

Public Relations Techniques for Leaders in a Crisis:  
Mackenzie King and John Curtin in the Canadian-Australian  
War Alliance, 1941-1945 <sup>1</sup>

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***Abstract:***

During their Pacific war alliance, the Canadian and Australian prime ministers initiated public relations techniques that secured journalists' support, providing insights for developing positive media relations in the contemporary global financial crisis. As popular leaders, Canada's Mackenzie King and Australia's John Curtin used their backgrounds in news management and journalism to set precedents in government-media interactions. Yet there has been a lack of publications on their success as public relations strategists to persuade journalists and citizens to endorse their leadership in this alliance. King and Curtin advanced the use of relatively new media to convey symbolic messages that they were trustworthy leaders, sharing similar values and challenges as working-class audiences. Their expansion of the prime minister's traditional use of the press, radio, and newsreel films created more opportunities for citizens to engage with political leaders and the government. By initiating more two-way discussions with journalists, they generated mainly favourable news coverage about their alliance. This paper investigates their use of interactive news interviews, practiced rhetoric, rehearsed gestures, expressions, and other media techniques to communicate with more citizens, based on the concepts of the public sphere and democratic governance developed by Habermas and Castells. Their techniques aided the development of more contemporary public relations practices in Canada and Australia. These tactics are relevant for today's leaders when interacting with public audiences in diverse media to develop a shared understanding of common goals to resolve the global financial crisis.

**Keywords:** Canada-Australia Relations; Crisis Communication; Government-Media Relations; John Curtin; Media History; Political Communication; Public Relations Techniques; Public Sphere; William Lyon Mackenzie King; World War II

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**Résumé:**

Lors de l'alliance de la guerre du Pacifique, les premiers ministres canadien et australien ont initié des techniques de relations publiques qui leur ont sécurisé le support des journalistes. Cet exemple offre un aperçu pour développer des relations positives avec les médias lors d'une crise financière globale contemporaine. À titre de leaders populaires, le canadien Mackenzie King et l'australien John Curtin ont employé leur expérience en gestion des nouvelles et journalisme pour créer des précédents dans les interactions entre les médias et le gouvernement. Cependant, il y a un manque de publication sur leurs succès à titre de stratèges de relations publiques pour persuader les journalistes et citoyens d'endosser leur leadership dans l'alliance. King et Curtin ont avancé l'utilisation d'un média relativement nouveau pour transmettre des messages symboliques à l'effet des leaders dignes de confiance partageant des valeurs similaires et challenges tel les audiences ouvrières. Leur expansion de l'utilisation traditionnelle des premiers ministres, de la presse, de la radio et des films d'actualité, a généré davantage d'opportunités pour les citoyens de s'engager avec les leaders politiques et le gouvernement. En initiant plus de discussions à double sens avec les journalistes, ils ont généré une couverture médiatique positive sur leur alliance. Cet article examine leur utilisation d'interviews interactives, rhétorique pratiquée, de répétition de la gestuelle, expressions, et autres techniques médiatiques pour communiquer avec plus de citoyens, basées sur les concepts de la sphère publique et gouvernance démocratique développés par Habermas et Castells. Leurs techniques aident au développement de plus de pratiques contemporaines de relations publiques au Canada et en Australie. Ces tactiques sont justificatives pour les leaders d'aujourd'hui lorsqu'ils interagissent avec leurs audiences publiques dans divers médias pour développer une connaissance partagée des buts communs afin de résoudre la crise financière internationale.

**Mots-clés:** Communication en crise; Communication politique; Deuxième Guerre Mondiale; Histoire des médias; John Curtin; Relations Canada-Australie; Relations gouvernement-médias; Sphère publique; Techniques de relations publiques; William Lyon Mackenzie King

## **Introduction**

When Australian Prime Minister John Curtin arrived at Ottawa's Union Station late at night in spring 1944, he declared to news broadcasters that his nation would "stand side by side" with Canada to "represent free people" fighting for a "victory" against "aggressors". He added: "Never again will evil rear its head in the world" (ScreenSound Australia, 1944b). Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King greeted Curtin and his wife, Elsie, in front of reporters, photographers and film crews. Earlier, King noted that he "admired his [Curtin's] straightforward, direct manner" (The diaries . . ., 1944, May 3). Both leaders faced the challenge of persuading their nations' citizens of the need to fight in the prolonged Pacific war to help achieve a victory in World War II (hereafter the war). To maintain their popular support, they initiated more two-way discussions with journalists and expanded the use of the relatively new media by giving more direct radio and filmed newsreel talks. Through their public relations techniques, they were able to create media images of themselves as trustworthy leaders with direct, personal relationships with working-class voters, contributing to their record election victories. Their strategies are relevant for contemporary democratic leaders when using the media to persuade journalists and public audiences to support their policies in the current global financial crises (e.g., Bourrie, 2010; Coatney, 2011).

