Abstract

New social network technology (Web 2.0) provides individuals and small groups with powerful resources for rapid political mobilization. This can create strategic surprises to policy-makers. Two cases of Web 2.0 driven micro-mobilization processes are considered. In both cases, new network technology helped the process of issue-expansion on which the emergence of these strategic surprises is dependent. Policy-makers were taken by surprise because their repertoires of action are focused primarily on official arrangements of consultation and on the news coverage by traditional media. Policy-makers' capacities and resources are not attuned to the political use of network technology by citizens.

Key words

Micro-mobilization, new media, strategic surprises, Web 2.0

CAUGHT BY SURPRISE?

Micro-mobilization, new media and the management of strategic surprises

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INTRODUCTION

Political parties, interest groups and single issue movements have traditionally played an important role in the way political demands are voiced. These organizations promote specific frames and help to synthesize issues that are put forward by citizens. Moreover, they support and facilitate negotiation processes (Gerhards and Rucht 1992; van den Donk *et al.* 2004). These intermediary organizations act at the meso level of protest politics. A micro level exists as well. Micro-mobilization refers to the mobilization efforts by individuals and small groups. Micro-mobilization is likely to increase in significance, in part because of widespread distrust in the functioning of representative democracy and 'the iron triangle' of bureaucracy, politicians and vested interest groups. The emergence of a relatively educated, emancipated and empowered citizenry is likely to play a role as well (e.g. Barber 1984). These considerations relate the phenomenon of micro-mobilization also with the broader theme of deliberative democracy.

In this article, we focus on another factor that is enhancing micro-mobilization. We proceed from the proposition that new media, especially social network technology (Web 2.0), provide individuals and small groups with powerful resources for rapid political mobilization. Access to media has traditionally been dominated by organizations close to the centre of the political system with far more resources than smaller, more peripheral groups (Bimber 2003). Micro-mobilization is likely to confront traditional intermediary organizations and public managers with unanticipated demands for change that are difficult to control. Unanticipated demands and the speed with which these demands are pushed forward can create 'strategic surprises' (Ansoff 1980) that represent a significant discontinuity and challenge the existing patterns of consultation and negotiation between organizations and policy-makers. The way in which public managers deal with these surprises influences the legitimacy of government organizations. Safeguarding the legitimacy of government organizations can be considered as one of the major challenges for the involved public managers.

In this article, we aim to analyse how public managers in government organizations deal with strategic surprises that may occur when individuals and small groups use new social network technology in political mobilization. Public managers are senior government officials who are responsible for the development and implementation of policy programmes. We consider two cases of Web 2.0 driven micro-mobilization processes in the Netherlands, analysing them according to a number of expectations derived from theory on mobilization processes and agenda-setting, the role of new social media and strategic surprise management. The combination of these insights is focused on the theoretical contribution we aim at in this article, namely exposing (1) mechanisms underlying web 2.0 driven micro-mobilization processes and (2) Web 2.0-related capacities for the management of the resulting strategic surprises.

The structure of this article is as follows. We begin by addressing a number of relevant theoretical notions regarding political mobilization. We then discuss how media provide a powerful infrastructure for facilitating processes of mobilization. We

subsequently highlight the concept of strategic surprise management, particularly in the context of the rapid articulation of issues at the micro level of protest politics. The combination of these notions generates a number of expectations that will be investigated. We subsequently introduce our research strategy. Based on an analysis of the cases, we draw our conclusions and discuss some implications for democracy.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Micro-mobilization

Mobilization is aimed at persuading people to contribute material and non-material means and resources, such as time, commitment, knowledge and money to support a mobilization actor (Melucci 1996). Mobilization can be considered at several intertwined levels. Macro-mobilization refers to mobilization processes along the lines of large mass-oriented movements (e.g. coalitions of green parties and environmental organizations). Meso-mobilization refers to mobilization attempts that are made by individual organizations (Gerhards and Rucht 1992). Micro-mobilization refers to mobilization attempts by individuals and small groups or networks, and is directed towards other individuals and small groups. Mobilization processes at the micro, meso and macro levels may go hand-in-hand. More specifically, micro-mobilization can be successful only if loosely coupled, small groups of individuals are able to connect to an intermediary organization at the meso level, as these organizations can provide a platform for communication and debate, and resources (McAdam 1988; Gerhards and Rucht 1992).

