

Book Review

Maltby, Sarah, *Military Media Management*, Routledge: New York, 2012; 132 pp. ISBN 978-0-415-58005-2

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Since the end of the Vietnam War, national militaries of democratic countries have recognized the importance of public relations. They have subsequently developed effective systems of managing their relations with the global media. Sarah Maltby offers a fascinating and insightful case study on the British military's process of media management. As a former officer with the U.S. Army, I believe she has a comprehensive understanding of how military culture influences media management. Furthermore, she frequently references the military's own doctrine and policies. Thus, she is able to accurately compare what the military actually does with what the law says it must do.

Maltby employs the concept of impression management as developed by Erving Goffman, which is rooted in symbolic interaction theory. Impression management is an appropriate theoretical framework for this type of study, since the military is trying to manage the public's perception. Her application of this theory is sound. For instance, she discusses how embedding journalists into military units is a form of bounded impression management. This example provides the reader with acute insight into why this risky practice is so crucial for military impression management.

This book also provides an astute analysis of how the military employs linguistic, visual and narrative control moves to manage impressions. The book emphasizes the development definitions for battlefield events and operational procedures as a control move: U.S. and British military public affairs officers embrace the ethos that you must define yourself, or someone else will define you. Maltby correctly states that the military meticulously crafts definitions of events that are tied into the strategic narrative and subsequent operational themes. She uses a supporting example of how British soldiers used the Answer, Bridge, and Communicate (ABC) technique to define events and link them to strategic themes.

Furthermore, Maltby shrewdly describes how the military attempts to manage its impression with civilian political masters. However, those political masters are also using the military as a tool to manage the public's impression of them. These civilian officials may dictate what impression management techniques the military must use. In the U.S., senior generals are politically vetted and appointed by Congress. They are keenly aware of the need to negotiate the interests of the presidential administration with the needs of their service. They may receive instructions from the civilian administration, but pass them down to subordinates as operating instruction or guidance. This can often mask the political administration's role in impression management. And while Maltby acknowledges this reality, she does not explore it in this book.

The only major critique is that the book could have explored the role of the adversary in the impression management process. Maltby does discuss how the military uses the news media as a channel to reach adversarial audiences. However, these adversaries also use the same news media to communicate with the military, political officials and the public. Al-Qaeda may undertake a high visibility attack for the specific purpose of provoking a certain response from the U.S. or British military. For instance, employing human shields leads to collateral damage that causes the military to lose face and apologize for the incident. These activities can force the military to change or alter its impression management strategy.

However, Maltby provides thoroughly enjoyable and keen insights into how and why military public affairs operate. I gained new insight into why I was required to perform certain activities that, at the time, I believed were a nuisance. However, it seems at times that Maltby is too reliant upon impression management and symbolic interaction theory to explain military media management. Other theoretical perspectives like social exchange or coordinated management of meaning theory may also provide tools to understand this phenomena.

Military Media Management would be a great selection for public relations and mass media scholars exploring how national militaries manage media relations. It is an appropriate text for graduate school courses exploring this subject. Additionally, it also provides an excellent case study of how to apply symbolic interaction theory and Erving Goffman's impression management to an organizational process.