This paper explores Jürgen Habermas' concept of the public sphere and Manuel Castells' analysis of power to gain a deeper insight into how these two wartime leaders shaped mainly positive news media coverage about themselves that influenced public attitudes. Habermas identified the public sphere as the realm of civil society that is concerned with politics and open discourse between individuals that allow for the rational formation of public opinion. This concept also supports a two-way symmetrical model of communication that facilitates understanding among people (Habermas, 1989; 2006; Leeper, 1996; Roper, 2005). According to Castells (2007; 2008), communication and information are fundamental sources of power. Politics can be staged for the media to create symbolic messages of trust about a leader so as to obtain citizens' support. Moreover, leaders benefit by using new media to generate greater communications with stakeholders (Duhé, 2007). By expanding the prime minister's direct communications to more journalists and media audiences, Curtin and King were able to persuade their publics to support their war aims and thus maintain power. Their techniques included a theatrical approach to their broadcast and filmed appearances as they developed rhetoric, gestures, facial expressions, and camera shots to convey the media image that each was a forceful leader and a democratic "man of the people". They carefully stage-managed their news interviews to appear as authentic, spontaneous exchanges of information with reporters and public audiences (e.g., British Pathé, 1941-1945; Coatney, 2011). By expanding the prime minister's customary use of the media, they informed more "anonymous audiences" (Habermas, 2006: 411) about wartime decisions, providing more opportunities for citizens to engage in open discussions about politics and the governance of their nations.

Through their public relations techniques, King and Curtin promoted the partnership of more than one million Canadians and Newfoundlanders, along with almost one million Australians who served in the war. As well as about 1,975 Canadian soldiers who had sailed from Vancouver in October 1941 to defend Hong Kong, some 8,000 Canadians served in South

East Asia during the war. They provided vital assistance to the United States and Australian troops defending the Pacific region against Axis attacks. Although radio broadcasts and war movies pervaded 1940s societies, the electronic news media were still developing rapidly during this era. In Canada and Australia, King and Curtin early recognized the shift in the traditional mode of political speeches from town halls to the radio by 1935. Australia's public broadcaster first employed a federal political correspondent in 1939 and the Canadian Broadcasting Commission (CBC) News Service officially opened in 1941. Previously, the two nations' leaders had used newsreels sporadically since about 1929; however, King and Curtin developed these as important communications tools in wartime, a forerunner to televised political news. The media contained the visual, audio and press elements that allowed them to communicate adeptly with mass audiences (Coatney, 2011).

Using their professional experience in journalism and public relations, King and Curtin advanced new global radio talks to communicate with citizens more directly and explain the need for the two nations' "unity" in "times of crisis" (e.g., Curtin, 1944b; ScreenSound Australia, 1944b). King had broadcast his government's declaration of war against Japan's military government, giving this "the great care that every word demanded", before the official U.S. and British announcements (The diaries . . ., 1941, December 8). Similarly, Curtin (1941a) used radio to assert Australia's first independent declaration of war, when announcing the new Pacific battles. They began delivering international broadcasts to each other's country, "couched in the specific language of media" (Castells, 2007: 241), to appeal to more working-class listeners and encourage them to discuss such contentious issues as the question of expanding military conscription. Moving away from the traditional one-way "push" communications, they transformed prime ministerial news conferences by initiating more two-way discussions with journalists and citizens to expand the role of political journalism as a "centerpiece of deliberative politics" (Habermas, 2006: 423) involving citizens. Since then, their techniques have influenced successive prime ministers to use the news media more frequently to inform journalists and engage in more egalitarian conversations with citizens (e.g., Coatney, 2011; Strangio, Hart & Walter, forthcoming 2013). These techniques are still useful for business and political leaders when managing the news in a crisis.

In the following section, a literature review shows that there are gaps in the current understanding of how these two leaders won media and citizen support for their alliance and war aims. Also this paper outlines its multi-method approach to assess the success of their media strategies. Next, an analysis of their use of the media is conducted to identify the relevance for political communications and government-media relations today. The conclusion is made that King and Curtin have shown how contemporary leaders can work with new media, as well as use old media, in innovative ways to generate support from journalists and citizens.

