person. I hope she’ll join us in this.

From my earlier interviews, I had had hints that this is how it works,
but now I had it confirmed; that the top politicians joining PR consul-
tancies do not actually work there. They have a room at the PR agency
that they use occasionally, a business card with the PR agency’s logo on
it and then they charge the PR agency for hours spent on various pro-
jects. A subcontractor, of sorts.

Despite being better prepared than last year, I am already a bit astound-
ed, just one hour into the week. The sophistication and swiftness of
Magnus’s play-it-by-ear strategy is striking. There was no possibility
Magnus could have known that Annika would attend the seminar, and he
hardly recognized her at first. But from hearing her speak just a few sen-
tences, he rapidly singled her out from all the other 100 people in the
audience, identified his old connection with her, found her number is his
old phone book – where he must save a thousand old phone numbers,
sent her a text, waited for her outside, re-established the personal con-
nection, briefly presented his case and tied a potential ally to his cause.
The whole series of events took a maximum of 20 minutes, but he drew
on his whole professional arsenal to perform it; network contacts, politi-
cal know-how, years of experience, and last but certainly not least, his amiable personality. A beautiful display of PR consultancy in action?

We decide to sit down at a nearby restaurant on the Harbor Square. As we wait for our food, Magnus starts elaborating the mission to me in closer detail;

M: “We need to do two things; to create a clear argumentation strategy and to identify which persons are good to have on your team.”

A: “So Annika, she could help you shape the arguments?”

M: “Exactly. As you heard this morning, all actors say the same thing: Policy in this area is too unstable, and developments are going in the wrong direction. And I have still not been able to figure out why ethanol is being dragged through the mud, where all the bad talk comes from. So we need, as you said, to find allies, and also find which politicians have a say.”

A: “But on a concrete level, what does [your client] wish to accomplish? Policy decisions?”

M: “Partly that, like tax reliefs at the station. Then second, to crush this myth about the substitutability of ethanol. It is simply not true that ethanol is competing with food.”

Magnus sounds like an echo of Annika’s recent speech, and I cannot see where this is coming from, whether this is his own view or a quick adoption of hers to make his argument look more orderly.

M: “Then there are ‘auxiliary taxes’: tax relief for environmentally friendly cars. For producing them, and buying them but also in the form of exemption from car tolls for green cars. Things indicating that using bio fuel should be encouraged.”

A: “Also car rentals?”

M: “Yes, and company cars. But what we see now is that you when you buy a car you get compensated for the price difference between an ethanol-driven vehicle and a gasoline one. But you don’t get rewarded, you get nothing extra. So, to conclude, we want 1) subsidies at the gas station, reflected in fuel price levels, and 2) subsidies when you as a private person buy and drive a “green” car.

---

66 Swedish: utbytbarhet.
67 Swedish: miljöbilar.
68 Swedish: tjänstebilar.
The project started with the client asking for a report from Magnus’ PR agency, with an overview of policy, regulation and actors in the bio fuel field. But Magnus felt that more could be done.

“We said to the client ‘you need to go to Almedalen.’ And they said, ‘no, we don’t have time.’ Then we thought at the agency that we would go instead. So we’re doing this mapping now, attending seminars and trying to identify people and angles.”

Magnus shows me the official homepage of the Almedalen Week, where visitors can login and put together their own personal schedule of seminars, in the “My program” application under the “Visitor” tab. He shows me his planned seminars during the week, and gives me his own login so I can see.

“See, I have listed the 7 most relevant events here. Already this afternoon there is one at Green Car Owners at the same time that I would need to attend to a telephone conference. Do you think you could go in my place?”

I recognize the familiar feeling from last year, a simultaneous feeling of being trusted and feeling lost. Somehow, Magnus must know what he’s doing.

“Oh, sure. What should I look for?”

“Good politicians, whether he or she might be interested in this. No need to take extensive notes. It is really about identifying good people. Then there are two more seminars this afternoon. Tomorrow afternoon there is also something on ethanol. But I am double-booked, actually triple-booked. Maybe you could attend one of these seminars too?”

“Sure.”

Magnus then continues to describe the three other clients he is working for during the week; he is coaching a PR manager of a cable TV provider who is participating in a radio debate, arguing for more radio frequencies. He is also trying to sell media training education to a public authority based in Visby. And then there’s the yearly party in the church ruin of course.

In addition, Magnus is also pitching for a renewed contract on the State Delegation on Technology project from last year, promoting science education for youths. But since the client has disappeared since then – the Delegation has been dissolved by government decree, he and the partnering advertising agency are trying to find a new sponsor in the Swedish Association of Graduate Engineers, who are not yet onboard. It

---

69 Söv. Gröna Bilister.
70 Söv. ”urskiljning av personer”.
would be a shame just to drop the project now that it’s on the road, Magnus reasons.
“We have momentum, and we want to keep it going. But we have to find the right angle and the right organization.”

In the industry organization PRECIS’ documents, the role of PR consultancy painted that of a cold-minded expert uniquely serving their clients and protecting their interests, often comparing the professional role to that of lawyers or management consultants. But when Magnus speaks, this image seems inadequate to describe how PR consultancy products come about. Instead, quasi-political initiatives seem to be proactively taken at the firm level or sometimes individual level. Even in the Denim Workshop case I saw proof of such PR firm-driven agency, and it has arisen in several interviews. I decide to ask Magnus straight out:
“So it is often like this, that you come up with an idea, before you have a client?”
Magnus looks at me, surprised:
“But why, yes. ALL the time. With the State Delegation on Technology it was certainly like that. We were working for two or three years before we found the client. And then I was so persistent, kept nagging, and then finally I got the job.”
It actually seems like Magnus sees this as his project; he came up with it, designed it, found a client, ran it for them for a few years. Now, when the client is no longer sponsoring it, he wants to take his project elsewhere.
“But why?”
“Because I felt for this issue! I believe that the lack of scientific knowledge is a crucial deficiency for our country. And that too few people realize this. With digital TV it was the same. For a long time I had a general feeling of “something is going to happen soon.” Then I heard that a decision was taken by the parliament to appoint at state commission to administrate the transformation of broadcasting from analogue to digital. So I called that new commission. If you ask the first director general of that Commission, he would describe the course of events likes this: he got a room and a desk with a phone on it, and on the first day at work, that phone rang and it was ‘Hi, it’s Magnus from PR Agency X. Could I do this for you?’ Then I explained what I had in mind.”

But these four projects – the Nordic petroleum company, the cable TV manager, the public authority media training, the Swedish Association of Graduate Engineers - are not all the projects Magnus will be doing in Almedalen.
“There is actually another thing that Erik and I are working on, concerning the pension fund system. It is a bit secret I guess. The basic idea is this: With the new pension system, there are a tremendous number of brokers earning tremendous amounts of money. People who are just profiting, earning money, without anyone knowing what they’re doing. You just have to calculate how much money in a interest-on-interest economy that we ordinary pension fund savers have lost in the 15 past years, since the new system was introduced. It’s awful! Horrendous! I mean, this is our money! So we’re sketching on a system where you’d have maybe three options, one a little more risky, and one that follows index etcetera. Actually, that would be a bit of a return to the old system.”

“But this sounds like a big project?”

“Yes, it’s huge! The ideal would be if we could find a consortium. We have some contacts with one of the large mutual funds, they might be interested.”

Magnus and I work for a while side by side. I collect myself: I have three more seminars the same afternoon, and then another X the coming days. I need to go off to the second seminar of the day. I stand up. I feel as though I have to set the expectations to the right level.

“So. I’m leaving. But you get what you get. I mean I am a researcher, not a political analyst.”

Magnus smiles, kindly: “No Anna, you know just what we need.”

I doubt this statement completely. I feel like a rookie. But Magnus is the uncrowned master of moderate flattery, so I make myself believe this. I go off.

On my way out, I visit the washroom. As I enter, a famous Swedish fiction writer whom I have only seen in newspapers and on TV before, comes out of the gentlemen’s. I am a bit star struck. Just as I come out on the street, I see the party secretary of the Moderate Party, Per Schlingmann, passing by accompanied by… yes, the Prime Minister, Fredrik Reinfeldt, with his bodyguards closely behind him. Welcome to Almedalen, I think to myself.

I spend my afternoon in various seminars. Most of what is said is a repetition of the morning’s panel discussion. I finally meet up late afternoon with Magnus at a debate with the minister of trade, Ewa Björling. Overall, the talk is not so interesting, very politically correct. The sun is really hot, and after a while I see Magnus in the shade. After the debate is over, Magnus goes off to take a power nap in the Almedalen Park, on the lawn while I have a late takeaway lunch on a nearby bench. After the nap, he

71 Sve. fondförvaltare.
comes back, and I debrief him on the other seminars. He hears me out, then he asks:
“So… Do you think Ewa Björling is a good person?”
“And you ask that question to a PhD Student specializing in Organization Theory? I have no idea!”
Magnus laughs, continues:
“No, but the main question is: Does she have any reason to listen to the ethanol producers?”
“You mean like national-political reasons?”
“Yeah, or others. We could take a Nordic angle on this. After all, this is a Nordic corporation starting up in Sweden, of course they should talk with the minister of trade who also happens to be the minister of Nordic cooperation.

I get nervous, I feel he is expecting too much from me. He must see that I have no clue. On the other hand, he doesn’t seem to be bothered by my presence. I can’t say if it’s just Magnus’ chivalrous ways – he is surely a true diplomat who seems to get along with most people – or our personal chemistry, but I don’t feel intimated. Someone calls Magnus, he picks up. I overhear the conversation:

“Which country are you in? Ah. […] I’m in Almedalen with Anna Tyllström. You know, she’s following me this week.”

He talks with the person in the other end about a dinner the same evening with yet another company he wants to get as clients, as I understand it. He hasn’t told me about them though. He hangs up. I have no idea who that was. Who could it have been, who is abroad and yet knows my name? He had seemed so openhearted this morning about clients and projects, but there is one that he hasn’t told me about. What other clients hasn’t he told me about this morning?

I decide to change the subject, and ask him about his methods. So this is how you run these lobbying cases, you brainstorm with somebody junior?
“Yes, I normally brainstorm with younger consultants, to get ideas. Then Pelle and I get it together in the end. You know, to get things in order.72”

As we head off for our next event, Magnus continues talking. I fell as I am in the TV series West Wing, where young political analysts must walk with the senior staff in order to get time with them. Except that we are

72 Sve. ”få ordning på det”
in a dazzling hot summer vacation paradise on an island in the Baltic Sea, and I am an intern.

“I mean, we have young political scientists [in the agency], trained people. But sometimes I feel that this is not enough, the formal training, they don’t teach you this in the Political Science 101 course.”

We reach the harbor. Magnus goes to the temporary washroom in the harbor area. I don’t want to abandon the topic of good and bad consultancy just yet, so as he comes back, I ask:
“‘So a good PR consultant is a former journalist?’
“Yes, I use that background a lot. My colleagues are political scientists, and they read. I call. I don’t stop calling until 5 pm. I can call 20 people, and they all describe the same thing but differently, because that’s reality, a bit different to everyone.”

“But with this mission… I haven’t yet succeeded in finding the soft tissue.” I still haven’t understood why the government is increasingly negative towards ethanol, who’s pushing this in the opposite direction.”

