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# Generating forms of media capital inside and outside a field: the strange case of David Cameron in the UK political field

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## Public figures, media and symbolic power

As societies become more ‘mediated’ so the elevation of public figures is increasingly linked to their ability to generate a positive public profile through the mass media. Politicians, artists, film stars, authors and others each gain professional status, in part, based on how consumer-citizens actively respond to media representations of themselves. The linking of media to individual celebrity and symbolic power is now implicit in much writing. Individuals succeed because of their personal charisma (Weber, 1948) and an innate ability to present a media personality that directly engages with large publics (Ankersmit, 1997; Horton and Wohl, 1993; Pels, 2003; Street, 2003). Alternatively, one’s symbolic image is primarily manufactured by promotional professionals (Boorstin, 1962; Evans, 2005; Franklin, 2004; Hall Jamieson, 1996; Lilleker and Lees Marshment, 2006) and parts of the media industry itself (Evans and Hesmondhalgh, 2005; Turner, 2004). However one’s public image develops, media exposure then bestows a ‘primary definer’ status on those placed in positions of power thus drawing additional media coverage (Bennett, 1990; Champagne, 2005; Hall et al., 1978, Herman and Chomsky, 2002).

From this varied literature, we learn about how leading public figures have ‘para-social relationships’ with their publics (Horton and Wohl, 1993), are successfully marketed as commodities or are presented as ‘primary definers’.

Something less explored is the issue of how actors come to be initially selected within a professional field and how such media-oriented considerations influence that selection process.

Such concerns suggest that public figures succeed because they manage to gain recognition and support from a mix of audiences: insider peer, intermediary media and external public. In some sectors, such as avant-garde art or a big-budget film it is not necessary for all such audiences to be in accord. In others, individual status within an occupation, is enhanced by a combination of one's perceived professional attributes and, also, by one's ability to generate large-scale aggregate responses from a public (for more on this see Moran, 1999; Wright, 2007). A large proportion of each of the three audience types (professional, intermediary and public) must accept the representation of an individual, even if the evaluative criteria vary accordingly. For each of the audiences involved, to a greater or lesser extent, media representation is a key part of the evaluation of individuals. Media exposure, in effect, is a means of generating symbolic recognition inside a profession, among intermediaries and outside it. The ability to gain media representation, in both quantity and quality, via a range of media and audiences, becomes essential. How is this achieved and can we conceptualize and empirically investigate the question more systematically?

In order to engage with these questions this article draws on the work of Pierre Bourdieu to develop the concept of 'media capital' and explores its application in the political field. Bourdieu's analytical tools have proved to be extremely useful for observing individuals, their accumulation and deployment of economic and cultural resources, and their movements within 'fields' and wider society. However, despite a keen interest in media and politics (1998, 2005), Bourdieu never did focused research on the political or media fields and did not himself use the term 'media capital'. Thus, the following section briefly introduces and adapts his research tools rather than attempting a fuller engagement with his work.<sup>1</sup>

### **Bourdieu's conceptual tools**

In Bourdieu's sociology the key conceptual tools are 'habitus', 'field' and 'forms of capital'. Individuals develop, and are guided by, their 'habitus' from early childhood onwards. This is mainly determined by their social environment (family, friends, education). For much of their adult existence such environments consist of occupational 'fields', such as art, literature, law or the social sciences. Sociologically, the 'field' is defined as 'a separate social universe having its own laws of functioning independently', but also a 'war of everyone against everyone, that is, universal competition' (Bourdieu, 1993: 162–3). Individuals enter into a field and move through the positions offered by that field and according to its specific, established 'laws' (norms, values, hierarchies). In order to enter into a

particular field an actor must first possess a certain habitus and the appropriate mix and accumulation of 'forms of capital' (Bourdieu, 1986). While operating there they continue to accumulate, exchange and lose field-specific forms of capital as they move up and down the field's hierarchies.