## **Literature Review**

Very few scholars have focused on these two prime ministers' media dealings and relationships with journalists (e.g., Bourrie, 2010; Coatney, 2011). Furthermore, the Pacific war has been a neglected research area of Canada's history (e.g., Price, 2011; Williams, 2008). Yet other media and political authors have demonstrated the usefulness of comparing Canada and Australia because such studies are valuable for extending knowledge of governance (e.g., Chantrill, 1999; Mickler, 2010; Ward, 1999). Both countries were middle-ranking powers in wartime with a federal parliamentary democracy, an English political heritage, and a strong tradition of press

freedom as their governments developed closer ties to the United States. It is useful to glean an understanding of how King and Curtin developed media methods that have allowed for more openness between a political leader and citizens.

Yet, more scholars have been interested in the two prime ministers' press interactions than their use of radio and film to communicate with public audiences (e.g., Coatney, 2011; Day, 2000). While previous Canadian and Australian prime ministers had held formal press interviews, King and Curtin were known for conducting more one-to-one talks with political journalists (e.g., Bourrie, 2010; Coatney, 2011). Several researchers have discussed the innovative aspects of Curtin's twice-daily news conferences as he shared confidential war information with journalists (e.g., Coatney, 2011; Lloyd, 1988; Lloyd & Hall, 1997). George Kerr (1982) and John Hilvert (1984) have shown that both prime ministers were successful in persuading many reporters to accept wartime censorship and withhold news voluntarily that might have endangered citizens' lives and jeopardized national security. Relatively few authors have commented on the two prime ministers' early use of radio by 1935 (e.g., Black, 1995; Canadian Communications Foundation, 2005; Ward, 1999). A cross-national comparative analysis of the media strategies of King and Curtin would help to identify their communication successes in restoring public confidence during a shared crisis.

Biographies and public relations scholars have discussed that the two leaders used their professional backgrounds in news management to develop positive media relations that furthered their political careers (e.g., Black, 1995; Day, 2000; Ferns, 1955). Before he became Canada's longest serving prime minister, leading the Liberal Party, Mackenzie King had been a journalist and labour relations specialist. As an early advocate of public relations as two-way communication, King assisted in developing recognition for organisations' need to be sensitive to public opinion and engage in direct communications with different interest groups (Hallahan, 2003). Before becoming the Australian Labor Party (ALP) Prime Minister on October 7, 1941, Curtin was the editor of labour-oriented newspapers, *The Westralian Worker* and *The Timber Worker*, for about 13 years. Also he was a state district president of the journalists' union, the Australian Journalism Association. To promote positive press interactions as soon as he became Australia's leader, Curtin hired the first full-time prime ministerial press secretary, Don Rodgers, until his untimely death from a heart condition on July 5, 1945, shortly before the resolution of the Pacific war (Rodgers, 1971). Perhaps he was influenced by Franklin Delano Roosevelt's decision to employ the first presidential press secretary, Stephen T. Early, in 1933. Curtin's press secretary, Rodgers, helped to develop positive media relations that contributed to the ALP winning its greatest election victory at the time in 1943 (e.g., Coatney, 2011; Rodgers, 1971). Although the literature indicates the success of King and Curtin as media communicators, there is not a comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness and impact of their news management techniques.

## **Methodology**

This study utilizes a multi-method approach to identify these wartime leaders' positive media interactions and use of relatively new technology to engage global public audiences. First, a new examination is made of the appeal and accessibility of a selected sample of their significant radio speeches (Curtin, 1941a; 1942; 1943b; 1944a; King, 1939; 1942; 1943). King and Curtin assiduously prepared for their broadcasts to appeal to their voters and publicise their countries' war efforts (Curtin, 1941b; Mr. Curtin's quotation, 1941, December 9; The diaries . . . , 1943,

August 21). To help evaluate whether they achieved their aims, this paper uses readability statistics and measures their speaking rate when analysing their radio rhetoric. These measurements include the Flesch Reading Ease score and the Flesch Kincaid score. The recommended Flesch-Kincaid score for most public documents is about eight, close to the reading level of “middle-brow” newspapers and suitable for an eighth-grade student (e.g., Day, 2008; Lim, 2003). Rudolph Flesch first developed his readability formula as a doctoral dissertation in 1943 (Sirico, 2008). Certainly, King and Curtin were aware of the need to communicate clearly to reach mass audiences (Coatney, 2011). Ideally, an accessible public document should have a Flesch Reading Ease score that is between 60 and 70, with a lower number indicating more complicated language. Expert recommendations have varied on the optimal pace of public speech, with different scholars recommending between 100 and 125 words a minute (e.g., Lim, 2003; Nichols & Stevens, 1957). To discover the impact of the two prime ministers’ media messages, this study will ascertain whether journalists reproduced their statements favourably in the news. This analysis is based on the Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism (2008) formula that a news article is deemed “positive” if two-thirds of the statements appear to support a leader (Public Broadcasting Service, 2009, June 24). These formulas assist to measure the success of Curtin and King as radio communicators.

