

## Successful Silences: A Practitioner's Toolkit

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*In this paper I present ten patterns of successful silence which professional communicators use in their daily work. A silence succeeds if, first, it is mutually recognised as communication and, second, it conveys meaning, which the listener principally interprets the way the speaker has implied. The focus here is on communicative silence, although non-communicative silence is also a common and legitimate technique. I remain as close as possible to the language of the practitioner, which is both functional and rich in proto-theories that wait to be developed. Patterns are tools, not rules. Rules are abstract and universal. Tools are concrete and situational. Patterns*

*depend on the context and objectives of a campaign —they do not work in every situation. One needs to know how to select and apply them. Coded in shortcut titles, some patterns are: know when to shut up; engagement is a means, not an end; no negative publicity first; everything you say is on the record; people follow leaders, not communication; and how to measure silence. This paper “breaks the silence” on behalf of communicators and for the sake of learners.*

**Keywords:** *strategic silence, engagement as means, choreography of public attention, off-the-record communication, measuring silence.*

Where shall the word be found, where will the word  
Resound? Not here, there is not enough silence...

T. S. Eliot, *Ash Wednesday*

### COMMUNICATIVE SILENCE

I would like to start with a rule of communication, which I derive from my decades-long experience as professional communicator. This is in what I mainly believe: *Even when you are right, you may fail if you do not know how to communicate strategically.* Many political activists and human rights advocates



with whom I have worked would argue that they do not need propaganda and spin because they are right. They say, “Truth is infectious”. To what I usually reply, “You are confusing influence with influenza” (Dimitrov, 2008). The good news, however, is that the access to strategic communication and skills has been democratised. It no longer depends on social privilege and inheritance. Everyone can learn how to communicate strategically—both by voice and silence—if they put the necessary effort.

Another widespread bias in professional communication—but especially among the civil society leaders and organisations—is that voice is good, and silence is bad. This is a normative approach, in which silence is taken out of its neutral theoretical dimensions and only recognised as one of its negative practical appearances—as “silencing”. Silencing is bad because it denies the empowerment of the voiceless. “Breaking silence” is good and democratic, because it fosters public scrutiny and emancipation (Dimitrov, 2015).

“Silencing”, however, is different from “silence”—in the way it will be used in this paper. Silencing is when the speaker uses various strategies—from power and coercion to shaming and inappropriateness—to silence the listener, the other. The speaker makes someone else silent. Silence is when the speaker chooses not to speak—applying, again various strategies—from deliberately and explicitly not speaking to make a point (Parkland survivor Emma González’ silence at the March of Our Lives, for example) (López, 2018) to presupposing and implying meanings, which are not uttered (Dimitrov, 2019). This is communicative silence—a way to convey meanings in a more indirect way, in which the listeners are not “silenced” but rather the opposite—challenged, encouraged to take the co-production of meaning in their hands. Of course, there is also the other silence—the non-communicative silence, which stalls, brakes or disallows exchange of information. Power relations are also in play here. “Silencing” is rather a case of this non-communicative silence.

This paper deals with the successful communicative silences of the professional communicators. Communicative silence is perhaps the most neglected—albeit a most efficient—aspect of effective communication. A silence succeeds if, first, it is mutually recognised as communication between speaker and listener and, second, it conveys a meaning, which the listener principally interprets the way the speaker has constructed it.

A note about the methodological foundations of this paper. Its format lies in the field of applied communication. It is as close as possible to the language of the communication practitioners. Although methodological and epistemological assumptions stay necessarily distant, in the background, they guide the discussions of the empirical cases taken from my twenty interviews with professional communicators on the role of strategic silence in their daily work. I argue that successful silence is neither good nor bad. There is no inherent ethical—or political, for that matter—quality in it. It could be both depending on the context of its uses. My definition is ontological, not normative.

Silence is an extreme form of indirect communication. In indirectness, silence mediates. Here I distinguish between mediation and mediatisation. My approach is semiotic rather than purely material. The media as physical resources (both as

materials and instruments) are part of the chain of production and distribution of discourses (Leeuwen and Kress, 2011). Mediatization is the materialisation of indirect communication. But here I am more interested in the semiotic aspect of indirectness, which involves strategies of sense making. I mostly borrow from the approaches of systemic functional (Halliday, 1973), critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992; Dijk, 1997; Wodak, 1996), pragmatics (Grice, 1975), speech act theory (Austin, 1975; Searle, 1989), and social semiotics (Hodge and Kress, 1988; Kress and Leeuwen, 2001). My objective, however, is to extract from empirical cases and interviews some piratical wisdom and come to some recommendations about successful silences. The method informs the practical recommendations, but the applications—not the approaches—stay in the centre of my interest.

