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10

Government strategic communication in the democratic transition of Chile

Rodrigo Uribe

Introduction

On 11 March 1990, Patricio Aylwin, the candidate of the *Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia* – a coalition of Christian Democrats, Socialists and other social democratic forces – became the first democratically elected president of Chile after 17 years of military dictatorship under Augusto Pinochet. It was the final moment of an authoritarian government that had taken power in September 1973 and was characterized by the destruction of political freedom, the violation of human rights and the rapid implementation of a neo-liberal economic and political model.

The process of re-establishing civil liberties, democratic values and full respect for human rights developed by the new democratic governments during the 1990s and part of the first decade of the 2000s has usually been called the political transition¹ (Siavelis, 2009) (Table 10.1). Although analyses of this period of Chilean history have been carried out from different perspectives – including economic, political and communicational viewpoints – no studies have scrutinized the structure and trends of government communication that developed as part of this transitional scenario.

With the purpose of examining this issue, the chapter is divided into two major sections. The first provides background information on the political

landscape and the media context in which government communication was carried out. The second section examines government communication in terms of both the organizational structure of government communication and the key trends detected in this period. All the information was obtained by desk research, the author's experience as government advisor, and interviews with experts (government communication officers and the main presidential advisors on communication strategy), whose viewpoints have not been explored before in the literature on Chilean government communication.²

TABLE 10.1 Primary political landmarks of contemporary Chilean history

September 1980	The Chilean Constitution was approved by a plebiscite controlled by the Pinochet government (1973–90)
May 1983	First national protest against the Pinochet government
October 1988	National referendum to determine whether Pinochet would extend his rule for another eight-year term in office. The dictator was defeated in this plebiscite
December 1989	First open presidential election won by Patricio Aylwin (Christian Democrat, candidate of the <i>Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia</i>)
March 1990–4	Patricio Aylwin's presidency
March 1994–2000	Eduardo Frei's presidency (Christian Democrat, member of the <i>Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia</i>)
March 1998	Pinochet resigned as Commander-in-Chief of the Chilean Army and assumed the position of lifetime senator
October 1998	Pinochet arrested in London
March 2000–6	Ricardo Lagos' presidency (Socialist, member of the <i>Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia</i>)
March 2000	Jack Straw (British Home Office Minister) released Pinochet due to ill health
August 2005	Main amendments to the Chilean Constitution
March 2006–10	Michelle Bachelet's presidency (Socialist, member of the <i>Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia</i>)
December 2006	Pinochet's death

Political and media landscapes

A brief overview of the Chilean political system

During the transition, Chile was ruled by a centre-left coalition, *Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia*. The opposition consisted of two right-wing parties, the conservative Independent Democratic Union (UDI) and the more liberal National Renovation. In addition to these two main coalitions, there were other left-wing groups: the Communist and Humanist parties. All the Chilean parties operated within a political system characterized by two basic principles of the Chilean Constitution (1980). On the one hand, the strong central role given to the figure of the president as the head of state, and on the other, the idea of creating a political system that would promote stability as its central value.

In this constitutional order, Chile was and is governed by a president who is the head of state and government. The president is elected by the direct vote of the electorate in general elections.³ Although the 1980 Constitution establishes the existence of three branches of the State, there is a clear pre-eminence of the executive (presidentialism) over the legislative and judicial branches (Carey, 2002). The legislative branch – also directly elected by the electorate – consists of two houses, the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies. In the original design of the 1980 Constitution, the Senate was composed of 38 elected senators (2 per each of the 19 districts elected every 8 years) plus the Institutional Senators (eliminated in 2005): 9 designated senators (changed every 8 years) and all the former presidents of the Republic (lifetime senators). The Chamber of Deputies consists of 120 members (2 per each of 60 districts), who are elected every 4 years (Carey, 2002). Finally, the judicial branch is composed of the Supreme Court of Justice, the Appeal Court and other minor courts. The highest level is the Supreme Court, which consists of 21 judges, one of them elected President of the Court. All the members of the Supreme Court are selected by the President with the agreement of the Senate (Correa, 1999).

