



START-UP AND ENTREPRENEURIAL COMMUNICATION

**THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND
CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENT**

Edited by
Alexander Godulla and Linjuan Rita Men



ROUTLEDGE



Start-up and Entrepreneurial Communication

This book delves into the dynamic field of start-up and entrepreneurial communication, addressing a significant research gap.

Start-up and entrepreneurial communication is a critical practice for organizations in their early stages of development. Characterized by their innovative and growth-oriented nature, these organizations often find themselves in a constant state of re-evaluation and reinvention. As such, the competencies within these organizations frequently struggle to match the real-time changes. Addressing this gap, this book provides scientifically sound answers to defining and systematizing start-up and entrepreneurial communication. It delves into central areas of discourse, exploring the intricate balance between a start-up's brand, identity, and strategic communication, as well as the crucial role of internal communication. Additionally, the book offers insights into the highly innovative realm of crowdfunding, complementing its comprehensive exploration of start-up communication.

This volume will be a key resource for scholars, students, and practitioners in the emerging field of entrepreneurial and start-up communication. It was originally published as a special issue of the *International Journal of Strategic Communication*.

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Theoretical Foundations and Contemporary
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Edited by

Alexander Godulla and Linjuan Rita Men

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Introduction: Start-up and Entrepreneurial Communication

Alexander Godulla  and Linjuan Rita Men 

ABSTRACT

This editorial introduces start-ups as critical drivers of growth in modern economies and gives an overview on existing research about young and innovative companies in the field of strategic communication. It also provides an overview of the articles published in this special issue.

Start-ups are young and innovative companies with the potential to change the prevailing rules of economic competition in their respective industry or to create new markets and industries. Start-ups are defined by three criteria: They are in an early stage of development, are highly innovative, and demonstrate scalable growth rates in turnover and workforce (Kollmann et al., 2016). Start-ups are thus a critical player in economic growth in modern society as they drive innovation, competition and create employment opportunities (Men et al., 2018). Since start-ups are basically not older than ten years and usually stand for a new business model, product, service or technology, their constant change places special demands on strategic communication research. This problem is aggravated by additional properties attributed to start-ups: They do not only have liabilities of newness (Stinchcombe, 1965) and smallness (Aldrich & Auster, 1986), and often struggle with financial or human resources, but also lack an established brand/reputation and knowledge from previous market success. Further, start-up culture and performance can be highly influenced by their founder(s).

Entrepreneurship is much more difficult to define, as it is used to explain specific patterns of action in a social and economic context, as well as motivation and mindset of people. Literature reviews show that dozens of definitions exist due to numerous academic approaches (Gedeon, 2010). Schumpeter (1934), in his seminal work on the theory of economic development, states that an “entrepreneur is the innovator who implements change within markets through the carrying out of new combinations” (p. 63). Today, it is often argued that entrepreneurship serves an economic function, is confronted with risks and challenges, is based on innovation and creativity, and manifests itself by means of observable people who face these challenges based on their personality traits and life experiences (Raimi, 2015). Accordingly, the concept is closely linked to the topic of start-ups.

Existing research in the areas of strategic communication related to start-ups and entrepreneurship can be categorized into the areas of resource acquisition, external communication, corporate branding, personality communication for founders, internal communication and strategic communication about the start-up ecosystem in general (Wiesenberg et al., 2020). Most of this research focuses on the roles of external investors and supporters (Gompers & Lerner, 2000), venture capitalists (Kollmann & Kuckertz, 2006), or angel investors, incubators, and accelerators (Cohen, 2013). Others examined start-up reputation, leadership communication, and social media communication. For instance, Petkova (2012) describes the process by which young companies can create a reputation among relevant stakeholder groups. Rode and Vallaster (2005) found that start-ups lack the ability to clearly articulate their main business, their values, and their market positioning. Tumasjan et al. (2011)

elaborate on the advantages of successful employer branding for start-ups. Invernizzi and Romenti (2015) proposed an entrepreneurial communication model by combining entrepreneurial organization theory and strategic communication; they elaborate on several dimensions of communication relevant to the success of an enterprise. Men et al. (2018) explored the role of entrepreneurial leadership communication in shaping start-up culture in China. They revealed effective start-up CEO communication strategies and tactics in engaging internal and external stakeholders. Chen et al. (2021) examined start-ups' social media communication practice in China through the theoretical lens of dialogic communication.