Our new seminar facility is a boat. “Tre Kronor” is a 45-meter-long brig, built as an exact replica of a 19th-century navy cargo ship. She is sailed down from Stockholm to Visby every year to serve as a seminar hall - below deck, there is a small conference room for 50 people – and the ship’s hand-crafted feel and use of windpower has made her an especially popular rental among environmentalist organizations. This afternoon’s host is Green Motorists, a lobbying group for “environmentally friendly motoring.”

In contrast to the previous four seminars, this seminar is spot on; both issues and representatives are highly relevant to Magnus’ cause. The seminar starts with a presentation by two men from Green Motorists. I recognize one of them; he is a former Green Party campaigner and a former PR consultant, and I have previously interviewed him for research purposes. He and his colleague are quite demagogical in their approach – not unlike car salesmen, actually. Still, they provide a lot of useful facts; statistics on sales over time, distributed over different green car classes and types of bio fuels, and an overview of recent policy changes. After this, two representatives from the car industry, Volvo and Nissan, share their views. The car manufacturers are despairing, claiming to have spent big money on developing new, more efficient ethanol engines, and now, in time for the launch of these engines, politicians are

73 Swe. “mjukdelar”
scrapping the tax benefits for ethanol, resulting in plummeting sales. The share of ethanol-driven vehicles among new cars has decreased dramatically, from 50% to below to 5%, in just three years. Also, the requirements for a car to be classified as a “green vehicle,” and hence qualify for purchase discounts, have become considerably stricter. The Volvo representative is desperate when he speaks of the launch.

“This is the engine everybody asked for three years ago, and now nobody wants it!” he exclaims.

Two local politicians, one from Gothenburg municipality and one from up north, both social democrats, now raise their voices. They are there because they have been awarded “Best Green Car Municipality of the year” by Green Motorists. Considering that the competition to attract elected politicians to events in Almedalen is razor sharp, this contest must be regarded as a smart move.

The lady from Gothenburg stands up, and agrees with the car industry representatives about the difficulty of predicting policy being a major obstacle to efficient public environment plans. She says that the major bottleneck is the ministry of finance.

Thereafter, the former PR consultant from Green Motorists ends the session with an appeal urging all actors in the room to come together in drafting a letter to the government. In this letter they would demand a list of concrete policy goals, for which he has already listed bullet points: subsidies, tax rewards, and classification limits in detail.

Magnus has somewhat of a poker face, so I cannot read his reaction. But I reckon this must be a jackpot for him; an extant network of powerful organizations that wish to accomplish the same thing as his client?

Afterwards there is mingling on the deck with sparkling wine and crackers. Annika Åhnberg is there, with her dog. For entertainment, Green Motorists have hired an impersonator, who makes is embarrassingly bad impressions of Swedish politicians. Magnus and I sit down a bit farther away by the railing. Magnus is thoughtful, reflecting actively and openly, in a sort of verbal protocol.

M: “Maybe the smartest thing for my client would be to join these people. Maybe that would be the most honest thing. To say: ‘You have to find allies, you can never do this on your own. You need help in this.’ That would be an advanced way of us saying ‘Sorry, we cannot help you.’ That is one way to attack the problem. But then you have to be a consultant, as well.” If I tell the client that the best thing is to join an exist-

74 Såväl. ”man måste vara konsult också”
ent network, then that would be bad – for us of course, since there would be no work. But it would also be, like, as if we left them with nothing. Which is not fair. They come here, expect to get help and then we say that there’s nothing to be done!”

A: “So what is the solution?”
M: “I still have to think about that. Maybe the solution would be an alliance with the social democrats, Volvo, the competitor Preem…”

A: “But there seems to be a network already, as we just saw?”
M: “It might look like that, but I wouldn’t think it is that fixed. And we’ll say to the client, that at the same time, [taking initiatives together with them] will make you more renowned. In certain cases they should approach ministers, in others maybe the social democrats in Stockholm, Nissan or Volvo. And maybe Green Motorists. That would be on a small scale, but a good scale.

Feeling somewhat like a useless intern, I try to assist in the brainstorming.

A: “Well Green Motorists seems to have made a smart move with the prize, awarding politicians like that. Maybe you could establish a prize? A truck manufacturer I interviewed started an international competition, ‘The Best Truck Driver of the Year.’ They seemed really happy with it.”

M: “Ah… a prize, I like that.” Magnus looks interested. “But to whom?”

From where he’s sitting at the railing, Magnus has an overview of the deck. His gaze scans the middle-aged crowd watching the impersonator, whose act seems so be coming along better now. He says:

M: “Who is not here right now, Anna? Young people! Maybe a competition for the best young green driver? Maybe look at people taking their driver’s license? Big city youth.

A: “Youth car insurance policies could be another point of identification?”

M: “Yes, you have to get target groups that are not normally targeted… women, youth.”

By now, it is almost 7 pm. We talk a bit more about Magnus’ house construction project, and how he started his own company, something he did mostly to avoid; avoid having bosses, and avoid stockholders. We make some preliminary plans for the coming day. After agreeing to call each other the following morning, we part, and I go home.

________________________

75 *Swe.* ”lämnar dem i sticket!”

76 *Swe.* slippa.
Day 2: Flyers, Fuel and Media Coaching

Around 11 a.m., as I sit and flesh out my notes from Day 1, Magnus calls me on my cell phone. He wants to ask me for a favor for which he “would be so, so grateful”: that I distribute flyers for a seminar that Strat PR is arranging. Time is short; Magnus would join in himself at 2 p.m., but the seminar is at 3 p.m., just a few hours away, and the agency needs somebody on the streets now. Apparently something has gone wrong with the staffing, and they’re missing people. He doesn’t tell me who the client is, or where the seminar is, just where to show up. From the lack of detail, I gather that it is not one of Magnus’s own projects; otherwise he would have mentioned it to me yesterday. Or maybe not? Since I have a general “yes” policy, I say yes, and get into my car to drive into Visby. As I arrive on the designated spot in a church ruin, a bit further into the town center, I am met by Isabelle, one of the agency’s younger consultants whom I’d met the previous year. I get a hug, an enthusiastic “thank you!” and a stack of flyers advertising a seminar on the conditions for independent actors in the Swedish film industry. People on the panel are an odd mix: one semi-famous actor, a blogger, the former minister of trade and communications, and an movie director who used to do comedies in the 1980s.

As I stand there in a sloping cobblestone street with a stack of flyers in my hand, I realize I hate this type of job. The symptom of my resistance is physical, a sort of tingling in the arms. I have done this so many times working extra when I was younger (as a telemarketer, coffee shop assistant, etc.) - you have to SELL. Lend your body and personality to whatever the cause may be. Maybe this is why I became an academic, so I would not have to do precisely this? I yearn back to the strategic reasoning of the previous day. At the same time, I know that Magnus himself had been distributing flyers in the morning, and that Isabelle is doing it right now further up the slope; that it’s a part of PR consultancy work. (On repeated occasions, Magnus has told me that the mix between “practical and theoretical” is absolutely central to PR consultancy.) And since PR consultancy work is what I am here to study, I should take part. So I brace myself, and take the plunge.

After a rocky start, I actually find a flow; I am able to detect the easiest target group; older female tourists, and to condense the message to the most crucial point, using the semi-famous celebrities’ names: “Lasse Åberg” in half an hour? Lasse Åberg and Alex Schulman” in half an hour?”

77 Movie director.
78 Blogger.
As more and more people take the flyer, the tingling in the arms subsides and eventually another force takes over, a combination of winner’s instinct and problem-solving obsession. For this is the flip side of the selling coin; once you’ve gotten into it, it gets easier and easier, until it even becomes fun. The act of selling is a spectacle; a role-playing game, circling around one question only; how can I best persuade the next person I meet to accept what I am offering? At that point, the offering itself is no longer of importance; I could be selling lavender shampoo, executive education or, for that matter, munitions. When one of the older ladies asks me, flyer in hand, for the venue, I realize that I do not know this. Isabelle hasn’t told me and I had forgot to ask. I have to read aloud from the back of the flyer.

By 2.55 p.m. I am all out of flyers, and it’s time to leave for the next seminar on energy, taking place at the University College of Gotland. One of Sweden’s most dominant industry organizations, Car Sweden, is arranging a panel debate on alternatives to fossil fuels for heavy transports. On my way down to in the harbor area, I pass a small group of people looking more beautiful, taller, and better dressed than the average Almedalen mix of political analyst and tourists. In their midst, I see Erik. This is the film seminar starting.

As I enter the College, the cool air-conditioned hits me like a wall. After a few hours outside in 35 degrees and sunshine, the sudden drop in temperature makes me dizzy. But contrasts do not stop there. The gap couldn’t be wider between distributing flyers for the independent actors’ trade union, and the crowd in the college auditorium. I am back to politics again, and this time it’s the big guys talking. The relative importance of the industry organization Car Sweden, built up over decades by Saab and Volvo and their subcontractors, is reflected in the setting; the main hall is huge, food is free, and the participants are more distinguished; several members of parliament, head experts from the traffic and energy authorities, CEOs and vice CEOs of several oil companies, and Volvo. These are the people with actual power. The audience as well as the panel is mainly made up of middle-aged men in blue shirts and khaki shorts or slacks. Out of perhaps 150 participants, maybe 20 are women, including the event hostesses and myself.

The outcome of the discussion is also illuminating. Volvo repeats its lament from yesterday, but meets resistance straight away from the experts at the Swedish Transport Administration. They are very critical of ethanol, and accuse ethanol of being a “fad” that politicians had been too eager to join too soon. If that trend is subsiding, they seem to be saying, then that’s all for the best. The future lies in biogas and electric cars, both state experts seem to think. I will bring this information home
to Magnus; yesterday, the ministry of finance was identified as an enemy of ethanol, and here we have crucial state-employed experts that are against. There is hence resistance occurring in multiple places in governmental administration, simultaneously.

After one hour, I have to sneak out, as I am to follow Magnus in his coaching of the PR guy from the cable TV company, here called T-Com, in the radio discussion. The broadcast is live, from the radio station’s tent, right at the back of the university college building. It has now started to rain, and we stand outside the tent, trying to look in through the plastic windows. Magnus feels we should try to get inside. At the entrance, a guy stops us. His mien is not hostile, but curious as he asks us: “Hi, where are you from?”
“We’re from T-com”, Magnus responds.
The guy looks utterly surprised;
“Oh, but I am from T-com. I don’t recognize you!”

Oh-oh. Are we caught in the pretend-to-be-something-else game? Magnus quickly leans over to the man, mumbles in his ear. I guess he explains that he’s from the Strat PR. But still, it’s quite remarkable that a communications staff member at T-com does not recognize Magnus, or know that he would be there. Are the media training services that Magnus is providing the PR manager with a secret? Maybe media training is a personal thing, yet I don’t understand the mechanisms at work here. We are let inside. However, the sound is bad, so we immediately go outside again. A huge van, whose side is covered with a picture of a very up-front picture of a fetus, drives slowly past us. It has extremities and a head, and is covered in blood – the remains of a late abortion in size 1:2500. In Sweden such anti-abortion campaigns are quite uncommon, and I can’t help staring. Magnus looks at it briefly, says “Euh”, then goes back to focusing on the broadcast again.

