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Government communication and democratic governance: Electoral and policy-related information campaigns in Canada

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Abstract

Government communication is now a large growth industry in many countries. Exactly what is meant by the term, however, varies from author to author. In this paper government communication is conceived as a policy tool or instrument, that is, as a means to give effect to policy goals. Key policy-relevant aspects of the term are examined including differences between the role of government communications in the 'front-end' of the public policy and production processes related to agenda-setting, policy formulation and producer activities as opposed to the 'back-end' of policy implementation, policy evaluation, consumption and distribution. Two case studies of political and policy-related information campaigns in Canada, one dealing with Elections Canada at the federal level and the second with provincial health policy-making in British Columbia, are examined in order to discern patterns in the use of government communication tools useful as a basis for comparative inquiry into Democratic governance.

1. Introduction: thinking about government communication as the use of nodality or information-based policy tools

Political and policy-related government communications are large growth industries in many countries as overall governance modes have shifted towards consultation and collaborative government (Adler & Pittle, 1984; Heeks, 1999; Heeks & Davies, 1999). This has led to the internalization and mandating of many new communication practices in many jurisdictions (Feldman & Khademian, 2007). These include the development and use of policy tools and instruments which promote citizen empowerment such as Freedom of Information legislation, the use of public performance measures, various forms of e-government and the increased use of government surveys and advertizing among others and also, in the post-911 era, the enhanced use of information-restricting tools such as censorship and official secrets acts (Hood & Margetts, 2007).

The disparate nature of these government communication activities and the fact that recent government actions have both prevented information release as well as promoted it are indicative of the need to be more precise in what is meant by the multi-faceted term 'government communication'. Exactly what is meant by the term, alas, varies from author to author, ranging from its association with all forms of political activity (Deutsch, 1963; Bang, 2003) to a very specific focus on one action, like political advertising (Firestone, 1970; Young, 2007) or labelling (Baksi & Bose, 2007; Padberg, 1992).

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These different foci make comparative cross-national assessments and generalizations about trends and patterns of use difficult (Ledingham, 2003; Bougherara & Grolleau, 2007). Nevertheless, classifying and analyzing the wide range of activities and tasks that fall into the category of 'government communication' is an essential pre-requisite for such assessments (Weiss & Tschirhart, 1994).

1.1. Two dimensions of government communication

Government communications are the 'sermons' in the 'carrots, sticks, organizations and sermons' formulation of basic policy instrument types. Evert Vedung defines these 'sermons' as:

> ''Efforts to use the knowledge and data available to governments to influence consumer and producer behaviour in a direction consistent with government aims and wishes'' and/or ''gather information in order to further their aims and ambitions'' (Vedung & v.d. Doelen, 1998).

This definition, while useful, is limited in that it conceals or elides several dimensions of information tool use and the general purposes to which they can be put.

Two dimensions of government communications activities, in particular, are often incorrectly juxtaposed in the literature on the subject. First, whether the communication activities are intended to serve as devices primarily oriented towards the manipulation of policy actors (Saward, 1992; Edelman, 1988) or social and economic ones (Hornik, 1989; Jahn, Schramm, & Spiller, 2005) and, second, which stages of the production process or policy cycle different communication tools focus upon (Howlett, 2009a, 2009b). Both missing dimensions require further elaboration in order to develop a workable definition and classification of communication tools for comparative purposes.