Yet, from the perspective of strategic communication, start-ups remain an under-researched study context. Strategic communication is defined as “all communication that is substantial for the survival and sustained success of an entity. Specifically, strategic communication is the purposeful use of communication by an entity to engage in conversations of strategic significance to its goals” (Zerfass et al., 2018, p. 487). Despite the growing interest in various issues of start-up strategic communications, there are still several research gaps that this special issue seeks to identify, develop, or close.

Overview of articles in the special issue

This special issue includes eleven articles on start-up and entrepreneurial communication topics that are categorized into four broad sections: Theoretical approaches to start-up and entrepreneurial communication; start-up brand, identity, and strategic communication; internal communication for start-ups; and start-up crowdfunding and strategic communication. The following overview provides a summary of the four sections, introducing each article briefly.

Theoretical approaches to start-up and entrepreneurial communication

The articles in the first section address various theoretical issues related to start-up and entrepreneurial communication.

The first article, “Analogies in entrepreneurial communication and strategic communication: Definition, delimitation of research programs and future research” by Britta M. Gossel, uses an unconventional problematization approach that is under-utilized in communication research to explore conceptual differences between entrepreneurial communication and strategic communication. By exploring the etymological roots of the core terms *strategic* and *entrepreneurial* and their adoptions in strategic and entrepreneurial research, analogies are identified along with three unifying dimensions that define and delimit research programs in these two distinguished and related areas. These dimensions and analogies include: developmental stage (entrepreneurial as formulation and strategic as existence), mode (entrepreneurial as the creative mode of becoming and strategic as the maintenance mode of organizing), and logic (entrepreneurial as effectual logic and strategic as causal logic). The dimension and analogies and their underlying assumptions are discussed based upon the literature. The author further discusses opportunities for future research in entrepreneurial communication through the theoretical lens of formulation, mode and logic. Overall, this conceptual paper provides an important step for future debates in the definitions and delimitations of entrepreneurial and strategic communication research programs.

The second article, “Conditions of one-way and two-way approaches in strategic start-up communication: A qualitative comparative analysis” by Christian Rudeloff, Sigrid Bekmeier-Feuerhahn, Jörg Sikkenga, and Aliena Barth, uses a qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) to identify different condition configurations that lead to the one-way vs. two-way strategic communication approaches in start-ups. Based on in-depth interviews with 18 start-up founders in Germany and using Fuzzy-set QCA, the authors reveal the interplay between decision-making logics and communication approaches in start-ups. Specifically, the “industry-driven path” and “data-driven” path are described as conditions for the outcome of the one-way communication approach; the “organic growth path”, “profit-driven path” and “competition-driven path” are found to lead to the outcome of two-way

communication. “Means orientation” is revealed as a necessary condition for both communication approaches. While different combinations of decision-making logics lead to different communication approaches, the authors suggest that decision-making logics alone do not fully explain the communicative practices in start-ups. Situational factors such as industry, type of product, and business model interplay with different decision-making logics in the entrepreneur that lead to one-way and two-way communication in start-ups.

The third article, “Relationship cultivation and social capital: Female transnational entrepreneurs’ relationship-based communication on social media” by Zifei Fay Chen and June Y. Lee, is dedicated to the question of how Korean American female transnational entrepreneurs (FTEs) manage their relationships with different publics. The authors conducted 16 in-depth-interviews, deriving their perspective from approaches like relationship management theory and social capital theory. Their study shows that Korean American FTEs in the San Francisco Bay Area and Silicon Valley depend on three key publics (customers, business partners, social media influencers). The existing literature regarding FTEs explains that there are several practices for relationship cultivation already used. In addition to these known practices like networking, sharing tasks, being unconditionally supportive or saying win-win or no deal, the authors identified new strategies like sharing identity and interest, proactive outreach, and focusing on social over para-social relationships. The study shows that the important role cultural heritage plays lies in the context of cognitive social capital. To FTEs, structural and relational social capital is also transnational. On social media, they pursue a strategy of bonding social capital with the supplement of bridging social capital.

Start-up brand, identity and strategic communication

The articles in the second section examine start-up brands and identities as well as their interconnections with strategic communications using different approaches.