The PR manager does well, in Magnus’s view, and we go on to see if the Car Sweden seminar is still on. It isn’t. We then continue to another client, outside the city walls in fact, where Magnus is about to get another media training project. I later find out that he lands the deal.

**Day 3: The Mingle**
The main attraction of Day 3 is the party, or “The Mingle.” The mingle was at least as large as last year, but this time, I haven’t participated in the organizing. The partners are the same as last year. Magnus has allowed me to bring four friends. A consultant from *Strat PR*, whom I don’t rec-
ognize, meets me at the door. I say my name. She looks excited: “Oh. You’re the secret person working with us!”

“Everybody” is there; it is really the de facto party of Almedalen. I see famous or semi-famous faces at every bar table. After a while, I meet the husband of an old study mate of mine, who works as edition manager at the political magazine co-hosting the party together with Strat PR. He is very respectful and shows a genuine interested in my research. He is joined by two very tall men who turn out to be an editorial writer at the dominant liberal tabloid, and the chief editor of a business weekly, respectively. When I explain why I’m there, they cannot believe their ears. Their opinion is unanimous:

“I can’t believe that Strat PR let’s you in on this. They are very, very brave!”

As my friends and I are about to leave, the CEO of the political magazine whom I had worked with the year before grabs hold of me: “This year you won’t do anything, Anna!” He then treats my friends and me to free wine, telling them and the surrounding crowd, mainly a bunch of political bloggers, that “Anna did such an amazing effort last year!” I take this with a large pinch of salt. This was actually one of the largest eureka moments the first year; how little it took to get compliments. Coming from an academic world, where you can present what you consider the best piece of research you have ever produced, and still come out of a seminar awash in waves of criticism. In the PR consultancy world it was obviously is enough to answer your phone, arrive on time, do what you’re supposed to do (or a little more), all while smiling, in order to get positive remarks. Finding a rental TV screen, transcribing some notes and running them through the spell-check program, or foreseeing a practical need before it actually arose, were all endeavors earning judgments in the vein of “unbelievable,” “fantastic” or “incredible.” I has also noticed how this flattery was a used for directive purposes; a gratifying phrase was often followed by yet another question of a practical task to be carried out. Nevertheless, I cannot say that this aspect of the PR work was not attractive, the feeling of being adequately competent. The same could be said of the free wine. We stay until they kick us out at midnight, and we continue out in the streets of Visby.

Day 4: The Diesel War
This is the last day Magnus and I work together. When I open the country’s largest newspaper that morning, the headline of the Economic Supplement reads: THE DIESEL WAR. The phrase is directly stolen from a trade magazine covering the media industry, which the previous day had
published a “scoop” on the bio-fuel debate. I google the original article, which Magnus had mentioned just briefly during the party last night. It comes up at once, and the original headline reads “Full Throttle in the Diesel War.” National newspapers are evidently not late to pick up this news on the issue, and spread it to a larger audience. The rather lengthy text describes the conflict in detail, and the focus is not on ethanol directly, but on the tax difference between bio-diesel (called Mk1) and normal diesel (Mk3). Whereas ethanol had lost its tax benefits, the tax benefits on bio-diesel had remained, although rates had been lowered. Now, two camps, represented by the two oil companies Preem and Statoil, continued to fight about the remaining tax:

Those who cherish tax benefits for Mk1-diesel are primarily Preem, producing Mk1-diesel in its refinery on the west coast. They have the support of the Red and Green parties, but also by the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC). On the other hand, as producers of Mk3 diesel or Europe Diesel, there is primarily Statoil but also other oil companies. They are supported by the right-wing parties, as well as transport companies.

(Resumé, Jul 6, 2011)

The earlier decrease in tax benefits was the result of a long, still on-going campaign headed by the second camp, headed by Statoil.

The article also mentions what PR agencies are working for the two oil companies. Here, things start to appear blurry to me. Statoil had long relations with the PR agency where the very passionate lobbyist from Green Motorists had been employed as a senior energy expert. Had he been active in the campaign for abolishment of tax benefits for ethanol? But why then, would he organize seminars where the car industry was invited to make pro-subsidy claims? When I interviewed him back in 2006, he was active both in Green Motorists and PR consultancy. Did he play out different arguments in different organizational arenas? Or had I simply missed something? Moreover, the refinery mentioned in the text is run by Preem together with a conglomerate of large foresting companies, and had been advertised as producing “the greenest diesel available” on the market during the week’s first seminar, at which Magnus had spotted Annika Åhnberg. When it comes to pine oil, is the whole forestry industry – a substantial part of the Swedish economy, traditionally mightier than the car industry – behind that lobby too?

The further into the text I read, the fuzzier the picture becomes. To an outsider, who is not familiar with energy policy, the whole situation appears confusing. Relationships, networks and activities all melt into
each other, they seem entangled. Initiatives on the individual, organizational and industry level seem to work in tandem, and I am no longer sure of who is a driving behind what issues. The article ends:

On Thursday Preem and Statoil meet face to face in two consecutive seminars in the ‘Environment News’ arena. […] So when the diesel war comes to Almedalen, an already combustible area risks being considerably heated up.”

(Ibid)

Just a few hours later, I find myself in Visby, aiming for the very same seminar that the article mentions. I can’t find Magnus, so I text him, and he replies; “I’m in the back!” I look around; he waves from where he’s sitting, next to someone he obviously knows. The panel discussion is, indeed, lively. Preem and Statoil go into opposition from the first minute. The panel is divided into exactly the two teams painted in the article; the conservative MP and Statoil argue against tax benefits, Preem and the Green party MP are for. The Preem representative is a woman, which is a novelty in itself. The whole seminar ends up with an inflamed debate of how to measure the CO₂ emissions from the two types of diesel; according to Preem’s way of calculating, the difference in emissions between Mk1 and Mk3 is considerable, according to Statoil’s commensuration system, it is negligible. These are the positions as the debate comes to a close.

Afterwards, Magnus and I sit down on a bench outside. Suddenly the image that had been so diffuse the other day is very clear to Magnus. I don’t know if he has adopted the analysis of the Resumé article, or if he has gained more information since we last spoke that he has not shared with me. I give him the Economy Supplement from the same morning. He asks if he can keep it. We talk about how the green party MP has shaped up her act considerably over the past few days.

“Yes, she was a bit school-girlish before, wasn’t she? By the way did you see my friend there, the guy I sat beside?”

Indeed, I had seen how Magnus shook hands with a man his age on the seat beside him, while leaving the seminar room. Magnus explains:

“‘There you can really speak of an ‘Almedalen effect’! He is my old study mate. He’s an administrator at Energy Gas Sweden, since like forever, and now he just said: ‘look Magnus, I really want to discuss something with you, let’s be in touch after the summer.’ So we’ll chat

---

79. Säve, Miljöaktuellt.
80. Industry organization for the energy sector.
then. That wouldn’t have happened in Stockholm. It’s incredible, really, the atmosphere here!”

Magnus is obviously inspired and continues to talk:

“Also, I met former Vice Governor of the Riksbank in the harbor the other day. I know him, we have had children in the same school. Since he stopped working there, I know some of what he’s been up to, we’ve been in touch sporadically. Now he’s in the management of a large academic foundation. And when I met him the other day, he was like ‘Magnus, I need your advice on a few things, couldn’t we have a bite as you get back to town?’ Then you know, when friends say that, that’s an entry to an assignment. And that happens every day here. So it is hard to systematize the effects [of Almedalen] for sales. I mean you meet people. If the agency organizes some party, people come. Or you bump into people at seminars.

“So what do they want your help with?”

“Often it’s about information flows, or an image. Managing their information, outwards our inwards. The whole thing with the media-training contract we got the other day started like that, with the boss there. He and I go way back, maybe 2005 or before. The first time we worked together, he called me. He was then head of a large state-owned historical museum. Somebody had told him, “Go to Magnus at Agency X.” Then we had a very long meeting, off the record, maybe 3 hours, of just brainstorming. I did a major assignment for him last winter. That was a report, I think three or four people from us worked on it. And now there’s this new thing.”

We talk some more about the coming media-training project.

“By the way, there’s something I haven’t mentioned… But behind the scenes this week, we’ve have had another assignment going on, for American Express. This Monday when we had the phone conference, that’s what we were discussing. On that project there are two other consultants and me. So that is also going on.”

Actually, this is the third client project in Almedalen that just “pops up” during the week, in addition to the five he had mentioned during our

---

81 Sweden’s Central Bank
82 Swe. “ingång till jobb”
83 Swe. “inåt eller utåt”
84 Swe. utredning.
first lunch on Day 1 (the others were the high-tech company that I overheard in his phone conversation, then the film seminar). Despite Magnus’ seemingly exhaustive information-sharing – sharing his log-ins, time and thoughts with me – it is obvious that he is conscientiously managing the boundaries between what he is telling me and what he is not. It is difficult to tell, since I have followed him alone, and never seen him in interaction with other consultants.

“Otherwise, that is something that struck me, how you seem to be alone in these lobbying missions?”

“I see what you mean. On the report for the oil company there were actually more people involved, I think four. But yes… On the assignments involving more complicated political games, I tend to take them.”

As we are talking, the Communication Manager from Preem comes up to us, together with her assistant. I get the feeling that Magnus and she have met before, at least remotely. Why is she coming up to us? Maybe he has told her assistant that he wished to speak with her? Magnus says the name of his client, that they’re entering the Swedish market, and that they share the same political goal as Preem, namely to lobby to keep tax subsidies for the local Swedish “green diesel” and ethanol. As usual, he pays her compliments on her contributions during the panel, and she had indeed done well. They continue talking about the conflict between them and Statoil, and then they proceed to educational background, stating that they are both chemical engineers but never worked with engineering per se. A professional tie established. As she turns to leave, she says: “I am really happy to hear they have employed someone for lobbying! It was about time.”

After she’s gone Magnus says:

“She was so sweet that girl! You know, when you meet ambitious women in technical companies, it’s not uncommon that they are chemical engineers.”

We decide to go for a free coffee, offered by the client’s nemesis, Statoil. Statoil’s main argument against tax subsidies is that it unfair, as it thwarts competition and hence trade. To drive home the point, Statoil has rebuilt an electrical car into a coffee-serving wagon, serving free Fair Trade-labeled coffee. Witty. On the side of the wagon, the rationale for serving free coffee to Almedalen visitors is printed in large letters: “Because it gives you energy to modernize the diesel tax.”

---

85 Swe. “Urgullig tjejer!”
The Statoil Coffee Wagon. “#58. Because it gives you energy to modernize the diesel tax. Did you know that the diesel tax is being revised? Make sure your party votes for a competition-neutral and fair tax.”

Magnus and I each have a latte in takeaway mugs. It tastes quite horrendous, but Magnus is impressed by the initiative. In fact, he is so impressed that he even takes a picture of the wagon, to show his clients back at the oil company an example of “how the enemy works.”

We go back to the bench under the shade of the tree. As we are about to conclude the week’s collaboration, and Magnus himself had started the topic of contacts, I decide to ask the question I have been wondering about:

“How common is it that you use personal contacts? You hardly seem to use personal contacts within government for example. Is this a conscious strategy, or do you simply not have them?”