With respect to the first dimension, much existing literature focuses on the manipulation of the behaviour of economic actors – namely consumers and producers – to the neglect of the effects such tools can and do have upon other kinds of policy and policy network actors and activities. At their most basic level, all government policies fall into two types depending on their general goal orientation: one type proposes to alter the actual *substance* of the kinds of activities carried out by citizens going about their day-to-day tasks, while the other focuses more upon altering political or policy behaviour in the *process* of the articulation of policy goals and means. '*Procedural*'' policy tools are used to accomplish the latter purposes, while '*substantive*' policy instruments are those used to more directly affect the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services in society (Howlett, 2000). Substantive instruments are thus expected to alter some aspect of the production, distribution and delivery of goods and services in society: broadly conceived to include both mundane goods and services (like school lunches) as well as a range of vices and virtues from crude vices (such as gambling or illicit drug use) to more common individual virtues (such as charitable giving or volunteer work with the physically challenged); to the attainment of sublime collective goals (like peace and security, sustainability and well-being). We can thus define substantive government communication policy instruments as those policy techniques or mechanisms which rely on the use of information to directly or indirectly affect the behaviour of those involved in the production, consumption and distribution of different kinds of goods and services in society.

Procedural tools, on the other hand, affect production, consumption and distribution processes only indirectly, instead affecting the behaviour of actors involved in policy-making. These actors are arrayed in policy networks which are comprised of very simple arrangements of nodes (actors) and links (relationships), but which can result in very complex structures and interaction patterns. Policy networks include sets of formal institutional and informal relational linkages between governmental and other policy actors which are typically structured around shared beliefs and interests in public policy-making and implementation. In order to pursue their preferred policy initiatives, governments must interact with other state and non-state actors who might possess diverging interests (Leik, 1992). They use procedural communicative tools based on government information resources in order to attempt to alter the behaviour of policy network members involved in policy-making processes. They are only tangentially related to productive or consumptive behaviour, if at all.

With respect to the second concern, many studies focus exclusively on the role of government communications as part of the agenda-setting process in government (Gandy, 1982; Mikenberg, 2001; Sulitzeanu-Kenan, 2007) or on its role in policy implementation (Salmon, 1989a, 1989b), or upon their effect on consumption activities and actors versus those involving productive or distributive activities. These are quite different roles and functions within the policy and production processes, however, and should be carefully distinguished from each other in order to understand the links

and linkages that exist between government communication strategies and activities and policy outcomes such as accountability and policy efficacy and in order to assess any trends or directions in the use of these instruments, either cross-sectorally or cross-nationally, or over time, or both.

2. Two case studies of government communicative tool use for democratic governance purposes

2.1. Government communications for political purposes: the case of Elections Canada

The first case focuses on the growing use of procedural communications tools by Canada's federal elections agency, Elections Canada. Elections Canada was established in 1920 by the Dominion Elections Act, largely in response to what was perceived to be partisan involvement in the handling of Canadian elections. The management of elections was removed from the purview of the sitting government and responsibilities for elections were assigned to the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, a candidate whose appointment is approved by a majority decision of the Canadian House of Commons. Today, Elections Canada remains an independent non-partisan body that reports directly to Parliament through the Speaker of the House of Commons. The agency has seen its role evolve to include not only the administration of elections and by-elections but also a mandated responsibility to deliver ongoing education and outreach campaigns to voters.

Today, Elections Canada is mandated to (Elections Canada, 2009b):

- be prepared at all times to conduct a federal general election, by-election or referendum
- administer the political financing provisions of the *Canada Elections Act*
- monitor compliance and enforce electoral legislation
- conduct voter education and information programs
- provide support to the independent commissions in charge of adjusting the boundaries of federal electoral districts following each decennial census
- carry out studies on alternative voting methods and, with the approval of Parliament, test electronic voting processes for future use during electoral events

Elections Canada has a longstanding history of communications initiatives targeted at encouraging electoral participation. It has traditionally used radio, television and print advertisements in order to make citizens aware of their rights and of the means through which they could exercise their franchise, but has also increasingly explored new technologies and communications vehicles. The agency has also expanded its campaigns from broad voter based communications to targeted communications aimed at marginalized groups such as youth, aboriginal and minority communities.

As with many advanced western democracies there has been a trend towards lower voter participation levels in Canada. Indeed, a snapshot of federal electoral cycles saw participation rates decline from 75.3 to 58.8 per cent between 1988 and 2008 (Elections Canada, 2009c). More specifically, certain groups within the Canadian electorate have traditionally had lower participation rates such as aboriginal Canadians, youth, and certain ethnocultural minority groups. In the context of decreasing participation rates Elections Canada sought to reach out to the general voting public with information about the voting process and the importance of electoral participation.