To understand how both prime ministers projected media images about their leadership, this paper uses a dramaturgy approach to explore the more theatrical aspects of their political tactics to create symbolic messages of trust. This study undertakes a rare examination of filmed rehearsals and unissued newsreels, as well as screened appearances. The practice sessions indicate the importance that Curtin placed on delivering forceful rhetoric and strong hand gestures (ScreenSound Australia, 1944a). Other unused material conveys King’s friendly interactions with news interviewers, photographers and film crews (British Pathé, 1941-1945). From this sample of screened newsreels, an analysis will be made of the camera angles, shots and signs, or meaning, based on Arthur Asa Berger’s (1982) semiotic film conventions. This analysis will show how the two leaders collaborated with filmmakers to portray the semblance of a close relationship between them and moviegoers.

Other historical news archives reveal how King and Curtin transformed the traditional prime ministerial media conferences by initiating more two-way discussions with reporters (Alexander, 1971; *The diaries . . .*, 1941-1945). While the measurement of public opinion was still new in the wartime era, this paper examines the relatively few, available polls to gain an insight into whether their media communications contributed to their popularity as leaders (e.g., Levine & Morgan, 2006; Mackenzie King’s popularity . . ., 1941, December 31; Mr. Curtin’s job . . ., 1942, August 14; Pammett & Dornan, 2011). By applying these methods to identify the value of their techniques, this paper aims to contribute towards the continued development of successful public relations strategies for leaders dealing with contemporary crises.

## **Findings and Discussion**

Both leaders used inclusive language of unity and appealed to shared values in their radio broadcasts, accomplishing the political task of delivering mass messages in the specific language of the media (Castells, 2007). Although speechwriters assisted them, they made personal amendments that portrayed their war aims as linked to a historic, global fight to stir citizens to accelerate industrial production (Mr. Curtin’s quotation, 1941, December 9; *The diaries . . .*, 1943, August 21). At the beginning of the European war, King (1939) addressed “my fellow

Canadians” and declared “we must ourselves be strong, secure and united”. Attempting to persuade voters to support a strengthened military role, he represented the war as a battle for “civilisation”, emphasising the ideals of “freedom”, “democracy”, “liberty”, and “independence”. His speech was “the largest broadcast” made from Canada at the time and reached listeners “worldwide” (The diaries . . . , 1939, September 3). Likewise, when Curtin made Australia’s first declaration of war as he announced the Pacific battles, he appealed to a sense of national identity, greeting his listeners by saying: “Men and women of Australia”. Along with his references to the country, he repeated the keywords of democracy, freedom, and liberty that he had used in his earlier newsreel speeches (Cinesound Productions, 1941). It was clear that he was talking to “the people”—rather than to politicians or the monarchy—and frequently used “we”, “us”, and “our” that supported his inclusive approach (Curtin, 1941a). This strategy also resembled the approach taken by Roosevelt in his radio “fireside chats”, which always began with some variant of a greeting to “My Friends” (Lim, 2003). When Curtin spoke for more than 40 minutes without notes to the Canadian Parliament, he made “a plea for the average citizen, for the shopkeeper, for the mother of forty years of age”, possibly aware of media microphones (Curtin 1944b; The diaries . . . , 1944, June 1). Through their radio techniques, the two leaders evoked a shared understanding of common ideals and used an egalitarian tone to convey that they symbolized values of trust.