Pinochet's new constitutional order also created a number of legal institutions to encourage an unchanging and authoritarian political system (called a protected democracy). The first was the restriction on the number of votes needed to modify the Constitution (more than 60% of MPs and Senators). This prevented many changes due to Pinochet supporters' reluctance to make significant modifications until 2005, when some of the most conspicuous authoritarian elements were removed from the Constitution, including the provision that there should be institutional senators (Nogueira, 2008). Nevertheless, the most significant authoritarian characteristic (still in force) is the binominal system for election of both chambers of the legislative branch.

The law selected the most-voted candidate from each of the two most-voted lists (unless the most-voted list obtained twice the votes of the second-place list). Although this system was allegedly created to encourage the stability of the political system by promoting large, solid and disciplined parties, in practice the binominal system has promoted a centripetal competition within the major coalitions. Moreover, the binominal system has caused structural distortions in the effective consolidation of democracy, such as the underrepresentation of minority parties and a decrease in electoral participation, particularly among young citizens (see Table 10.2).

The Chilean media system

The new democratic governments continued the privatization of the media system, which had started during Pinochet's regime as a consequence of the process of liberalization of the entire economy. In this context, the media landscape during the transition was characterized by the commercialization and concentration of media outlets. Other relevant trends detected in this period were the increasing relevance of both electronic media and entertainment-oriented content.

A commercialized environment

Despite the attempts of Pinochet's regime to control media content in the 1970s and 1980s, its simultaneous promotion of the free market caused a paradoxical effect: some of the private media were able to reconstitute spaces of ideological plurality in the midst of a society controlled by a dictatorial government (Palacios, 2003). It has been suggested that in this context, the transition of the mass media began earlier, during Pinochet's regime, and therefore the media system could normalize its agenda during the first years of the political transition (Tironi & Sunkel, 1993). Democratic governments continued the process of media privatization in the early 1990s by redefining the property of public media and by promoting the creation of private outlets. In these years, the new democratic regime redefined the way in which state-owned media (television, radio and newspapers) would operate. The basic idea was to eliminate public funding in order to prevent direct government influence on media content, which was a traditional practice of the Pinochet era (Tironi & Sunkel, 1993).

Simultaneously, numerous private media outlets emerged and consolidated. In the case of the television system, the process started in the final months of Pinochet's regime when the Chilean State granted television concessions to private groups in a questionable fashion. This policy ended a legal monopoly

TABLE 10.2 General characteristics of the political landscape

The political landscape						
Political system	Electoral system	Democratic freedom (2006)	Press freedom (2006)	Good government indicators (1996/2006)	Share of votes/seats of the largest party (1990 and 2006)	Turnout in national elections (1990 and 2006 presidential election)
Presidential The 1980 Chilean Constitution is the fundamental law of the country.	Presidential election: Absolute majority (50% plus one of the valid votes). Parliamentary elections: binominal system (two seats per district). Registration in the system: voluntary, but once a person is registered in the electoral system, voting becomes compulsory.	1	Legal environment: 8 Political environment: 11 Economic environment: 7 Total Score: 25	Voice and accountability 1996: 0.78 2006: 0.88 Political stability: 1996: 0.70 2006: 0.56 Government effectiveness: 1996: 0.87 2006: 1.15 Regulatory quality: 1996: 1.29 2006: 1.43 Rule of law: 1996: 1.28 2006: 1.19 Control of corruption: 1996: 1.30 2006: 1.35	Parliament 1990 <i>Concertación</i> (coalition): 51.5%/69 seats Christian Democracy (Party): 25.99%/38 seats Parliament (2006) <i>Concertación</i> (coalition): 51.76%/65 seats UDI (Party): 22.36%/33 seats 1990 Senate <i>Concertación</i> (coalition): 54.63%/22 seats Christian Democracy (Party): 32.18%/13 seats 2006 (renewed only 50% of the Senate) <i>Concertación</i> (coalition): 55.73%/22 seats Christian Democracy (Party): 29.72%/5 seats	1990 Presidential Voters: 7,588,346 (94.7% of electors) 2006 Presidential Voters: 7,207,278 (87.7% of electors)