Successful mobilization depends on the alignment of frames (Snow *et al.* 1986). Throughout the mobilization process, particular issues are defined and re-defined in a process known as framing. Framing refers to the creation and reproduction of interpretive schemes or 'frames' (Goffman 1974). Identification within the group, a prerequisite for successful mobilization, occurs through a process of linking frames to each other, thus allowing for a shared understanding of a problem as well as possible solutions (Snow and Benford 1988).Frame-alignment processes can thus be considered a necessary condition for expanding issues to a broader public (the public agenda), and subsequently for placing these issues on the political agenda (Kingdon 1984).This article focuses on micro-mobilization processes in political agenda-setting. Political issues must obtain sufficient attention, as the existing political institutions are biased towards the status quo, thereby working to the advantage of some issues and to the disadvantage of others (Bachrach and Baratz 1970; Cobb and Elder 1972; Jones and Baumgartner 2005). We consider agenda-setting as a non-linear process in which 'policy windows' are created and various mobilization actors and policy entrepreneurs are able to advance specific frames regarding alternative problem definitions and solutions (Kingdon 1984). One important factor in the creation of such policy windows involves 'triggers' (Kingdon 1984) or 'focusing events' (Birkland 1998).These terms refer to occurrences

arising suddenly and offering a glimpse into the 'national mood'. Such occurrences also attract considerable public and political attention (Kingdon 1984). Successful agenda-setting therefore depends on timing.

The power of the media

Newspapers, television, radio, websites and other forms of mass media play a powerful role in the articulation and expansion of issues. First, the power of the media is perceived as discursive with regard to its potential to create and align frames (Street 2001). Media help individuals to pick up particular versions of reality, to construct identities and to define their relation with reality (Newton 1999; McCombs and Shaw 2007). Second, the media have access power, which refers to the way in which mass media control the range of voices. The kind of media used creates barriers to specific actors who want to advance their ideas and frames, thereby influencing the likelihood that these ideas will be picked up by a larger public (Street 2001). Third, media power can also be defined as resource power, because media conglomerates provide the infrastructural services to ensure the provision and circulation of information among the public (Bennett and Entmann 2001; Street 2001).

Although the media can mobilize support for issues, the agenda-setting power of the media should not be overestimated (Cobb and Elder 1972; Kingdon 1984). Rather than initiating mobilization, the media may enhance existing mobilization processes through such means as showing that the 'official representation' of problems and approaches does not match the 'reality'. Issue expansion is contingent upon the kind of issues covered, the specific media outlet and the sort of coverage, in addition to the specific political context and the features of the political actors at stake (Walgrave and van Aelst 2006). Issue expansion may involve a snowball effect, as media stories are picked up by interest groups and, later, by political parties, which might create a policy window. This snowball effect creates attention, which helps to open the policy window. 'Media logic' plays an important role in the creation of this effect. Media logic refers to 'the process through which media present and transmit information', including how the material is organized, the emphasis on particular characteristics of behaviour and the style in which it is presented (Altheide and Snow 1979: 10, 1991: 8–9; Luhmann 1990). First, the media are more likely to report on surprising and unexpected occurrences. Second, the complexity and ambiguity of these occurrences are reduced to simple, clear and almost binary occurrences (e.g. good versus bad), which tend to become personalized and dramatized. Third, the selective imaging created by the aforementioned mechanisms, increased by the tendency of the media to refer to each other in their coverage, creates a repetitive effect.

The primary focus of this article is on the opportunity structure that Web 2.0 media provide for political mobilization. The term Web 2.0 was originally introduced by O'Reilly (2004, 2005) in reference to a new generation of internet and web-based

applications. The social and interactive nature of Web 2.0 is what distinguishes it from the older generation (Web 1.0). This new generation of applications emphasizes the importance of user participation, openness and network effects. Although there is no consensus regarding the definition of the term, a number of characteristics can be mentioned (Boulos and Wheeler 2007; Stanyer 2009). Users of these applications are no longer the passive consumer of content; they have become co-producers and co-creators. As a result, an organic and flexible process of open content production, collaboration and content sharing occurs (Benkler 2006; Chadwick 2009). Three striking elements are present in the nature of social network platforms. First, the co-ordination within these platforms and networks has a self-organizing character, as it is based on horizontal communication (Bimber 2003; Bekkers 2004). Second, the communication has an instant character, and it involves many people at the same time (many-to-many-communication), for example instant-messaging. Third, communication is no longer restricted to the exchange of words. Images and sounds have also become increasingly important.

Which 'powers' do Web 2.0 networks provide for citizens who want to mobilize public and political support? In terms of discursive power, the many-to-many communication and the instantaneous character of the communication by Web 2.0 networks is likely to facilitate a rapid, almost real-time process of frame alignment. In terms of access power, Web 2.0 applications can be expected to make it relatively easy to establish links between and within social networks, thereby enhancing a process of inclusion that furthers the growth of a network of contacts to be mobilized for action. Web 2.0 technologies facilitate a scale shift that makes the organization of collective action, with large numbers of participants, more efficient (Chadwick 2009: 32–3). With regard to resource power, Web 2.0 networks and platforms enhance the potential to mobilize free available resources (technology, formats, knowledge and staff) for self-organization. In theory, any individual is able to start a blog, network of friends, communicate and 'broadcast' political ideas, as well as to co-create relevant content. The new-media environment has not resulted, however, in a landscape divided into two separate spheres. In contrast, we witness significant cross-overs between traditional and new media (Bennett 2004), and all kinds of back-and-forth between new-media participants and mainstream journalists (Jenkins 2006; Russell 2007).

