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# Editorial: Policy Framing and Branding in Times of Constant Crisis

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## Abstract

This editorial serves as an introduction to *Media and Communication*'s thematic issue Policy Framing and Branding in Times of Constant Crisis. Crises cast challenges for political actors and concurrently create opportunities for policymaking, public reflections, and political competition. In times of crisis, when it comes to communicating policymaking but also framing the crisis itself, issues close to political communication (including political marketing and political branding) become of paramount relevance. The eight articles of this issue cover a broad array of subjects, expanding the understanding of the relevance of communication when it comes to policymaking in times of crisis, through the lens of policy framing and policy branding.

## 1. Introduction

In a seminal definition that has endured over time, Rosenthal et al. (1989) articulated crisis as a "serious threat to the basic structures or the fundamental values and norms of a system, which under time pressure and highly uncertain circumstances necessitates making vital decisions" (p. 10). The notions of threat, urgency, and uncertainty underscore two crucial aspects: (a) the perception of crisis as a collective construct, and (b) its capacity to engender conditions conducive to subsequent action, what Kingdon (1984) calls a "window of opportunity." This conceptualization of both shared perception and crisis-induced opportunities serves to galvanize policymakers and politicians to capitalize on crises as avenues for effecting modifications that would be unattainable within a stable environment (Boin et al., 2016). Additionally, in what can be described as a form of "frame contests" (Boin et al., 2009), contestants engage in strategic maneuvers and

deliberate efforts to assert their position/frame as the prevailing narrative, employing various tactics to ensure the acceptance of their perspective within the public discourse.

Keeping this in mind, and following Entman's (1993) theory on framing, in times of crisis, policy framing entails the strategic selection and presentation of specific crisis-related aspects (while excluding others) to direct public perceptions, elicit backing for proposed interventions, and shape decision-making processes. Since crisis scenarios typically involve intricate and multifaceted challenges, the framing thereof holds significant sway over public perceptions of the crisis and the appropriate avenues of response. Furthermore, as crises commonly manifest the notions of uncertainty, urgency, and threat and accentuate an imperative for effective framing, policymakers are compelled to meticulously deliberate on how to frame the crisis in a manner that fosters confidence, stimulates collective mobilization, and mitigates potential disarray or consternation.

Additionally, in the policymaking process, another aspect also plays a significant role: policy branding. Policy branding during periods of crisis entails the creation and dissemination of a unique identity or portrayal for the policies and measures formulated to tackle the crisis. This branding endeavor can serve multiple objectives, e.g., from indicating to the public the implementation of specialized measures to address a pressing and exceptional circumstance, to fostering trust and confidence in the proposed measures by assuring the public of the competence and capability of authorities in managing the situation, to galvanize support and resource mobilization for crisis response initiatives by fostering a sense of unity and collective purpose among stakeholders.

During periods of crisis, the effectiveness of policy framing and branding necessitates meticulous consideration of both the substance and communication of policy propositions. Policymakers are tasked not only with formulating evidence-based strategies to address the crisis but also with articulating these strategies in a manner that aligns with public sentiments, instills assurance, and cultivates cooperation. By framing the crisis in a manner that underscores common values and objectives, and branding crisis response initiatives in a way that engenders trust and unity, policymakers can facilitate resilience, facilitate efficient responses, and alleviate the crisis's repercussions on individuals and communities.

This thematic issue on Policy Framing and Branding in Times of Constant Crisis focuses on ways international organizations, European institutions, national governments, and other fora utilize, frame, and brand crises to make policy or pursue political change. The integrated study of communication and crisis provides a critical perspective for analyzing various aspects, such as policymaking, branding, framing, governance, representation, and communication processes. The eclectic selected contributions expand the understanding of the relevance of communication when it comes to policymaking in times of crisis, through the lens of policy framing and policy branding. Exploring further policymaking via these communication lenses is essential to understand further how public perceptions are shaped, what guides the decision-making process, and ultimately determines the effectiveness of policy responses in times of crisis.

## 2. Presentation of the Contributions in This Thematic Issue

Dikaios (2024) presents an analytical framework that elucidates policy branding as a potent mechanism for shaping policy narratives, leading to policy framing. Employing the International Maritime Organization

as an example, the article addresses how entities utilize social media platforms, particularly X, to position themselves as advocates for climate action within their respective sectors and to cultivate a climate-conscious image. The author's findings underscore the imperative of contextualizing the study of policy framing and policy branding, within the realms of communication and political science, to ensure the avoidance of erroneous conclusions.