A review of the policy tools used by the agency underscores the frequent use of general information campaigns but also highlights an increasing shift towards targeted campaigns aimed at reaching potential voters deemed 'at risk' of not voting, specifically aboriginal Canadians, youth and members of special needs groups. Elections Canada has mounted a variety of persuasion-based information campaigns to this effect and used a range of media vehicles including television, radio, and print advertisements. In addition to their educational media campaigns, however, Elections Canada has also engaged in a wide range of consultative and collaborative processes in order to attempt to engage groups at higher risk of not voting, and to seek feedback on the mechanisms by which it informs and educates voters about changes to electoral policy and the timing of elections. Lastly, Elections Canada has also increasingly partnered with non-governmental organizations, academia, and a host of other civil society groups to encourage electoral participation and to consult on how the agency can better foster civic engagement.

Though some initiatives are ongoing, the majority of media advertising and outreach occur in the lead up to and during the electoral cycle. Thus recently, in the Canadian case there is significant activity surrounding the 1997, 2000,

Table 1
Elections Canada spending (public education, information, support).

Year	Total actual spending ($ million)
1999–2000	4 570 000
2000–2001	7 617 000
2001–2002	6 308 000
2002–2003	16 056 000
2003–2004	14 751 000
2004–2005	9 787 000
2005–2006	9 599 000
2006–2007	6 542 000
2007–2008	6 976 000
2008–2009	11 457 000 (planned spending)

Compiled from Reports on Plans and Priorities, Treasury Board Submissions, Office of the Chief Electoral Officer 1999 to 2009.

2004, and 2006 federal elections. As Table 1 underscores, Election Canada advertising and public information campaigns are multi-million dollar operations and budgets for communications, education, and information have been increasing. Though limited information exists with respect to Elections Canada's advertising practices prior to the 2000 campaign, the agency has subsequently begun reporting on its advertising practices and expenditures in its annual reports to parliament. Elections Canada did, however, report developing specific advertising campaigns geared towards Aboriginal Canadians and ethnocultural communities in various languages and shipped approximately 15,000 information kits to both community organizations and individuals for the 1997 election (Elections Canada, 1997, 43).

With respect to the 2000 election cycle, the agency launched a multimedia national advertising campaign including many traditional procedural communications policy tools. Officials conducted a campaign which included newspaper advertisements appearing between three and five times in over 100 daily papers and community newspapers. Radio and television ads were broadcast in 46 television and 68 radio markets. The agency staggered their information and persuasion campaign over the 36 day election period to first encourage voters to register to vote, to inform them of the availability of advanced polling days and locations, and finally radio advertisements were broadcast on Election Day encouraging potential voters to participate (Elections Canada, 2001, 43). This election cycle saw Elections Canada implement a five pronged communications and outreach strategy including the first ever provision of information through a web and telephone based automated Voter Information Service and the first redesign of the Elections Canada website. Due to the particular timing of this election cycle the agency also designed outreach campaigns aimed at informing Canadian seniors known to winter in warmer climates of their opportunity to mail in their votes. The resulting 'Snowbirds Campaign' saw advertisements placed in 15 widely read newspapers in American states such as California, Arizona, Texas and Florida (Elections Canada, 2001, 44).