Strategic surprise management

In order to survive (in terms of both effectiveness and legitimacy), organizations are involved in strategic management processes in which they try to react or anticipate changing demands from their environment. This environment has become more volatile. There is 'a growing incidence of fast issues – shifting from periodic towards more real-time disturbances – caused by events which come from unexpected sources and impact quickly on the organization' (Ansoff 1980: 132). The speed and novelty of these issues hampers the ability to perceive and respond to them in a timely manner, thus restricting

internal reaction time (Ansoff 1980). It is therefore important to pay attention to the management of strategic surprises through such means as permanent scanning and monitoring of the environment or the continuous re-evaluation of the significance of issues in terms of priorities and policy programmes (Ansoff 1980). Strategic surprises may emerge from the rapid articulation and expansion of issues that were originally framed at the micro level of protest politics. The rapid expression of these demands may challenge the implementation of policy programmes, because they question their effectiveness, thereby also showing that the support for these programmes is diminishing.

The speed at which issues and demands are articulated and expanded is not the only important factor. The increasing gap between the goals of policy programmes and what they actually achieve also contributes to the expansion of issues (Kruckeberg and Starck 1988; Jones and Baumgartner 2005; Heath and Palenchar 2009). This can generate a gulf between the expectations of the public and the performance of an organization, resulting in damage to the reputation of the organization involved. The ultimate goal of strategic issue management when addressing this gulf is to achieve a shared understanding between the organization involved and the relevant stakeholders concerning the issue's significance. In the process, it is important to prevent specific issues from becoming possible risks that could evolve into crisis-like events (Heath and Palenchar 2009).

There are two distinct strategies for preventing issues from becoming risks. The first strategy aims at adjusting the organization's policies to the changing demands in its environment. The second strategy focuses on developing a process of re-framing, in which the original claims are subjected to dialogue and negotiation. One-sided advocacy campaigns, which attempt to persuade the general public, are seldom effective (Sethi 1977; Brummett 1985). Through dialogue and negotiation, organizations can use specific power resources that enable them to foster and control the pushing and pulling that takes place within this re-framing process. Moreover, strategic issue management is based on a variety of monitoring activities. These strategies and activities require organizations to develop the capacity to act quickly in order to seize opportunities or to avert risks before an issue becomes relevant to their business operations, reputations or both (Palese and Crane 2002). Some scholars refer to the possibilities of Web 2.0 applications as a relevant set of capacities to be exploited, due to their interactive and communicative nature, and their narrow casting potentials (Heath and Palenchar 2009).

Expectations

Based on the previous theoretical exploration, we formulate some expectations which can help us to develop a line of reasoning for answering our research question. The research question has two focal points. The first group of expectations concerns the emergence of strategic surprises through Web 2.0 driven micro-mobilization and issue expansion. The second group concerns how public managers perceive and manage the resulting strategic surprises.

The emergence of strategic surprises: Web 2.0 driven micro-mobilization and issue expansion

The first expectation is that successful micro-mobilization and issue expansion are dependent on a process of frame alignment. Second, we expect that the use of social network technology helps to expand the issue, due to the discursive, access and resource power that these technologies provide to micro-mobilizing individuals. Third, the rapid and massive expansion of an issue through social network technology may have spill-over effects into the traditional media. 'Media logic' furthers this spill-over effect. Fourth, we propose that political mobilization alone is not enough to place an issue on the public and political agenda. This depends on the national mood, focusing events and the role of policy entrepreneurs who advocate the issue and help to open possible policy windows.

The perception and management of strategic surprises

First, the management of strategic surprises is dependent on the perception of a gap between the public's expectations of a policy programme and what it actually achieves. Relevant questions in this regard involve the salience of this gap for public managers and whether it presents a possible risk that might endanger the legitimacy of the policy and the reputation of the public managers behind it. Second, strategic surprises occur when public managers do not expect an issue to expand and become the subject of intense political and public debate. It is thus important to ask whether public managers are aware of such issues and, if they are, how they react to them. The repertoire of reactions that public managers have at their disposal is a third factor to be considered. In general, public managers have two options: they either adjust to the content of the claims that have been made or try to reframe or channel the issue in such a way that the issue will not harm the long-term interests and identity of the organization. Fourth, the success of strategic surprise management is likely to be dependent on the availability of relevant capacities and resources to public managers. More specifically, it is important to know whether the public managers have the resources and capacities that they need in order to use the discursive, access and resource power of the media, in particular social network technology.