Magnus does not look offended, as he answers.

“I mean, in general, all people are Greek, thinking: ‘I know somebody who…’. There’s no doubt about that. We DO have these contacts. We have extremely close relations to the minister of education for example. We know the minister of integration and gender equality very well. Same with the minister of culture’s assistant. But we rarely use them. I mean the clients who come to a PR agency, knowing that we know, say “Lars,” they go wild. ‘Wow these people know Lars!’ they think. So it’s like with everything else, it works only because we believe in it. We allow ourselves to be Greek! See?”

He stops to think.

“But then I think using your contacts is quite inefficient really. I mean our [employed CEO] knows one particular government member ex-

---

87 Referring to ongoing political-economical crisis in Greece summer 2011, in the media often explained by intricate systems of nepotism and corruption instead of meritocracy.
tremely well, they go on vacation together. I mean, could you possibly have a closer bond than sitting boozing together 5 weeks in Spain?!? But if our CEO then were to ask this guy, ‘Look, could you push for…?’… NO! I think it works exactly in reverse. I mean they have a private, personal relationship. Imagine then if we would do that all the time! No, no.”

“So it’s a bit like Peter and the Wolf? That contacts lose their value if you call on them too often?”

“Exactly, we have to save these contacts for when we really need help.”

As usual, I cannot tell if Magnus is only “post-rationalizing” because he is asked to answer the question, or if this is really so. I persist:

“But did you ever need it?”

“Look. I also believe in being decent with these things, and no, so far we haven’t needed it. You know, a close family member of mine is working for the ministry of social affairs, and I mean we meet all the time, every day, we’re building a summer house together now. Sometimes I ask her things, what’s going on here and here. And sometimes she says ‘I’m sorry, I can’t answer that’ and then that’s completely OK. And sometimes it’s not so important either which political color a person has, or where in politics you have worked. All politicians, regardless of party affiliation, know the political game, on their 5 fingers.”

Magnus is clearly done with talking about this, and moves on to hypothesize about the case at hand.

“Now with this assignment, I wonder… Or should we take the Nordic angle? Or the political angle? Or go to the media? One way is to go in and the take the lead in non-profit issues,88 but then we risk becoming a peeve of the Conservative parties, and being received in the wrong way…”

Magnus and I don’t reach any conclusion. We agree that I will e-mail him notes from the earlier seminar that he missed, and then we are through for this year. We thank each other. The atmosphere is cordial now after working together for two consecutive Almedalen years. Then I go off, quite exhausted after the past few days.

88 Såväl. ”Ideella frågor.”
Identifying Product Mechanisms: Visibilization and Amalgamation

The aim of this chapter was to see if there were new dimensions of understanding PR consultancy to be reaped from watching the product construction in practice. Despite the obvious difference between cases, and the limited nature of the observations, a number of themes emerge from the observations, both confirming and complementing the other analysis of PR consultancy products.

My observations from PR practice share several of the themes from Chapter 5: the importance of keeping abreast is one of them. The demand for novelty and analysis of the latest events in the “reality” of audiences seems to be insatiable. By constantly updating and synthesizing information from different sources, PR consultancy services create new versions of reality relevant and understandable to the client. This is what Sports Inc. wants from Prod PR, and what the Nordic oil company wants from Strat PR.

The simultaneous management of both form and content that emerged from the discourse analysis is present here as well. Throughout all activities, the utmost importance was assigned to the external appearance of things, locations and people. Both PR consultancies worked with transforming physical space; the atmosphere and dimensions testified to almost scenographic skills. In the denim case, Prod PR offices actually functioned almost like a stage; people, clothes and scenery changed rapidly and effortlessly, as in a theater. A similar effect was achieved in the church ruin, as Strat Pr and its partners transformed an archeological heritage monument without a roof into a beautiful party venue for a day. Without a doubt, it seems to be of part of the product to be good-looking and to deliver good-looking events.

But it is not only the surface that counts; according to both themselves and the clients, both Pr agencies are very active in coming up with ideas and messages. Unlike advertising agencies, for example, content is actively managed or formatted to fit a journalistic model, and multiple-channel messages and contents are constructed. This was also apparent in Perspectives texts, but it became even more obvious in my observations how everything and everyone should possess a minimum of stylishness, self-consciousness and beauty. One could imagine a difference between the market PR agency and a more lobbying type of Public Affairs operation, but no differences were observable. Lights, food, party venues, and online event invitations – everything was meticulously designed, and sometimes outright orchestrated, made to appeal to several senses simultaneously. But this was not enough; the right politicians should come to the party, the right arguments should be put forth in the panel debate, the right opinion leaders should be tied to each project.
The bike wagon used in advertising higher education in Almedalen is an emblematic example: the people and the materials were all “type-casted” for the spectacle; the seminar was in a central location attracting the right politicians, the teenagers pushing the wagon came from the right high-school program, they were media-trained by being filmed, and the wagon itself was of a unique design, painted in a harmonized color scale offering content-related services – all while offering a sensory experiences in the form of fresh strawberries.

A nearby theme is the multiplicity of aims from the Perspective texts series, as they were written to interest many different audiences and served multiple functions to the agency authoring them. In the ethnographic observations, this is reflected in fuzzy boundaries between what is marketing for clients, and what is marketing for the PR firm itself. It seems like an optimal “event” for Prod Pr is one that can fill at least two aims simultaneously, marketing clients while marketing Prod PR itself. Making a drink-control campaign that also produces new products, dishes and contacts is another example of multiple aims. Statoil’s coffee wagon in Almedalen was another such example of multiplicity of aims; using the Free Trade insignia while giving away free coffee could be interpreted as many things simultaneously; showing Statoil as a innovative organization (inventing a new concept), a generous one (giving away coffee), a witty one (playing word games), caring about CSR (showing the Free Trade insignia) and a political one (messages against thwarted competition for diesel).

These insights are all highly compatible with the results of the discourse analysis in Chapter 5. However, there were several insights that I would not have been able to retrieve without participating in the denim workshop myself. One such observation was how time was handled. I have already mentioned how the unpredictability of PR consultancies’ planning has puzzled me. In fact, entering the world of PR practice was for me as an academic an experience equivalent to stepping into the magic wardrobe of in the C.S. Lewis books of Narnia; when I came back to my office at the university, I realized that in just a few hours or days, more things happened than would happen in a normal month. The short deadlines and floods of these good-looking material outcomes (invitations, scenery, people’s participation) were especially impressive as they came about so quickly, as if they were produced out of thin air. On the other hand, each task lasted for only a tiny share of the normal time that I am used to putting into a task. Also, the level of robustness of plans was radically different from what I was used to; things would be called off or produced with little time, and a promise was more a letter of intent than an actual promise.
Another theme impossible to distill from reading texts only was the emphasis on personal contacts. In the texts, I saw how metaphors were drawn from discourses of personal or private life. After entering the practice of PR consultancy, I saw how the personal meshed with the public very quickly. Despite my feeling so unreseveredly alien to the environment at the denim workshop, and the audience being so small, a personal link or contact emerged with almost everyone involved. All consultants are aware that they are managing contacts, and selling them: between clients and the media, clients and partners, between clients and other clients. The way Magnus with such ease re-established his own decade-old connection to the former minister of agriculture, whom he considered a “good person” was telling of this dynamic.

The difficulty of evaluation was also a new mystery that was not discernible in the interviews; the formal version in texts and interviews was that PR projects were evaluated in a rationalistic, commensurable way. By participating myself, I could contrast these versions with what I saw: interactions where neither client nor producer counted clips, or sales increases. In the cases I observed, other values were considered priorities, such as legitimacy, credibility and network contacts.

Finally, a conspicuous theme was the effects of PR agencies’ initiatives on other markets, going beyond the mere PR of the clients’ products. These effects ranged from highly expected to highly unexpected. Media training, for example, has a highly visible influence on corporate behavior, guiding representatives’ talk in interaction with the mass media. But that the production of PR services should result in the invention and production of other commercial products (sponsoring the developing Sweden’s most prestigious glassworks sell a new schnaps glass) was an unforeseeable effect of the glassworks market. And by pooling brands in showrooms, and arranging market-configuring events for several players on the Swedish “denim market,” Prod PR also helps to define the Swedish denim market. Strat PR’s plans to come up with a draft of a new pension fund system, and to sell it to a large mutual pension fund, is another example of interference in the market for pension funds. The list could go on.

Consequences for Categorization

In summary, PR consultancy products consist of many things: beauty, guidance, contacts, and texts. The reasons for buying services seem to vary greatly. As such, PR consultancy services differ little from earlier findings that professional service firms are “ambiguity-intense” organizations which, in the absence of “real” products become more dependent on image management, personal contacts and rhetoric (Clark and Salaman, 1998, Alvesson and Johansson, 2002a). However, there are
reasons to believe that “PR consultancy” is potentially even more prone to ambiguity than other types of consultancy, such as management consultants, or HR consultants – reasons that may cause difficulties for legitimization, which in turn will amplify the complex relationship between ambiguity and categorization.

Studies of management consultants have shown how PSF commodification has come to center on management concepts; Balance Score Cards, Total Quality Management, Lean or New Public Management. However cumbersome the process of commodification, these are concepts that externalize knowledge from and codify professional knowledge (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2001, Zbaracki, 1998, Heusinkveld and Benders, 2005). In PR consultancy, no such concepts are available. Instead, the common denominators of PR consultancy products, I will argue, are two: amalgamation and visibilization. These are patterns or forces so dominant, repeated and prescriptive of action that they actually resemble product-level mechanisms, sets of interacting social processes that together produce a foreseeable, and repeated effect on market dynamics (Hernes, 1998).

**Amalgamation.** At the core of both texts and practices is amalgamation, a process by which consultancies strive to mesh previously disparate things into one. In Chapter 5, non-economic and economic vocabularies were blended to form a new unity. In the observational data, this same pattern is reflected in the constant mix between types of actors, partners, clients and activities. Combining elements, people, organizations and even words from various spheres of activity seems to be an ever-desirable outcome. To connect producers of schnapps with chefs and glass designers was a chosen example of good PR consultancy. In the Public Affairs departments, consultants from a right-wing political background are consciously set to work with consultants with a left-wing background, to make a more competitive PR consultancy offer. PR agencies are providing the link between the media and corporations. By this dynamic, amalgamation is a goal in itself, and constructing that amalgam is the position of the PR consultancy.

In network theory, such advantageous positions have been called structural holes (Burt 1992 [2009]), and it is suggested that actors that provide connections between two networks will profit greatly from being the link (Raider and Burt 1996). The philosopher Carol Steiner (1999) argues that conformity, with bounded theoretical and jurisdictional frames, is incompatible with the PR industry, an industry she describes a heterogeneous, dynamic, and thriving on influences from other fields.