Furthermore, King and Curtin expanded the prime minister’s use of the radio to broadcast targeted messages that created the sense of a friendship between them and international audiences. Curtin (1942) made the first Australian prime minister’s direct broadcast to North American listeners, when he urged them to support his country’s defence as Japanese forces bombed its northern areas. To demonstrate the relevance of his country’s plight, he affirmed, “I give you this warning: Australia is the last bastion between the West Coast of America and the Japanese. If Australia goes, the Americas are wide open”. Emphasizing the bilateral alliance, he said to listeners, “[y]ou have, no doubt, met quite a lot of Australian pilots in Canada”. He was referring to more than 37,000 Australian airmen who had received advanced instruction in Canada. A *Time* magazine writer affirmed his talk “should have roused the fight in the entire U.S. public” (Last bastion, 1942, March 23: 27). The speech was broadcast by more than 700 radio stations in the US, as well as transmitted throughout Canada, South America, and Europe (Broadcast to Americas, 1942, March 16; Dr. Evatt’s mission . . . , 1942, March 16; Pledge to U.S.A., 1942, March 16). The next month, King confided he felt “tremendous sympathy” for Curtin’s priority of helping to win the Pacific war (The diaries . . . , 1942, April 8). After the Pearl Harbor attacks, he noted that if Axis Japan defeated Australia, there was “only an ocean between us and them” and “our plans had now to be made for a world war instead of a European war” (Ibid). Delivering another international broadcast from Ottawa, he said “he was glad to have the opportunity to speak to Australia” and paid tribute to Curtin as he talked to that country’s listeners (Many happy returns, 1942, October 12: 3). Both leaders emphasized their nations’ shared experiences and struggles to elicit citizen support for their alliance.

While King and Curtin used radio rhetoric to convey that their leadership efforts were the “symbolic embodiment” (Castells, 2007: 242) of ideals of democracy, freedom, and liberty, they branded their political adversaries as endangering the nation (Curtin, 1943b; King, 1942). King described the anti-conscriptionists as those who “refuse to face the facts”; they were “harmful” to the nation because they fostered “a false sense of security”. He encouraged radio listeners to discuss the conscription question in the forthcoming plebiscite, praising the conversations about this “over the radio, in the press and in public meetings”. In his broadcast, he mocked his

opponents' queries, "why should the Japanese attempt to come and install themselves in California, in Oregon or in British Columbia?" He added he was not "exaggerating the danger to our country". He also seemed to enjoy private conversations with working-class citizens about his media communications. After his conscription broadcast, he wrote in his diary that "a mechanic from Hull [in Quebec] 'rang up' to discuss the speech". King noted: "He seemed to feel that if I could speak more as I had that night it would be possible to stop the distribution of bills to vote No [against conscription]. I was quite impressed with his earnestness" (The diaries . . ., 1942, April 24). Similarly, Curtin (1943a) used forceful oratory to ostracize the politicians who attacked his policy to extend military conscription for Australians. In a parliamentary speech, he criticised the "mischief-makers outside" the government and the "abusers" whose "quarrelling" would not hinder "those who have the responsibility of conducting war". Yet both leaders took care to make impersonal references to Japan in their radio talks, consistent with US policies to persuade more Japanese people to withdraw their support from their country's government. By expanding their radio communications, both prime ministers created more opportunities for citizens to discuss politics and governance in the public sphere while marginalizing their critics as deviating from their nations' ideals (Curtin, 1941a; 1942; 1943b; 1944a; King, 1939; 1942; 1943).

Due to their backgrounds in journalism and news management, they chose words that were clear and accessible to their listeners. On the whole, Curtin (1941a; 1942; 1943b; 1944a) aimed for his talks to be understood by a tenth-grade audience. King (1939; 1942; 1943) mainly targeted an eleventh-grade level. Although the prescribed standard was for a public document to be suitable for an eighth-grade level, they still aimed their major radio broadcasts to a predominantly secondary school level. In 1941, the statutory school leaving age was 14 years old in Australia and 16 years old in much of English-speaking Canada (e.g., Kelley & Evans, 1996; Lemieux & Card, 2001). Curtin's radio speeches were 54.375 and the selected King broadcasts registered at 55.4. These were fairly similar to Roosevelt's "fireside chats" that were an average of 57.5 (Lim, 2003). Altogether, their broadcasts were slightly more complicated than the ideal score of 60 to 70; however, these were not beyond their listeners' comprehension.

Also they spoke slightly more quickly than the recommended levels of 100 to 125 words a minute, perhaps because they were emphasising the urgent need to defeat the Axis powers (Curtin, 1941a; 1942; 1943b; King, 1939; 1942; 1943). While King (1942) explained to listeners, "I have always tried to measure my words, to speak with moderation and only after careful reflection", the selected broadcasts showed he spoke at an average 131.775 words a minute. The relatively new technology might have affected his speech rate. King commented that once at the radio studio:

A noise started in part of the broadcast, which was like a motor, and I nearly turned once or twice to have the noise stop . . . I pulled myself together, and by exercising all the control possible, got through, but not with the inflection or ease that I should like to have had in speaking.