RESEARCH STRATEGY

Our research strategy involves a comparative case study. The advantage of the case study method is that it acknowledges the complex and meaningful interaction between relevant social processes and actors, instead of limiting the study of social phenomena to a highly specific set of variables and the relations between them (Yin 2003). In this study, we compare two cases. We selected cases in which the 'media powers' that Web 2.0 technologies provide play an important role. Both of these cases had attracted public attention and both could be followed. The real-time occurrence of the events was especially relevant in relation to the study of the interactions that took place online. This

implied a search for recent cases – cases that occurred in the Netherlands in 2007–9. The first case involved the protest of secondary school students against the '1,040-hour norm'. The second case involved the dissenting voices of Dutch soldiers in Afghanistan. Although these cases are similar in terms of national context, political system characteristics and media use, they differ in terms of factors that are crucial for the success of strategic surprise management. More than other cases we considered, the Uruzgan case represents a contrasting case in terms of the ways in which public managers were able to cope with the expansion of the issues. Admittedly, a main reason why the Ministry of Defence was able to restrict Web 2.0 communication flows was the military security dimension that impacted on public managers' abilities. However, for our exploratory purposes it is more important to analyse contrasting cases with regard to policy-makers' anticipations and responses to micro-mobilization, cross-overs and other elements in our theoretical framework than engage in a second-order explanation in terms of factors 'underlying' the public managers' abilities. The comparison of relevant similarities and differences may contribute to the development of a line of reasoning in which our conclusions are based on the plausibility of arguments, as derived from the empirical findings (Yin 2003). This approach can improve our understanding of why the success of strategic surprise management differed, even though both cases involved the use of Web 2.0 for the creation and expansion of a political issue. In order to improve the validity of our research findings, we also used and combined a variety of research techniques in a process to which Yin (2003) refers as 'triangulation'. First, we directly observed and analysed the interactions (discussions, photos and videos) in relation to relevant social network and other websites, in addition to other internet sources. Second, we examined ways in which traditional media covered the issues. Third, we conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with eight relevant stakeholders in each case. Each of the people interviewed had played a leading role in the organization and expansion of the protest. We also interviewed senior public managers who had been involved in the management of the strategic surprises within the involved organizations. Fourth, we organized a focus group in order to discuss the findings and their policy implications. The six members of the focus group were senior public managers and senior public administrators involved with strategic issue and communication management in organizations other than those involved in the cases.

CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

Student protests against the 1,040-hour norm

The introduction of major reforms in primary and secondary education during the last decade caused the quality of education to become a widely discussed issue in the Netherlands. In 2007, discussion focused on the Government's enforcement of the '1,040-hour norm'. This norm refers to the total amount of teaching hours that students are

required to follow each year during secondary education. Although required by education inspectors to comply with this norm, teacher shortages prevented many schools from being able to do so. Schools were forced to take a variety of 'phony' or 'misleading' measures (e.g. hours for 'self-study' in classrooms) that gave the impression that students were receiving education. Students complained that they were being forced to be at school without taking classes. In November 2007, students across the country revolted against the perceived absurdity of this norm. The initial mobilization actor in this case was the National Student Action Committee (*Landelijk Actie Komitee Scholieren* (LAKS)), which acts as the trade union for secondary school students. As framed by LAKS, the 1,040-hour norm was detrimental to school quality, as demonstrated by their claim, 'If you are in favour of quality, you are opposed to the 1,040-hour norm.' This claim dominated the discussion and was adopted by most of the involved actors, including the media. An analysis of the digital archives of the five national newspapers (*NRC Handelsblad*, *Volkskrant*, *Telegraaf*, *AD* and *Trouw*) shows that this argument was dominant in nine articles between 1 November 2007 and 1 January 2008.

A key figure in the expansion of the issue was a student named Kevin. On Friday morning 23 November, strikes and demonstrations took place in many cities. Throughout the country, thousands of students came into action, which led to some order disturbances. One day before, Kevin had forwarded the following MSN message to his friends:

> All students in the Netherlands are going on strike because the number of lessons has been increased to 1,040 hours. As a result, we have to stay in school longer, and a ninth hour has been added to the schedule. Therefore, the whole Netherlands will strike on 23 November 2007, immediately after the first break, simply on the school playground,and ignore the lessons. FORWARD THIS TO ALL STUDENTS.[1]

These friends forwarded the message to their contacts; the wheel was set in motion. Students recorded many of the actions on their mobile phones and uploaded the videos to YouTube.[2] In a statement, LAKS declared that it had not organized these protests, but was glad that the students had raised their voices (*NRC Handelsblad* 2007). In addition, LAKS summoned the students to demonstrate on Friday 30 November in Amsterdam, thereby regaining control over the protests. This demonstration brought a temporary end to the campaign. In mid-January, twenty secondary schools announced their refusal to comply with the norm. More schools followed. The norm received a new and final blow on 13 February 2008, when a Parliamentary Enquiry Committee published its report 'Time for Education' (*Tijd voor Onderwijs*). The Committee concluded that 'politics had overloaded the field of education with ambitions and trampled the freedom of the schools' (Dijsselbloem 2008). It argued that the present 1,040-hour norm was 'highly contested' and should be reconsidered. In the House of Representatives, the Deputy Minister expressed agreement with this recommendation and promised an investigation. Although the norm was not formally withdrawn, it would not be enforced during the investigation.