But this amalgamation is not merely a function of mediation between separate spheres of activity (Deephouse and Heugens, 2009). PR consultants are not only carriers (Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall, 2002b), dip-...
Iomats (L’Etang, 2006), or brokers (cf. Alvesson and Johansson, 2002b, Fleming and Waguespack, 2007). I will argue that PR consultancies are actor organizations, in the theatrical sense of the word. What is sold is not only their skill to promote the clients, but also the skill of acting in the theatrical sense of the word, taking on temporary roles of other organizations. A consultant should be able to take on the role of a journalist if this is needed, the role of a fashion blogger, the role of an advertising agency, the role of an in-house communication officer, or the role of a politician. Diversity is hence not external to the product; it is at the heart of it. Through the mechanism of amalgamation, such diversity is commodified and stabilized into products of “PR consultancy.”

Visibilization. Visibilization is the second mechanism characteristic of PR consultancy. Borrowing the term from computer work studies (Engeström, 1999), I here let visibilization signify the purposive action of rendering things or practices visible. This mechanism has two dimensions: the visibility of the clients, and visibility of the PR consultancy itself. The visibility of clients is the end goal of many PR services, achieving credibility and legitimacy by mass media coverage. But in certain situations invisibility is preferred; non-disclosure policies of clients is standard practice among most large PR firms. PR consultant informants say that the need for corporate transparency is what drives demand for their products but also point out that such transparency must be carefully constructed and bounded.

The relationship between PR consultancy and visibility is equally complex. In certain situations their visibility seems to be superior to that of their clients; Prod PR’s invitation to the Denim Workshop promoted the consultancy itself more than anything, and Strat PR’s arranging the de facto party in Almedalen suggests the same. But visibility is not always desirable, as the ignominious situation of the T-com broadcast in Almedalen, revealed; we presented ourselves as T-com representatives to the actual T-com representatives, who did not recognize us. Moreover, the senior consultant that I followed in Almedalen gave an impression of full openness; sharing information, logins and his time with me. But he only told me of five client projects during the week, omitting three (or more?). In the denim case, I found that evaluation procedures that sounded rationalistic and institutionalized were not carried out in practice; in the specific case I observed, a number of reasons were invoked to justify why this specific process, along with other PR projects, were impossible to evaluate metrically. To write about the state of the world but omit the financial crisis, as in the perspective texts of 2008, is also symptomatic of such management of visibility.
A Semiotic Analysis of Mechanisms

The Alvesson quotation states that the fluid nature of professional service products will render fixed identities constructions unlikely:

…identity constructions are being backed up by rhetoric and images, at the same time as the fluid and fluctuating nature of persuasive talk, appearance and adapting to the whims and wants of clients undermine the prospect of, as well as the usefulness of, fixed identity constructions.

(Alvesson, 2001, p.883)

Perhaps such stability is it not even useful, or even less desirable. A semiotic analysis of the two mechanisms characterizing PR consultancy, amalgamation and visibilization, supports this hypothesis.

Amalgamation is the logic of meshing disparate things into one, and is by definition a boundary-spanning process. Amalgamation strives to dissolve boundaries and to repeal separation. If crisp boundaries are a prerequisite for categorization in accordance with theory in Chapter 2, the mapping of cultural base values yields that amalgamation is anathema to categorizable (Figure 7.1)

![Figure 7.1 Semiotic Meaning Structure of Amalgamation](image-url)

Figure 7.1 Semiotic Meaning Structure of Amalgamation
Similarly, cultural assumptions, along with extant theory, stipulate a relation of implication between visibility and legitimation. Visibilization is the act of rendering something visible, but the logical consequence of this is that something is also rendered invisible; there is an ongoing parallel process of *invisibilization*. Critics of PR consultancy accuse it of being clandestine, carried out in secret. A structural mapping of the semiotic relations shows that invisibility, which is the semiotic “residue” of visibility, is contradictorily related to legitimacy.

As long as *amalgamation* and *visibilization* remain two central market mechanisms, these will continually push the market away from clear categorization, and away from legitimacy.

Consequently, full categorization, a process aiming at clear boundaries, and stabilized meaning across audiences and over time, will be difficult to achieve in such a market context. As Durand and Paolella (2011) state, ambiguity is inherent in such categories.

*Figure 7.2 Semiotic Meaning Structure of Visibilization*
Chapter 8. Legitimizing a Market for Legitimacy

On the first page of the final chapter, I can indulge in a confession: I have found PR consultancy quite difficult to study. Not seldom, I have felt as though I am entering a house of mirrors. If I have looked for industry scandals, I have found crisis management for other industries. When I set out to explore PR consultants’ strategic use of language, I found instructions to other business as to how to use language strategically. Even when I have looked for theory explaining how these post-modern professionals manipulate meaning and relations between labels and denotations, I have found public relations theory on “how to infuse symbols with meaning.” When interviewing consultants, they have answered by giving me typologies, time periodizations, and the thinking of Bourdieu. To a researcher such reflexivity poses a genuine challenge. How grapple with such an elusive object of study?

In the coming pages I will argue that this reflexivity, this shape-shifting quality, is not erratic or inconsistent, as it may first appear. Quite the contrary. For just as the mass media are dual institutions in that they are both integrated into the operations of other social institutions, while also being social institutions in their own right (Hjarvard, 2008), so are PR consultancies. Only by recognizing this duality as a central dynamic to PR consultancy is it possible to learn why and how it has emerged as a product category, and how audiences have reacted to it. In other words, PR consultants are burdened with the task of legitimizing themselves, and legitimizing others.

This book started with two empirical observations: a virtual visit to the offices one of Sweden’s largest PR agencies, and eavesdropping on a Plenary Debate in the Swedish Parliament in the spring of 2012. Together these two images, of a flawlessly renovated former Soviet spy central now housing a PR consultancy, and the rejection of a call for regulation of PR consultancies’ lobbying activities, created an puzzling contradiction – that of a new market having conquered considerable market space but still suffering from two critical problems: a lack of legitimacy, and a lack of clarity. In other words, some people did not like it, and what is more, many actors could not describe exactly what this new thing that they did not like consisted of. Its meaning was unclear.
In my literature review, I found that extant theory on market categorization only had scant explanations for problems of this character. In fact, most previous studies had shown similar results; in the beginning, an industry might be a fuzzy construct, overlapping many product fields, and being called by many names or labels. With time, though, more stable categories emerge that can “act as institutions that facilitate market exchange by providing bases for comparison and valuation” (Khaire and Wadhwani, 2010); becoming taken-for-granted cognitive objects. Organizations who do not adhere to one category, by increasing boundaries, generally lessen their chance for legitimization and long-term survival (Hsu, 2006, Hsu et al., 2009, Zuckerman, 1999) In my case, this categorical imperative seemed to apply only partially.

My way to study this apparent contradiction was to follow the construction of the product category of PR consultancy services. Emanating from an ontological assumption that markets come about in language, my aim has been to look at how market categorization has been structured semantically over time, but also in practice. And market categorization is indeed a semiotic process; it is not only about spreading a word, but also attaching that word to practices, and then connecting that combination of words and practices to interpretations. Central to the semiotic approach is a tenet of meaning as being constructed in opposition; it is only by knowing what something does not mean that we can know what is does mean. As a consequence, the process of categorization involves setting boundaries versus other categories.

Categorization is also a process that takes place between the collectives of actors, or audiences, that care about the category. Full categorization has not taken place until there is a generalized understanding across audiences about what a category label means and the label enjoys both cognitive and socio-political legitimacy, i.e. it is known and regarded as desirable. To my ends, I constructed a semiotic model of categorization, allowing me to study the elements of a label, its denotations, connotations, and boundaries, both over time and in practice.

In the first empirical part of the thesis, Categorization over Time, I investigated meaning processes longitudinally. Drawing on interview data, documents and media archive studies, I found a widespread use of the “PR consultancy” label among actors. Categorization, however, was incomplete; mass media and regulatory audiences used “PR consultant,” but the use of synonyms was still frequent across audiences by the end of a time span ranging over more than 30 years. Moreover, many of those being categorized as “PR consultants” themselves resisted the label, trying to launch other, alternative labels. Another important audience, that is clients, did not seem to care much about product labeling at all. As a result, the widespread use of the PR label crystallized as more of a tem-
porarily stable equilibrium in an on-going power struggle than a display of taken-for-grantedness. Connotations, and hence meaning, were still in flux by the end of the time span, and category boundaries - although clearer than at the onset of my study - remained fuzzy.

From the analysis in Chapter 5, I concluded that the nascent category did enjoy a certain cognitive legitimacy but lacked socio-political legitimacy. I discussed two possible explanations; stigmatization, i.e. sticky negative connotations, and audience differentiation, i.e. that salient audiences in the case of PR consultancy markets, such as clients and producers, do not attach as great importance to product categorization as to other types of social evaluation (media evaluations and network recommendations of specific firms/teams/consultants etc.) Both these explanations seemed to have bearing on the case of PR consultancy. But how did they come about? The results of Part I pointed towards a closer study of the product label’s denotations, in other words: a study of PR consultancy construction in practice.

In the second empirical part, Categorization in Practice, I explored this construction along two dimensions: by analyzing a series of texts authored by PR consultants (Chapter 6), and by observing the everyday work practices in two Swedish PR consultancies (Chapter 7). I found two key processes paramount to the understanding of construction of PR consultancy services; visibilization and amalgamation. Throughout my empirical inquiry, I found a double relationship to visibility. On the one hand, the proclaimed goal of most PR consultancy services is achieving visibility in the form of media exposure for clients and, to a certain extent, also themselves. On the other hand, this visibility did not equal full transparency. For, as semiotic analysis suggests, visibility cannot be constructed without also constructing invisibility. And in my data, many things were indeed rendered invisible; the financial crisis in 2008 became invisible in consultancy texts in Chapter 6. In Almedalen the consultancies presented themselves as representatives for their client, something which became problematic as they were not recognized by the in-house staff at the client corporation. This conscientious management of boundaries between visibility and invisibility is called Visibilization in my analysis, referring to the intended acts of rendering social things visible and invisible. The second process, amalgamation, referred to the intended acts of temporarily combining multiple entities into one product. PR consultancy services, as I observed them, were largely an act of amalgamating different elements: contacts, organizations, settings and texts. The PR consultancy service could involve introducing a chef to a glass designer, teaming up right-wing politicians up with left-wing politicians, connecting a jeans company with a academic researcher. PR consultants
added a silver lining to education policy through the luxurious taste of fresh strawberries.

I found that these two processes, Visibilization and Amalgamation, permeated PR consultancy work to such an extent that they took on law-like properties of social mechanisms implying causality between PR consultancy practice and the way the product is organized — and categorized. These mechanisms are also of theoretical importance to the argument made in this thesis, as they help explain the lingering lack of legitimacy and clarity. Continuous visibilization produces continuous invisibilization, making products difficult to legitimize. Continuous amalgamation, the mechanism by which the PR consultancy service provides new constellations of actors, organizations and objects, cannot take place without also dissolving boundaries, a state semiotically contrary to the boundary-setting making the products difficult to categorize. Interestingly, the quality of PR consultancy as constructing visibility and legitimacy for others seems to create fuzziness and illegitimacy for the product itself.