Source: The Freedom House Index (2006); the good government indicator is composed of measures related to political stability, rule of law, government efficiency and corruption (Kaufman, Kraay & Zoido-Lobaton, 1999).

in which only universities or the Chilean State itself were permitted to own television stations. Thus, private channels began operating and competing with traditional university or public stations in the VHF spectrum in 1990. As of that moment, private channels played a more prominent role in the Chilean television system, operating the licenses of some universities or creating new stations. Therefore, although Chile promoted a mixed media system in terms of property, overall the system was defined as commercially funded and operating as a semi-regulated market.

A concentrated media market

During the early years of the new democracy, small and alternative media created in opposition to the authoritarian regime attempted to redefine their identity and sources of funding. Nearly all of these media disappeared in the process, and only one – *Radio Cooperativa* – succeeded in reorganizing itself to face the demands of the market, capture advertising investment and redefine an editorial line attractive to audiences less involved in political issues. Moreover, other media outlets were subsequently created (such as the *El Metropolitano* newspaper in 1999), but failed to obtain sufficient advertising and therefore suffered the same fate as the vast majority of previous independent media (Dermota, 2002; Palacios, 2002).

A resulting paradox of the new democracy was the increasing economic and ideological concentration across different media. In the case of the press, two large groups began to dominate the market for audience (over 70% of reach) and advertisers (75% of the spending in the mass media) (Megatime, 2006). The *El Mercurio* Group – owned by the conservative Edwards family – controls three national newspapers (*El Mercurio*, *Las Últimas Noticias* and *La Segunda*) and twenty regional newspapers. The COPESA Group, whose principal owners are two economic groups with explicit sympathies with right-wing parties, owns *La Tercera*, *La Cuarta* and the free newspaper *La Hora*, as well as the weekly news magazine *Qué Pasa* (Cortés, 1998).

Terrestrial television stations operated in a mixed system with public stations, university outlets, private channels and local broadcasters. In the television market, the tendency towards concentration has prevented the development of local and minor players. An oligopoly of four stations, all located in Chile's capital, Santiago, controlled more than 85 per cent of the advertising investment and approximately 90 per cent of the audience share (Sunkel & Geoffroy, 2001). Paid television was not a relevant actor in this context because although its market penetration over the final years of the political transition (2005) reached approximately 40 per cent of the population, its audience share reached only 17 per cent and was distributed across 100

channels primarily dedicated to entertainment rather than information (Obitel, 2009).

Radio was the most diversified mass media in the country. During the 1990s and early 2000s, Chile had between 1,500 and 2,000 radio concessions, and large conglomerates (usually owned by international investors) only controlled approximately 15 per cent of them. These conglomerates, however, were located in Santiago (where 40% of the Chilean population lives) and have received the vast majority of advertising investment (98% of investment in radio advertising is in the metropolitan region). Therefore, although the large number of concessions has allowed Chile to have a certain degree of plurality, there was a clear concentration in terms of advertising investment and audience share (Ramírez, 2008).

Other relevant characteristics of the media system

Other relevant characteristics of the Chilean media system during the transitional period were the growing importance of electronic media outlets and the increasing importance of entertainment content. Regarding the former, there was a growing consumption of television news, the most important source of information about current affairs. Data from 2000 to 2005 showed that close to 80 per cent of Chilean citizens watched television to be informed about current events (CNTV, 2005). The internet deserves special mention, particularly since the year 2000. By the end of the democratic transition in 2005, 43.5 per cent of the households had a computer. Internet users between 12 and 60 years old – excluding the poorest 10 per cent of inhabitants – increased from 24 to 48 per cent between 2000 and 2006, more than any other country in Latin America (Subtel, 2008).