For Bourdieu, the two most significant forms of capital for individuals to accumulate and utilize are 'economic' and 'cultural'. Economic capital is self-explanatory. Cultural capital, in its 'objectified' (cultural goods) and 'institutionalized' (qualifications) states is transferable. Cultural capital, in its 'embodied state', cannot be bought or sold, but accumulates through a mix of formal education and social or professional experience. Other forms of capital, regarded as less significant by Bourdieu, are 'social' and 'symbolic'. 'Social capital' is 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu, 1986: 286). The term 'symbolic capital' is used more ambiguously across Bourdieu's work. In some cases it is presented as something that simply relays existing symbolic power as an aggregate reflection of other capital forms possessed by powerful institutions and actors (meta-capital). But, elsewhere in his writing, it becomes something to be accumulated as a capital form in its own right by individuals, among their peers, within a field, as well as beyond it, among citizens (Bourdieu, 1991, 1998).

Fields and their participants link socially and communicatively to the wider public through several mechanisms. Bourdieu's position is that all fields themselves operate within the larger 'field of power' (wider society) and that fields vary in the degree of socio-cultural autonomy they have from this. Accordingly, he describes the social architecture of a field as, in part, revolving around an axis of two poles: the heteronomous and the autonomous. The heteronomous pole is where the field, with its participants and outputs, is most outward-looking and connected to the wider social world. The more autonomous pole is least outward-looking and closer to the purer social and cultural elements of the field itself. It is down to a range of 'cultural intermediaries' (Bourdieu, 1984) to link fields and larger society via mass media and other communicative apparatus. These aspects of Bourdieu's work remain relatively under-theorized (see Couldry, 2003, and Hesmondhalgh, 2006, on this point).

How is this discussion transposed onto the contemporary 'political field' and how does the mass media act as the communicative conduit between field and society? For Bourdieu, the 'political field' refers to that of formal, institutional politics, parties and professional politicians (Bourdieu, 1991, 2005). It operates like any other field: 'with certain (electoral) procedures, etc., is an autonomous world, a microcosm set within the social macrocosm' (Bourdieu, 2005: 32). Like all fields, the political field is one of continuous personal and party struggle over position (social, ideological, political). Struggle is also between: political purists, equivalent to the intellectual avant

garde, located at the more 'autonomous pole' of the field, and those seeking broader public appeal, the more 'heteronomous pole', a '*realpolitik*' at any cost (Bourdieu, 1991: 189–90, 2005: 30–34). Individual politicians make use of their capital forms in order to win such struggles and progress within political hierarchies. The victors get to present their interests and ideas to the wider citizenry outside the field and citizens, in turn, pass judgement on politicians. Thus, politicians must be able to acquire symbolic capital among several audiences in order to succeed. As Bourdieu puts it: 'Political capital is a form of symbolic capital, credit founded on *credence* or belief or *recognition* or, more precisely, on the innumerable operations of credit by which agents confer on a person' (1991: 192).

News media and reporters are the significant media and intermediaries linking the political field and wider citizenry. The accrual of news 'media capital' thus becomes a necessary step in the accumulation of the symbolic and social capital necessary to acquire further political capital in politics. That said, identifying what media capital is is complicated by the multiple roles occupied by news producers. For many media scholars, news media symbolically represent politics to the public. At the same time reporters very much operate socially as part of the fields they report on (Barnett and Gaber, 2001; Cook, 1998; Davis, 2007; Herbst, 1998). They have long-term posts in political institutions spending more time there than in their news organizations. For others still, journalists are most guided by the norms and practices of the professional field of journalism itself (Benson, 1998; Benson and Neveu, 2005; Bourdieu, 1998, 2005; Champagne, 2005; Couldry, 2003). Thus, journalists are cultural intermediaries who move between professional fields, newsrooms and publics. This suggests that there is not one but several forms, or components, of media capital which individuals can seek to accumulate in relation to their varied audiences (peers, intermediaries, public). These operate within a political field and external to it, and on both a personal and institutional basis.