Communicators work with silence daily (Clair, 1993; Davis, 2002; Dimitrov, 2015, 2018; Ephratt, 2008; Glenn, 2004; Glenn and Ratcliffe, 2011; Greenberg and Edwards, 2009; Jalbert, 1994; Jaworski, 1997; Johannesen, 1974; Kenny, 2011; Lentz, 1991; Tannen and Saviile-Troike, 1985). Being silent is not being idle. Telling and active silence is hard work. But to succeed practitioners are also silent about their silence. (Explained silence is no longer silence.) This makes the “unseen power”—as Scott Cutlip (1994) has put it—of indirect, silent communication complete

Today the 24/7 media cycle is saturated with noise. Making more noise—shouting louder than the others—does no longer guarantee that one will be heard. Curating noise—finding or creating alternative, quieter and slower spaces for conversation and reflection—is how communicators are animating their audience now (Kallio, 2012). They are shifting from amplified speaking to actionable listening (Back, 2007; Kanter, 2010; Macnamara, 2016). Control of the message is not wakening but getting more indirect.

In small sections, I present ten patterns of successful silence from the professional communicator’s toolkit. Patterns are tools, not rules. Rules are abstract and universal. Tools are concrete and situational. They may fit to the context and conditions or not. They are designed for specific tasks. Whether and how practitioners use each pattern depends on their plan—on your research, objectives and strategies.

For the structure of the text, I was inspired by a small book written by Ron and Suzy Scollon, *Responsive communication: Patterns for making sense* (Scollon and Scollon, 1986). Each chapter consists of three major parts:

- a statement of the pattern,
- its discussion with some examples from my empirical research, and
- final recommendation for its use.

## KNOW WHEN TO SHUT UP

“Only fifteen years ago”, says Matthew Gain, General Director for *Edelman*, Australia, “I used to have more discussions with clients about the importance of responding to things. About how you just cannot say nothing. And now it feels

like the opposite. Clients are so influenced by the social media that they want to comment on everything. But even responding to that it's fuelling speculation, it's rubbish. It's been a bit of a flip. Fifteen years ago, I was saying to clients, 'You need to go out and say something, you cannot just ignore this, it's not going away.' But now it's like, 'Whoa, it's going to become a bigger issue if you talk about that.'"

In the 24/7 media cycle managers and communicators are ceaselessly challenged and tempted to respond to all possible, including tangential issues, which, calmly considered, are not relevant to their agenda. If, for example, a relative of the CEO has committed a crime, why should we address it and unwittingly make a connection between that crime and our organisation? If a small newspaper tries to fan a scandal about a local issue, which is not relevant to the national media and audiences in the bigger cities, why should we make it more relevant by denying it where it is not raised?

In the career of a communicator —like in the lifecycle of a person— there is a first phase of learning how to speak. Many complete it after years of professional experience. But only few make it to the last phase of professionalism when one knows when to shut up —the highest valued and remunerated skill in the industry.

Recommendation: Know the difference between responsive and responsible communication. You are responsible for your publics and clients first. Messaging is not only writing-in but also writing-out, filtering of excessive noise. Take more time for reducing noise than for making noise.

## ENGAGEMENT IS A MEANS, NOT AN END

Engagement and disengagement are communication means for achieving ends, which often are beyond communication (Hockenson, 2013). Engagement and disengagement for what? They both are tools from the same kit. Both do work. And both do work together.

Strategy planning cannot be one-sided. He who targets is also targeted. Our strategies are also responses to someone else's strategies. Someone is trying to make use of us. How should we react? As a silent strategy, disengagement —non-committing, non-responding, not even opposing— may be a reasonable reaction when strategy meets strategy. How often do we say, or act like, "Don't call me, I'll call you"? Non-engagement (or disengagement) here is a device of not being distracted, halted, diverted —of staying the course.