The rise of electronic media occurred within the broader context of the increasing development of entertainment-oriented content (a phenomenon closely related to the growing market-driven environment). As has been widely described in the international literature (Esser, 1999), Chile was also part of a clear tendency towards a lower presence of political issues and an increasing predominance of any content defined as entertainment. Although the amount of time devoted to informative content on television increased during the transition, there was a high presence of topics traditionally labelled soft news, such as crime and sports, which were reported as the principal themes on the major television newscasts during the period 2000–5 (Valenzuela & Arriagada, 2009). Examining the available data by genre shows that the amount of time devoted to entertainment programmes increased from 8 to 20.5 per cent between 1996 and 2004 (Marín, 2007).

The structure of government communication

In examining the main characteristics of government communication in Chile in the period from 1990 to 2006, two particular issues are stressed namely, the structure of government communication and the main tendencies detected in the implementation and development of government communication. While these issues and tendencies emerged during the Chilean political transition, they continue to be valid for understanding contemporary Chilean government communication and will be discussed in the following section.

During the transition, the structure of government communication was headed by the Ministry General Secretariat of Government (SEGEOB). This ministry was led by the government spokesperson and had four divisions including the Secretariat of Communications (SECOM). The Director of Communications of the Chilean Government (or Director of SECOM) had the specific role of determining governmental and presidential communication needs and actions. Working alongside the Secretariat was the presidential Cabinet, the group of direct advisors to the president (including the head of the presidential press office and other senior advisors). Therefore, and formally speaking, the Minister of the General Secretariat of Government was the spokesperson and the Director of Communications was the strategist who provided the information and analysis to face communicational challenges and problems of the government and the president of the Republic. In addition, the structure of government communication included the presidential Cabinet. This was a group of advisors without formal authority but with significant influence on the president on a variety of issues, including communication strategies and direct contact with political editors. Among these advisors a relevant figure was the head of the presidential press office, who was in charge of the relationship with the correspondents in the presidential palace of government (*La Moneda*).

During the political transition, the general structure of SECOM remained essentially the same. The institution was composed of a director, a deputy director and a group of departments in charge of dealing with presidential and government communication needs. There was a Studies Department dedicated to producing media analyses (audience and content) and public opinion polls (telephone and face-to-face surveys and qualitative studies). The Department of Intra-Government Advice was in charge of providing analyses and occasional communication support to the different ministries (such as helping to prevent and manage communications crises). The International Press Department was in charge of monitoring the presence of the Chilean State and government in the different international media outlets. The number of professional people working for SECOM was roughly 100 (approximately 90 in 1990 and 114 in 2006), two-thirds of whom were journalists (approximately

60%) and the rest were political scientists, sociologists and other social scientists (SEGEOB, 2006).

The communications strategy designed by SECOM was primarily carried out by communication actions such as ministerial and presidential interviews, speeches, and a strong presence in public activities to stay in touch with citizens (such as ceremonies, inaugurations, anniversaries and other public events). Simultaneously, the SEGEOB Minister and/or the Director of Communication conducted press briefings with political editors and journalists highlighting the main elements designed in the strategy to be covered by the media (newspapers, radio and particularly television). In this context, an increasing use of sound and image bites and other production techniques were observed. Another important tool for government communication was advertising, which was legally restricted to informing about policies (SECOM had no budget for advertising). However, advertisements should not be understood as merely informational elements because they all depicted the logo and/or mentioned the 'Chilean government'. Sponsorship was also used as a promotional tool by supporting different activities with social impact. Finally, from the late 1990s there was an increasing use of the web. Some of the more traditional uses of this new media included a system of presidential email and the publication of governmental and presidential news on the web page.

Although this structure seems to be effective to face the communication challenges of the government, it could not always work efficiently. At least, two relevant problems with this structure can be described: the redundancy in several roles and the difficulty of combining governmental and presidential communication.