The emergence of strategic surprises: micro-mobilization and issue expansion

This analysis first focuses on factors that contributed to the expansion of the issue. We see that the students framed the issue in an appealing way by using such terms as 'kennel requirements' and 'kennel hours', and through such statements as 'if you are in favour of quality, you are opposed to the 1,040-hour norm'. This type of phrasing helped students, teachers and members of the school boards, to identify themselves with the issue, thereby contributing to a process of frame alignment. The availability of social media provided the micro-mobilizing students with a structure of media power throughout this process. The use of mobile telephones with digital cameras facilitated the real-time coverage of the disturbances and the police actions through postings on YouTube and other social networking sites. This also helped to produce and reproduce a shared understanding about the need to protest. Personal experiences and comments were also shared on these sites. We can therefore conclude that the discursive power of the Web 2.0 applications helped to expand the issue, thereby aligning frames by sharing written and visualized experiences. The traditional media facilitated this process of frame alignment by using a number of photos and videos that were made available through YouTube and other sites. This provides evidence of cross-over effects between Web 2.0 and the traditional media. In terms of access power, this case shows that access to networks of friends that can be linked and mobilized has the advantage of the capacity to include numerous people in the protest. The open character of many social networks did not only help the students but also the traditional media to take notice of the events. For the television shows and newspapers free material was available. In terms of resource power we see that young people possess the necessary devices and capacities to use Web 2.0 applications effectively. We conclude that the discursive, access and resource power of Web 2.0 facilitated a process of self-organization of students in order to be politically effective.

The coverage in the traditional media also contributed to the expansion of the issue, as the issue and the course of events appealed to their 'media logic'. First, terms like 'kennel hours' reduced the relatively complex and administrative issue into a comprehensible topic, and it raised emotions by pointing at the perverse effects of the norm. When reporting or discussing the issue, all of the newspapers referred to these specific terms in their articles. This frame was used by the televised media as well. The Dutch evening news programme (*NOS-Journaal*) referred to it in ten reports between November 2007 and January 2008. The current-affairs programmes *NOVA* and *Netwerk* each reported twice on the issue, also with reference to the words 'kennel hours'. Second, the disruptions had considerable news value. Framing the issue in terms of potential 'winners and losers' also enhanced dramatized coverage: would the Deputy Minister ('Goliath') succumb to the protests of the students ('David'). In addition, the well-spoken chair of LAKS became an important icon in the conflict (thus personalizing the issue). The traditional media provided him with a platform for free publicity, which politicians could not ignore (Swart 2007).

The perception and management of strategic surprises

At the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW), public managers and the Deputy Minister in charge were completely surprised by the scale and speed of the protest actions. In itself, the ability (or inability) of schools to comply with the 1,040-hour norm was not new. The Ministry and the schools had discussed the issue for some time. LAKS, however, used the enforcement of the 1,040-hour norm a concrete symbol for poor quality of education and the perverse effects of this norm. A broader sense of discontent was reduced to a single, comprehensible issue. Public managers were surprised by this new articulation of the quality issue. They were also surprised by the mobilization force the internet had provided to the protesting students. Before then, blogs and communication on social networking sites had not been seen as relevant sources of information. Consultations with vested organizations and close interactions with the traditional media were core elements of the Ministry's 'Standard Operating Procedures' (cf. Allison and Zelikow 1999). According to the people who were interviewed, the dominant frame of the involved public managers was focused on the perceived 'one-sidedness of the internet discussions', in which hardly 'no attention was paid to the arguments of the Ministry', which was very much in contrast with the regular discussions with the vested organizations. They were confused about 'whether and how they should react and which media they should use to inform students and the wider public on their views'. In the end, they decided to use the traditional media. The public managers feared that, once their opinion was posted, students would 'manipulate the message', given the open and flexible character of the content in Web 2.0 environments. As a result of these experiences, the Ministry is now developing a new communication strategy. It still wrestles with finding an appropriate balance between the voices that are expressed in Web 2.0 environments and those that are expressed in the vested forums for policy consultation. They recognize, however, that the first step should involve better monitoring of relevant social networks, blogs and other forums. They were further surprised by the attention that newspapers and television news shows paid to the student protests and their claims, which the public managers considered to have been framed in the 'wrong perspective'.

Because they were caught off-guard by these strategic surprises, the public managers had no procedures available for reacting to these new forms of protest politics. The Ministry also had no knowledge or staff available to deal with the Web 2.0 driven protests. During the peak of the revolt, public managers adhered to their established standard operating procedures in their attempts to counterbalance the claims of the students, thereby relying on their access to the traditional media.

Dissident military voices in Uruzgan

In late 2005, the Dutch government received a request from President Bush to relieve the approximately 1,500 Canadian soldiers present in the Uruzgan region of Afghanistan. In 2007, the Dutch Parliament agreed to continue the presence of troops until 2010. This

gave rise to a lingering public and political debate. One reason was the contrast between the political expectations that had been advanced originally and the situation that actually occurred. Although the mission was originally framed as 'a reconstruction mission', most of the time was actually spent on combat activities against the Taliban and Al Qaida.