Where to start? First, listen to your listeners. Who are they? Are they directly involved in your mission? How serious is their intent? If you are, for example, a pro-vaccination campaigner, you may engage with various groups, which are genuinely concerned about the health of children such as parents, teachers and health workers. But there are other influencers with different agendas. They may be, say, political or religious groups, for whom you are only another platform. Their primary concern may not be with the children's health but with unrelated doctrines or dogmas. Do not give them a forum. Because you also will become

the means for their ends. Even when they talk with you, they only talk to others and over you. And when the legislation about vaccination has already been passed, and the issue now is how to implement it, the time for debate is over—it is time not to go back but forward.

Recommendation: Before you set up your strategies, do your homework. Research the objectives and strategies of others towards you. You may then decide to interact with them for synergy (engagement) or skip them as obstacle (non-engagement). Engagement is endorsement. Do not engage with actors who seek your endorsement, because this will make them stronger, but will but not help you—or will stall you—in your venture. They will talk to you but not listen to you. Do you want a dialogue between one?

## CHOREOGRAPHY OF PUBLIC ATTENTION

Communications is media—and it is not. It is more than media. The media works entirely within the attention economy (Davenport and Beck, 2001). There it vies for the scarce resource of public attention. More attention generates higher circulation, higher rating, and higher traffic—it cashes out higher profit. Attention is the currency in the public spheres, which may be equivalent to money in the media markets (Franck, 2005; Kellner, 2003). And vice versa. Attracting and keeping attention—maximising its audiences—is what keeps the media afloat.

In contrast, communicators operate both inside and outside the media. They work the media to achieve changes outside the media (Dietrich, 2018; Summers and Morgan, 2008). Communicators are interested in media audiences as far as they overlap with their publics. But audiences and publics are not identical. Being an audience is just one of the faces—also the interface—of being a public (Karlberg, 1996; Leitch and Neilson, 2001; Pieczka, 2019). The goal of the practitioners is not that of the journalists; it is not to enlarge their audiences but to influence their publics. Publicity is an important but not the only way of influence.

Thus, professional communicators are rather choreographers of public attention. They not only attract and keep but also divert and deflect it. They use public attention to influence publics and serve clients in various markets and economies. As the pickpocket showman, Apollo Robins, explains it, visibility is only a tool. Attention is diversion. For example, he shows a “client” a coin. At the same time, he breaks eye contact by looking down. He pivots around the point of focus, stepping forward in an arc, in the private space of the person. He gets under his radar and close to all his pockets. “It’s all about the choreography of people’s attention. Attention is like water”, he says. “It flows. It’s liquid. You create channels to divert it, and you hope that it flows the right way [...] I was using the old technique called ‘Feel, Felt, Found’, where you empathise with the customer. Also the improved technique of never using a negative—agree and add on instead” (Green, 2013).

“Choreography of public attention” is not some dismissive or cynical association of communicators with criminals. Parents act upon it when they feed their baby; businesses direct it to promote their products and services; and politicians

perform it when they position themselves in crowded electoral markets. And, by the way, psychiatrists, neuroscientists, and the military study Apollo Robbins' methods for what they reveal about the nature of human attention (Berger, Sorensen, and Rasmussen, 2010; Hoffman, 2008).

Recommendation: Ask yourself: Am I giving the story oxygen? Is it going to snowball or to melt away on its own? What is the interest of the client? Of the public? Is publicity the answer? If yes, what do I have? To what extent are my target publics also media audiences? Is it significant? If not, how do I channel the attention of those audiences? Toward what? Around what? Away from what?

## NO NEGATIVE PUBLICITY FIRST

There is a school of thought, which claims that there is no bad publicity —any publicity is good (Berger *et al.*, 2010; Kruse, 2016). Vloggers and presidents, challengers and usurpers worship and practice it. Every publicity is good that increases your brand recognition and earns you free media. Outrageous stunts may polarise people and alienate some oldies, but it excites your fans and energises your hinterland. Popular or notorious, you generate news value. Love you or hate you, the media cannot stop publish you —for their own sake, not for your sake. Even when they hate you, they love to hate you because your brand earns their daily bread.

And there is another school. It warns that of course not all publicity is good publicity. If you are a celebrity or an entertainer, that may be alright. But if you are responsible not only for your ego and image but also for values, ideas and sectors of the society such as economy, health and family, you would better steer off negative publicity (Ahluwalia, Burnkrant, and Unnava, 2000; Coombs, 2014; Monga and John, 2008). Because it is not about you; it is about what you represent. Negative publicity would mean you do not represent it well —that you are not you. If you are a leader whose goals and mission are more important than the popularity of your persona, then you should be careful with basking under the spotlight. Because avoiding negative publicity is more important than creating positive one. Most communicators I know subscribe to this school.