The first article in this section, “Assembling the start-up brand: A model for understanding strategic communication challenges” by Vidhi Chaudhri, Jason Pridmore, and Carola Mauck, explores the role of strategic communication in the brand building process of start-ups. To that end, the authors treat start-up branding as an active process of meaning making which assembles different layers of professional and material activities. Based on in-depth semi-structured interviews with the (co-) founders of 15 European start-up and scale-up brands across different business sectors, the authors propose a process model of start-up branding which entails 4C dimensions: craft (“purposeful efforts to infuse meaning in the idea/concept or the product/service offering to carve out a differentiated identity”); cultivate (“developing and nurturing relationships in which employees are empowered and engaged to contribute to the brand, to live the brand values both within and outside the organization”); curate (“entrepreneurs communicate and socialize their product/concept in an effort to favorably and consistently position themselves among stakeholder”); and (re)-calibrate (“the iterative and cyclical processes by which start-ups’ customer-focused orientation plays a key role in strategy formulation and refinement . . . (which highlights) stakeholders as a source of inspiration, input, and feedback”). This framework illustrates how strategic communication can be used to understand and evaluate brand processes in entrepreneurial organizations.

The second article, “Narrative Startup Identity Construction as Strategic Communication” by Sanna Ala-Kortesmaa, Tomi Laapotti, and Leena Mikkola, adopts the social constructionist approach. The authors present a qualitative case study. They focus on the health technology start-up company Naava Group from Finland in order to derive general ideas on how identity is interpreted through narration. In addition, they investigate organizational identity in strategic external or internal communication. The project is based on the analysis of Twitter communication, blog posts, and interviews. Its results show how organizations define their identity in a strategic way and which aspects of storytelling and narratives are important to this process. Essential to this process is a strategy of narrating the same stories through different voices within the social media identity storytelling. Regarding Naava Group, four aspects of external organizational identity become visible. From the

perspective of narrative storytelling, the roles “(re)connector with nature”, “promoter of well-being and health”, “solution provider” and “innovative interior designer” are permeable. Central to this research project is the identification of strategic key factors to start-up identity creation. Especially the cohesiveness of the identity storytelling, the voices that narrate the identity construction, and the content and temporal dimensions of the narrated stories are important.

The third article in this section, “Carving start-up character: Effects of symmetrical communication on start-up corporate character, customer-start-up identification, and customer advocacy” by Yi Grace Ji, Zifei Fay Chen, and Linjuan Rita Men, is based on a personification approach. The study focuses on the Chinese market and examines the influence of strategic communication on the development of the corporate character of start-ups. It puts emphasis on examining the relationship between several internal and external factors of start-ups. Aspects such as the relationships among start-ups’ symmetrical communication model, start-up characters (agreeableness, enterprise, competence, ruthlessness), customer identification with the start-up, and customer advocacy are taken into consideration. Based on an online survey with 641 start-up customers in China, the authors manage to show the importance of practicing symmetrical communication. In addition, they identify a positive connection between customer identification with the start-up and customer advocacy. On a more general level, this article contributes to the theoretical development in the field of stakeholder-organization identification, and symmetrical communication in the culturally distinctive market of China. For practitioners and entrepreneurs, it offers insights on how to develop a favorable start-up corporate character based on strong connections with customers.

Internal communication for start-ups

The articles in the third section take an internal perspective and address employee communication issues in start-ups.

The first article, “The role of internal communication in start-ups: State of research and practical approaches” by Cornelia Wolf, Alexander Godulla, Leonie Beck, and Leah Sophie Neubert, addresses the research gap in internal communication at start-ups. Based on the Communication Constitutes Organization (CCO) perspective, the authors describe three communication flows of start-ups: membership negotiation, reflexive self-structuring, and activity coordination. With the consideration of the three communication flows, unique characteristics of start-ups and the developmental stages of new ventures, the authors propose the following research question: What role is attributed to internal communication in the different development stages of start-ups according to academic research and practice? They conduct a systematic literature review of 38 journal articles and twelve guided interviews with representatives of start-ups at different stages of development in Germany, combining an academic and professional perspective. Results show that academic research has focused on how internal communication affects membership negotiation and reflexive self-structuring with a research gap regarding its role in activity coordination. In addition, this article reveals that, while the contribution of internal communication to start-up success is considered high, this field is rarely strategized and seldom evaluated in start-ups in practice. Start-up founders play a key role in internal communication. The authors thus call for more future research on start-up leaders’ internal communication function, and how internal communication supports start-up innovation as well as measurement issues.