Theoretical Contribution: Categorization in Professional Service Markets

My specific research question was: How have meaning and boundary construction processes among audiences affected product categorization in the emergent market for PR consultancy services over time? The answer is: As long as deconstructing boundaries and producing visibility is a consequence of market mechanisms central to the product “PR consultancy,” it will be difficult to achieve meaning convergence across audiences, and full categorization in the traditional sense will not occur. Figure 8.1 shows the relationship between the two problems introduced in Chapter 1, the two explanations generated by categorization analysis, and the two mechanisms identified in analysis of PR consultancy practice.
The generalized implication of this answer is the following: without understanding the construction of what is sold on a market, one cannot understand the categorization of that product. Categorizations are intricate, poly-centric processes involving audiences with different claims, and with different rights to interpretation. Claiming that the same mechanisms gear the categorization of consumer products and professional service products is, at best, simplistic.

In line with previous research (Alvesson 1993, 2001), I will argue that in professional service markets, ambiguity is a constant companion. As such it is an impediment to full categorization in the traditional sense, but also an asset that mediates and enables central mechanisms of the logic according to which products and offerings are produced. Professional services thrive on fuzziness, as previously suggested by research on professional service firms and management concepts.

This, however, does not mean that labeling in such markets is meaningless. Every social thing needs a label, but such categories are not a prototype category based on a certain numbers of attributes. Instead they are best understood as a goal-based type of category (Durand and Paolella, 2012), by which various audiences pursue different goals. In fact, an established label in ambiguous contexts may be reversely coupled to variance in meaning (Brunsson, 1989a); the established labels allow for greater variation in denotation and connotation. An established label allows for a nascent industry to be "approximately known" and to organize itself, for mass media to be able to relate to a phenomenon to which they are highly ambivalent, for market managers to explain to their top...
management how they spent this year’s marketing budget. The exact prototypical attributes are of less importance than the political value of the specific category. As a consequence, category fuzziness will be common in professional service markets as there will be an abundance of audience strategies to manage labels (Granqvist et al., 2012, Weber et al., 2008). If professional service markets are politicized, as is the case in the PR consultancy market, activating strife over deep-seated cultural values involving labels that suffer from stigma (cf. Vergne, 2011, Healy, 2004, Zelizer, 2007, i.e. negative connotations deeply embedded in the cultural tissue, this plethora of label meanings could be expected to be amplified as power struggles. This, however is not the case of all types of professional services; to these only the right-hand column of Figure 8.1 applies.) Future studies could advantageously explore market categorization in other professional service markets, as well as the interaction between stigma and goal-based view on categories.

A second contribution to the study of market categorization is methodological. The semiotic approach to market categorization provides a nested framework for studying market meaning, linking micro-level empirical work with higher-level outcomes of categorization processes. In this book, the wide yet stringent, triad of label, denotations and connotations has guided empirical explorations of meaning construction both over time and in practice, in text and in the field. Because if this vertical and horizontal flexibility, the semiotic approach, I argue, is a highly promising avenue for the study of market construction in language. How market audiences communicate with each other via signs and symbols, beyond the discursive level of texts, and how these communications influence categorization, could be especially interesting.

A Market for Legitimacy

But before I could derive the sophisticated research question above, I posed a more elemental question in the introductory chapter of this book: Why, and how has “PR consultancy” been constructed as a market category? In many ways, it is a more elemental version of the theoretical question above, but it is also a wider one, as it includes a small but crucial word: “why.” In the next section I will try to answer this Why-question, along with the larger question that every social scholar should be able to reply to: What are my findings a case of?

As a starting point, I will use the three meta-processes introduced in Chapter 1 of marketization, de-corporatization and mediatization. But I will also suggest that it is a case of something more, an emerging meta-process of a cognitive-cultural market logic.
PR Consultancy and Marketization: The Sacred Market

Why markets emerge is a much-explored topic in the social sciences. Some have claimed there is an invisible hand that will guide self-interested demand and profit-seeking supply to meet; others have focused on governments’ role in instigating markets, how regulation and laws shape markets. Yet others have stressed the symbolic power invested in the idea of the Market, and that a market emerges because cultural values are conducive to it.

In the case of PR consultancy, there was no invisible hand guiding potential clients; the market did not just emerge by itself. During the years of PR consultancy, roughly between 1970 and the beginning of the 1990s, the idea of PR was not commercially viable on a “free” market, in the sense that corporate clients could muster enough demand to support a PR industry. Instead clients were found among political organizations that shared ideology with the founders: especially ideologically conservative and neoliberal organizations in the form of political parties and business organizations seem to have formed almost an organizational symbiosis with early actors in what today is called the PR consultancy market, functioning as providers of projects, board members and of human resources, and even offices. Both founders and clients shared an adamant support of neoliberal ideas holding the market as the ultimate mode of exchange – cherishing it as a “political calling” and working on political projects for political organizations.

The relationship between market emergence and regulation is interesting. Whereas the services and consultants remain unregulated and non-standardized, regulation has been important, along with other macro-events such as world economic events and political decisions. But in the case of Swedish PR many such events visible at the macro-level were actually not always exogenous to the market. Many consultancy market projects were induced by political reform that PR consultancy industry had contributed to bringing about; privatization created profitable business opportunities for Swedish PR consultants, but at the same time PR consultants had also been active in bringing about de-regulations enabling privatization. In a similar vein, Sweden’s entry into the European Union created commerce for PR consultants, but PR consultants were also active in bringing about the EU entry; consultants worked with pro-EU advocacy years before the formal campaign started, and then worked in the campaign. In this vein, it contributed to de-corporatization to the extent that consultants helped industry organizations to reshape their role in the Swedish model from labor market organizations only to advocacy organizations. Much like the British case described by Miller and Dinan (2008), the emergence of a Swedish PR consultancy industry happened in conjunction with changes the national political system.
The emergence of the market was also paralleled by cultural processes of re-negotiating meaning. In North America, the emergence of investigative media in the late 19th century stimulated the development of a sophisticated machinery of PR know-how even before the mid-20th century (Cutlip and Wylie, 1994, Schudson, 1981, Ewen 1996). In Sweden, embedded in a Scandinavian welfare state, corporate-political interaction had been differently organized during most of 20th century. In that society corporate-political interaction was organized outside the market realm. Likewise, journalistic content was assumed to be editorially produced. Product marketing was previously conducted by advertising agencies, and financial reports were drafted within hierarchies, to the extent they were drafted at all. The unifying of these product elements and the insertion of them into a sphere of salable advice was dependent on cultural negotiations at multiple levels, allowing the service to be culturally legitimate as exchangeable goods, and allowing actors to be seen as culturally legitimate market actors. (A state only partially obtained, as my analysis above demonstrates.) In summary, the emergence of a market for PR consultancy in Sweden was hence much less of a response to external shocks than an outcome of “multidirectional struggles, an aggregation of decision points, and multiple critical junctures charted a posteriori a series of crooked paths” (Djelic and Quack, 2007, p. 181).

The emergence of PR consultancy is hence emblematic of marketization, i.e. the symbolic belief in market as a superior mode of exchange. The work of PR consultants has two dimensions of marketization: pertaining to their own market, promoting the organization form of private business despite a lack of cultural embeddedness at the time, and defending oneself against criticism with the counter-argument of the unimpeachable power of markets reveals a regard of markets as sacred. This “affinity to market ideology” is shared by many other consultancy professions. But what is remarkable in the case of PR consultancy I observed is a second dimension of spreading market logic to other spheres of society by the force of their professional work; supporting clients in financial and political advocacy strengthens the view of PR consultancy as a symptom, but also as a co-constructor, of market ideology.

PR consultancy and Mediatization: A New Visibility
Another meta-process associated with PR consultancy is that of mediatization, i.e. the process by which society is increasingly influenced by the media and media logic (Altheide and Snow, 1979, Lundby, 2009, Hjarvard, 2008, Hernes, 1978, Thompson, 1995). This influence has been vastly theorized in general sociology, and communication studies, but less so in organization and management theory. With a few exceptions (Lammers, 2011, Suddaby, 2010), the media have been reduced to
an intermediary or “infomediary” passing judgment over corporations, and thereby influencing other audiences.

But there is reason to believe that the influence of media on organizations go deeper than evaluation of corporate output. Thompson (2005) argues post-modern Western societies, a new type of visibility is the principle means by which societies, and even the goals of organizations are shaped;

To achieve visibility through the media is to gain a kind of presence or recognition in the public space, which can help to call attention to one’s situation or to advance one’s cause. But equally, the inability to achieve visibility through the media can confine one to obscurity – and, in the worst cases, can lead to a kind of death by neglect. Hence it is not surprising that struggles for visibility have come to assume such significance in our societies today.

(Thompson, 2005, p. 49)

To organizations today, media visibility is hence a crucial output, in many cases superseding the actual material products or goods. In this struggle for visibility, Thompson argues, the public domain will be shaped by technologies diffusing words and images, but also by “the institutions and organizations that have an interest in transmitting this content (or not, as the case may be) and that have differing quantities of power and resources to pursue their aims” (Thompson, 2005, p. 49). PR consultancy is one such organization: assisting and formatting information for other audiences, choosing what is visible and what is invisible.

Again, in my data, I have also seen how this want for visibility in itself is constructed by consultancy behavior. In the consultancy texts in Chapter 6, the world was described as a chaotic place where media visibility was of the utmost importance, but very hard to navigate (without the help of a PR consultant, that is). The pooling of different clients together for the same events (four denim brands instead of one, seven clients in Almedalen when the trip was planned for two) also creates an air of visibility as necessary and good.

Intuitively, one might think that companies today outsource what was previously done in-house. Remarkably though, the purchase of external services seems be positively correlated to the size of corporate communication departments, i.e. corporations with extensive in-house operations thus seem to be compelled to buy more services (Sveriges Informationsförening 2005). As pointed out, as early as the 1980s there seems to be a mediatization spiral (Asp, 1986), which refers to the process by which organizations and the media simply learn to deal with each other in a circular yet widening process. The actions of one party may be
seen as a reaction to what the other party does, and thus activities and methods develop in a sample of different types of organizations and the media, becoming more sophisticated with time. A clear example is how increased media coverage of the company’s operations by the media breeds a need for media training in business, which in turn increases the demands on journalists to be able to obtain relevant information from the media-trained business leaders. Once such demands are established as legitimate needs on a market, the spiral spins wider and faster. In summary, PR consultancy has established itself within this spiral, in which it works by mediating between different systems and logics, contributing to the spiral’s widening of scope, and faster pace.

A Note of Caution: On PR Consultancy and Agency

It is difficult to study actors such PR consultants without grappling with the problem of agency. In certain respects they are the easily portrayed as “muscular men of agency”. Indeed, their activities lend themselves easily such an analysis. Juxtaposed to the ‘cultural dopes’ of more macro-level oriented theory, consultants are described as cunning blighters, agile advisors, brokers of meaning, who consciously weaving cultural tissue. And in their function lies indeed an aim of change at a deeper cultural-cognitive level (Scott 2008), as PR is indeed aimed at changing people’s way of thinking, changing *public opinion*, rather than a one-time decision of consumption.

