

European Journal of Communication

<http://ejc.sagepub.com>

Spin Doctoring in British and German Election Campaigns: How the Press is Being Confronted with a New Quality of Political PR

Frank Esser, Carsten Reinemann and David Fan
European Journal of Communication 2000; 15; 209
DOI: 10.1177/0267323100015002003

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://ejc.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/15/2/209>

Published by:

 SAGE Publications

<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *European Journal of Communication* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://ejc.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://ejc.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations (this article cites 10 articles hosted on the
SAGE Journals Online and HighWire Press platforms):
<http://ejc.sagepub.com/cgi/content/refs/15/2/209>

Spin Doctoring in British and German Election Campaigns

How the Press is Being Confronted with a New Quality of Political PR

■ *Frank Esser, Carsten Reinemann and David Fan*



ABSTRACT

■ The 1997 British and 1998 German general elections showed striking parallels and distinctive differences in the way Blair and Schroeder delivered their campaigns and defeated long-sitting conservative governments. Of vital importance was a new quality of political public relations called 'spin doctoring'. In this, the British Labour Party served as a kind of role model for the German Social Democratic Party. This article traces the origins and different meanings of 'spin doctoring' in both countries, distinguishes between media-related and non-media-related spin activities and analyses it against the background of the specific national contexts. The aims and methods of political spin doctors in modern election campaigns are described, particularly their half antagonistic, half symbiotic relationship with journalists. A comparative content analysis of the press coverage of the last general elections reveals that the two countries' journalists dealt with political spin doctors very differently. In Great Britain, 'spin doctoring high gear' predominated, in Germany it was 'spin doctoring low gear'. British journalists covered their efforts extensively and critically, mainly because some of them turned to

Frank Esser is Assistant Professor at the Institut fuer Publizistik, Johannes Gutenberg University, 55099 Mainz, Germany [email: frank.esser@uni-mainz.de]. Carsten Reinemann is Research Associate at the same department [email: carsten.reinemann@uni-mainz.de]. David Fan is Professor at the Department of Genetics and Cell Biology, University of Minnesota, St Paul, MN 55108-1095, USA [email: dfan@email.labmed.umn.edu].

European Journal of Communication Copyright © 2000 SAGE Publications (London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi), Vol 15(2): 209-239. [0267-3231(200006)15:2;209-239;012800]

unusually aggressive methods towards the media. German journalists were less likely to report extensively on spin doctoring. This can be explained by the fact that it is still in a stage of development in Germany and — for that very reason — that German journalists are still less interested in the strategic inner perspective of the electoral campaigning. ■

Key Words election campaigns, Germany, Great Britain, spin doctoring

Spinning the ‘Third Way’

The political landscape in Europe has changed significantly in the late 1990s. For the first time ever, the centre-left is simultaneously in charge in all the big four European powers — Germany, Britain, France, Italy. Some observers hold the view, though, that the rise of the ‘new’ democratic left is not only a triumph of ideology but also a triumph of political marketing. The rules of the political game have changed: parties bring in management consultants for a more efficient party organization, advertising experts for better pre-election publicity, communication experts for better dealing with the mass media, and brainpower — gathered together in policy units and think tanks — for the ideological content. Justifiably or not, Tony Blair is regarded as personifying this new style of politics more than anyone else in Europe. Consequently, *Newsweek* elected him ‘European of the Year’ in 1997. The following year the magazine did not elect a person but a political movement, ‘The Third Way’, the product of a think tank (McGuire et al., 1997, 1998). The movement is named after a pamphlet by Tony Blair titled *The Third Way: New Politics for a New Century* (Blair, 1998), which has now been published in 40 countries. This ‘new centre’ course between hardliner Thatcherism and old-style socialism¹ was drafted with the help of Anthony Giddens, director of the London School of Economics and author of *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy* (Giddens, 1998); Geoff Mulgan, director of the Labour think tank Demos and special adviser to Blair; and Ian Hargreaves, journalism professor and editor of the Labour-friendly weekly magazine *New Statesman*.

A very attentive observer of the British development has been the Social Democratic Party (SPD) of Germany. After the Labour Party’s victory of 1 May 1997, Gerhard Schroeder’s SPD election camp copied many elements of the Blair campaign: the pledge card (‘Keep this card and you’ll see we keep our promises’), many programme slogans (e.g. ‘Be tough on crime and the causes of crime’) and promises (‘100,000 new jobs

for young people'). The SPD election manifesto contained word-for-word phrases from Labour's manifesto. Schroeder's consultants had regular meetings with Blair's people before German election day on 27 September 1998. The SPD's election coordinator, Mathias Machnig, travelled three times to Britain to learn about Blair's campaign, and Labour MP Denis MacShane made three trips to Germany to lecture about Blair's first year in office. At the same time, Geoff Mulgan conducted regular seminars on Blair's 'Third Way' for SPD officials in Bonn. Of particular interest are the exchanges between Schroeder's campaign guru Bodo Hombach with Blair's special adviser Peter Mandelson. Both were labelled the 'No. 1 spin doctor' of their respective candidates; both published programmatic books on their party's new 'Third Way' policies (Mandelson, 1996; Hombach, 1998); both are experienced campaign professionals, feared by the opposition but disliked by traditionalist left-wingers within their own parties; both were not 'officially' responsible for the campaign (in Britain it was the then shadow chancellor, Gordon Brown; in Germany chief party whip, Franz Muentefering) but later took much of the credit for the landslide victories; they drafted together the so-called Blair/Schroeder paper 'Europe: The Third Way — Die neue Mitte' published a week before the June 1999 elections to the European Parliament; and — interestingly enough — both lost their high ministerial posts after newspaper disclosures of financial irregularities regarding loans to finance their exclusive private homes. Mandelson was thereupon appointed chair of the German British Forum in September 1999 and announced as lending his full support to improving connections between Blair's and Schroeder's parties. Yet, the most important parallel between Mandelson and Hombach concerns their special knowledge of campaign management: both advisers became prominent personalities in their own right because they forced and personified a new development in their respective countries: the spin doctor election.

The professionalization of campaign communications

Political campaign management has changed fundamentally over the last two decades. This development has been described as a process of modernization, professionalization and a trend from labour-intensive to capital-intensive campaigns (Farrell, 1996; Mancini and Swanson, 1996). Since the USA is considered the pacesetter, many Europeans call this development Clintonization or Americanization of election campaigns (Michie, 1998; Schoenbach, 1996; Scammell, 1998). A significant element

of this process is the professionalization of campaign communications, which is characterized by two aspects: (1) central planning and controlling of all campaign communication activities as part of an integrated communication strategy that follows the pattern of commercial PR and advertising campaigns; (2) employment of professional experts in PR, marketing, advertising and polling in spite of relying on non-professional party members. Only these experts are able to plan and execute an integrated communications strategy. The need to professionalize campaign communication management can be traced back to changes in voting behaviour (i.e. dealignment) and changes in the media (i.e. expansion and diversification of mass media, domination of politics by mass-communicated messages).

As a result, elections have become increasingly media affairs rather than party affairs. This is particularly true in the USA, where the media have more or less taken over the parties' former role of organizing the campaign. There, the significance of political parties decreased while the role of professional political consultants increased dramatically. Their job is to run 'a specific campaign tailored for the individual candidate based on relevant political science, marketing, public relations, and advertising theory and research' (Johnson-Cartee and Copeland, 1997: 5). In the USA, political consulting has become a fast-growing, profit-making industry (Luntz, 1988; Friedenbergl, 1997; Althaus, 1998). In Europe, the rise of political consultants has been less noticeable, the main reasons being that political party organizations are still much stronger than in the USA and that they have managed to build up specialist knowledge and campaign expertise within the party machineries. Most European campaign experts come — like Mandelson and Hombach — from within the party.

Spin doctoring — a new quality of political PR?

'We live in the age of spin doctors', welcomes Paul Richards to the readers of his book *Be Your Own Spin Doctor — A Practical Guide to Using the Media*. The worlds of big business, show business and, most of all, political business are allegedly dominated by them. 'Feared, loathed, venerated or emulated, the spin doctors are amongst us', Richards (1998: 7) writes, 'moulding the images we see and crafting the words we hear. Behind the scenes of politics and business, at the shoulders of the rich and powerful, discreetly out of camera shoot (most of the time) and firmly off-the-record, they ply their trade.'