The 2004 election saw another round of advertising and communication designed to inform, educate, and encourage participation. The agency continued the five pronged communication strategy introduced in 2000 and introduced the ''Why not speak up when everyone is listening?'' theme that was tailored to different target audiences. The agency again launched a national media campaign which saw print advertisements run twice in 876 community based papers and four times in 107 daily newspapers. Elections Canada continued to target youth, aboriginals, and ethnocultural communities with advertisements placed three times in approximately 33 ethnocultural papers and 33 minority language papers. The agency also repeated its television and radio campaigns with television ads broadcast on 143 stations in 47 different markets and radio advertising on 430 stations in 168 markets across the country (Elections Canada, 2004, 14). Elections Canada also initiated the use of Internet 'banner ads' which appeared throughout the election period on 24 major youth-oriented and news-related sites. The use of the internet as a component of the Elections Canada overall communication strategy continued to grow with a sharp increase in visits documented in their 2004 official report to Parliament. The agency noted that:

> ''From year to year, visits to the Elections Canada Web site have sharply increased. In 2001 the number of visits was 463,391, an average of 8,911 weekly; the figure rose by 46 percent in 2002 to 675,654, or 12,993 weekly. There was a further 72 percent increase in 2003, when visits numbered 1.16 million or 22,329 weekly'' (Ibid).

Thus, the 2004 media campaign saw the continuation of the traditional outreach and communications approaches with an emphasis on blanketing the general public and targeted outreach efforts to 'at risk' voters.

The 2006 communications efforts were largely an incremental build on the previous 2004 electoral communications strategy. The ''Why not speak up when everyone is listening?'' theme was utilized again and the communications efforts were once again staggered to inform voters an election was coming, advise that voter registration cards had been mailed to eligible voters, inform and encourage participation at advanced polling days, and encourage voting close to the election day itself. The usual host of vehicles was used with the agency producing print, radio, and television advertisements. The agency reported that during the 2006 information campaign their print advertisements were carried in 109 dailies, 752 weeklies, 94 minority language papers, 22 ethnocultural papers and 78 student papers (Elections Canada, 2006, 70). As this was Canada's first winter election in 25 years, Elections Canada again worked to target and encourage participation among Canada's seniors or 'snowbirds' community who winter in warmer climates. The agency reported partnering with the Canadian Snowbirds Association which sent out 80,000 information kits to their members with information on how to vote from abroad. Elections Canada also reported a unique media campaign predominantly delivered through newspaper advertisements targeted at this cohort at a cost of $260,708 (Elections Canada, 2006, 71).

The most recent federal election saw a continued use of communicative policy tools by Elections Canada in the lead up to, and during the 40th Canadian general elections held October 14, 2008. Elections Canada communicated to potential voters through print, radio, and television advertisements in addition to a substantial web of offices throughout communities across Canada established to deliver information and outreach services in specific communities. In terms of its overall advertising and outreach campaigns, during the most recent Canadian election the agency reported that ''Ads were carried on 144 television and 629 radio stations, and in 145 daily newspapers, 1,114 community newspapers, 22 cultural publications and 97 student papers. Ads also ran on 1977 movie screens, while banner ads appeared on 280 Internet sites. Based on industry standards, the campaign potentially reached 99.9 percent of electors'' (Elections Canada, 2009a, 21). Such advertising activities indicate a current emphasis on utilizing nontraditional communications techniques to ensure high levels of public information. These outreach and advertising tools were used to highlight the date of the election, provide information on how to register to vote, and provide additional contact information for voters requiring further assistance. Significant efforts were made to provide information in a variety of formats and languages to meet the diverse needs of potential Canadian voters. For the 40th general elections written communications products continued to be available in both Canadian Official languages, 27 heritage languages, 8 Aboriginal languages, and Braille (Elections Canada, 2009a, 22).

Since its inception, Elections Canada has seen a substantial shift towards the use of both targeted substantive policy tools aimed at persuasion, collaboration, partnerships and fostering engagement among Canadian voters as well as procedural tools designed to affect its own policy-making activities. As Table 1 above makes clear, funding for communication, education, and informational programs has been steadily rising. Elections Canada has conducted wide-ranging media campaigns that have utilized traditional print, radio, and television mediums. The agency has also increasingly engaged in targeted communications campaigns aimed at segments of the voting public who have traditionally had lower participation rates such as youth and Aboriginals. In addition to informational campaigns Elections Canada has utilized collaborative tools through partnerships with various civic organizations to deliver programs to students, and community based programming such as the Aboriginal elders and youth programs. Such collaborative endeavors highlight the agency's attempts to partner with social organizations to further leverage the dissemination of information to targeted communities. The agency also remains highly active in partnering with the academic community for various research programs aimed at assessing opportunities to encourage electoral participation, share best practices, and take the pulse of electoral participation rates in Canada.