In his 1901 work *Opinion and the Crowd*, the French sociologist Tarde described public opinion formation as an inherently modern method. In modernity, new technologies such as the printing press, railroad, and the telegraph had changed the very premises of communications between individuals and groups, allowing messages to travel across far distances. “The transportation of force over distance is nothing compared to this transportation of thought over distance” (Tarde, 1969 [1901], p. 279). Thereby, Tarde introduced a clear distinction between the largest pre-modern social entity, the physical *crowd* and the new, cognitive collective arising with modernity, the *public*. This distinction changed the social world fundamentally, he argued, as preconditions for diffusing, maintaining and disrupting institutions were radically altered, allowing for vast imitation and mimicry but also requiring new modes and means of managing publics and their opinions. Inevitably, this change broke up old social orders. The printing of Bibles enabled separation of faith from religion. Old collective identities based on geographical proximity and organizational affiliation had to make way for new, psychologically constructed publics, with identities defined by a common goal, such as “international socialists,” “intellectuals,” “capitalists,” or even “anti-
Semites.” The notion of Society was transforming into a virtual one, more real in people’s minds rather than in their eyes:

The division of a society into publics, an entirely psychological division which corresponds to differences in states of mind, tends not to substitute itself for, but rather to superimpose itself more and more visibly and effectively on, divisions along economic, religious, aesthetic, political lines, and divisions into corporations, sects, professions, schools or parties.

(Tarde, 1969[1901], p. 284)

According to Tarde, changing the minds of opinions was a difficult task. But succeeding in doing so granted more power since “publics are less extremists than crowds, but their extremism is more chronic.” Inherently modern, publics not only engaged in physical conversation, but in conversations made universalistic through their values and thoughts, i.e. public opinion. “Opinion is to the modern public, what the soul is to the body,” Tarde wrote, thereby making it a pillar of modernization (Tarde, 1901, p. 34). There are always competing opinions, he argued, beaming as rays. The winning idea, the one takes on a hegemonic character and comes to influence public opinion, is the most radiant; the fastest or the brightest.90

Understanding the formation of public opinion is, in Tarde’s view, understanding what makes an idea fast and bright. It is indispensible to any understanding of the function of mass media. Tarde pointed out the press as the single most important factor to master it. Newspapers spread faster than books, and writers are in a position to ignite an latent flame, such as anti-Semitism or anti-business sentiment, turning it into a prairie fire. Once it stood for the interpretation of “elite” monologues and conversations into universalistic claims:

the press unifies and invigorates conversations, makes them uniform in space and diversified in time. Every morning the papers give their publics the conversations for the day. This increasing similarity of simultaneous conversation in an ever more vast geographic domain is of one of the most important characteristics of our time.

(Tarde, 1969 [1901], p. 312)

In 1922, Walter Lippmann published his book Public Opinion, in an attempt to translate the writings of Tarde into practice. The book an-

89 French: “L’opinion est au public, dans les temps modernes, ce que l’âme est au corps.”
90 French: “Le rayonnement plus rapide et bruyant.”
nounced the birth of an era where opinion would be fabricated. In the book’s fifth part, “The Making of a Common Will,” Lippman formulated a theory of semiotic manipulation, how symbols can be infused with meaning by strategic actors, and truth ‘fabricated’, by getting to know the cultural stereotypes through which people see the world, for “we do not first see, and then define, we define first and then see” (ibid). His book came to exert a major influence on generations of PR cadres but also on social science at large; he spoke, in fact, about category meaning.

The problem of the acquisition of meaning by things, or (stated in another way) of forming habits of simple apprehension, is thus the problem of introducing (1) definiteness and distinction and (2) consistency or stability of meaning into what is otherwise vague and wavering.

(Lippmann, 2007 [1922], p. 81)

The task of PR officers is then to charge symbols with value – to employ them – but also to make sure that words “be spoken by people who are strategically placed, and they must be spoken at the opportune moment”. Otherwise, he argued “they are mere wind” (Ibid, p. 73). He called his approach Organized Intelligence, carving out a new role of expertise performing “Intelligence Work”.

When reading Tarde and Lippmann it is easy to understand how PR consultancy, when they are successful, services have amplifying effects on other sectors that are disproportionate to the own organization’s size or reach (e.g. Barley 2010); by relatively little endeavor or financial investment, a large group of people’s opinions might be changed. However, two important dimensions to Tarde’s theory are lost as it is translated into normative application by Lippmann, stressing the ability of individuals to ‘employ’, ‘fabricate’ and ‘earmark’ symbols.

A first caveat is that actors and categories are culturally embedded in both local and transnational contexts. As a consequence, so is the meaning and boundaries of market elements. Even if the activities of Pr consultants are feed into and underpin into macro-level structures, they are also circumscribed by the. In the case of PR consultants, their sway for strategic action is always defined by events in the media and in political and technological arenas. The form that the PR industry took in Sweden, at what time it emerged and in what place, was framed by the Swedish model and other political initiatives. The upsurge of a PR industry in the beginning of the 1990s was contingent on both the availability of people to work there, and the existence of commercial clients willing to pay for the products. The formation of an industry organization in 1990 was
allegedly influenced by a transnational trend to form organizations, and the ICCO constituted such a transnational power (cf. Meyer 1994). The ideological agenda pushed by SAF in the 1970s and 1980s were not isolated events but rather a part of a broader neo-liberal movement across Europe, organized through think-tanks and ideologically submerged in transnational discourse communities that spanned borders and pushed agendas (Plehwe, 2010, Plehwe et al., 2006).

The second caveat concerns the limited success of PR endeavors. As Tarde points out, and later new institutionalists (Scott, 2008), cognitive-cultural institutions such as interpretative frames and values are much more difficult to alter by mere strategic action than for example written norms and rules. The majority of attempts to shape public opinion, initiated by PR consultancies and others, fail. In the chronological overview of PR consultancy history in Empirical Part I, the success stories are documented, as these tend to survive for posterity. To this ‘skewed reporting’, the studies of PR consultancy practice in Part II bring indispensable perspective to market understanding; in the cases presented there, we do not know if the endeavors are successful or not; whether Principal PR manages to sell their world view to clients or whether denim manufacturers in Sweden got more media coverage after the denim workshop, or if they sold more jeans. Neither will we know whether there will be a re-establishment of tax advantages for ethanol. And even if these things did happen it would be hard to trace them back to the three isolated PR consultancy endeavors alone. On the contrary, the difficulty of evaluating singular PR consultancy efforts was a conspicuous theme throughout Part II.

Where Marketization and Mediatization Meet: Towards a Cognitive-Cultural Market Logic

What this study does say for sure, though, is that attempts to influence are made, and that there is new market activity around those attempts. The attempts are cognitive-cultural manipulations, using symbols and opinions rather than established channels for commercial discourse: spreading market logic by unexpected means in new places. Despite being deeply embedded in a capitalist paradigm, and resolute defenders of the same, the consultancies in Chapter 6 did not imply economic discourse. Instead they combined discourses and experiences from other more “sacred” fields than that of PR consultancy in order to act, in the theatrical sense; like the French cartoon figure of Barbapapa, they could tempo-

91 As of the spring of 2013, this has not been the case.
rarily take other organizational forms, and use the discourses of other spheres: of politics, advertising, corporations, and the mass media. There was commodification through “non-commodification” located in the deep symbolic layers of audience cognition.

One could argue that this implicit semiotic level of market-making is not new. Aristophanes of Ancient Greece accused the ambulating teachers in eloquence, the so called Sophists, of being so skilled with words that they could make people believe the heaven to be an oven damper, and the citizens of Athens to be the charcoal feeding it. Marketing professionals using smooth-talk to manipulate consumers is quite common, and is normally known as “branding.” Neo-classical economists would perhaps speak of ‘product differentiation’ and historical materialists of “fetishism.” Lippman wrote almost a century ago on the power of “employing” symbols.

But, I would argue, the large-scale employment of such semiotic methods is of a hitherto unseen magnitude, as well as its far-reaching integration into other institutions. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, PR consultancy is only one among many types of organizations that have organizational talk. Barley (2010) has mapped the U.S. field of organizations devoted to political influence, which has grown exponentially since the 1970s, among them industry organizations, think tanks, law firms, ad hoc organizations, lobbying firms and PR consultancies. Together they form a choir that has an amplifying effect on corporate messages: “Everyone knows a choir’s tune is stronger and carries further than that of a soloist, even a Pavarotti” (Barley, 2010, p.795). Corporate communication departments have increased. Corporately sponsored think tanks have increased exponentially in both the U.S. and Europe during the same time span as studied here (Rich, 2004, Ricci, 1994, Mirowski and Plehwe, 2009). Fries (2011) showed how Swedish business organizations have re-evaluated their core activities, shifting from labor market negotiations to pro-corporation advocates.

But this semiotic means of corporate influence reaches beyond, and goes deeper than, corporate-political interaction. For just as there are a variety of capitalisms (Hall and Soskice 2001; Hall and Thelen 2009), there seem to be a variety of competition-based market logics (Djelic and Durand, 2010). In line with the conclusions drawn here, the characteristics of a market logic construction should reasonably depend on the type of market constructed. With a view of markets logics allowing for heterogeneity, there might very well be several co-existent market logics: one market logic in the traditional sense of production industry stressing is-

---

92In the Swedish context, PR consultancy encompasses lobbying services. There are hence no separate lobbying firms as in e.g. the U.S. See Chapter 3 for a more detailed description of what PR consultancy entails.
sues of productivity and efficiency, alongside of a financial market logic emphasizing transaction and price (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury 2012). If so, the findings in this book could indicate the coming into being of a cognitive-cultural market logic, specific to the ‘new’ capitalism focusing on the cognitive-cultural products and deep-layered semiotic strategies of influence (Scott 2007, cf. Boltanski and Chiapello 2005). Scott (2007)

Within the framework of contemporary capitalism, [cognitive-cultural] tasks are focused on activities including neoliberal techno-management, innovation-oriented process and product design, the personalized provision of services, the naturalization of socially-useful aptitudes and beliefs (in educational institutions and the media, for example), and the commercialization of experiences, cultural encounters and leisure pursuits.

(Scott, 2007, p. 1474)

From such a perspective, the emergence and success of PR consultancy are only one type of market organization promoting an expansion of the cognitive-cultural dimensions of modern capitalism, selling their products to clients, namely, advice on how clients should sell theirs by using simile and metaphor to create an air of non-commercialism and legitimacy.

In 1995, new institutionalist Richard W. Scott wrote that “legitimacy is not a commodity to be possessed or exchanged but in a condition of reflecting cultural alignment, normative support, or consonance with relevant rules or laws” (Scott, 1995, p.45). After writing this book, I know a few who people would beg to differ, instead suggesting that legitimacy is the new hard currency.


Strömbäck, Jesper (2004). Den medialiserade demokratin: om journalistikens ideel, verklighet och makt, Stockholm, SNS.


Svensson, E. (2012). Lobbyisms villkor. PRECIS.


Newspaper Articles

DI, Nov 19, 2001.“The Lost Virginity of the Business Reporter” (Swe. Börsreporterns förlorade oskuldl)

DI, Nov, 25, 2002. ”PR Niceness” (Swe. PRevligt värre)

DI, Sep 24, 2002. ”Lobbying Should Be Taught in Schools” (Swe. Lobbying borde läras ut i skolan).

Resumé, Jul 6, 2011. Full Throttle in the Diesel War (Swe. Full gas i dieselkriget).