The term 'spin doctor' has sinister connotations, as a manipulator, conspirator, propagandist, even a malign and evil force at the heart of the body politic. *Chamber's 21st Century Dictionary* defines 'spin doctor' as 'someone, especially in politics, who tries to influence public opinion by putting a favourable bias on information presented to the public or to the media'. Throughout history, powerful and influential people had trusted advisers, counsellors, propagandists and publicists. The earliest examples were priests, explaining what was really meant by the commandments or religious texts. Today, spin doctors are portrayed in Hollywood blockbusters such as *Primary Colors* and *Wag the Dog*.

The term 'spin doctor' was born, along with many techniques of PR and the business of political consulting, in the USA. 'Spin doctor' is an amalgam of 'spin' — the interpretation or slant placed on events (which is a sporting metaphor, taken from the spin put on a baseball by the pitcher, or the spin put on a cue ball in pool), and 'doctor' deriving from the figurative uses of the word to mean 'patch up', 'piece together' and 'falsify'.²

The success of a spin doctor can show in two ways: either the reporter treats him or her as a usual news source, quotes the actual words and gives the full name and party affiliation, or the reporter uses the favourable bias or story angle offered by the spin doctor without revealing where this interpretation comes from. Spin doctors mainly exist because there is no such thing as objective truth. Facts, figures, events and words all have different meanings to different people. So their interpretation is the key issue. The rationale behind spin doctors' activities is the realization that those who can use the media to their advantage can shape reality (Richards, 1998: Ch. 1; Sitrick, 1998: Ch. 4). But they not only ensure that the positive message comes across loud and clear, they also ensure that negative, inconvenient stories are presented with 'balanced' arguments — if they cannot be made to disappear completely. A large proportion of a spin doctor's energy is focused on 'spin control', i.e. stamping out fires. Spin terms have spun several derivatives, from 'spin control' to 'spinmeisters', 'prespin', 'simulspin' and 'ultimate spin' (Safire, 1993: 741; Randolph and Shogren, 1996). In the USA, the area in convention centres where the candidates' PR advisers congregate is called 'spin alley'. Over the years, the usage of the term 'spin' has broadened in all countries. What has not changed is that the expression often implied lack of political substance, sometimes even lying. It is obvious from reading the news reports that journalists were using the term to indicate that a 'spin doctor' did not offer them hard facts but a more or less slanted version of events.

The US term was imported into British politics in a *Guardian* article in January 1988 written by journalists Alex Brummer and Michael White (see White, 1996). But it was only in 1996/7 that 'spin doctoring became a media obsession' (Richards, 1998: 14). The British usage has always been much broader than in the USA, representing almost any kind of 'political consultants', 'PR professionals' or members of the campaign team. In Germany, the term was first used in the run-up to the German general election of 1998 — although some isolated mentions could be found earlier in foreign correspondents' reports on the American and British elections. By trying to find an appropriate translation, German journalists spoke of *Strippenzieher* (string-puller), *Einfluesterer* (insinuator), *Wirklichkeitsmacher* (reality maker), *Wunderbeiler* (wonder doctor), *Wahlkampfmagier* (election campaign magician) or 'manipulator'. Spin doctors were described as a new phenomenon of modern election campaigning that had been imported from Britain and the USA (Buchsteiner, 1998; Krumrey et al., 1998).

'Spin doctor' is neither a scientific term nor has it an internationally uniform meaning. In today's media-driven election contexts, the term 'spin doctoring' is used to characterize methods deployed by politicians, parties and consultants to achieve favourable publicity. To attain this goal, some campaigners deal directly with the media, others are responsible for improving their own party's campaign and others are concerned with fighting the oppositional campaign. While the full range of activities is discussed in greater detail later, we concentrate here on the most important and most controversial innovations. Some deal with media manipulation and news management ('spin doctoring high gear'), others with attacks on the opposition ('campaigning as warfare').

Centralization of communication

Concerning a party's appearance in public during an election campaign, it is highly important that the party appears united with regard to party policy. The overall impression of the campaign must not be spoiled by diverging opinions, cranks and conflicts within the party. Spin doctors should see to it that all party members are equally informed and make statements in accord with party principles. Thus, Tony Blair's campaign headquarters centralized all communication by making sure that all party members synchronized their interviews with election campaign direction and kept 'on message'. The Labour Party still adhered faithfully to this procedure after the election campaign. A spokeswoman commented: 'It's government policy not to have too many people on the airwaves or the

message will get lost. Frankly we don't want the airwaves clogged with too many opinions' (quoted in Franklin, 1998: 9).

Rapid rebuttal

'Speed kills' was the motto hanging in the campaign headquarters ('war room') of the Clinton campaign of 1992 (for which James Carville and George Stephanopoulos were responsible). This means responding immediately to every single statement of the opponent in order to induce the point of view or corrections of false information into the current news cycle. According to Richards (1998: 118), the British Conservatives could not even sneeze without the oppositional Labour Party responding with a 'rebuttal'. It was the aim of this procedure not to leave any statement of the opponent uncommented upon.

Perfecting of media monitoring

Only by observing the whole news situation around the clock and already responding to agency reports if required, can rapid rebuttal be guaranteed. Part of this is also the attempt to attain information on possibly damaging reports in advance in order to take adequately reactive measures. In addition, media monitoring serves the evaluation of one's own activities.

Professional collating of information

A further prerequisite is to collate information about the inner structure of media organizations, journalists and the electorate, followed by the feeding of large computerized databases. This includes data on target groups and coverage, the political lines of media organizations within the media system, inner newsroom structures and the attitudes and preferences of journalists. It is only with this knowledge that advantageous information can be launched and rapid rebuttal accurately and efficiently put into action. It is also helpful to make use of the mechanisms of motivation and gratification that exist within journalism: journalists want to report earlier, more exclusively and in greater detail on events than their competitors do. This guarantees the respect of colleagues, heads of department and editors-in-chief. Journalists like to be seen in the role of insiders who have access to the people at the top, but also to the experts in the background who — in contrast to the 'official' statement — know about the 'true' version of the story.

Complaints and threats to journalists

'Part of the political spin doctors' job is to be on the phone for much of the day complaining — about perceived bias, lack of time given to an item, too much time given to an opponent, lack of prominence given to a story, an interview being dropped, or incorrectly slanted facts', explains Richards (1998: 120). However, complaints about election campaign coverage are also in Germany not essentially new techniques. Crucial is not the fact that British spin doctors are complaining, but about what, how consistently, how aggressively and how fast they are complaining. Labour's spin doctors even complained about the order of reports in the evening television news broadcast. In addition, there were implicit and explicit threats about cutting off journalists from access to information or to the candidate.

Other activities are less controversial such as explaining and interpreting the party's own strategy, issues and candidates' statements to the media; strategy, speech and debate consulting; polling, focus groups and grassrootsing; as well as advertisement consulting and producing commercials. Once the term 'spin doctor' was established in the public discourse, some British journalists used it indiscriminately to describe all sorts of campaign members. By doing so, they themselves were putting a spin on minor stories presumably to increase readers' interest. In Germany, too, journalists used the term rather loosely. For that reason and because of the different languages, we use a broader understanding of spin doctoring. We distinguish between media-related and non-media-related activities.³

Spin doctors and journalists — a complex relationship

Spin doctors operate at the borders of two distinct societal systems, between the political and media systems. They are of importance for politicians because they know about the logic of the media system and because they are able to anticipate, simulate and stimulate the actions of journalists. Two types of spin doctors can be distinguished: those from a media background (like Alastair Campbell and Charles Lewington in Britain and Hans-Hermann Tiedje and Detmar Karpinski in Germany) and those from a party-political background (such as Peter Mandelson and Brian Wilson in Britain and Franz Muentefering and Peter Hintze in Germany). Political journalists, on the other hand, are sceptical about PR attempts but must realize that without the support of electoral campaign advisers they will have no access to internal and exclusive information. The campaign advisers themselves are interested in controlling the media

coverage as far as possible. The big danger in this respect is to 'over-spin', i.e. giving journalists cause to reflect critically on the exaggerated attempts of spin doctors to be in control. One can expect three media coverage strategies of how journalists deal with the spin doctor's attempts to assume influence.