The second article, “Welcoming newcomers in start-ups: Challenges for strategic internal communication” by Mia Thyregod Rasmussen, deals with typical problems that affect the internal communication of start-ups. On the one hand, they are affected by uncertainty and limited resources. On the other hand, they have to integrate newcomers and thus ensure their success as an organization. In this context, a special role is played by strategic organizational entry communication. This study is based on research at the intersection of human resources management and entrepreneurship. To this end, interviews were conducted with entrepreneurs and newcomers in six start-ups. Using a thematic analysis, three themes of strategic communication challenges were identified that should be considered

when welcoming newcomers. These are aspects that affect the overall organizational context and situation. In addition, important aspects are those that relate to the newcomer's job content and design. Furthermore, there are the competencies of entrepreneurs to communicate their knowledge and the time available to them. In summary, implications for the start-up context for strategic organizational entry communication (opportunities, content, form) can be derived from the study.

The third article “Understanding start-up employees’ communicative behaviors on an employer review website: A comparison of TikTok and Snapchat” by Soojin Kim, Lisa Tam, and Seung B. Bach, takes the premise that employees’ external communication behaviors are reflective of an organization's internal communication. Through comparing employees’ communication behaviors regarding TikTok, a technology startup and those of a similar tech company, Snapchat, the authors identify reputational opportunities and challenges for start-ups in the tech industry. A content analysis of 320 employee review posts about TikTok and 324 employee review posts about Snapchat on Glassdoor was conducted. Results show that employees most frequently mention topics of work environment, co-workers, and salaries and benefits. The comparison reveals that a proportionately higher number of positive reviews about career progression opportunities, work environment, and office and location are published on TikTok. At the same time, more negative reviews on work arrangements, salaries and benefits, and intrinsic rewards were identified on this platform. The authors explain potential reasons, taking into consideration the uniqueness of start-ups, features of tech organizations and case specifics. While the case study does not intend to make generalizations, the results shed light on reputational opportunities and challenges that are common for start-ups in the high-tech industry. The authors suggest that start-ups should constantly monitor employees’ communicative behaviors online to immediately address the issues which might lead to employee turnover or damage of the start-up's reputation.

Start-up crowdfunding and strategic communication

The two articles in the last section focus on a specific strategic communication practice for startups: crowdfunding communication.

The first article, “The use of crowdfunding and social media platforms in strategic start-up communication: A big-data analysis” by Sun-Young Park, investigates crowdfunding platforms like AngelList and Crunchbase on the one hand, and social media sites like Facebook and Twitter on the other hand. From the perspective of social capital theory, the study asks what impact social media marketing has on the fundraising success of start-ups. It becomes clear that three dimensions of social capital sources (cognitive, structural, and relational) significantly determine the fundraising of start-ups. Specifically, the article identifies and names the following aspects: Shared values, which are this case interpreted as the number of followers and the number of investors of start-up companies. Secondly, attention, which is measured using categories such as product/service descriptions and videos. This refers to a cognitive category that makes a positive contribution to an increase in investor funding. A third key factor is trust, which is associated with indicators such as quality ratings, the number of rounds of funding, and the number of investors. As part of the structural dimension, it becomes clear that social interaction ties such as the number of likes and the number of social media followers exerts a positive influence on funding.

The second article, “Persuasive reasons in crowdfunding communication: Comparing argumentative strategies in successful and unsuccessful projects on Kickstarter” by Rudi Palmieri, Chiara Mercuri, and Sabrina Mazzali-Lurati, identifies argumentative strategies that are more likely to explain the success of a crowdfunding campaign. Through a qualitative analysis of 15 successful and 15 unsuccessful campaigns launched in the 2018–2019 period on Kickstarter, the authors identified three main macro-level pitching strategies: societal problem-solution (projects framed as a solution to a societal problem), personal problem-solution (projects framed as a solution to the founder's problem), and desire-project (identification of an intrinsically desirable initiative or product which requires funding). Successful crowdfunding campaigns tend to use more of the societal problem-

solution strategy. The study also reveals micro-level rhetorical strategies (ethos, logos, and pathos appeals) used in the entrepreneurial pitching. In particular, crowdfunding pitches of highly successful founders tend to focus more on advantages of the project's properties rather than on the description of its features; they use less ethos appeals but more pathos appeals reflecting an audience-oriented argumentative strategy; they also use more argumentation to connect macro-thematic reasons that justify micro-level claims. From a rhetorical perspective, this study adds to the growing body of knowledge on crowdfunding communication for startups and provides much-needed practical guidance for effective entrepreneurial pitching.