Yet many leaders still tend to exaggerate the capacity of their organisations to influence positive media coverage. Lachlan Harris, Press Secretary of former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, told me:

In issue management and crisis communication, 99.9 percent of the time the best thing to do is to do nothing and say nothing and not react. And that's is because most things that organisations consider crisis are actually not crises. They are the normal, ongoing reality of being an organisation and being subject to accountability. But lots of times they get themselves into trouble when they are tangential players in a bigger story.

For example, when there is a rumour —a tentative, almost unrelated, slightly suggestive story that flies a kite— no response would honour it best.

Recommendation: Keep your organisation from overreacting. Do not think that proactive denial would be the strategic defence. Because it is likely that

any move against an improbable story is going to give it legs. The unnecessary attempt to kind of avoiding scrutiny will only provoke more negative content. Righteousness sounds shrill, wakes up suspicion. If you are right, dignified silence is the answer.

## PRODUCING NO-NEWS

The professional interest of journalists is to make news. The professional interest of communicators is to produce both news and no-news. News draws public attention; no-news —boredom— repels it. Both news and no-news produce the powerful magnetic fields for the levitation and flow of public attention. News is impossible without no-news —and vice versa. No-news takes not less work than news.

News is one-off. There is no repeating news. There is an active and subtle way of producing no-news. I will call it “anticipating silence”. Speakers discuss openly and in detail what could happen in the future, including all worst-case scenarios. This tactic seems counter-intuitive. It looks like the opposite of the refusal to speculate about “hypotheticals”. But it is not. For example, a festivity in a city is planned, where some main streets will be closed for the traffic. There are invested publics, which look forward to enjoying the event. And there are non-invested publics, for which impeded traffic would be a nuisance if they would, say, drive to work or the airport. They would feel ambushed by the city authority. Thus, for all —but especially for the non-invested— there must be information that anticipates everything that may go wrong in the execution of the plan. We should assume this and that so that no one is caught off guard. More information that includes worst case scenarios also lowers the expectations. In the end, whatever happens will be better than what may have happened.

Scott Crebbin, a communications and events specialist, told me:

You're going to do all consultation, you're going to have your call centre, you're going to have your website updated, you're going to advertise if you need to. If the media chooses not to talk about it —after all, a scenario is only a script of a fictitious story— you pretty much nullify 70-80 percent of it by telling them in advance, and they can refer back to, “Yeah, I knew it was going to be like this”, as opposed to, “What the f..., what's going on?” Nine times out of ten it completely changes the event. It's strategy that really works well.

Recommendation: Producing no-news is as necessary and legitimate as creating news. The former is not the negation of the latter. They work together. Because the attention of publics is scarce (4), no-news muffles the noise that prevents other news from being heard. In doing that, you have a range of choices —from the passive rejection to take position on an event that may not happen to the active advertising of all possible scenarios, including the worst ones.



## EVERYTHING YOU SAY IS ON THE RECORD

Off-the-record communication is not the opposite of on-the-record communication. It is still communication on purpose. Its goal is not preventing information from publishing. Communicating both on the record and off the record aims at getting an information out under certain —although different— conditions. What sets both apart are the ends, not the means. As Michelle Schofield, Manager Corporate Communications of Communities NWS, summed it up: “Golden rule is everything you say is on the record”.

Either way, the journalist, not the source, has the ultimate control of what to publish and how. The source, however, also retains some control. The difference is between tactic and strategy. On the record, the communicator has more direct control over the message because their own voice —through direct or indirect references— has a place next to voice of the journalist. Communicating off the record, the speaker has less control over the message but perhaps more control through the message. For example, if a reporter is selected by a minister for an off-the-record briefing —which is different from a leak—, his privileged position of knowing what the politician thinks will prompt him to find a way of telling it. As a difficult rhyme may lead to an original idea, journalists would find ingenious ways to tell what they know but should not say. They would do it not directly as reporting of secret facts but indirectly as a prism through which they would separate an obscure matter into a spectrum of established facts. In other words, what cannot be directly said as content indirectly becomes a pattern of interpretation. As Chuck Todd, the NBC political director and chief White House correspondent has it, “The facts are off the record, but not the sentiment” (Byers, 2013). Political and professional interests trump any vow of silence and cabal of sorts.