Intensive coverage out of fascination and the intention to expose

Many journalists tend to become fascinated by the shadowy, secret role of spin doctors and the influence they have on the candidate and the course of the campaign (Jones, 1996: 154). Fred Barnes of the *New Republic* confesses: 'Political reporters, including me, are suckers for tales of consultants' legerdemain. By ascribing election victories to consultants, they explain the secret, behind-the-scenes reality of politics' (quoted in Althaus, 1998: 281). The political stage in this kind of coverage has been turned around. The backstage becomes front and centre. The implication is, however, that nothing is what it seems, that it is all manipulation and posturing. On the other hand, overstressing the political perspective contributes to the audience's perception of the campaign and of the whole political system as cynical (Woong Rhee, 1997; Cappella and Jamieson, 1997). At the same time, the media coverage of spin doctors is rarely negative because during the electoral campaign journalists wish to keep in with the advisers. Why is it this way? 'The answer is simple: consultants are a great source' (Sabato, 1989: 16).

Intensive coverage out of scepticism and disapproval

The second possible reason why spin doctoring is given intensive coverage is due to its newness, which itself is perceived as 'over-spun'. Countries in which spin doctoring is used for the first time give more attention to the background of this phenomenon than countries in which it has been established for a longer span of time. The more aggressively spin doctors try to control the media, the more critically journalists cover the campaign management.

Adopting information without naming the source

German studies dealing with the influence of PR found out that newspapers use PR information to a high degree without revealing the source and often do not research its background (see Russ-Mohl, 1994; Bentele, 1998). The same is apparently true for Britain (Michie, 1998:

1–17). Journalists have grown more and more dependent on spin doctors as their most important source of information and as the key figures through which they get access to the candidate. This is especially true for information that provides an insight into the inner workings of the campaign, i.e. exclusive information about ‘unexpected’ news developments, rapid rebuttal information and the spin doctor’s interpretations of the candidate’s aims and actions (Jones, 1996: 154, 160; Jones, 1997: 19–20). In doing so, spin doctors get the potential to sanction journalists, e.g. in denying information or access to information. However, the laziness of journalists can also lead to their dependence on spin doctors.⁴ Many journalists despise the PR business and do not like the idea of being dependent on it: it contradicts their own professional image, being just a lazy transmitter of PR information. This fact can also be responsible for often treating PR material as anonymous.

To what extent these three strategies of coverage concerning spin doctors make a difference should be discussed by means of a comparative content analysis of British and German news coverage of electoral campaigns.

Spin doctoring in comparative perspective: the background of the 1997 British and 1998 German general elections

When comparing campaign strategies across nations, several environmental factors have to be taken into account (see Farrell, 1996). These factors include the *political*, *party* and *media system*. Both Germany and Britain have a parliamentary system. It is important to note, however, that the German chancellor’s powers are much more restricted compared to those of the British prime minister. The German chancellor has come to terms with the powerful premiers of the 16 federal states and lacks the central powers of a British prime minister to appoint ‘his or her’ people to important positions. As regards the *party system*, the British first-past-the-post electoral system puts small parties at a disadvantage. Consequently, Britain is traditionally characterized by a two-party system. The German electoral system is based on the principle of proportional representation, which results in a greater variety of parties in parliament, currently five. While the British system leads to one-party governments, the German system favours coalitions. As regards the *media system*, the similarities outweigh the differences. Broadcasting in both countries consists of a combined system of commercial and public service programmes, where the latter are committed to the same journalistic values of impartiality, independence and fairness. In both countries, party access to election

broadcasts is restricted on public service as well as on commercial channels (Holtz-Bacha and Kaid, 1995). It is almost impossible for parties to buy air time for rapid response ads at short notice. Certain time slots are allocated to each party, but strict rules prohibit aggressive and offensive campaigning, at least in Germany. Both countries are characterized by a strong press market with influential newspapers following different political lines. However, the British system differs from its German counterpart in one important aspect: with the exception of the *Financial Times*, the 10 British national newspapers are aggressive and agenda driven in ways that would baffle even an American spin doctor (Tunstall, 1996). The German press is more moderate in comparison.

The 1997 election in Great Britain

The victory of the British Labour Party on 1 May 1997 was described by commentators as a 'landslide', a 'political earthquake' and a 'sea change in British politics' (Norris, 1997: 1). The Conservative government under John Major lost a quarter of its 1992 vote, a third of its Cabinet and over half of its seats. The Conservative share of the UK vote fell from 41.9 percent to 30.7 percent, their worst result since modern party politics began in 1832. The Labour Party, after 18 years in the opposition wilderness, surged to power with 419 seats, their highest number ever. Tony Blair won an overall majority of 179, the largest for any administration since the National government of 1935, and the biggest in Labour history. The 10 percent swing from Conservative to Labour was the largest two-party shift since 1945. The Liberal Democrats achieved 17 percent which equalled 46 seats (Norris, 1997; Butler and Kavanagh, 1997: 244–53).

The 1997 election was also a 'landmark' in the political history of the British press (Scammell and Harrop, 1997: 156): never before has the Labour Party enjoyed the majority support of the national daily press in a general election. Six out of 10 papers backed Labour. The Labour supporting papers had 21.6 million readers, double the 10.6 million figure for the Conservative press. 'In the political history of the press, this was an historic moment every bit as significant as the size of Labour's majority', writes Colin Seymour-Ure (1997: 79). How did this striking transformation of press fortunes come about?

First, pollster Philip Gould figured out with the help of focus groups in which areas Labour had to fundamentally rebuild its party profile (Gould, 1998). Then Peter Mandelson came into play. Any history of the Labour Party is incomplete without reference to him — the first

figure in Britain to be dubbed a spin doctor. As a former television journalist, he was taken on as Labour's campaign and communication director in 1985. After directing the party's publicity effort for the 1987 general election, he helped Tony Blair win the 1994 leadership contest — as his personal but secret undercover spin doctor (for details, see Jones, 1996: Ch. 6). Mandelson finally assumed control of a publicity machine which he had helped to devise and develop and which allowed him to exercise unparalleled authority. He declared in late 1996 that the publicity operation which he controlled at the campaign headquarters at Millbank Tower, central London was the 'finest, most professional campaigning machine that Labour has ever created'. In the weeks leading up to polling day the party would be 'fighting a war on the air and on the ground . . . fighting the battle of the airwaves, as well as in the press' (quoted in Jones, 1997: 12). Jones goes on saying, 'Among his fellow practitioners in the dubious calling of political spin doctors, Mandelson had no equal. His experience far outweighed that of any of his Conservative or Liberal Democrats counterparts.' Mandelson has been described as 'the greatest spin doctor since Goebbels' (William Rees-Mogg in *The Times*, 31 March 1997) and 'the second most powerful man in the country' (cover story of the *Sunday Telegraph* magazine, 16 March 1997). In an interview with *The Guardian*, Mandelson said: 'I'm trying to create the truth — if that's news management I plead guilty' (quoted in Jones, 1999: 31).

The second Labour spin doctor besides Mandelson was Alastair Campbell, a former political editor of the left-wing tabloid *Daily Mirror*. He had been a long-standing friend of both Blair and Mandelson and became Blair's press secretary in 1994. Thanks to Campbell's connections to the tabloid press, articles signed by Tony Blair became a regular feature of mass-circulating newspapers like *The Sun* and the *News of the World*. Both papers have a long right-wing tradition and are owned by Rupert Murdoch. Campbell and Mandelson, however, had gone to immense lengths to win over the papers owned by News International — and finally succeeded (see Jones, 1996: 173–4, 247–8; Jones, 1997: 149–50). On 18 March 1997, six weeks before polling day, Murdoch's *The Sun* declared on its front page '*The Sun* backs Blair'. *The Sun*'s conversion from Conservative to Labour was headline news in all other British newspapers (for background see Seymour-Ure, 1997). After the election, *The Sun*'s editor, Stuart Higgins, made public a handwritten Tony Blair note in which the new prime minister thanked the paper 'for its magnificent support' which 'really did make the difference' (quoted in Scammell and Harrop, 1997: 183). This only became possible not least

thanks to Alastair Campbell's assiduous efforts to thaw icy relations with the Conservative press (Jones, 1996: 171–6).⁵ After the election he became Prime Minister Blair's powerful — and controversial — press secretary. Political correspondents accused him repeatedly of misleading them in lobby meetings and press conferences (Jones, 1999: 203, 207, 214, 223, 252).