Parliamentary Documents (Other than Member Bills)


## Appendix 1. Member Bills

### Member Bills Concerning Registration of Lobbyism in Swedish Parliament

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>MEMBER BILL</th>
<th>COMMITTEE</th>
<th>AUTHORING MP</th>
<th>RESULT</th>
<th>SOURCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1991-01-25</td>
<td>1990/91:K230 Dokumentering av lobbying m.m.</td>
<td>KU</td>
<td>Hans Leghammar m.fl. (mp)</td>
<td>Reject</td>
<td>Betänkande 1991/92:KU12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1998-10-28</td>
<td>1998/99:K207 Registrering av lobbyister</td>
<td>KU</td>
<td>Bertil Persson (m)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1999-10-05</td>
<td>1999/2000:K225 Registrering av lobbyister</td>
<td>KU</td>
<td>Bertil Persson (m)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Datum</td>
<td>Nummer</td>
<td>Bidragare</td>
<td>Beslut</td>
<td>Betänkande</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>2000-10-05</td>
<td>2000/01:K239</td>
<td>KU Bertil Persson (m)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>2001-10-05</td>
<td>2001/02:K380</td>
<td>KU Bertil Persson (m)</td>
<td>Reject</td>
<td>Betänkande 2001/02:KU12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>2005-09-30</td>
<td>2005/06:K289</td>
<td>KU Lars Lindblad (m)</td>
<td>Reject</td>
<td>Betänkande 2005/06:KU21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>2005-10-03</td>
<td>2005/06:K338</td>
<td>KU Lars Ångström (mp)</td>
<td>Reject</td>
<td>Betänkande 2005/06:KU21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
15. 2011-10-04 2011/12:K293 Åtgärder för ökad trovärdighet för den offentliga sektorn KU Peter Eriksson m.fl. (MP) - Betänkande 2011/12:KU13

Member Bills about Waiting Periods for Politicians Leaving Politics for PR Consultancy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>MEMBER BILL</th>
<th>COMMITTEE</th>
<th>AUTHORING MP</th>
<th>RESULT</th>
<th>SOURCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16. 2005-09-28</td>
<td>2005/06:K421 Karantänsregler för ministerar</td>
<td>KU</td>
<td>Sven Gunnar Persson (kd)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. 2006-10-26</td>
<td>2006/07:K334 Statsrådsuppdraget</td>
<td>KU</td>
<td>Sven Gunnar Persson (kd)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. 2007-09-29</td>
<td>2007/08:K278 Karantänsregler för politiker</td>
<td>KU</td>
<td>Lennart Sacrédeus (kd)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. 2007-10-04</td>
<td>2007/08:K368 Tidskarantän för statsråd</td>
<td>KU</td>
<td>Sven Gunnar Persson (kd)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. 2009-10-04</td>
<td>2009/10:K364 Karantän för ministerar</td>
<td>KU</td>
<td>Agneta Berliner och Carl B Hamilton (fp)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Other Relevant Member Bills (On Public Authorities’ Advocacy etc.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>MEMBER BILL</th>
<th>COMMITTEE</th>
<th>AUTHORING MP</th>
<th>RESULT</th>
<th>SOURCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002-10-23</td>
<td>2002/03:K242 Myndighetemars opinionsbildande roll</td>
<td>KU</td>
<td>Tobias Krantz och Johan Pehrson (fp)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-10-07</td>
<td>2003/04:K248 Myndighetemars opinionsbildande roll</td>
<td>KU</td>
<td>Tobias Krantz och Johan Pehrson (fp)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-10-25</td>
<td>2006/07:K332 Riksdagsutbildning i politisk påverkan</td>
<td>KU</td>
<td>Sven Gunnar Persson (kd)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix 2. STORY ELEMENTS – sample quotes (Chapter 6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preamble</th>
<th>Sample Quotes</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Today we will reflect on what in the US is a long-established concept: citizen journalism. How does it transform the media landscape right now? And what requirements does it impose on corporations, organizations, politicians, journalists and even on us consultants? What is most important – content or context? And finally, who is the winner and what does the power shift look like?”</td>
<td></td>
<td>The lobbyist guild in resolution! (July 11, 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Tonight Swedish time, the first televised debate between John McCain and Barack Obama will be held. There are obvious differences of opinion between the two candidates, but there are also two diametrically different campaign approaches opposing each other – news cycles versus fieldwork. Lessons learned from this year’s presidential campaign will be studied for a long time to come, by both political and commercial campaigners.”</td>
<td></td>
<td>New Cycles Versus Fieldwork in US Presidential Campaign (September 26, 2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“BP’s problems show how difficult it is to do the right thing communication-wise when so much is at stake. Johan Hedman*, who works for Principal in New York, reports on how the oil spill disaster is depicted in the American debate, and on the challenges facing the oil company with Obama and other politicians as opponents.”</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hard to do right when stakes are so high (June 15, 2010)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### What Used to Be and What is Now

“Three years ago, MySpace and Facebook were equals and it was unclear which one would draw the longest straw. But when MySpace in contrast to Facebook hardly changed it quickly felt outdated and limited. When Twitter became popular, Facebook quickly made its interface more “flow-based”, just like Twitter, and enabled the integration of Twitter profiles on Facebook. […]Facebook is perhaps the most general web service ever.”

“...”

“In Sweden, we have previously treated eating out as a thing you did only when you had something special to celebrate, or if you had a business dinner or the like. Today, many have changed this behavior and eating out has turned into more of an experience, and a carrier of social status for ourselves. Not only do we want to show who we are by what we eat. It is equally true that we want to show the world who we are by where we eat.”

The Philosophy that Brought Facebook to the Top (October 13, 2010)

Think Again, Think New, Think Hush-hush (April 20, 2009)
“A time ago, I believe many agencies were hyper-specialized, resulting in detrimental tunnel vision. And now we are seeing a retreat from that position; a trend bouncing back in the other direction, in search of a more sound equilibrium – a not-too-narrow, nor too broad area of specialization.”  

**Corporate Dilemma**

“Citizen journalism is here to stay! How does it affect you? […] Whether it's about rats invading an established restaurant chain, negligence in a school kitchen or an airplane crash lands in Hudson River, you can bet that there is one or several cameras capturing the event.”

“But how should companies react when employees upload pictures from their private lives or from the business kick-off on facebook, flickr or myspace?”

“A search for "privacy + internet" in Google blog search gives 11 170 hits since 1 January 2009. For the same period last year, the number was 3 104. Now it is important for large companies and organizations handling logins on their websites to comply with and address the issue just as its visitors have.”

**Exemplification**

“If you want to enjoy a really good corporate story, go to youtube and search for ‘The story of Adidas.’ That story is true, it is inspiring and represents value for decades of customers, product developers, designers, consultants and journalists.”

“Recall also the former Minister of Commerce Bjorn Rosengren (s) who, in the negotiation of a merger between Telia and Telenor93, was caught on tape when he said these famous words: ‘Norway is actually the last Soviet state. It is so very nationalist. Everything is politics.’ Following this statement, negotiations broke down and the merger never took place.”

93 Swedish and Norwegian state-owned telecommunication corporations.
"This is not an art show. It's a Levi's campaign.' A final exhibition, which would have been the crown of Levi's collaboration with street art artist Akay, turned into a public relations meltdown when the artist displayed huge a poster with these words. He regretted the collaboration at the last minute. Levi's tried to cover up the incident by taking photos of the exhibition from angles where the words were not visible, but the story spread anyway."

“Although said before, you have to point out Apple, one of the most successful brands of our time. Who can tell what is R&D and what is branding over there? The two are united from day one of each product process.”

Theorizing

“Today most media consumption is steadily moving towards streams of combined content, cherry-picked from different sources. In addition, mainstream culture and media is quickly joining in. A term once used by DJ’s has rapidly become the most relevant way to describe the information society. Today it’s everywhere – Pride and Prejudice and Zombies, Facebook + Myspace, the Hitler Downfall parodies, Cowboys and Aliens. The idea of mixing existing thoughts and content has always been around in the creative process.”

“There is already a gap between the private willingness to pay and ability to finance our growing demands through taxes. The fact that we have fewer taxpayers in the future due to demographic changes, together with the fact that our growth is productivity-generated and does not come from more people working or more hours worked, puts us in the future situation where the private purchasing power rises sharply and the public purchasing power hardly changes at all.”

“In contrast to the rest of eBay, its security portal blue as the base color, which according to color psychology, signals safety (it is also the reason that a very large part of the brands in the financial sector has blue in its visual identity). They have quite simply thought of almost everything.”

Guidelines

“1. Reality: Build your brand promise around attainable outcomes.
2. Accessibility: Never stop listening to the people on the receiving end of a brand promise.”

Counselling for a Successful Marriage between Culture and Capital
(November 4, 2009)

Winning in the Melting-Pot of Communications (June 10, 2011)

Mass Media to Mash Media
(June 1, 2011)

Sweden’s Health Care 2017
(November 26, 2007)

More websites need to act like eBay
(September 26, 2009)

Obama – a broken brand promise
(November 19, 2010)
3. Accountability: Never blame anyone else for your failure to deliver on a brand promise.”

“Now, what does this mean for companies and organizations: 1) Think about what the organization’s true self is from a favorable external perspective and communicate this in a genuine and honest - preferably unique - way, 2) allow target groups to be nerds if they want, or uninvolved if they prefer, 3) emphasize the healthy, the committed good and / or enjoyable in your offerings.”

Five Trends from United Minds
(March 2, 2009)

“1. Find the Right One
2. Don’t get married only for the money
3. Give your partner some space
4. Improve the communication in your relationship
5. Build a relationship that holds over time”

Counselling for a Successful Marriage between Culture and Capital
(November 4, 2009)

Byline
“You can actually run a whole business based on consumer trends and their implications for marketing and communications. One person who has done this extremely successfully is Camilla Svensson, who for seventeen years was marketing manager at the Swedish Dairy Association. Now she has changed course and become colleague with us here at Common Cause, strengthening our expertise in consumer trends in general, and food industry in particular. Welcome, Camilla!

/Joakim Andersson Project manager, Common Cause

PS. Camilla reached at Camilla.svensson@commoncause.se. DS.”

Get to know your pig - before you eat it!
(September 6, 2007)

“/ Pontus Knutsson, Project Principal
Pontus.knutsson@principalpr.se
ps don’t hesitate to send me more links ds.

When Big Becomes Small
(April 1, 2009)
All the links:
- Britney Spears slip of tongue during clothes change http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MRb3Ebe9gD0  Or go to Youtube and search for: Britney Spears, tampa, hanging out
- School meal on the floor http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jkYbrGuc3dI&feature=related  Or go to Youtube and search for: School meal, floor, pasta

…”
DOCTORAL THESES
Department of Business Studies, Uppsala University


Holmström, Christine, 2004, In search of MNC competitive advantage: The role of foreign subsidiaries as creators and disseminators of knowledge. Uppsala: Department of Business Studies.


Persson, Magnus, 2006, Unpacking the Flow - Knowledge Transfer in MNCs. Uppsala: Department of Business Studies.


156 Lippert, Marcus, 2013, Communities in the Digital Age. Towards a Theoretical Model of Communities of Practice and Information Technology. Uppsala: Department of Business Studies.