At the beginning of the Uruzgan campaign, the Ministry of Defence started an active media policy intended to mobilize support for the mission within the military, the public and political opinion, as well as to improve its image as transparent, open and realistic. The issue was framed in terms of 'a fight between right and wrong', thereby referring to the events of 9/11 and international terrorism. Journalists were invited to join the forces as embedded correspondents. The dominance of embedded journalism provided the Ministry with substantial control over the media coverage. The message told was that everything was under control and that, despite the fighting, the Dutch forces were working on substantial reconstruction in Uruzgan.

At the same time, the Ministry was convinced that unlimited access to the internet would support the morale of the troops and their families. Free access to Web 2.0 applications allowed many individual soldiers to communicate events as they were actually taking place. Soldiers began to express dissenting voices, especially when attacks led to casualties. Personal experiences were expressed in an emotional way, and the reconstruction goal of the mission was called into question. These dissident opinions were advanced on weblogs and on several Hyves pages. In addition, photographs and videos were uploaded on YouTube. As time progressed, soldiers attempted to express the failure of the reconstruction mission, thus emphasizing that the essence of the mission was 'to fight' instead of 'to reconstruct'. The following message posted on a weblog on the site 'Where are you now?' (www.waarben.jij.nu) provides an example:

> I have lost my trust. We are going to rebuild this wall. This is the best we can do … Trust is good, but especially in yourself. I will keep in contact with you, because you can't do anything about these circumstances. After each expedition, I feel as if there is a knife in my heart, or at least in my back.
>
> (Anonymous soldier at Tarin Kowt on 22 March 2008)

These messages were picked up by the traditional media. Television programmes used uploaded films and photographs to show the Dutch public and politicians that they had a distorted view of the nature of the events taking place in Uruzgan. For example, on the Dutch television news show *Reporter* (19 November 2007), Dutch soldiers expressed that they were 'being driven into a corner by the Taliban' and that they were 'not able to build schools and bridges'.

The emergence of strategic surprises: micro-mobilization and issue expansion

We see that individual Dutch soldiers raised their voices in order to show that the frame that was dominant in the political and public discussion was not in line with the facts, as they experienced them. The initial casualties among Dutch soldiers served as focusing

events that prompted many individual soldiers to advance a counter-frame: the mission was not about reconstruction but about fighting. In this way, a 'framing contest' ensued between the Ministry and the soldiers (Boin *et al.* 2009). For the soldiers, access to Web 2.0 media served as a powerful resource, which allowed them to express their opinions to their friends and families, as well as the broader public, at least to some extent. Their frame was picked up by the traditional media, thereby creating cross-over effects between new and traditional media. 'Media logic' further enhanced this cross-over, as the soldiers' stories contributed to a dramatized and personalized coverage of the events. Nevertheless, the process of frame alignment within a broader public was relatively limited. The soldiers did not use the social media to organize themselves by creating a shared understanding about the mission. According to the people we interviewed, the reason that the mobilizing effects of these dissident voices were limited involved 'the hierarchical culture of the military' and the 'loyalty of the soldiers'. Nevertheless, the uncontrolled voices of individual soldiers created a strategic surprise by reporting a different story to the general public. At first, the Ministry had been unaware of the dissident voices and the popularity of Web 2.0 social networks. The traditional media made no use of information from Hyves until the first soldier was killed, and they used information from his Hyves site to provide a glimpse into the deceased soldier's private life. The Ministry perceived this as a threat to its original media campaign.

The perception and management of strategic surprises

As a reaction to this the Ministry issued internet-usage guidelines intended to ensure that no specific combat information would be made accessible to the enemy. Soldiers were no longer allowed to talk freely to the visiting embedded journalists. The Ministry also decided to switch off internet communications before outbursts of grief could be spread over the internet. In addition, the media agreed upon a code of conduct, which specified that the media should exercise caution when using Web 2.0 information in reporting about soldiers who had been wounded or killed. By developing a media code, the Ministry tried to prevent the dominant 'media logic' from being set in motion. In addition to the efforts of the Ministry to control possible cross-over effects, it also relied on a number of existing routines and policy practices, including the imposition of stricter rules and the development of a permanent publicity campaign in the newspapers, magazines and television.

In trying to control dissenting and emotional outbursts of dissatisfaction, the Ministry set up a centrally controlled condolence register (www.defensieforum.nl) on which personal messages could be posted whenever a soldier was killed. Another measure taken by the Ministry involved the organization of a monthly survey to monitor public support for the troops in Afghanistan. The Ministry also launched several media campaigns involving interviews with the Minister, the Commander in Chief and the commanding officers in Afghanistan. This set of reactions was more based on the idea that attempts to resist these new, interactive media were futile and that their efforts

should be directed towards monitoring, managing and channelling the communication of expressions and reactions.