(The diaries . . ., 1943, August 21)

Since Curtin had developed a reputation as a "street corner speaker", when he was a very fast communicator, he slowed down deliberately when announcing the Pacific wars (e.g., Curtin, 1941a; Street corner speaker, 1941, October 4). Even so, he spoke an average 139.46 words a minute in the selected broadcasts. Roosevelt's average pace was between 105 and 117 words per



minute in his fireside chats (e.g., Bradenburg & Braden, 1958; Lim, 2003). While they did not achieve the ideal rhetorical levels, they kept refining their scripts to appeal to working-class listeners.

Just as they carefully prepared for their radio talks, the prime ministers gave well-rehearsed performances for their newsreels to project the image that they were both strong leaders and aligned with working-class moviegoers. Eye-level, close-up newsreel shots conveyed the sense of a personal relationship between them and movie audiences (e.g., British Pathé, 1941-1945; ScreenSound Australia, 1944a; 1944b). In an Ottawa newsreel, Curtin greeted King warmly, speaking to reporters about the previous “successful prime ministers’ conference” in London, as well as the Australian airmen training in Canada for “a common cause” (ScreenSound Australia, 1944b). King privately wrote of his rehearsal with American film operators, where he acted as if he were speaking to a crowd (his advisers were the “stand-ins”), with “a battery of lights, reels, instruments etc. in a semi-circle beyond them” (The diaries . . . , 1940, January 17). He spent more than two hours to be filmed in another newsreel about Canada’s war loans (The diaries . . . , 1939, December 20). Similarly, filmed rehearsals showed Curtin emphasising messages about Australia’s strong international alliances. After the director’s clapperboard and call for “action” in “take three” of a practice film session, he pointed his finger, moved his head from side to side, looking like he might be addressing an unseen audience, and said: “We know that our destinies will go forward hand-in-hand and we are proud and confident in that association”. The camera zoomed in closer during “take four” as he embellished his statement to add, “we will stand or fall together” and “we are proud *and happy* in that association” (*emphasis added*). As in his other newsreels, he did not refer to notes. Other practice scenes revealed him acting as if he were holding a media conference, leaning forward as he was seated at a table, with his hands in front of him to signify his direct, straightforward manner (ScreenSound Australia, 1944a). Their newsreels were well-received by Allied moviegoers around the world (Coatney, 2011).

The two prime ministers used contrasting methods to evoke the image that each one was “a man of the people” (A great Australian, 1944, June 1; Movietone, 1945). Newsreels often showed King smiling as he paused to wave and greet journalists, answer their questions, and allow photographers to take his picture when he entered the parliament. Differing from some other politicians of the era, he frequently did not mask his face with a hat when he was filmed and this contributed to his image of being honest and approachable (British Pathé, 1941-1945). Giving an interview to British Pathé News at his summer estate in Kingsmere, for example, he walked across his garden in a light-coloured suit with his pet dog, Pat. Upbeat “light music” was played in the background as he beckoned Pat to follow him and then sat in a chair. Close-up, eye-level shots focused on him as he talked to the journalists, looking at them from side to side, and spoke of Canada’s economic growth and “rightful place in world commerce” (Pathé Sound News, 1939). King cultivated a popular, homespun image of himself with his pet Irish terrier dog. When Pat died, the *Ottawa Journal* political correspondent, Richard Jackson, visited King’s home to ask for an old photograph of the dog when in good health. As a result, the *Ottawa Journal* published a picture of a younger, cheerful King, dressed in tweed plus fours, with Pat (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1978, March 27). Symbolism, music and popular forms of relatively new media conveyed an egalitarian relationship between him and Canadians.

In contrast, film images frequently showed Curtin in more conventional attire including a stiff, white collar, plain tie, dark waistcoat, matching jacket and, at times, a heavy overcoat. His style was noted by a *Sunday Sun* journalist, who wrote light-heartedly that Curtin would not be

concerned about wartime clothes rationing because he had “never been a fancy dresser” (Clothes would not worry Curtin, 1942, June 14). As his press secretary, Don Rodgers (1971), observed later, he “deliberately had his suits cut very conservatively” to evoke “a very serious appearance”. Through a voice-over in an international newsreel, the audience was informed he was setting out for his “daily walk to work to show how to be healthy and petrol-wise” (Movietone News, 1941). A *Daily Telegraph* journalist commented that his four-year-old black kelpie dog, Kip, would forego the “imposing” and “costly” prime ministerial kennel to remain at his family house (Curtin’s dog . . . , 1941, October 7). Another newsreel showed him opening his front door and walking past his garden to his white picket fence; this was “just a home like so many others in the towns and cities of Australia”, the unnamed narrator said (ScreenSound Australia, 1945). Australian servicemen gave a standing ovation when they watched this film scene at an outdoor theatre (Day, 2000). To evoke symbolic messages of trust, King and Curtin used camera techniques, rehearsed rhetoric, and practiced gestures that conveyed they were honest, open, and represented national ideals.