An organizationally redundant system

The organizational structure of government communication had certain problems during this period, which caused a lack of coordination and disputes on some occasions. The most important organizational difficulty was the redundancy in the communicational structure. A case in point is that the Communications Director (head of the ministerial division) formally reported to the SEGEOB Minister, although they both usually developed a direct and parallel relationship with the president (both were traditionally appointed by the president and had their offices at the Governmental Palace). In addition, the SEGEOB Minister and the Director of SECOM developed direct links with media directors, editors and journalists, and simultaneously briefed them. This meant that, in practice, the coordination of their efforts primarily depended upon the personal relationship between the SEGEOB Minister and the Director of SECOM.

Another case of overlapping structure was the existence of other officers who directly gave communication advice to the president and interacted with media professionals. One example was the above-mentioned head of the presidential press office, who was in charge of the direct relationship with Governmental Palace correspondents and political media editors for issues directly related to the president. In addition, some presidential Cabinet advisors usually participated in communication design. In fact, during certain moments of the 20-year period, the presidential advisors directly assumed the definition of the communications strategy.

The difficulty of combining governmental and presidential communication

The other major problem of the government structure of communication was the difficulty of combining the development of governmental and presidential communication. Although SECOM was formally in charge of all government communication, in practice this institution prioritized the presidential figure and the communication of selected policies. This decision could be related to several factors. First, the strong sense of presidentialism in Chile caused support for the government to increase whenever public support for the president rose, and not vice versa (Morales & Navia, 2007). Second, SECOM was part of a ministry and could not force any other minister (or authority) to adopt a particular communication strategy. Third, SECOM had limited human resources in comparison with the government's communicational needs. Fourth, some policies were more relevant for the political project of the government and consequently required particular attention. Finally, the budget for the communication of public policies was not centralized, but rather managed by each ministry (usually associated with the budget of each policy). In practice, a relevant part of the government communication was decentralized (developed by each ministry) and some exceptional key policies or crises were supported or directly managed by SECOM, either by the Department of Intra-Government Advice or directly by the Director of Communication.

In this context, a parallel communicational structure was developed in each ministry or public service to deal with daily communication problems. Thus, the role of the minister's (or public service's) press officer was reinforced, and local communications areas increased their number of communications advisors. Although there is no official information about the number of people working in these communications offices, one could estimate at least 500 communications advisors in the government structure: 2 or 3 journalists in each of the 22 ministries, local government offices (15 regional intendancies

and 53 provincial governments), and other public offices such as the Chilean Trade Commission (PROCHILE) or the Records Office (*Servicio de Registro Civil*). All were administratively independent from SECOM because they were in charge of supporting media relations for their particular authorities and organizations.

Main trends in government communication

In the context of the Chilean political transition, five main trends can be described in Chilean government communication, all starting from a moment of exception, and depicting a process of growing modernization and partial professionalization of government communication.

The increasing relevance of the president

One of the major trends during Chile's democratic transition was the increasing relevance of the president as the central figure of government communication. Interestingly, in the early years of the new democratic government the situation was different; government communication had a more institutional focus primarily derived from the existence of an essentially feeble democracy and the pressures exerted by more radical political sectors. Thus, at the beginning of the political transition, government communication focused on the process of renewed national unity, the value of democratic institutions, and the notion of a government that promoted political and economic stability in conjunction with civil liberties and justice. As time went by, and democracy became relatively more established, the central point of government communication was to increase the focus on the presidential figure, a trend that was particularly clear after the establishment of the second democratic government (1994).

There are several important issues related to this process of the presidentialization of government communication, including the fact that during the second (Frei) and the third (Lagos) governments of the *Concertación*, the primary strategists were people close to the president. This is an interesting issue that reveals the increasing status of communication: this area was placed under the charge of someone of the president's confidence.

The growing emphasis on presidential approval ratings

The early years of the Chilean transition were filled with high levels of instability, pressure and negotiation by the major political actors (political

parties, armed forces, the Catholic Church and other macrosocial organizations). In terms of public opinion, the goals of government communication strategy at the time were to help handle social demands in the context of the complex process of political negotiation that was played out at the highest political level.