This case demonstrates an interesting paradox in terms of resource power. On the one hand, the Ministry provided the internet infrastructure to the soldiers, and it was therefore able to block their access to the internet and its social networks. On the other hand, free access to the internet allowed the soldiers to use these communication resources to articulate their opinions and experiences, and to share their stories with a wider public. In this way, the use of Hyves, weblogs and YouTube represent discursive power, as they facilitated the soldiers' ability to frame the events in Uruzgan. Upon examining the media power used by the Ministry, we see that public managers relied on their own media resources access to the traditional media. In doing so, they tried to counterbalance the frame that was being advanced by the soldiers (discursive power). The Ministry exercised resource power through its control over the internet infrastructure in Uruzgan. Whenever situations threatened to get out of hand, they were able to block internet communication, thereby exercising both access and resource power. In addition, they had the resources to develop an alternative platform (www.defensieforum.nl), which they could also control. Access power was exercised with regard to the traditional media. The Ministry used its close relationships with the traditional media to manage public and political opinion. In terms of strategic issue management, these actions represented an attempt to re-frame possible contrasting views about the nature of the Afghanistan mission.

CONCLUSIONS

Our first set of expectations addresses factors regarding mobilization and issue expansion that help to create strategic surprises.

The first factor is related to the processes of frame alignment that occurred in the two cases. In both cases, the power of the frame that was used was based primarily on a contradiction between the official goals of a policy programme and the actual nature of the programme, as expressed by the mobilizing group. Framing can promote issue expansion if this contradiction can be phrased in an attractive way. The nearly binary articulation of the contradictions in these two cases (i.e. quantity versus quality in the case of the 1,040-hour norm and reconstruction versus fighting in the Uruzgan case) was well suited to the operating logic of the traditional media. The scale of the mobilization process enhanced issue expansion. This was especially evident in the 1,040-hour norm case. The linking capacity of Web 2.0 made it possible for students all over the country to become involved. In addition, students deliberately mobilized themselves in order to make their point. In the Uruzgan case, the dissident soldiers did not have the intention to mobilize themselves politically, due to their loyalty to the army. Nonetheless, public managers considered the expression of their views to be potentially harmful to the political and public support for the mission.

The power structure of social media was a second factor in the expansion of the issue and the emergence of strategic surprises. In both cases, the interactive nature of social media applications combined with the students' and soldiers' ability to express and share experiences in text, sound and image, facilitated identification with an issue. We can conclude that the discursive power of social media facilitates the process of frame alignment, which can expand further as the traditional media pick up the story and the dominant frame behind it. This process was stimulated by focusing events (e.g. the orderly disturbances in the local protests against the 1,040-hour norm and the deaths of soldiers in the Uruzgan case), as the interactive nature of social media enabled people to express and share their emotions. The access power of Web 2.0 media also contributed to the strategic surprises in these cases. Their ability to connect a wide variety of lists of friends led to the inclusion of an increasing number of people in the mobilization process. In addition to the scale of this inclusion process, the speed in which it occurred is relevant. In terms of resources, the cases illustrate that it is quite easy to set up a network of friends or develop a website with interactive features. The fact that the students and soldiers who were involved had grown up in a generation characterized by the prominence of modern information and communication technologies contributed to the resource power that was exercised (Palfrey and Grasser 2008). The cross-over between Web 2.0 media and the traditional media provides a further explanation for the successful expansion of issues. In the case of the 1,040-hour norm, two factors contributed to this cross-over. First, newspapers and television news shows used material that was available on YouTube and other social networking sites. These materials contributed elements of personalization and dramatization to the coverage of the issue. Second, the LAKS chair acquired a platform for expressing his views. The fact that he had media appeal and presented himself as an underdog facilitated this cross-over, as these characteristics were consistent with the dominant 'logic' of the traditional media. The opposite was observed in the Uruzgan case. The strategic surprise management of the Ministry of Defence limited the expansion of the issue. The Ministry was successful in launching a number of actions to reduce the risk of further harmful media cross-overs.

With regard to the fourth expectation, the two cases highlight the importance of the national mood, focusing events and the role of policy entrepreneurs. In the case of the 1,040-hour norm, a prominent role was played by policy entrepreneurs: LAKS, organizations of teachers and school boards and the parliamentary investigation committee that mentioned the contested nature of the norm in its report. Policy entrepreneurs played no prominent role in the Uruzgan case.

Our second set of expectations focused on the perception and management of strategic surprises. The first factor involves the perception of a gap between the public's expectations and the actual achievement of a policy programme. Both cases provide evidence of such a gap. In the Uruzgan case, the Ministry perceived this gap as a potential risk to the legitimacy of the mission. In the case of the 1,040-hour norm, LAKS successfully used the enforcement of the 1,040-hour norm as a concrete symbol

for poor quality of education and the perverse effects of this norm. Public managers were surprised by this new articulation of the quality issue. The views and demands of the soldiers, and particularly those of the students, were also perceived as a strategic surprise because of the speed of the articulation and expansion process.