Outlook

The multitude of perspectives raised in this special issue shows the dynamic development of start-up communication internationally, integrating numerous national characteristics and contexts. Start-ups across various nations seem to face similar as well as culturally unique challenges. In the meantime, various theoretical and methodological approaches have been adopted or developed to explore this relatively new territory. While this special issue broadens the scope of start-up research from the perspective of strategic communication and provides valuable insights into important issues of startup branding, identity management, reputation building, relationship cultivation, internal communication, crowd-funding, and the like, research at this stage remains relatively scattered. A general theory or systematic overview on the body of knowledge of start-up strategic communication is still lacking. Many other important issues in the context of start-up communication remain under-explored, such as measurement and evaluation, institutionalization of communication, ethics, diffusion of new technologies, the role of entrepreneurial leadership communication, and cross-cultural comparisons. We therefore hope that this special issue will stimulate more research interest for the topic of start-up communication and that more research will be devoted to this important area in the future.

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Section I

Theoretical Approaches to Start-up and Entrepreneurial Communication



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Analogies in Entrepreneurial Communication and Strategic Communication: Definition, Delimitation of Research Programs and Future Research

Britta M. Gossel

ABSTRACT

This article aims to build a better understanding of entrepreneurial communication and strategic communication. The term entrepreneurial is finding its way into the discussion of communication science in general and strategic communication in particular, for example, through the consideration of startups. So far, the term entrepreneurial communication remains vague, is hardly defined and is not systematically distinguished from strategic communication. By applying an analogies lens in the context of problematizing, differences between the terms *entrepreneurial* and *strategic* in entrepreneurial communication and strategic communication are explored based on selected given definitions. As a result, three unifying dimensions – development stage, mode, and logic – are developed to highlight fundamental differences between the two terms. To create potential for a future creation of entrepreneurial communication as research program, and to elaborate on future potential for strategic communication in relation to this, central theoretical approaches in entrepreneurship research and their potential to research entrepreneurial communication are explored.

Introduction

Defining and delimiting key terms and research programs are major challenges for evolving research fields. For *strategic communication* well known is the definition of Hallahan et al. (2007), followed by recent discussions of the concept (e.g., Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2015; Nothhaft et al., 2018; Thomas & Stephens, 2015; Van Ruler, 2018; Zerfass et al., 2018). In addition, another recent approach is discussed under the name *entrepreneurial communication* (Brender, 2005; Invernizzi et al., 2012; Invernizzi & Romenti, 2015; Mella & Gazzola, 2018). With the terms *strategic* and *entrepreneurial*, both strategic and entrepreneurial communication, draw on conceptual worlds that originate beyond communication science, namely in strategic management and entrepreneurship research. *Strategic* in strategic communication is strongly related to the concept of purposiveness, from beginnings of its definitions (Hallahan et al., 2007) until today: “The term ‘strategy’ is traditionally [...] a calculus of purpose, ends, and means” (Nothhaft et al., 2018, p. 360). *Entrepreneurial* in entrepreneurial communication is thus far reduced to a very narrowed view on the term, drawing exclusively on entrepreneurial organization theory and assuming *entrepreneurial* in terms of “entrepreneurial *content* [emphasis added] of strategic communication” (Invernizzi & Romenti, 2015, p. 224). In the heterogeneous and interdisciplinary field of entrepreneurship research, *strategic* and *entrepreneurial* can be assumed as potentially diametrically opposed (Sarasvathy, 2009). This fundamental difference in core assumptions *across* and *within* the originating disciplines has not yet been addressed in the discourse of communication science that addresses both terms in strategic and entrepreneurial communication.