Recommendation: If you do not want it out, do not say it —neither off the record nor on the record. Once the bottle opened, one cannot put the genie back in. But take time (and pains) to privately explain to the reporter why it is in the interest of your client that you cannot speak (now). That is par for the course. Professionals understand and accept that.

## HOW TO BRIEF OFF THE RECORD

Off-the-record briefings are a form of indirect communication. Sources release the control over the message —deleting their name and even the circumstances of the meeting— to “allow” the briefed journalists to spread it as independent, more credible information. As such, they are strategic and risky. There are rules, however, which can help minimise that risk.

But why taking chances at all? Why do people communicate off the record? To establish personal trust between source and reporter? Yes. But this is not the only, not even the main reason. More important is that a selected reporter is professional and authoritative enough to adequately reproduce how the views of the briefing person regardless of whether he agrees with them or not. The news should be about what has been said —not about whether it is right. As Keiko



Tanaka (1994: 42) puts it, the reported “does not have to be true to be appropriate”. Another reason is that off-the-record briefings let more room for honest and less guarded exchanges. They are discursive communities —not cliques of confidants.

How to communicate off the record? The first rule is a literal one: no tape. Meetings should be materially irreproducible. Second, no partisans or informers. The invited influencer should not harbour special interest in the topic. An analyst or columnist, for example, should not be a shareholder of the business in question. Nor should he be an adversary of a political organisation on which sensitive information is shared. Off-the record communication is neither inside trading nor dog whistling. Third, keep the number of participants to a minimum. More people can corroborate, constitute a material fact —as a tape does. Alex Jones, Pulitzer Price reporter says,

Who ever heard of an off-the-record press conference? There [is] too much interest to stay off the record.

And Tom Rosenstiel, the executive director of the *American Press Institute*, adds:

There is a gravitational law... The more people who are in the room, the less valuable the briefing will be (Shister, 2013).

**Recommendation:** Plan carefully off-the-record briefings. Set specific and clear rules to the invited, and secure full understanding and agreement. Talk to independent and established reporters, who would not succumb to temptations for the sake of their first big scoop. Meet not with those who agree with you but who can also tell you something new and important off the record. Select them rigorously. Go for the lowest number.

## PEOPLE FOLLOW LEADERS, NOT COMMUNICATION

Communicating is ideal work. It is also not self-sufficient; it is truly cooperative. Communication materialises in the work of others. For the media, the practitioner is an attributed source. The leader —the CEO, politician or any other representative— is an accredited source. What is the difference? Attribution here means that the responsibility of the communication worker is delegated and limited. In contrast, the accredited sources are fully accountable. A formal mechanism has empowered and authorised them. Tradition legitimises the power of the king, votes the power of the politician, capital the power of the businessmen and knowledge the power of the intellectual (public servants are also intellectuals). The accredited source delegates limited responsibility to the attributed one.

The problem is, people in power often overdo it. In many organisations, the “Do me it” culture is rampant. It may innocently start with, “Knock it into shape for me, will you?” But it may end with bitter hints or sharp accusations of the incapability of the communication worker, department or director. Because com-

municators are invisible when they succeed. They only become visible when they fail.

The practitioners should not be visible; they should not obscure the visibility of those who are responsible. Communicators are not leaders. The leaders are communicators. One can easily detect communication rookies who love to be seen near their bosses in front of the camera. And some leaders are conspicuous by their absence, which sometimes is not due to some intricate silence but, indeed, to their failure to communicate. As practitioner, resist as much as you can leaders discharging their communication duties to you. As the Communication Strategy Manager of *Sydney Water*, Paul Matthews, says, “People won’t follow communication; they will follow a leader. People won’t buy into an empty message, email or campaign. Unless it’s got some person carrying a torch”.

Recommendation: As communicator, you are not there to speak for the leader. Communication is a leadership function. You are there to mediate and advise and coach and mentor those who represent the others. Strive to strengthen the communicative power of the leaders —as if they would not need a communications team. The more unseen you become, the more you will be sought after.

## THE CREDIBILITY TO SAY NO

There is a point in the career of a professional communicator when you are paid for the credibility of saying one thing: No. You have moved to near perfection, you have become top influencer when you can tell political leaders, directors or CEOs, “Do not do anything, do nothing”, and they listen to you and say, “Well, I accept your advice. I won’t act”. You need a load of credibility to convince others that doing nothing is sometimes the best reaction, which involves hard work, exact science and fine art.