In terms of the public managers' repertoire of action, senior public managers in both cases focused primarily on the official arrangements for consultation and negotiation, within which established interests are represented. These arrangements constitute core elements of their 'Standard Operating Procedures' for dealing with the outside world. This orientation can partly explain why the Ministries were taken by surprise by the respective actions of students and soldiers (as expressed in the second expectation). The same orientation subsequently influenced the reaction pattern of the Ministries that were involved (as expressed in the third expectation). Because they were focused on well-established channels of consultation, public managers were unaware of and unfamiliar with the existence of alternative views and the use of new social media among students and soldiers. Many public managers had considered the online platforms as an 'underground' phenomenon. Much to their surprise, public managers within the two Ministries noticed that the locus of the political debate was shifting to other public arenas, surpassing the existing consultation platforms and extending to online platforms as well.

In the case of the 1,040-hour norm, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science eventually adjusted to the claims that were being advanced. In the Uruzgan case, the strategic surprise management implemented by the Ministry of Defence focused on limiting the expansion of the issue, first by preventing major cross-over effects between social media and traditional media and, second, by channelling grievances through the creation of an alternative online platform.

The fourth and final expectation concerns the availability of capacities and resources for reacting to strategic surprises. One reason for the perceived novelty of the actions refers to the gap (i.e. a new digital divide) between involved actors from the younger generation (i.e. students and soldiers) and the average senior public manager, whose affinity with new media tends to be based largely on e-mail and Web 1.0 applications. It is interesting to see how public managers tried to cope with the new technologies in both cases. Recognizing the importance of interaction, the Ministry of Defence included this element in its new web environment (defensieforum.nl). Their actions can be interpreted as an accommodation strategy aimed at locking in unwanted elements so that they can be controlled (Thelen 2003). The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science was afraid of the manipulative possibilities offered by new media and therefore avoided them when responding to the views of the students. For a long time, they wrestled with the question of how to cope with the new media environment.

When the first soldier in Uruzgan was killed, public managers in the Ministry of Defence immediately recognized the discursive power that social media provide for soldiers to express their grievances and frustrations. They did accept the importance of these new media, however, by incorporating elements into their own media

environment, while simultaneously developing a strategy for 'damage control'. The Ministry's strategic surprise management was also based on its resource and access power. Their approach reflected resource power through the control that the Ministry exercised over the communication infrastructure supporting the use of Web 2.0 applications by soldiers (e.g. it was possible for the Ministry to switch off this infrastructure when necessary). In terms of access power, 'embedded journalism' and the development of a media code allowed the Ministry to influence the extent and nature of the information that was used by the traditional media. The strategic surprise management implemented by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science points in another direction. To some extent, the behaviour of the public managers reflected elements of anxiety and uncertainty. The most striking difference between this case and that of Uruzgan, however, was that the Ministry of Education was unable to exercise resource and access power regarding the kind of information that was exchanged.

What do these findings imply for public management? The possibilities that new media provide to individual citizens and small groups of citizens in combination with a diminishing lack of trust in the functioning and policy results of governments, will increasingly confront public managers with all kinds of strategic surprises that fundamentally question the implementation of policy programmes for which they are responsible. Hence, a major question will be how to anticipate these surprises. At least three options can be distinguished. A first option is to scan permanently the social media environment in order to see if possible resistance is building up. A second option is to get involved in these social media discussions in order to bring in the government perspective. A third option is to set up actively the debate regarding the effectiveness of specific policy programmes and to use the experiences, knowledge and information of citizens for the assessment and adjustment of these programmes. Further research could show under what conditions these options might be effective. However, the choice for one of these options also depends on the views public managers have on the functioning of democracy. The public managers in our focus group acknowledged that mobilizations by web-enabled citizens tend to introduce a new 'chess-board' in addition to the institutional arrangements geared to the functioning of representative democracy, the consultations with vested organizations and the publicity in the traditional media. They agreed that these mobilizations have implications in terms of a more responsive democracy: 'The availability of new ways of gathering new kinds of information has also implications for how we use this information in policy processes.' However, there were different attitudes among the participants on how far these implications should go, ranging from notions concerning 'civil servants Web 2.0' who have some autonomy to develop their own communities with citizens to the more traditional idea that the 'political primacy' of the minister should not be impaired. One suggestion which serves to relate our article to deliberative democratic theory is to consider the creation of connections between 'formal' deliberative forums and informal 'forums' that emerge on the internet (cf. Saward 2000).

Additional research into the nature of emerging patterns of mobilization is needed, as web-based forms of micro-mobilization are likely to increase in importance. These forms of mobilization can be expected to exercise increasing influence on the legitimacy of government and politics, thereby challenging traditional forms of democratic processes.

NOTES

1 A screenshot of this MSN message was published in the newspaper *Volkskrant*, 23/24 November 2007. Available at http://www.volkskrant.nl/binnenland/article481220.ece/Msn_Staak,_na_de_kleine_pauze

2 See, for instance, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xKydYGSQCis&NR=1; http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lfkjbZ1DNfI&feature=related.

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