Therefore, this article focuses on the question: *Which analogies and unifying dimensions of the terms strategic and entrepreneurial can be identified to define and delimit research programs of strategic communication and entrepreneurial communication?*

To elaborate this question, this article follows a slightly unconventional structure. In a first step, it is argued why problematization (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011; Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013, 2020) enriches research in entrepreneurial and strategic communication. Next, problematization and the lens of analogies as heuristic are introduced as applied in this research. Along these heuristic, etymological roots, adoptions in entrepreneurial and strategic communication definitions and first traces of analogies are presented sequentially. As result, the analogies and unifying dimensions developed in this way are presented. Finally, potential for the creation of future research in entrepreneurial communication and strategic communication are discussed.

Why problematizing enriches theorizing in entrepreneurial and strategic communication

A call for more and substantial theorizing can be observed in research related to entrepreneurial and strategic communication (e.g., Heide et al., 2018; Lock et al., 2020; Nothhaft et al., 2018; Plowman & Wilson, 2018; Van Ruler, 2018). Precisely, there is “lack of theoretical development” (Nothhaft et al., 2018, p. 364), and regarding this, researchers in the field are encouraged “to strive for more complexity and less simplification” (Heide et al., 2018, p. 465). Although undoubtedly, “[m]ethods are the key” (Nothhaft et al., 2018, p. 364), and clearly a high level of empirical research is being conducted in strategic communication to push the field forward, we suggest to enrich theorizing in entrepreneurial and strategic communication with the likewise less-known approach of problematizing (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011, 2013, 2020).

Theory development does not start with empirical methods, but with developing relevant research questions. A prevalent approach to come up with research questions in many disciplines is to deduce them from a gap found in the current state of research. This gap is usually identified carefully and thoroughly with rigorous methods such as structured literature analysis. Examples in current entrepreneurial and strategic communication research are Lock et al. (2020), Sundermann and Raabe (2019), and Wiesenbergh et al. (2020). This “gap-spotting” (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011, p. 248) way to develop research questions has its limitations and was criticized a decade ago as “an increasingly disturbing problem in management studies” (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011, p. 251). Precisely, “the scarcity of more interesting and influential theories is a serious problem” (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011, p. 251) in management science and generally in social sciences, which unlikely can be overcome by further developing or refining gap-spotting research (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011, p. 251). As an alternative, Alvesson and Sandberg (2011, 2013, 2020) introduced problematization methodology.

The aim of problematization is “generating novel research questions through a dialectical interrogation of one’s own familiar position, other stances, and the literature domain targeted for assumption challenging” (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011, p. 260), that can be applied in various settings without any paradigmatic stance. The process is based on two key questions: “First, what *types* of assumptions are relevant to consider? Second, *how* can these assumptions be identified, articulated and challenged in a way that is likely to lead to the development of an interesting theory?” (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011, p. 254, italics as in original). Based on a typology of five different forms of assumptions, Alvesson and Sandberg (2011) suggested six principles to identify and challenge assumptions, which they narrowed down to four in a recent publication (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2020). This approach “enables researchers to imagine how to rethink existing literature in ways that generate new and ‘better’ ways of thinking about specific phenomena” (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2020, p. 1290).

In management and organization science, problematization is an increasingly common approach. Its application is not only recommended in conceptual (Dubois & Salmi, 2016; Jaakkola, 2020; Patriotta, 2020) or methodological articles (e.g., Brslin & Gartrell, 2020), but has already been successful applied in management (e.g., Touboulic et al., 2020), marketing (Holmlund et al., 2020);

Jabbarra et al., 2020; Kowalkowski et al., 2015), information systems research (Hafermalz et al., 2020; Schuetz & Venkatesh, 2020), economics and finance (Prabhu KP et al., 2019), and entrepreneurship (Hasenzagl et al., 2018). Compared to this, in entrepreneurial and strategic communication, problematization was mentioned recently (e.g., Simonsson & Heide, 2021; Willis, 2019), but not yet applied. However, when Goyanes (2020) asked—in a study with editorial board members of international communication science journals—what is interesting in communication research, counterintuitive research was that one most considered to be relevant, which follows, according to Goyanes (2020), the principles of problematization.

If theorizing with more complexity is required in the field (Heide et al., 2018), and if problematization as introduced here can be seen as likewise new but promising approach, it is assumed to be supporting for the major aim of this article, which is to open up new research questions for theory development in entrepreneurial and strategic communication.