The Founder and President of *Professional Public Relations Asia-Pacific*, Peter Lazar, told me the following story. One day, the CEO of KFC called him and asked for help. In a few country towns, for no explainable reason, there was a whisper that the chicken served by KFC was actually... rabbit. The CEO was worrying and angry. The rumour was ridiculous. He wanted to deny it. He wanted to get to the media and say,

This is nonsense. It is urban myth for the following reasons...

It took Lazar three days to persuade the CEO to say nothing. He argued that openly denying the rumour will give it more oxygen.

It was totally illogical. Then, rabbits were very hard to find. They all had been killed by myxomatosis. Rabbit was more expensive than chicken. Maybe only one percent of the people have heard the whisper. It was just that sort of gossip you could not avoid passing on. People were concerned. They were sending the bones from their KFC meal for government analysis... Three days later everything stopped. I remember thinking a few days later how to bill the CEO for telling him to do nothing... for three days.

Recommendation: Research well the dynamics of gossip and insinuation. Do they have a base? Are they waxing to a critical mass or waning under their own weight? Automatic prevention —addressing a whisper as soon as possible and no matter what— is reactive and short-sighted. An early and emphatic denial may be the thing that an urban myth needs to survive.

## CONCLUSIONS: HOW TO MEASURE AND APPLY SILENCE?

There is no chronometer for measuring silence. It is impossible to directly gouge and quantify silence. As a semantic construction, silence is non-linear, polyphonic and contextual. This is another reason why some practitioners prefer not to talk to their clients and bosses about such elusive means. They are accountable to them, and measurement appears to be the most objective and persuasive justification of their work. In a positivist mindset, real is what you can observe, show and measure. Politically, if you cannot measure it, you'd rather not mention it. Michelle Schofield, Manager Corporate Communication of *Communities NSW*, shared with me her frustration:

They were telling me, “You must be able to measure everything”. And I'd say, “Okay, you tell me how to measure me keeping a story from page on of the [Australian] *Financial Review* to down the back of the paper and to page twenty-two and two paragraphs? That's invaluable”. And you know what? None of them could tell me [...] because you were trying to place a value on an intangible thing.

What can be done? First, one cannot measure silence directly, but one can observe and describe its semantic functions. This is important in formative research —when one critically analyses the strategies of others— not forgetting their own. Deconstructing silence would here mean articulating it —making it visible (hearable) and understandable (explainable). And it may help in the next phase of strategic planning, when one designs strategies, which take indirect roots. For this, useful are the functional approaches to discourse analysis such as functional linguistics, pragmatics, speech act theory, conversational analysis and social semiotics (for many Clegg, Courpasson, and Phillips, 2006; Fairclough, 2001, 2003; Gee, 2011; Hardy, Palmer, and Phillips, 2000; Kress, 1993; Kress and Leeuwen, 2001; Leitch and Motion, 2010; Mickey, 2003; Schiffrin, 1994; Leeuwen, 2005; Wodak, 2009). They give eyes to read texts differently —in context and between the lines. They can help discover hidden agendas and make the best use of the semantic resources accumulated in the local or foreign culture.

Second, one cannot measure and evaluate single silences —as one cannot measure and evaluate isolated tactics. Silences realise in strategies, where they dovetail with non-silences. Silent and non-silent tactics function as dialectic entities. They give each other existence, meaning and strength. Hence, the question how to measure silence is partly wrong. It makes sense only when we observe how silences in combination with other tools work together —as unique strategies that aim to achieve concrete objectives. The whole makes

sense of the parts. If the sum of the parts does not produce synergy, it probably does not produce anything. Understanding strategy is key to understanding silence.

And third, one cannot gauge silence directly, but one can do it indirectly by measuring its effects. Such are changes in the media and in the publics. For example, one can use social media analytics and measure changes in repeating topics, issue priorities and public sentiment.

Recommendation: Learn to analyse and apply the semantic functions of silence. Use them critically—to detect and articulate the practices of strategic silence—in the phase of formative research. And use them creatively—combine explicit and implicit silences with other tools—in the phases of strategy design and implementation. Measurement makes more sense at the level of strategy rather than tactics. You cannot gauge silence directly, but you can do it indirectly by measuring and evaluating its effects.

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