Karlsson (2024) explores the implementation of foreign policy through communication, focusing on the legitimization of foreign policy branding. Employing Sweden's feminist foreign policy as a case study and drawing on van Leeuwen's (2007) legitimation theory, the article posits that legitimacy constitutes a fundamental element in shaping a convincing and credible representation of a nation and its foreign policy initiatives. The study proposes that a branding logic within the context of the attention economy accelerates foreign policy communication that tends to prioritize the marketability or "sellability" of foreign policy objectives over substantive goals, thereby legitimizing policy in a manner conducive to broader audience appeal.

Sengul and McSwiney (2024) explore communicative and policy-framing state responses to the increasing crisis of far-right extremism. Focusing as a case study on the Andrews-Allan Labour governments of the State of Victoria in Australia during the period from 2021 to 2023, the authors argue that the Andrews-Allan administrations utilized a spectrum of communicative, discursive, and legitimization tactics to justify the implementation of policies aimed at prohibiting Nazi symbols and gestures, to reinforce Victoria's identity as an inclusive and multicultural liberal democracy. Their findings contribute to a deeper empirical understanding of the crucial role played by political and crisis communication in tackling extremism and offer a framework for policy framing contending with the global rise of far-right extremism.

Tsagkroni (2024) emphasizes the pivotal role of branding in policymaking. The author concentrates on the case of Portugal, seeking to contextualize historical discourses surrounding migration and examine how perceptions and branding of migration policies evolved during the Covid-19 crisis through a framing lens. More specifically, the author explores the branding and framing strategies employed within Portuguese immigration policy discourse in parliamentary debates, to assess the role of branding in shaping migration policy responses, particularly within crisis contexts.

Kenix and Gibbins (2024) investigate the framing of refugees in crisis in both home and destination countries, to elucidate how each attribute of refugees was portrayed in media agendas, subsequently influencing policymaking across nations. The authors identify a consistent pattern of negative framing and clustering of negative attributes of refugees across all nations and reveal a trend towards increasingly negative and emotive content. They suggest that immigration debates are likely to intensify as political and cultural battlegrounds and discuss the risk of the impact of such negative portrayals of refugees to more nationalistic and xenophobic immigration policies.

Cmeciu et al. (2024) address the significance of public health branding and promotional communication strategies concerning the Covid-19 vaccine within the context of governance strategy, reflecting the evolving expansion of marketing concepts beyond commercial domains. They specifically underline the endeavors of national authorities to tailor communication strategies and vaccine policies from the World Health Organization to suit their respective domestic contexts while maintaining public trust. Employing the

Romanian government's communication campaign on Facebook as a case study, the research investigates the role of (de)legitimation in the processes of policy transfer and branding.

Vincze and Balaban (2024) investigate the utilization of the concept of crisis within the EU, drawing upon historical narratives that recurrently underscore crisis as a defining or organizing principle. The study focuses on the discursive utilization of crisis by the European Commission and scrutinizes crisis as a form of political discourse and its practical applications across different times, regions, and policy domains. Through this inquiry, the study contributes to a deeper comprehension of the dynamics of EU policy framing during periods of crisis.

Hayek (2024) explores the reception of governmental press briefings by newspapers during the nascent stages of the Covid-19 pandemic. It investigates a potential "rally-around-the-flag" effect among journalists amidst the Covid-19 crisis and examines how governmental press conferences influenced the prominence and sentiment expressed in newspaper opinion pieces. The study explores the longevity of these effects throughout the Covid-19 crisis and identifies which rhetorical strategies employed by political figures garnered the most media attention. The findings illuminate the influence of several on the portrayal of governmental agendas in media discourse and framing during periods of crisis.

## 3. Conclusion

In conclusion, the scholarly contributions within this thematic issue provide a thorough comprehensive examination of the intricate dynamics encompassing policy framing, branding, and crisis communication. Through an array of diverse empirical studies ranging from climate change to far-right extremism and the Covid-19 pandemic, the authors delineate the pivotal significance of communication strategies in configuring public perceptions, legitimizing policy initiatives, and steering decision-making frameworks amid periods of crisis. The collective findings underscore the nuanced nature of crisis communication, emphasizing not merely the formulation of empirically grounded policies, but also the strategic crafting and branding thereof to instill confidence, ensure cohesion, and solicit collective endorsement. By delving into the subtleties of policy framing and branding within contexts of crisis, this thematic issue contributes invaluable perspectives on the mechanisms through which communication shapes the dynamics of policymaking, governance paradigms and strategies, and societal responses within an era marked by constant crises.

### Conflict of Interests
The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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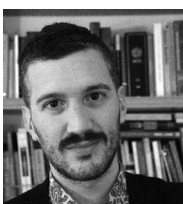
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