The Conservative campaign strategy, in contrast, worked less well and lacked determination, professionalism and discipline (Finkelstein, 1998). Their top spin doctor was Charles Lewington, director of communications.⁶ The biggest problem of the Conservatives' campaign was the lack of party discipline. Michie (1998: 310) concludes:

So long as the Tories remained in a rabble of indiscipline, it was impossible for Central Office to control the campaign. It is a stark lesson on the powerlessness of political spin doctors when their parties are too absorbed with internal battles to fight the common enemy. And it stands in marked contrast to the Labour Party, whose impressive 'on message' discipline was orchestrated by the shrewdest PR operator in the business.

It was 'the superiority of Labour's media operation and the party's ability to . . . manipulate the news media' that secured Labour's victory, agrees Jones (1997: 273):

Labour's spin doctors had the uncanniest knack of spotting ministerial gaffes which had originally escaped the attention of the media. . . . Of equal importance was an ability to bamboozle broadcasters, journalists and their editors into downplaying or dropping stories which harmed Labour's image.

The 1998 election in Germany

On 27 September 1998 German voters decided by an unexpectedly large margin to end Helmut Kohl's ambition for an unprecedented fifth term as chancellor. The Swiss quality newspaper *Neue Zuercher Zeitung* commented the next day: 'What a thunderclap! How brutally clear the Germans were in sending their almost eternal chancellor packing!' His challenger, Gerhard Schroeder of the social-democratic SPD, got 40.9 percent of the vote, compared with the 1994 margin of 4.5 percent or 2.5 million votes. For the second time since 1972, the SPD became the strongest party. In coalition with the Green Party, the SPD has a majority of 345 representatives in parliament, that is 56 representatives more than the former conservative-liberal Christian Democratic Union (CDU)–Free Democratic Party (FDP) coalition under Kohl. His CDU suffered a clear loss: the conservatives lost 5.3 percent of their votes and finally achieved

a total of 35.2 percent, which means the lowest outcome since 1945. About 1.5 million disillusioned CDU voters decided to vote for the SPD this time. Opinion polls characterized the electoral outcome as a general wish to see a new face in charge and to bring an end to political deadlock (Green, 1999; Braunthal, 1999).

The SPD slogans declared 'Thank you Helmut, we've had enough' and 'We won't do everything differently but we'll do many things better'. Not least thanks to the lessons learned from Britain and the USA, the SPD managed to shape a slick, modern campaign. For the first time in the history of all German parties, the SPD opened a state-of-the-art campaign headquarters (Kampa) separate from the party building. Schroeder's campaign adviser Bodo Hombach and the party's election coordinator Mathias Machnig made sure that a third of the campaign workers at the Kampa were private sector professionals. At the early stage of the campaign, from 12 to three months before polling day, Bodo Hombach was Schroeder's most influential 'spin doctor'. At the age of 27, Hombach conducted his first campaign for SPD candidate Johannes Rau in the German federal state of North Rhine Westphalia. The party won an absolute majority and, with Hombach's help, was able to repeat this success two more times. For that reason, CDU politician Kurt Biedenkopf called him 'probably the best German election campaigner'. However, in 1986 he was suspended from the national SPD campaign team in Bonn because of his alleged conceit, boastfulness and his 'populist, American campaign style' (Leyendecker, 1998a). He left politics, became a business manager but returned in 1998 to become Schroeder's personal campaign adviser.

In the last three months before election day, Hombach was, however, pushed into the background when the official SPD party organizers assumed control of the campaign. In particular, chief party whip, Franz Muentefering, and his long-time chief of staff, Mathias Machnig, took command of the Kampa, where they established opposition research and media-monitoring units. They focus-tested billboard language and planned 'made for television' events whose purpose was simply, as Machnig said: 'to bring up brilliant pictures'. It worked, and after election victory Machnig was the one to be visited by campaign strategists from other countries, namely Austria and Israel. Hombach appeared on the scene again, too. Schroeder made him chief secretary of his chancellor's office. As with Mandelson, many party workers disliked him for his vanity, his American campaign techniques and his enthusiasm for neo-liberal 'Third Way' policy ideas. Because he had been such a controversial figure, he had to leave office over minor rumours about

financial irregularities regarding his private mansion — again very similar to Mandelson.⁷

It is important to note that Schroeder's position during the campaign differed in some ways from Blair's, although he considers him as a role model. First, Schroeder was not the boss of his party before and during the campaign. The SPD was run by Oskar Lafontaine, a left-wing traditionalist, who was much more popular with party officials than the Blairite modernizer Schroeder. Schroeder had to share power with 'Red Oskar', who has always been a fierce opponent to any neo-liberal 'Third Way' thinking. Six months after the election, Lafontaine unexpectedly resigned because he condemned Schroeder's government course. Even when Schroeder took over Lafontaine's job as party leader in spring 1999, he found it extremely difficult to reform his party in the way Blair did. Second, although Schroeder sees himself as a moderate centrist in the Clinton/Blair mould, he leads a left-wing Red–Green coalition in which he has to consider Green ideas. This led to further shifts from the nebulous 'new centre' to an equally nebulous left-centre course. Third, Schroeder did not enjoy such support from the media as Blair did, although many influential papers such as *Spiegel*, *Stern* and *Woche* clearly endorsed him (Braunthal, 1999; Donsbach and Jandura, 1999).

Kohl's campaign focused almost entirely on his personality, was more traditional and less professional. This was in stark contrast to the 1980s when, as in Britain, the Conservatives delivered more modern and successful campaigns (in Britain with the help of strategist Tim Bell and advertising agency Saatchi and Saatchi; in Germany with the help of strategist Peter Radunski and advertising agency Coordt von Mannstein). Neither Kohl nor Major succeeded in depicting their younger challengers as lacking content and convictions. Another parallel was that they both suffered from lack of support by one-time loyal newspapers such as *The Sun* and *News of the World* in Britain and *Bild* and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in Germany (Seymour-Ure, 1997; Leyendecker, 1998b; Donsbach and Jandura, 1999). At the last minute, Kohl reinforced his campaign team by hiring a tough tabloid journalist, Hans-Hermann Tiedje, who was in charge of 'improving' the CDU coverage in the popular press. Although his nickname is 'Rambo', he restrained himself from the feared dirty tricks campaign.⁸ However, like the Conservative Party in Britain, it was the CDU that resorted to negative campaigning techniques. While the Tories used 'New Labour, New Danger' posters which depicted Blair with a grotesque face and demon eyes, the CDU attacked the SPD with 'Red Handshake' posters, accusing them of being willing to form a

coalition with the Party of Democratic Socialists (PDS), the successor of the East German Communist Party.

Method

To compare the coverage of spin doctoring in Great Britain and Germany, we content analysed leading national quality newspapers over a period of six months prior to election day (UK: 1 November 1996 to 1 May 1997; Germany: 27 March to 27 September 1998). In Great Britain we analysed *The Daily/Sunday Telegraph*, *The Times/Sunday Times*, *The Independent/Independent on Sunday* and *The Guardian/Observer*. Since Germany does not have a tradition of Sunday newspapers, we coded four six-day newspapers (*Welt*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, *Frankfurter Rundschau*) and four weekly newspapers and magazines (*Welt am Sonntag*, *Focus*, *Spiegel*, *Woche*). The German news magazines serve as functional equivalents to the British Sunday papers (Esser, 1999: 297). Moreover, the papers' political affiliations from 'more right-wing' to 'more left-wing' correspond in both countries.⁹ Concerning their comparability, the two resulting media samples offer the greatest possible convergence that could be drawn up with regard to the different structure of the press in both countries. A stronger provision for tabloid papers proved unfeasible since there is only one national tabloid newspaper in Germany (*Bild*), which published hardly any articles on the subject (Esser and Reinemann, 1999: 40). Television footage was unfortunately not available for this study. Concentrating solely on the opinion-leading quality press does not in our view pose a serious limitation to this study because (1) we analysed every relevant article in those newspapers employing an exhaustive sampling plan; (2) we were more interested in differences between countries than in differences between media; and (3) the opinion-leading quality press more or less mirrors and instigates the coverage of other media outlets such as tabloids and television.

Each article was coded that mentioned terms such as 'spin doctor', 'communication consultants', 'campaign strategists', 'media strategists' and corresponding expressions (synonyms). News agency copy was excluded from the analysis. All those persons were categorized as spin doctors who (1) were described by the word 'spin doctor', 'communication consultant', 'campaign strategist', 'media strategist', etc. or to whom (2) were ascribed activities of spin doctoring in a broader sense (see the section 'Spin doctoring — a new quality of political PR?'). This could apply to professional experts brought in only for the time of the campaign or to long-term party politicians with special knowledge in

campaigning. Excluded were all those cases where politicians were described as members of the campaign team but were not in reality according to our knowledge.