Likewise, both prime ministers worked hard to stage-manage their news interviews to appear as if these were spontaneous exchanges of views. King noted that Curtin “seemed to attach great importance” to his Ottawa media conference as he “came with material prepared for distribution” and “welcomed questions” from reporters in the Canadian House of Commons (The diaries . . . , 1944, June 1). Yet a *Time* magazine journalist did not notice Curtin’s preparations, instead reporting that he delivered an “impromptu account” of Australia’s wartime contributions for about an hour. He appeared casual and relaxed as “he settled himself into an easy chair” and joked to the correspondents that they could: “Now put on your wig and gown and put me into the witness box”. Also he attempted to establish a friendly atmosphere by saying “the press and parliament are the two great institutions that have a trusteeship in the service of men” (Department of External Affairs, 1944). The *Time* correspondent added that he “answered directly and enjoyed the session” (Canada at war, 1944, June 12: 16). While King lacked a full-time media advisor, he carefully planned for positive meetings with journalists because, as he opined in his diary, “[t]he only thing of value is the press reports” (The diaries . . . , 1939, April 27). Yet journalists also portrayed him as deftly responding to impromptu discussions in news interviews. At a London media conference, for example, he “unhesitatingly answered questions from the gathering of 200 pressmen”. A *Worker* journalist reported he seemed to be “pouncing on one questioner”, who suggested he was not making independent decisions, and “replied vigorously, ‘I am no rubber stamp, here or in Canada’” (Menzies . . . , 1941, September 2: 3). Although the prime ministers benefited from censorship, they expanded the role of political journalism as a site of deliberative politics for informing citizens (Habermas, 2006).

By initiating more two-way discussions with journalists, King and Curtin generated mainly favourable media coverage about their alliance (e.g., Bourrie, 2010; Coatney, 2011). When King spoke about the Pacific war, he received positive news coverage in Australia (e.g., in *The Age*, *The Canberra Times*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, and *The West Australian* between 1941-1945). After Hong Kong surrendered to Japan, for example, Australian correspondents prominently reproduced his statement that “[i]t may well be that the gallant Canadian, Australian” and other defenders will be remembered as the “world’s vanguard of freedom” (Hong Kong fall announced, 1944, December 27: 1; Hong Kong’s valiant defence, 1944, December 27: 3; Value of the defence, 1944, December 27: 3). Likewise, Australian and New York journalists welcomed his statement that “there is no doubt . . . that the Canadian Government and people would welcome a chance to be of direct assistance to Australia” (Canada

promises aid . . . , 1942, January 27: 14; Canadian division . . . , 1942, January 28: 1). After Curtin's Ottawa media conference, the Australian High Commissioner to Canada, Sir William Glasgow, wrote that he had made "a very favourable impression on Canadian newspaper men, many of whom have expressed the opinion that it was one of the most useful conferences ever held in the Ottawa [Press] Gallery" (Department of External Affairs, 1944). During the bilateral alliance, King and Curtin invited journalist teams from each other's country to visit them, thus generating positive press articles and photographs (Canada welcomes the Curtins, 1944, May 31; Curtin urges unity . . . , 1944, June 2; A great Australian, 1944, June 1; Mr. Curtin addresses . . . , 1944, June 5; Mr. Curtin in Canada, 1944, June 5). During Curtin's first news briefings back in Australia, he said to journalists "off the record" that Canada was "desperately short of coal"; they agreed to represent a strong alliance in the news. For the record, Curtin said he "greatly admired what Mackenzie King had done for Canada" (Cox, 1944, July 3). Reporters also remarked on the prime ministers' unusual decisions to travel without bodyguards, contributing to their media image as unaffected "men of the people" (No guards . . . , 1942, October 9; Reid, 1945, July 5). Their innovative public relations techniques included interactive interviews, cultivation of close press relationships, and background briefings that elicited journalists' trust.