Unfolding underlying assumptions with problematizing review

Because problematization review is a novel approach, only a few research examples exist that applied problematizing. It is applied in the beginning of a qualitative research process to create a strong relevance of research (e.g., Holmlund et al., 2020; Willis, 2019). Other examples follow Alvesson & Sandberg (2011), but provide own adaptations with just two steps (Schuetz & Venkatesh, 2020), three steps (Deng et al., 2020), or six steps (Hasenzagl et al., 2018; Kowalkowski et al., 2015). Here we focus on the most recent four-principles approach (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2020).

(1) Reflexivity: Hereby, “the author is guided by a constant consideration and occasional questioning of assumptions, perspectives and vocabularies in order to come up with, test and possibly suggest alternative ideas and ways of thinking about a phenomenon or domain” (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2020, p. 1297). (2) Reading broad but selectively: This principle “rejects the full store inventory approach [...] and suggests a more limited and careful set of readings” (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2020, p. 1298). Hereby, a three-level approach is suggested (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2020, p. 1298) (3) Problematizing instead of accumulating: This principle “is to question rather than trying to identify missing pieces in the accumulating domain jigsaw puzzle” (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2020, p. 1299). This principle was implemented with the help of the idea of questioning for analogies as underlying assumptions in theory development. Analogies (or metaphors) are an extensively researched area in the field of organization theory (Cornelissen et al., 2005; Morgan, 2006; Tsoukas, 1991). This perspective is applied because analogies are assumed to be “useful account of the progress of research programs” (Ketokivi et al., 2017, p. 638). (4) Stay minimal: The final principle of “less is more” [] emphasizes fewer readings of a large number of studies, and more concentration on coming up with new and unexpected insights” (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2020, p. 1300). This principle was complemented by the idea of the epistemic script of bricolage (Boxenbaum & Rouleau, 2011). This approach is providing general principles, but not a step-by-step guidance. Based on careful readings of existing examples (e.g., Deng et al., 2020; Hasenzagl et al., 2018), a six-step approach was applied. Each process step was guided by one core question. With the help of this one question, different logics of different literature were encountered. These process steps orient in different intensity on the principles of problematization (Table 1).

The selection routine in process step (2) followed the examples of Deng et al. (2020), Hasenzagl et al. (2018), and Hafermalz et al. (2020), who focus on a selection of most influencing articles that were identified similar to Deng et al. (2020) with help of Google Scholar Citation Index, knowing that this evaluation criterion has strengths and weaknesses (Harzing & Van der Wal, 2008). As it was already pointed out, researchers are challenged to find a way to question underlying assumptions from an outside perspective (Touboulic et al., 2020, p. 44), which is relevant in steps (5)–(6), in this context the example of Hasenzagl et al. (2018) was guiding to select particular theories—in this case from entrepreneurship research—for developing novel research questions.

Table 1. Procedure of problematization in orientation to the four principles according to Alvesson and Sandberg (2020).

Process step	Core question	Domain of literature	Elaboration logic	Problematization principle
(1) clarifying ety-mological roots	What is the etymological core of the terms entrepreneurial and strategic?	handbooks, encyclopedias, descriptions of subject development	describing, summarizing	reflexivity, reading broad but selectively
(2) detecting scientific adoptions	In which definitions of entrepreneurial and strategic communication were these terms in which way adopted?	published journal papers, handbooks in strategic and entrepreneurial communication, that included definitions	selecting	reflexivity, reading broad but selectively (first level), stay minimal
(3) finding traces of analogies/underlying assumptions	Which traces of analogies can be observed in definitions of entrepreneurial and strategic communication?	detected and selected definitions of strategic and entrepreneurial communication	analysing	reflexivity, reading broad but selectively (first level)
(4) defining analogies and unifying dimensions	How can different analogies and unifying dimensions be described?	additional literature from strategic and entrepreneurial communication and neighbourhood domains (entrepreneurship, organization, strategy) supporting the clarifying of analogies and unifying dimensions	narrowing, clarifying	reflexivity, reading broad but selectively (second level), stay minimal
(5) challenging assumptions	From which perspective can identified analogies be challenged?	additional theories from entrepreneurship research with challenging potential for the respective analogies	opening	reflexivity, reading broad but selectively (third level), problematizing instead of accumulating, stay minimal
(6) developing research questions	Which promising research questions can be deduced?	no additional literature	creating	problematizing instead of accumulating, stay minimal