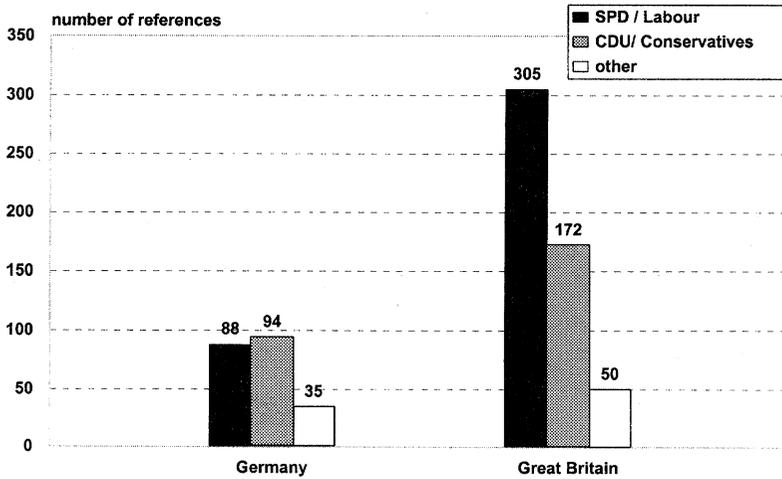
A computer method (see Fan, 1994) was used to retrieve the British newspaper articles from a full text electronic database, NEXIS. The programme retrieved every article that included at least one of the stated search words. The German articles were selected and photocopied from the original papers. All items were first checked by the authors for their relevance for the study and then hand-coded by four trained coders. The coders were fluent in both languages and familiar with the political background of the two elections. A full coding scheme is available from the authors.

Results

Amount of coverage

In both countries, the new centre-left parties of Blair and Schroeder were said to have brazenly copied the Clinton style to conquer a long-standing conservative government. Although the conditions of the British and German general elections were quite similar, the amount of the coverage on spin doctoring varied enormously. Spin activities seem to have caused more concern among British than German journalists: whereas the German papers published 169 articles in which spin doctors (in the broadest sense of the term including communication consultants and campaign strategists) were mentioned, the British papers carried 444 such articles. This means that in the German newspapers examined an average of six, and in the British newspapers an average of 17 articles per week were published. This different focus is not very surprising insofar as comparative studies show that the British media approximately report twice as intensively on election campaigns than the German media do (Semetko, 1996: 63). Whereas in Germany only 1 percent of the election campaign coverage dealt with professional election campaign advisers and spin doctors, it is to be assumed that the percentage in Great Britain was higher (Donsbach and Jandura, 1999: 152; Norris et al., 1999: 78).

Since one article could talk about campaign activities of two or more parties, we counted 217 spin doctor references in the German and 527 in the British press. The British papers' coverage of spin doctoring focused mainly on the Labour Party, as Figure 1 illustrates. This is a clear reaction to the professionalization of Labour's campaigning, which has become known as the 'Clintonization' of British political party PR (Michie, 1998:



Note: Based on 169 articles with 217 spin doctor references in German papers and 444 articles with 527 references in British papers. German media sample: *Welt*, *Welt am Sonntag*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Focus*, *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, *Spiegel*, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, *Woche* (27 April–27 September 1998); British media sample: *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Sunday Telegraph*, *The Independent*, *The Independent on Sunday*, *The Guardian*, *The Observer*, *The Times*, *The Sunday Times* (1 November 1996–1 May 1997).

Figure 1 Party affiliation of spin doctors

282). The party’s fundamental transformation and Labour’s copying of Democrat techniques quickly made its campaign strategists an interesting subject to report on. The Tories, on the other hand, ‘without resorting to the Clintonized approach, failed to recognize that the nature of the game had changed — and were hopelessly outgunned in the 1997 elections as a result’ (Michie, 1998: 283). A very different picture emerges in Germany: 43 percent of all spin doctor references in the German papers referred to the sluggish CDU campaign, 41 percent to the slick SPD campaign and 16 percent to other parties. Although the SPD campaigners were downright keen to make their new ‘American’ campaign techniques an issue in the media (A. Mueller, 1999: 24, 39; 57), the German journalists felt more attracted to the mistakes and problems of the CDU campaign. The relatively high number of references to spin doctors of other, smaller parties can be explained by the German multi-party system and the necessity to form coalitions. There are at least five possible explanations for the different patterns in both countries:

1. The number of people actually acting as spin doctors was much smaller in Germany than in Britain. One possible reason for this

- could be that the SPD copied many issues and programmatic ideas from Labour but was reluctant to copy the extent and intensity of their spinning techniques.
2. The higher number of spin doctor mentions in the British press is a consequence of the fact that British journalists are more interested in 'horse-race coverage', the behind-the-scenes strategy and the media-politics relationship than their German colleagues, who have not yet discovered this aspect as an issue proper.
 3. This is related to the fact that British journalists are more open about the activities of spin doctors, while German journalists tend to withhold the degree of campaign and news management from their readers. One reason for this is that although they do use their PR material they treat it as anonymous because they do not want to convey the image of being passive transmitters of PR information.
 4. The higher British figures might reflect the determination and persistence of Labour's PR strategists to break the long-standing Conservative bias of the British press and finally get their message across. Their methods to attain this goal have been made a media issue time and again. German spin doctors did not employ similar proactive campaign techniques and therefore attracted less media attention. Furthermore, the SPD's initial interest in media articles on their new campaign practices ceased abruptly after the first negative stories emerged.
 5. German journalists did not evaluate spin doctoring critically by referring to it as a new form of political communication per se, but by intense scrutiny whenever spin doctoring was performed in an unprofessional manner. It became obvious that the CDU spin doctors were evaluated much more frequently and much more negatively than those of the SPD (55 to 23 negative evaluations as regards competence and character). Apparently, German journalists found it more attractive to report critically on the unprofessional CDU campaign than to take the 'glamour' out of the new and professional campaign of the SPD (Esser and Reinemann, 1999). In contrast, the intensive coverage of the Labour Party is very likely due to the high amount of interest in their new style of campaigning.

It is impossible to give a definite explanation for the different patterns, but it seems sensible to assume that all five reasons apply to a

Table 1 Spin doctor activities

	<i>Germany</i> (<i>N</i> = 204)	<i>Great Britain</i> (<i>N</i> = 414)
<i>Activities not directly related to the media</i>		
Strategic consulting	62	21
Speech or public appearance consulting	4	37
Political advertising	19	9
Public opinion research: polling, focus groups	1	10
Disciplining one's own camp, e.g. keeping members 'on message'	2	12
Other activities for the campaign	7	2
Other activities concerning the oppositional campaign	3	6
General consulting	2	3
Total %	100	100
<i>Activities directly related to the media</i>		
	<i>Germany</i> (<i>N</i> = 151)	<i>Great Britain</i> (<i>N</i> = 460)
Explaining the party's election strategy to journalists	28	14
Criticizing the political opponent publicly, 'negative campaigning'	26	14
Informing or exclusive briefing of journalists	12	20
Explaining candidate's and party's statements and actions to journalists	3	14
Misinforming, intimidating, criticizing journalists	5	11
Explaining candidate's and party's plans (as regards content) and political positions to journalists	6	7
Rapid response via the media	3	7
Preventing negative coverage by criticizing and threatening journalists	1	8
Media monitoring	1	4
Media-related activities without specification	15	2
Total %	100	100

British media sample: *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Sunday Telegraph*, *The Independent*, *The Independent on Sunday*, *The Guardian*, *The Observer*, *The Times*, *The Sunday Times* (1 November 1996–1 May 1997); German media sample: *Welt*, *Welt am Sonntag*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Focus*, *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, *Spiegel*, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, *Woche* (27 April–27 September 1998).

certain degree. It is noticeable, though, that the SPD — despite their greater aspirations to spin — received less critical coverage and to a smaller degree whereas the CDU received more critical coverage to a higher degree.