As the Elections Canada, 2008-13 five-year strategic plan makes very clear the use of procedural policy tools by the agency will continue if not expand. Under the third key priority of *Public Education, Information and Support for Stakeholders* the agency lists continued voter education and outreach (with an emphasis on youth), continued corporate research including post election studies, and support for stakeholders. However the plan also calls for the development of an advertising communications framework to review existing practices and seek out means to gain efficiency and effectiveness through better integrated communications.

2.2. *Government communications for social purposes: The British Columbia Obesity Case*

Not all government communications activity involves political or electoral considerations, of course, and not all of it, in Canada at least, occurs at the federal level. Rather a great deal of government communications work occurs at

'lower' levels of government, especially the provincial level, where governments have major responsibilities for social and other kinds of policy activity. These areas of government communications also require analysis and study.

One key area at the provincial level is healthcare and, within that field, an area of much concern in recent years has been obesity, which has been linked to many chronic diseases and advancing healthcare costs. The percentage of Canadians who are overweight or obese has risen dramatically in the past 20 years, mirroring "...an escalating global epidemic of overweight and obesity" (World Health Organization, 2008). According to Statistics Canada, almost 50 percent of the Canadian population – roughly 17.5 million people – is either overweight or obese, and statistics indicate that the incidence of obesity is on the rise. The health implications associated with overweight and obesity are well-documented and pose a major public health challenge for the Canadian government, and have resulted in several major policy-related government communications initiatives.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, "health education" – a "one-way form of communication designed to give people information but not to persuade them to take action" – was the dominant government communication strategy in the health, and many other, spheres of life (Costas-Bradstreet & Edwards, 2004; O'Neill, 2007). A move towards "health promotion," began in the 1970s, when it became clear that health education alone was not having the desired effect of altering citizen behaviour (Khachkalyan, Petrosyan, & Soghikian, 2006; O'Neill, 2007). This recognition together with the LaLonde Report (1974), the WHO "Health For All by the Year 2000" strategy (1978), the Epp Report (1986), the WHO Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (1986), and emerging theories of "social marketing"[1] (Kotler & Zaltman, 1971; Andreasen & Kotler, 2003, 2008) were instrumental in transforming government informational tool use in the Canadian health care field from "health education" to "health promotion" (O'Neill, 3; Jennissen, 1992).

After 1986, health promotion received attention as a health care tool for governments worldwide (O'Neill, 8) and in Canada, the move re-defined government's role in public health issues in important ways. First, government has taken on the general role of health communication, defined as "the process of promoting health by disseminating messages through mass media, interpersonal channels and events" such as "clinician-patient interactions, classes, self-help groups, mailings, hotlines, mass media campaigns, [and] events" (Health Communication Unit, 2008). Over time, government health communication has evolved into a series of government-initiated comprehensive health communication campaigns, which are "goal-oriented attempts to inform, persuade or motivate behaviour change...at the individual, network, organizational and community/societal levels" (Health Communication Unit, 2008). Generally, these health communication campaigns are aimed at a large, well-defined audience (i.e., they do not constitute "interpersonal" persuasion) and occur during a time period ranging anywhere from several weeks to several years (Health Communication Unit, 2008). In terms of obesity interventions specifically, health communication campaigns have been used since the 1970s, and have experienced significant growth since 2005.