Public opinion polls, election results, and journalists' reminiscences suggest their public relations techniques enhanced their stature as democratic leaders. Three weeks after Canada's declaration of war against Japan, about two out of three voters indicated they approved King's leadership in the first poll taken of the nation's prime minister outside of an election (Mackenzie King's popularity . . . , 1941, December 31). A year after Curtin became the prime minister, eight out of ten Australians said they were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with his role (Mr. Curtin's job . . . , 1942, August 14). He won 66.9 percent of the votes in his electorate of Fremantle, Western Australia, during the Labor Party's 1943 record landslide election. King's re-election in 1945 testified to his abilities as he retained substantial support throughout the nation (Bélanger, 2007). Although the majority of Canadians and Australians supported an escalated fighting effort, the prime ministers responded to strong anti-conscriptionist sentiments by introducing a limited form of forced military service. Their popularity remained high as their nations' journalists were reporting on the large numbers of Canadians and Australians held as prisoners of war in the Pacific. Many wartime Australian correspondents recalled Curtin as the nation's "greatest" prime minister and King was well-respected by the Ottawa Press Gallery (e.g., Bourrie, 2010; Coatney, 2011; The diaries . . . , 1944, December 16).

During their lifetimes, King and Curtin transformed the traditional prime ministerial use of the media to expand public discussion of their policies and persuade citizens to endorse their leadership. At the Pacific war's conclusion, Colonel Lawrence Moore Cosgrave represented Canada and General Sir Thomas Blamey signed for Australia on the deck of the *USS Missouri* in Tokyo Bay on September 2, 1945, witnessed by 238 war correspondents and photographers. By this time, Curtin had died; however, King announced each signatory at a dinner party he had organised during the surrender, which took place on Saturday evening in Ottawa (The diaries . . . , 1945, September 1). He and Curtin had worked hard for such media images to show that Canada and Australia had earned a significant place in the global post-war negotiations. Since then, more political leaders have used some of their initiatives, including two-way discussions with journalists and an expansion of the election media, to communicate with nations' citizens (e.g., Coatney, 2011; Strangio, Hart & Walter, forthcoming 2013).

## Conclusion

Through their advancement of new media during their alliance, King and Curtin provided ideas on how to communicate successfully to mass audiences and engage their support during a time of crisis. They spoke directly to their target audiences to establish the sense of a close relationship, appealing to a shared political heritage of freedom, democracy, and liberty, and emphasising the urgency of working together to overcome challenges. As they referred to the common bonds between Australians and Canadians in their global radio broadcasts, they made an impersonal characterisation of “the enemy” that contributed to the inclusive tone of their talks. Yet they also branded their political opponents as deviating from the national ideals they represented. Their rhetoric, the largely favourable news coverage of their radio reports, and opinion polls indicated they achieved their aims to reach working-class audiences. In private, the two prime ministers rehearsed their speeches and gestures to cultivate authentic media images that they were both forceful leaders and closely aligned with their voters’ aspirations. Close-up, eye-level camera shots conveyed their symbolic representation of trust and the appearance of a personal connection between them and moviegoers. Since then, there has been a continuous history of national leaders’ use of the electronic media in Canada and Australia. By expanding their communications to these groups, King and Curtin empowered more citizens in the public sphere to voice their opinions on ideas about governance and their future.

Both prime ministers treated journalists as professional colleagues and their informal news interviews were more informative than previous prime ministers’ conferences. In this way, they made an innovative use of the traditional media methods of sharing information. Although they benefited from wartime censorship, they won journalists’ support for their leadership by engaging reporters in two-way discussions about governance that helped to develop their friendly press relationships. While their successors’ use of news conferences did not develop evenly, more political leaders were willing to conduct question-and-answer interviews with journalists. King and Curtin facilitated the development of political journalism as a forum of deliberative politics that informed citizens and involved them in more open discourse. As a result of their mainly positive press interactions, they generated largely favourable news coverage about their Pacific war alliance.

The current transformation of the news media creates valuable opportunities for political and business leaders to communicate their resolve to overcome the global financial crisis and appeal to core values that will create a public consensus about their policies. Although journalism formats are continually changing, it is vital to include news reporters in discussions and decisions about governance that affect citizens’ lives. It is timely to recall the insights revealed by King and Curtin that it is worthwhile for leaders to use diverse media to communicate simply and directly to public audiences and conduct regular, interactive interviews with journalists. As these two wartime prime ministers demonstrated, such multimedia strategies can encourage citizens’ participation in public discussions and foster support for a leader’s crisis-management policies.

## Notes

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