The activities of spin doctors

What kind of activities do journalists attribute to spin doctors (in the broadest sense of the term including communication consultants and campaign strategists)? How open are journalists in Germany and Great Britain towards their readers? Which activities of the spin doctors are covered and which are not? In this respect we distinguish between activities related directly to the media and those not directly related to the media. The latter category includes tasks aimed at improving the party's own campaign and fighting that of the opposition. Undoubtedly, the two categories overlap to a certain extent for the strongest measures of fighting the opponent are measures that work through the media (negative campaigning, rapid rebuttal). Therefore, they have to be counted as media activities. Despite these borderline cases it is still possible to draw a distinction between 'media-related' and 'non-media-related' activities (see Table 1). In each article, it was possible to code up to four activities for each party. The unit to be analysed is not the article, but the individual activities mentioned in an article. There were two possibilities by which a certain activity could be coded. Either, it was explicitly attributed to the spin doctors or it could be deduced from the article by the coder.

The German coverage of spin doctoring — even in its broad sense — only amounts to a fraction of the British coverage: 355 reported activities on the German side against 874 reported activities on the British side (see Table 1). The much lower figures of reported activities in Germany underscore that innovative campaign techniques are still less prevalent there, but they also emphasize the fact that German reporters still do not pay much attention to the work of the many aides in the background. As a consequence, the German electorate has not learned much about their role yet.

Particularly interesting is that British newspapers place more stress on the spin activities which are aimed at the media (460 vs 414), whereas German newspapers report more on traditional campaign work which is not directly linked to journalists and news management (204 vs 151). Let us first look at the spin activities 'not directly related to the media' in the upper part of Table 1. In Germany, the majority of all reported activities,

that is 62 percent, comes under the definition of 'strategic consulting'. This result is attributed to the fact that the spin doctors of German parties are in many cases merely labelled as 'electoral campaign strategists' without making further, more precise statements on their activities. Another 19 percent of the activities come under the category of planning, conception, placement or the presentation of 'political advertising', e.g. unveiling posters in front of party headquarters which then become known nationwide only through press photographers or television cameras without ever having been posted anywhere else. Other activities, such as 'speech or public appearance consulting', 'public opinion research', etc., hardly play any role within news coverage. The profile of German spin doctors' activities was therefore not very distinctive. Within the news coverage, minimalistic commonplaces without any closer definition, such as 'electoral campaign strategist', predominated.

In Great Britain the picture is completely different. What is remarkable here, is the high share of 'speech or public appearance consulting' mentioned (37 percent) and the comparatively large number of reports on the issue that 'disciplining their own camp' is an important duty of the spin doctors (12 percent = 48 mentions). Above all, this refers to the efforts of Mandelson and Campbell to keep all Labour representatives 'on message' and to keep critics from within the party quiet. It was to this purpose that the order was given to 'synchronize' every interview with the electoral campaign headquarters. Ten percent came under 'public opinion research' (polling, focus groups) and 9 percent under 'political advertising'.

How does the news coverage of spin activities which are 'directly related to the media' present itself? Here again it becomes obvious that Germany still retains a marginal position with less than a third of the British coverage (lower part of Table 1). The individual analysis demonstrates that the classic spin activity 'explaining candidate's statements and actions to journalists' (e.g. 'What he *really* meant was . . .') hardly exists in Germany. In comparison, the category 'media-related activities without specification' is the most frequently mentioned. This category was only encoded when expressions such as 'media strategist' without any further definition were used. The German media delivered little concrete information about what was going on between journalists and spin doctors in the background. All in all, there is a clearly more moderate, but also less distinctive media image of spin doctors than in Great Britain.

The picture there was completely different. What attracted attention, above all, was any mention of the fact that spin doctors are responsible for 'informing or exclusive briefing journalists', 'rapid rebuttal', 'misinforming, intimidating, criticizing journalists' as well as attempts to prevent negative coverage by criticizing and threatening journalists. Referring to the latter aspect, for instance, there were reports about the attempt of Labour's electoral campaign headquarters to influence a BBC vote by calling repeatedly in order to make Tony Blair 'Man of the Year' or reports about Labour and Tory headquarters complaining to the BBC, ITV, *The Daily Telegraph* or *The Guardian* about unbalanced news coverage.¹⁰ Obviously, the intensive coverage by British journalists was at least partly induced by scepticism and disapproval towards the influential attempts of the spin doctors.

To summarize: first, British journalists deal much more intensively and distinctively with spin doctoring than their German colleagues. In Germany, the reader is less informed about the duties of spin doctors and electoral campaign managers. Often, merely superficial commonplaces or blatant terms are used, distinctive information on the actual method of political campaigners was an absolute exception. The British coverage was primarily characterized by the critical discussion of their style of work. This is underscored by another finding of our analysis: 80 articles evaluated spin doctoring as having 'negative consequences for political culture' and another 28 articles criticized it as having 'negative consequences for the freedom of the press'. The equivalent German figures are three and one respectively.

Second, the different frequency of media coverage seems to reflect the actual differences in political campaigning. Particularly striking is the frequent mention of the 'disciplining their own camp' in British news coverage, that earned Tony Blair and his colleagues the reputation of being 'control freaks'. Also, the intensive coverage on 'misinformation' and 'preventing negative coverage' can be plausibly traced back to the aggressive style of Labour spin doctors. The conditions in Germany point to the assumption that the important background circles in Bonn were working highly effectively and therefore making some of the activities of spin doctors unnecessary. As German election specialist Albrecht Mueller writes:

Spin doctoring, as it applies to Great Britain, that is a system of rewards and punishments, the permanent phoning of journalists, was not used to the same extent in Bonn during the crucial period of campaigning [1998]. According to several Bonn correspondents, permanent attempts to influence the media from the party headquarters do not exist. There are

informal talks and there are numerous journalistic circles which meet on a regular basis and invite politicians to their meetings. But the idea of constantly holding journalists under scrutiny and criticizing their work, a notion that is held in some reports on spin doctoring, does not exist. By all means, the attempts to influence the media are very much more differentiated. (A. Mueller, 1999: 52)

Discussion

Our results gained from the content analysis and the interpretation of the relevant literature clearly demonstrate the entirely different profile of spin doctoring in British and German election campaigning. In Great Britain, 'spin doctoring high gear' predominated, in Germany it was 'spin doctoring low gear'. This led to a completely different journalistic handling of this new form of political campaign PR. Table 1 makes it quite evident which activities come under the category 'heavy spin doctoring', and thus were covered intensively by the British media: speech and public appearance consulting, the use of survey and focus groups, disciplining their own party's camp, informing or exclusive briefing of journalists, rapid response and preventing negative coverage by criticizing and threatening journalists. In comparison, in Germany, less spectacular, more traditional activities were prevalent, such as strategic consulting, election advertising, explaining the party's election strategy (e.g. in press conferences) and criticizing the opponent publicly or negative campaigning.

There are two questions to be answered. (1) How can the difference in the degree of acerbity of the spin doctoring be explained? (2) How can the difference in journalistic handling of this new form of political PR be explained? The first question can largely be explained by the overall conditions of both election campaigns which — when scrutinized — were found to differ more than it had first seemed. First of all, the British press plays a much more aggressive role in the election campaign than is the case in Germany (Esser, 1998: 160–78). Bias, campaign journalism and political aggressiveness are more common. Hence, there is a higher awareness within British parties that makes them respond by way of professional media activities. In addition, there was more at stake for Labour than for the SPD. Whereas during its 16 years in opposition the SPD was part of the government at least in several federal states and in the Bundesrat (upper house), Labour had been cut off from any form of governmental participation for 18 years. However, in order to win the general election, Labour had to make its way through an existing, strongly right-wing political spectrum. In contrast, the political spec-

trum of the German press has always been more balanced (Esser, 1998: 160–78). The greater determination of the Labour Party can be seen on many counts. Labour started its election campaign two-and-a-half years before election day, established its campaign and media centre, Millbank Tower, two years before the election and at the same time put Mandelson in charge of active campaigning. The SPD, on the other hand, only started their campaign one year and nine months before election day and moved into the Kampa only one year before. Labour spent £26 million on its campaign, the SPD £13 million; there were 250 aides working in Millbank Tower, in the Kampa there were only 80 aides (Butler and Kavanagh, 1997: 46–67; Norris et al., 1999: 39; M. Mueller, 1999). Blair as the undisputed leader has systematically modernized both the party and the campaigning, and established his allies in key positions. Schroeder, on the contrary, has remained the object of dispute within his party. He was nominated chancellor candidate only six months before election day and was not at any time involved in the planning of the Kampa.