Prior to 2005, obesity intervention strategies in British Columbia were small in number. In fact, one of the most comprehensive healthy living initiatives in the province was ParticipACTION, a national non-profit organization promoting physical activity and healthy living (ParticiPACTION, 2008). In 1971, when ParticipACTION was launched, the health communications discipline did not exist (Costas-Bradstreet & Edwards, 2004). Pre-dating other social forces that steered public policy towards health communication, ParticipACTION is often recognized as one of the major initiatives that prompted the shift towards "health promotion" as a government tool in Canada; in fact, ParticiPACTION is recognized as a "...leader in the developing fields of social marketing and health communications by both necessity and design" (Costas-Bradstreet and Edwards, 2). Exhibiting features of a "mass-media led health communications campaign," including awareness raising, social agenda-setting, and information transfer, ParticipACTION relied on multimedia – television, radio and print media – as a medium to inspire and support Canadians to live more actively and to participate in sport (Costas-Bradstreet and Edwards, 1–2; ParticiPACTION, 2001). ParticipACTION was established as a "leading catalyst and provider of information to positively influence personal behaviour and social supports which encouraged healthy, active living for all Canadians" (ParticiPACTION, 2001). Also deemed "...an inexpensive way to fight the rising cost of health care" (Oliveira, 2007), this strategy

[1] Kotler and Zaltman define social marketing as "the design, implementation, and control of programs calculated to influence the acceptability of social ideas and involving considerations of product planning, pricing, communication, distribution, and marketing research" (Kotler and Zaltman, 1971, 10).

sought to improve health and lifestyles of ''the average Canadian,'' raise awareness about the ''inactivity crisis and its health implications'' and constrain health care costs through the promotion of physical activity and sport (ParticiPACTION, 2001; Oliveira, 2007).

After ParticipACTION closed its doors in 2001, obesity intervention strategies were very much dormant in BC. This all changed in March 2005, with the adoption of ActNow BC, a comprehensive government health promotion campaign designed to encourage BC residents to make healthy choices, eat healthy, increase physical activity and reduce tobacco consumption. The introduction of ActNow BC marked the revival of obesity intervention strategies in BC and has prompted a number of health promotion initiatives aimed to counter rising obesity rates in the province. These strategies include Action Schools! BC, the BC School Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program, Active Communities Initiative, Dial-A-Dietician, Making It Happen: Healthy Eating at School, the 2010 Challenge, the BC Healthy Living Alliance, BC Healthy Schools, the Provincial ''Trans Fat'' Ban,[2] HealthLink BC, the Nutritional Guidelines for Vending Machines in BC Public Buildings, and Shapedown BC. These strategies have largely taken the form of Government health communication campaigns encouraging individuals to modify behaviors and adopt healthy lifestyle habits, namely healthy eating and regular physical activity, in order to achieve and sustain a healthy body weight (ActNow BC, Action Schools! BC, Active Communities Initiative, Dial-A-Dietician, Making It Happen: Healthy Eating at School, the 2010 Challenge, and HealthLink BC).

Obesity intervention strategies have grown in number since the 1970s, also experiencing significant growth from 2005 onwards. These findings suggest that, over time, government has used information about obesity as a strategic ''front-end'' tool for agenda-setting, and that government tools have, for the most part, shifted from ''treasure-based'' tools to ''nodality-based'' ones. Obesity prevention strategies in the 1970s and throughout the 1990s largely designated the Province as a ''cheque-book'' government; in other words, Government's tool choice in obesity prevention has been, for the most part, ''treasure-based'' (Hood, 1983, 40). This is evidenced by government funding for weight-loss camps for overweight or obese children and for weight management interventions under the provincial Medical Services Plan (MSP). Similarly, ParticipACTION was funded primarily through Health Canada, an agency of the federal government, though it did receive financial support from provinces and territories across Canada.