Etymological roots of the terms strategic and entrepreneurial

An introduction of etymological roots can be brief. As is known, the term *strategy* has its roots in the Greek language: “[T]he word strategy ultimately derives from the classical Greek word στρατηγός, denoting a military commander and being in use in the 6th century BC” (Nothhaft & Schölzel, 2015, p. 18). Based on this, the term is strongly connected to military theory, which was already explored (e.g., Holtzhausen & Zeffass, 2015; Nothhaft & Schölzel, 2015). Prominent are attributions to strategy in strategic management (Chandler, 1962 | 1990; Mintzberg, 1987, 1989; Porter, 1997; overview, see Cummings, 2008). Chandler (1962), the “founder of strategy” (Whittington, 2008, p. 267) defined strategy “as the determination of the basic long-term goals and objectives of an enterprise, and the adoption of courses of action and the allocation of resources necessary for carrying out these goals” (Chandler, 1962|1990, p. 13). Famous are Mintzbergs five Ps (plan, pattern position, perspective, ploy) for strategy (Mintzberg, 1987). And, of course, Porter assumed strategy as “the organization’s distinctive approach to competing and the competitive advantages on which it will be based” (Porter, 2012, p. 3). These roots of strategic management were mainly observed from strategic communications (e.g., Hallahan et al., 2007, p. 11; Zeffass et al., 2018, p. 293).

Less known from the perspective of communication science are the foundations of the term “entrepreneurship.” The term *entrepreneur* has its roots in Old French *entreprendre* or “undertake.” “The word first crossed the Chanel late 15 c (Middle English *entrepreunenour*) but did not stay” (Harper, 2021). The meaning of *entreprendre* can be characterized by the following impressions: “go ahead, take in hand, undertake, contract for work, take up work, get into a project, take a hold of” (Crookall, 1994, p. 333). Fallgatter (2002) describes the history of the term entrepreneur, beginning in France in the 16th century as a soldier of fortune, who hired mercenaries to offer their services for various purposes. In the 17th century, an entrepreneur was more a project maker, who made contracts with the public sector and introduced new agricultural techniques and a century later, an entrepreneur as a buying-and-selling person is assumed as a risk taker. In the 19th century, still the roles of managers and entrepreneurs were not separated, even though companies were growing. Starting with the 20th century, a view of entrepreneurs as inventors and innovators came to the fore (Fallgatter, 2002, pp. 12–13). In academia, the term was mostly influenced by the academic field of

Table 2. Definitions of strategic communication.

Reference	Definition
Hallahan et al.; (2007)	“Although their specific activities can be conceptualized in various ways – from coordinating administrative functions to product promotion and relationship building – all of these disciplines involve the organization, defined in its broadest sense, communicating purposefully to advance its mission. This is the essence of <i>strategic</i> communication. It further implies that people will be engaged in deliberate communication practice on behalf of organizations, causes, and social movements.” (p. 4)
Zeffass et al.; (2018)	“Strategic communication encompasses all communication that is substantial for the survival and sustained success of an entity. Specifically, strategic communication is the purposeful use of communication by an organization or other entity to engage in conversations of strategic significance to its goals.” (p. 493)
Heide et al.; (2018)	“Strategic communication has been defined as the study of how organizations use communication purposefully to fulfil their overall missions (e.g., Frandsen & Johansen, 2017; Hallahan et al., 2007).” (p. 452)
Van Ruler (2018)	“As a research field, strategic communication is said to examine how organizations use communication purposefully to fulfill their mission (Hallahan et al., 2007; Holtzhausen & Zeffass, 2015).” (p. 367)
Winkler and Etter (2018)	“Ultimately, with a central focus on emergence, we close with a programmatic proposition to rethink the academic definition of strategic communication, which is still rooted in a purpose driven and goal oriented understanding (Hallahan et al., 2007; Holtzhausen & Zeffass, 2013, 2015, p. 205). An extension of this definition that integrates emergence, as constitutive for both practice and product of strategic communication [. . .].” (p. 395)
Falkenheimer & Mats (2014)	“We define strategic communication as an organization’s conscious communication efforts to reach its goals. In the broadest possible sense of the term, organization in this context refers to private companies, public authorities and organizations, associations and interest groups.” (p. 132)
Argenti et al.; (2005)	“We define strategic communication as communication aligned with the company’s overall strategy, to enhance its strategic positioning.” (p. 61)