When the major tensions of the transition began to decrease, the task of improving the president's public opinion approval ratings began to take a more prominent role. On the one hand, this started to be a critical measure of public support for the government and crucial in the evaluation of presidential performance (as true in the rest of the world). On the other, it is important to note that the presidential approval ratings should not be merely understood as a political marketing tactic. Healthy presidential approval ratings was a means of organizing and keeping close political forces in relative order, particularly within a context in which there was increasing centripetal disorder, and infighting within the government coalition and the entire political system (Paley, 2001).

The development of modern forms of communicating with citizens

An important issue for government communication in the new democratic environment was the growing development of modern forms of communication with citizens. In practical terms, this change implied a different media emphasis and message development in which electronic media, particularly television and its logic, became more central. Similarly, ministers and the president began to use other media spaces and formats to explain government ideas directly to citizens. This change may be related to the relevance of television and other electronic media as a source of information and entertainment as well as the process of the people's disengagement from politics (Putnam, 1995; Riquelme, 1999).

In the Chilean case, the lower level of interest in politics in general, distrust and cynicism, among citizens detected in different democracies in the world had some particularities (Riquelme, 1999). The lack of freedom during Pinochet's government and the social movement created to restore democracy facilitated the connection between people, and politics and public issues in the late 1980s and early 1990s. After the early years of transition, this situation began to change, as was true in many other democracies in the world, for reasons such as the privatization of society, disorder in the political system, corruption and the failure of politicians to connect with the needs of the people. Chilean citizens began to have misgivings about politicians and became less interested in political issues. This disengagement was more

prominent in the case of political institutions and their members than in that of the president of the Republic.

In this context, government communication – partially influenced by developments in the United States – increased the role of the president outside the traditional circuit of news media, such as in magazine, television programmes and radio interviews. The president used these spaces to present policies more directly and include a greater personal touch in speeches, characteristics that became key aspects of presidential communication.

In addition, new dimensions emerged associated with the role of the president as a political leader, such as depicting the president's personal and family life as well as greater emotional proximity to the people. The development of this attribute is significant as it acquired increasing relevance over time and could be considered among the central aspects in improving presidential approval ratings.

Allocating more resources to government communication

Another relevant feature of this period is that the Chilean government began allocating significant amounts of human and financial resources to develop effective communication with citizens. Such is the case of the employment of public opinion measurement techniques. National face-to-face surveys, telephone polls, focus groups, the use of electronic devices to evaluate online reactions to presidential speeches were used to track citizens' opinions and provide input for government decision-making processes. The limited data available show that in 2004 this item of the SECOM budget was US\$400,000 compared to approximately US\$600,000 in 2006 (SEGEOB, 2006).

As mentioned earlier, ministers and other government authorities hired a number of communication professionals. This trend was particularly clear in terms of the number of communications advisors and press officers working for the ministries and other public agencies. In fact, it was difficult to find any minister or head of government agency or service who did not work directly with a team of communication advisors.

The development of a divergent agenda between the government and the media

In the early stages of the political transition, the major media outlets assumed a collaborative attitude towards the changes promoted by the new democratic government. In general terms, the major news media agreed to the need

to promote a smooth transition. With the arrival of the second democratic government in 1994, the media developed a more critical attitude towards the government (mainly caused by their earlier media transition), generating a new scenario for government communication (Tironi & Sunkel, 1993).

Indeed, the development of critical media is a healthy process in any democracy. The difficulty in the Chilean case was twofold. On the one hand, the process of the media distancing itself from the basic goals of the new democratic government occurred faster than the political normalization of the country. On the other hand, the separation took place in the context of the absence of a pluralist media system. The occurrence of these two issues generated additional difficulties in developing an agenda that was more prominent in political liberties (such as modifying the Constitution and the electoral system), social changes (such as negotiations with labour unions) and justice for human rights victims.