Since 2005, government tools have increasingly been ''nodality-based'' taking the form of government health information campaigns. In terms of obesity, government communication has almost always drawn from a larger scientific body of literature that presents obesity as a serious public health issue. In this way, government is very much a ''detector'' of information, using a number of tools to obtain information about obesity (Hood, 1986, 91). These tools range from ''nodal receivers'' (government inserts itself as a ''node'' in information networks), ''ear trumpet'' (government actively seeks out information) and ''scrutiny of free media and direct inquiries,'' where government scrutinizes news and media sources or uses surveys or questionnaires to obtain information from the general public (Hood, 1986, 92–95). Government's role as a ''detector,'' however, does not mean that government has been passive in framing obesity as a matter of public concern; rather, government has used this information as a strategic ''front-end'' tool, namely in ''agenda-setting'' (Howlett, 2009a, 2009b, 15).

Not surprisingly, the government's active role in agenda-setting has translated into a growing number of obesity intervention strategies in the province since 2005, suggesting that the government's use of information as a ''front-end'' agenda-setting tool has increased over time. Government communication tools are successfully adapting to the computer age, as well, relying on the internet to disseminate information about obesity and promote health campaigns, and government is increasingly relying on obesity partnerships as a tool for health promotion. With these strategies the information is framed in a persuasive and action-oriented manner in an effort to alter citizen's behaviors. It can thus be argued that the provincial government now relies on both ''front-end'' (notification instruments and moral suasion) and ''back-end'' (exhortation and information campaigns) substantive policy instruments in obesity intervention strategies (Howlett, 2009a, 2009b, 15).

[2] Although the ''Trans Fat'' Ban in BC was introduced to target reduce individual cholesterol levels, there are researchers who suggest that dietary fat intake, particularly saturated or ''trans fat'' intake, is linked to overweight and obesity morbidities (see Bowman et al., 2004; Ebbeling et al., 2002). For this reason, it has been included in this review.

3. Conclusion: government communication for democratic governance

Liberal democratic governments typically develop policy regime logics, or typical patterns of government activity, based on the use of mixes of substantive and procedural policy tools in order to correct or offset specific market and collective action or governance failures[3] which prevent optimal outcomes from emerging 'spontaneously' by unaided reliance on non-governmental actors in economic (markets) and policy networks (Dollery & Wallis, 1999; Kleiman & Teles, 2006; Howlett, 2009a, 2009b).

In the case of information-based substantive government communication tools, the general aim is often to overcome 'information asymmetries', that is, to correct situations in which consumers and producers may not make optimal decisions due to limitations on the quantity or quality of the information they have at their disposal when judging risk (Howells, 2005; Jahn et al., 2005). This is true both in the case of Elections Canada and obesity programmes in British Columbia.

Procedural communicative tools, on the other hand, attempt to alter or affect some aspects of policy network behaviour in order to offset 'governance' failures (Le Grand, 1991). Policy network management activities thus include the identification of potentially compatible network actors, given the issue of hand; limiting potential conflicts that would hinder flexibility; recognizing legal requirements; balancing political objectives/conflicts with policy objectives; and assigning costs in implementation (de Bruijn & ten Heuvelhof, 1995; Goldsmith & Eggers, 2004; Klijn et al., 1995; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2007). Many of these are tools are communicative in nature (Rochefort & Cobb, 1994; Weiss & Gruber, 1984) and examples of both are found in the two cases examined here.

As has been set out above, there are many different kinds of government communication activities and the lack of an effective taxonomy or framework for their analysis has made generalizing about their impact and patterns of use quite difficult. Conceiving of such activities as information-based policy tools helps to highlight the similarities and differences between different instruments and helps develop a relatively parsimonious taxonomy of their major types which can facilitate national and cross-national studies of their use and impact.

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[3] In the case of substantive policies the objective often pursued by a government is to correct a real or perceived *market failure*[iii] in which economic actors fail to autonomously deliver optimal or preferred social welfare outcomes (Stokey and Zeckhauser, 1978). In the case of procedural instruments the intent is often to correct a *governance failure,* in which network actors fail to deliver an optimal or desired policy formulation or implementation process and outcome (Wolf, 1979, 1987, 1988).

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