The SPD campaign was not as consistent as the Labour campaign. Without a doubt, there had not been an SPD campaign in the past that was carried out with the same degree of determination, exact planning and discipline as the 1998 campaign. However, that is just one side of the story, i.e. the myth that has been spread by the Kampa itself. In reality, the Kampa was split by a major battle that was going on between the supporters of Lafontaine (traditionalists) and the supporters of Schroeder (new centre). Neither Schroeder's personal consultants Hombach and Heye, nor Schroeder himself trusted the Kampa particularly (Knaup et al., 1999: 117–18). He considered the Kampa to be the Lafontainist camp: 'they are playing games again', he would often say. For instance, when Muentefering introduced the credit-card size pledge card with the various left-wing promises, Schroeder allegedly did not know anything about it (Knaup et al., 1999: 117–18). After the election victory, the SPD dramatically lost the sympathy and support of the media and the voters, for which it blamed its bad PR activities and news management. Because the British Labour Party had committed itself to a new policy a long time before the election, they have represented their aims determinedly and aggressively to the media both during the election campaign and after forming a government (for a critical appraisal, see Jones, 1999).

There were not only differences in the degree of sharpness of the spin doctoring employed, but also in how the press dealt with this new form of political PR. Generally, the German media cover election campaigns much less frequently than is the practice in Britain (Semetko,

1996). It is, however, surprising that the German media devoted only 1 percent of their whole campaign coverage to professional campaign and media consultants, for it is supposed to be part of the news media's role in modern democracies to lay bare the behind-the-scenes dependencies in election campaigns. Michie (1998: 1) calls it 'one of the great ironies of our consumerist times that while we have become acutely aware of the pesticides, growth hormones and artificial additives contained in much of the food we eat, we are largely oblivious to the fact that the media output we consume has undergone similar treatment'.

This difference between the two countries in media response to spin doctoring can be attributed in retrospect to the three strategies outlined earlier in the section 'Spin doctors and journalists — a complex relationship'. The first mentioned possible strategy, 'intensive coverage out of fascination and the intention to expose', is still somewhat lacking in Germany. The fact that election campaigns are stage-managed, i.e. controlled, has not yet been recognized as a media subject per se in Germany. The fact that German newspapers were preoccupied with the pathetic CDU campaign, instead of looking behind the scenes of the modern SPD campaign, suggests that their journalists are still pursuing the traditional news values 'negativity', 'power' and 'prominence' and have not yet discovered the new 'meta coverage' of the 'inside machinations' of organizations. There has been a lack of self-analysis as well as self-criticism and also a lack of investigative motivation. However, by overstressing the assertion that it is all manipulation and posturing, the media foster the audience's perception of the whole political system as cynical — evidence of which could be found in Britain (Norris et al., 1999: 140). In Germany, there was no reason either for the second strategy, 'intensive coverage out of scepticism and disapproval'. In Britain, this strategy was widely used. The critical coverage of the campaign management by journalists increases in direct proportion to the aggressiveness of spin doctors' attempts to control the media. It is because of this that the coverage of the British electoral campaign paid particular attention to the spin doctors' attempts to criticize and to intimidate journalists. Labour representatives in particular were described as 'control freaks' (Jones, 1997: 14–20; Michie, 1998: 286–7). This acerbic news coverage towards spin doctors could not be observed in Germany. Regarding the strategy 'adopting PR information without naming the source', several studies produced evidence that journalists in both Germany and Britain are often hesitant about revealing their news sources and the amount of PR information used in their reports (Michie, 1998; Russ-Mohl, 1994). In the case of general elections, however, the

present results support the impression that German journalists — although they have grown more dependent on spin doctors than ever before — were more likely to treat PR material as anonymous. This seemed to be the case in particular with information provided by the SPD campaign. In summing up, it becomes clear that the discussion of spin doctoring makes it necessary for the news media to adopt a completely new style of reporting, that of ‘reflective reporting’ or ‘meta coverage’. And here, for the reasons spelt out in this article, Germany obviously lags somewhat behind.

Notes

1. According to McGuire et al. (1998: 50), the various social-democratic parties in Europe are pursuing a wide range of divergent policies to translate their specific Third Way into domestic politics. ‘If there is a common ground, it is the desire to reduce government intervention through such classic neoliberal measures as privatisation and welfare reform — but not to yank the safety net out from under those who most need it. Arguments over how to do this will persist.’
2. The phrase first appeared in print on 21 October 1984, when a *New York Times* editorial commented on the televising of presidential debates:

Tonight at about 9:30, seconds after the Reagan-Mondale debate ends, a bazaar will suddenly materialize in the press room. . . . A dozen men in good suits and women in silk dresses will circulate smoothly among reporters, spouting confident opinions. They won’t be just press agents trying to import a favorable spin to a routine release. They’ll be the spin doctors, senior advisers to the candidates. (Safire, 1993: 740–1)

Four days later the *Washington Post* defined spin doctors as ‘the advisers who talk to reporters and try to put their own spin, their analysis, on the story’ (Safire, 1993: 741).

3. See Table 1 in the section ‘The activities of spin doctors’.
4. Labour’s campaign press officer David Hill was amazed how quickly political journalists came to rely on the information being provided by the Labour rebuttal service: ‘Journalists are inherently lazy and our rebuttal unit has made it easier for them. They’re also saying that our service is faster and more reliable than their own internal news libraries’ (quoted in Jones 1997: 22). The information came, of course, always with a Labour spin. This war room practice was again a direct copy of the successful 1992 Democrats’ practice where ‘a logical message, intellectual vision and efficiency of the campaign staff soon gave Little Rock a reputation for accuracy and reliability. Journalists came to rely on the Clinton campaign for their facts’ (Michie, 1998: 300).

5. Other members of Labour's campaign team were Brian Wilson, campaign spokesperson; Margaret McDonagh, general election coordinator; Donald Dewar, chief whip; Charlie Whelan, aide to Gordon Brown; Philip Gould, polling and focus groups; David Hill, in charge of a 20-strong press team.
6. Other members of the Conservatives' campaign team were Danny Finkelstein, director of research; David Willetts, chair of research; Tim Collins, media adviser to party chair Brian Mawhinney; Alan Duncan, chair's parliamentary aide; PR advisers Sir Tim Bell and Peter Gummer.
7. Other members of the SPD campaign team were Schroeder's press officer Karsten-Uwe Heye (former journalist), party spokesperson Michael Donnermeyer, consultant Detmar Karpinski from the Hamburg advertising agency KNSK/BBDO, and Bernd Schoppe, in charge of the communications department.
8. Other members of the CDU campaign team were former *Bild* editor Peter Bartels, radio manager Georg Gafron, media critic Reginald Rudolf, chief party whip Peter Hintze and his press officer Rolf Kiefer, media adviser Andreas Fritzenkoetter, party spokesperson Walter Bajohr, state secretary Anton Pfeifer and advertising consultant Cordt von Mannstein.
9. *The Daily Telegraph/Sunday Telegraph* is comparable to *Welt/Welt am Sonntag*, *The Times/Sunday Times* correspondents with *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and *Focus*, *The Independent/Independent on Sunday* corresponds with *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* and *Spiegel*, *The Guardian/Observer* corresponds with *Frankfurter Rundschau* and *Woche*.
10. For example, see Mark Lawson, 'Mediawatch: It Would Leave A Saatchi Gasping' (*The Guardian*, 22 April 1997: 18); Andrew Culf, 'Tories Accuse BBC of Labour Bias' (*The Guardian*, 3 March 1997: 2); Martin Kettle, 'Which Voters Count?' (*The Guardian*, 8 February 1997: 19); Nick Cohen, 'Hold on a Minute: Joyless Spin Doctors Dish Out Misery to Seekers After Truth' (*The Guardian*, 16 February 1997: 26); Alice Thomson, 'The Saturday Profile — Alastair Campbell' (*The Daily Telegraph*, 5 April 1997: 14); Greg Neale, 'Even Left Finds Bias in TV News Bulletins' (*The Sunday Telegraph*, 30 March 1997: 11); Janet Daley, 'How the Left Speaks Out While Using Your Name' (*The Daily Telegraph*, 17 December 1996: 18); John Simpson 'Repulsive, but Right' (*The Sunday Telegraph*, 17 November 1996: 1). See also Jones (1996, 1997, 1999).

References

- Althaus, M. (1998) *Wahlkampf als Beruf. Die Professionalisierung der political consultants in den USA*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- Bentele, G. (1998) 'Politische Oeffentlichkeitsarbeit', pp.124–45 in U. Sarcinelli (ed.) *Politikvermittlung und Demokratie in der Mediengesellschaft*.