In this scenario in which the media system underwent an earlier transition than the political system did (Tironi & Sunkel, 1993), the mainstream media tended to show a conservative bias more frequently, and in conjunction with the rapid depoliticization of society in general, government communication was consistently unsuccessful in positioning the importance of continuing with the basic political and institutional changes. These initiatives were usually framed as either remote from the real problems of people, disturbing social peace, or causing unemployment, contexts in which government communication efforts were unable to reposition the idea of the relevance of political changes.

Conclusions

During the Chilean political transition, government communication developed in a complex scenario. Politically speaking, it is important to note the high relevance of the figure of the president and the existence of a protected democracy. The latter particularly produced a legal scenario that did not encourage significant changes in the process of democratizing the country, a situation that was simultaneously reinforced by a media system that tended to be overconcentrated (paradoxically stimulated by the policies of the democratic governments) and more heavily focused on apolitical content.

In terms of the structure of government communication, the organizational design was characterized by redundancies and a lack of synergy. Moreover, the focus on presidential over government communication contributed to the development of a parallel structure dominated by ministerial communication advisors, which caused a lack of coordination and disputes. Clearly these problems were related to the absence of a state structure (financial, human and organizational) equipped to face the complexities of the contemporary

demands of political communication (Alvarez & Caballero, 1997). Moreover, the structure of government communication facilitated the concentration of the efforts on presidential communication and some key policies, rather than on government communication.

In terms of trends, during the political transition, government communication efforts faced a process of clear modernization and shifted from focusing on the exception to putting the accent on contemporary worldwide governmental communication challenges. A case in point is the process of the increasing presidentialization of communications and the emphasis on improving presidential approval ratings, which have been largely described in the literature worldwide (Poguntke & Webb, 2005). Similarly, the increasing allocation of resources and the relevance of public opinion were in keeping with worldwide characteristics of contemporary political communication, usually linked to what many authors have labelled as *Americanization* of politics and communication (Negrine & Papathanassopoulos, 1996). In addition, other international trends were the development of both new forms of communicating with citizens that was less engaged in politics and a divergent agenda between the government and the media.

Nevertheless, some aspects of these trends could be also explained by local characteristics. The presidentialization of communications also has a significant correlate with the Chilean constitutional order, the cultural relevance of the presidential figure and the restrictions of the government communication structure. Similarly, the divergent agenda between the media and government could be explained in part by the process of media concentration and its conservative bias.

All in all, it is important to observe that the Chilean political transition was, in essence, a process of modernization and partially a professionalization of government communication. That is to say, this transition was a process that shifted from an exceptional state regime (characterized by the promotion of institutional and political projects with few resources and little interest in the public's opinion of and support for the presidential figure) to a state displaying the major characteristics of contemporary political communication in developed democracies. Although there were increases in the amount of resources allocated, the incorporation of some highly skilled communication advisors, the regular use of public opinion tracking and the growing use of modern communication techniques such as sound bites, it is also true that a number of communication professionals were not specialists in strategic communication with political considerations frequently superseding communication criteria. There was also a lack of use of more sophisticated and modern political and marketing communication techniques such as microsegmentation of audiences. In this context, it is difficult to assert the clear existence of a proper professionalization process of the government communication during the political transition.

Notes

- 1 This chapter does not aim to debate the exact boundaries of that process (an issue where there is no consensus among scholars and commentators), but to examine a broad period of time – approximately 1990–2006 – in which there is general agreement that Chile was undergoing a transition from an authoritarian regime to democracy.
- 2 Many of the insights presented in this chapter are the result of my conversations with Eugenio Tironi (Director of Communications 1990–4), Pablo Halpern (Director of Communications 1994–8) and Ernesto Ottone (Head of presidential advisors 2000–6). My deep thanks to all of them for their generosity in sharing their experience and knowledge.
- 3 The Chilean Constitution established a four-year presidential period for the first democratic government, and six years for subsequent governments. In 2005, this norm was changed for a four-year presidential period.

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