- Beitraege zur politischen Kommunikationskultur*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.
- Blair, T. (1998) *The Third Way. New Politics for the New Century*. London: Fabian Society.
- Braunthal, G. (1999) 'The 1998 German Election. Gerhard Schroeder and the Politics of the New Middle', *German Politics and Society* 17(1): 32–54.
- Buchsteiner, J. (1998) 'Fuersten der Dunkelheit', *Die Zeit* 3 September: 5–6.
- Butler, D. and D. Kavanagh (1997) *The British General Election of 1997*. London: Macmillan.
- Cappella, J.N. and K. Jamieson (1997) *The Spiral of Cynicism. The Press and the Public Good*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Donsbach, W. and O. Jandura (1999) 'Drehbuecher und Inszenierungen. Die Union in der Defensive', pp. 141–71 in E. Noelle-Neumann, H.M. Kepplinger and W. Donsbach (eds) *Kampa. Meinungsklima und Medienwirkung im Bundestagswahlkampf 1998*. Freiburg: Alber.
- Esser, F. (1998) *Die Kraefte hinter den Schlagzeilen. Englischer und deutscher Journalismus im Vergleich*. Freiburg: Alber.
- Esser, F. (1999) 'Tabloidization of News. A Comparative Analysis of Anglo-American and German Press Journalism', *European Journal of Communication* 14(3): 291–324.
- Esser, F. and C. Reinemann (1999) 'Spin Doctoring im deutschen Wahlkampf', *Medien Tenor* 86(15 July): 40–3.
- Fan, D. (1994) 'Information Processing Analysis System for Sorting and Scoring Text', US patent 5,371,673.
- Farrell, D.M. (1996) 'Campaign Strategies and Tactics', pp. 160–83 in L. LeDuc, R. Norris and P. Norris (eds) *Comparing Democracies. Elections and Voting in Global Perspective*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Finkelstein, D. (1998) 'Why the Conservatives Lost', pp. 12–15 in I. Crewe, B. Gosschalk and J. Bartle (eds) *Political Communications: Why Labour Won the General Election of 1997*. London: Frank Cass.
- Franklin, Bob (1998) 'Tough on Soundbites, Tough on the Causes of Soundbites. New Labour and News Management', *Catalyst Paper* 3 May.
- Friedenberg, R.V. (1997) *Ballot Box Warriors. Communication Consultants in Political Campaigns*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Giddens, A. (1998) *The Third Way. The Renewal of Social Democracy*. London: Polity Press.
- Gould, P. (1998). 'Why Labour Won', pp. 3–11 in I. Crewe, B. Gosschalk and J. Bartle (eds) *Political Communications: Why Labour Won the General Election of 1997*. London: Frank Cass.
- Green, S. (1999) 'The 1998 German Bundestag Election: The End of an Era', *Parliamentary Affairs* 52(2): 306–20.
- Holtz-Bacha, C. and L.L. Kaid (1995) 'A Comparative Perspective on Political Advertising: Media and Political System Characteristics', pp. 8–18 in L.L.

- Kaid and C. Holtz-Bacha (eds) *Political Advertising in Western Democracies. Parties and Candidates on Television*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hombach, B. (1998) *Aufbruch: Die Politik der Neuen Mitte*. Munich: Econ.
- Johnson-Cartee, K. and G.A. Copeland (1997) *Inside Political Campaigns. Theory and Practice*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Jones, N. (1996) *Soundbites and Spin Doctors. How Politicians Manipulate the Media — and Vice Versa*. London: Indigo.
- Jones, N. (1997) *Campaign 1997. How the General Election Was Won and Lost*. London: Indigo.
- Jones, N. (1999) *Sultans of Spin. The Media and the New Labour Government*. London: Victor Gollancz.
- Knaup, H., J. Leinemann, H. Palmer, U. Schaefer and H. Schumacher (1999) 'Das Protokoll eines Machtkampfs', *Der Spiegel* 40(4 October): 116–30.
- Krumrey, H., O. Opitz, S. Schmitz and W. Stock (1998) 'Fuersten der Finsternis', *Focus* 38: 102–4.
- Leyendecker, H. (1998a) 'Willkommen, Genosse Ludwig Erhardt', *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* 10 March: 3.
- Leyendecker, H. (1998b) 'Hoppla, wo sind die Freunde? 1994 schauten die Medien andaechtlich zu, wie Kohl zum Triumph anhub — nun kann er nicht mal auf Bild und SAT.1 zaehlen', *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* 22 August: 20.
- Luntz, F. (1988) *Candidates, Consultants, and Campaigns*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- McGuire, S., W. Underhill, J. Hughes, A. Nagorski and C. Dickey (1997) 'European of the Year: Getting the Hang of Power', *Newsweek* (Atlantic Edition) 29 December: 13–17.
- McGuire, S., C. Power, M. Kerr, A. Nagorski, C. Dickey and R. Nordland (1998) 'European of the Year: Brave New Left World', *Newsweek* (Atlantic Edition) 28 December: 48–51.
- Mancini, P. and D.L. Swanson (1996) 'Politics, Media, and Modern Democracy: Introduction', pp. 1–26 in D.L. Swanson and P. Mancini (eds) *Politics, Media, and Modern Democracy: An International Study of Innovations in Electoral Campaigning and their Consequences*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Mandelson, P. (1996) *Blair Revolution. Can New Labour Deliver?* London: Faber.
- Michie, D. (1998) *The Invisible Persuaders. How Britain's Spin Doctors Manipulate the Media*. London: Bantam.
- Mueller, A. (1999) *Von der Parteiendemokratie zur Mediendemokratie. Beobachtungen zum Bundestagswahlkampf 1998 im Spiegel fruereber Erfahrungen*. Opladen: Leske und Budrich.
- Mueller, M. (1999) 'Parteienwerbung und Bundestagswahlkampf', *Media Perspektiven* 5: 251–61.
- Norris, P. (1997) 'Anatomy of a Labour Landslide', pp. 1–24 in P. Norris and N.T. Gavin (eds) *Britain Votes 1997*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Norris, P., J. Curtice, D. Sanders, M. Scammell and H.A. Semetko (1999) *On Message. Communicating the Campaign*. London: Sage.

- Randolph, E. and E. Shogren (1996). 'Dole vs. Clinton. The '96 Debates: Before, During and After, Journalists Get Full Spin Cycle', *Los Angeles Times* 7 October: A 12.
- Richards, P. (1998) *Be Your Own Spin Doctor. A Practical Guide to Using the Media*. Harrogate: Take That.
- Russ-Mohl, S. (1994) 'Symbiose oder Konflikt: Oeffentlichkeitsarbeit und Journalismus', pp. 313–27 in O. Jarren (ed.) *Medien und Journalismus 1. Eine Einfuehrung*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.
- Sabato, L. (1989) *The Rise of Political Consultants. New Ways of Winning Elections*. New York: Basic Books.
- Safire, W. (1993) *Safire's New Political Dictionary. The Definitive Guide to the New Language of Politics*, 3rd edn. New York: Random House.
- Scammell, M. (1998) 'The Wisdom of the War Room: US Campaigning and Americanization', *Media, Culture and Society* 20(2): 251–75.
- Scammell, M. and M. Harrop (1997) 'The Press', pp. 156–85 in D. Butler and D. Kavanagh (eds) *The British General Election of 1997*. London: Macmillan.
- Schoenbach, K. (1996) 'The Americanization of German Election Campaigns. Any Impact on Voters?', pp. 91–104 in D.L. Swanson and P. Mancini (eds) *Politics, Media, and Modern Democracy: An International Study of Innovations in Electoral Campaigning and their Consequences*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Semetko, H.A. (1996) 'Political Balance on Television: Campaigns in the United States, Britain, and Germany', *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 1(1): 51–71.
- Seymour-Ure, C. (1997) 'Newspapers: Editorial Opinion in the National Press', pp. 254–79 in P. Norris and N.T. Gavin (eds) *Britain Votes 1997*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sitrick, M. (1998) *Spin. How to Turn the Power of the Press to your Advantage* (with A. Mayer). Washington: Regnery Publishing.
- Tunstall, J. (1996) *Newspaper Power. The New National Press in Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- White, M. (1996) 'Making a Name in Politics', *The Observer* 15 December: T14.
- Woong Rhee, J. (1997) 'Strategy and Issue Frames in Election Campaign Coverage: A Social Cognitive Account of Framing Effects', *Journal of Communication* 47(3): 26–48.