### **Forms of media capital and their accumulation in the political field**

The concept of 'media capital' is now ready to be broken down into its distinctive forms or components. One important means of distinction is between that generated within a political field and that outside it, among the citizenry. Media capital, produced and wielded outside the field, which is linked to the wider citizenry, is a means of acquiring symbolic power, and linked to the symbolic meta-capital of the state. As Couldry (2003) advances, it might simply be referred to as '*media meta-capital*'. That generated within the political field, linked to politicians and journalist intermediaries, contributes to the total symbolic (or political) capital within the field. It might be classed as '*internal media capital*'. Politicians, accordingly, behave differently, and are judged differently, in relation to their immediate internal, intermediary

or external audiences. How political insiders then judge, and thus bestow symbolic capital on, other politicians, varies considerably from how a wider public judge, and thus bestow it. Such a conclusion is also to be deduced from several non-field oriented studies of politics, culture and communication (Alberoni, 2006; Ankersmit, 1997; Corner, 2003; Davis, 2007).

A second obvious means of distinguishing forms of media capital is between that linked to institutionalized position and that linked to individual personality. Bourdieu (1991) himself identified two symbolic forms of capital in the political field. These he called 'personal' and 'delegated'. Delegated, like Weber's (1948) 'legal-rational' form of authority, is linked to recognized official positions. This '*institutionalized media capital*' is associated with the position of an individual within a political party or state institution, to be reproduced through media to the wider social world. The alternative, 'personal' or 'charismatic' (Weber, 1948) form is '*individualized media capital*'. Individuals may build up personalized forms of media capital with all sorts of performances or associations in media and over time. Thus, several studies (Alberoni, 2006; Boorstin, 1962; West and Orman, 2003), describe the public communication of an individual politician's 'natural', 'innate', 'heroic' or 'charismatic' qualities. For others (Pels, 2003; Stanyer and Wring, 2004; Street, 2003) politicians must project a 'persona' that combines the familiar and unfamiliar, the ordinary and extraordinary, both impressing an external audience and developing a 'para-social relationships' with it.

How are these forms of media capital accrued? At a simple, quantifiable level such capital is accumulated through media exposure, in terms of number of appearances and the size of the media outlet's circulation. Clearly, the audience, whether internal field, intermediary or general public, is also significant, as specific audiences bestow symbolic capital. Lastly, the more qualitative, discursive framework implicit in media texts is a more complex contributory factor.

According to these definitions, externally generated, 'institutionalized media meta-capital' is the most straightforward in terms of its accumulation. There is often a natural hierarchy of political positions that may be correlated with a parallel accumulation of media capital. Thus, as work on media-source relations tends to confirm (Bennett, 1990; Hall et al., 1978; Herman and Chomsky, 2002), political elites automatically come to be the dominant news sources and agenda setters for news. Externally generated, 'individualized media meta-capital' is more elusive; the holy grail that political organizations increasingly look for when selecting leaders and spokespersons. The personal performances and journalist presentation of actors through media becomes important in terms of conveying the right mix of personal qualities that engages citizens. Although, once selected, the increasing employment of professional promotional intermediaries (Boorstin, 1962; Hall Jamieson, 1996; Lilleker and Lees Marshment, 2006; Wernick, 1991), suggests that the political personality presented to the public may, to a degree, be manufactured, focus-group tested and managed.

Two means of internal media capital accumulation with journalists are through an accrual of '*journalist-based social capital*' and '*media cultural capital*'. Since politicians and correspondents have intense and regular exchanges, politicians build up their social capital with journalists as they gather contacts and foster good relationships with them during their career. Media cultural capital is based on an accumulation of knowledge about how news production works and journalists operate. This comes with political experience, specialist media skills training and, increasingly, from prior professional experience as a journalist or public relations specialist. These means of influencing one's own media exposure to the external social world are gained quite independent of an individual's institutional position or telegenic qualities and, therefore, are a way of challenging such determinants.

The other obvious means of accumulating symbolic capital through the media is through public '*mediated performance capital*'. Performances can contribute to the accumulation of each of the four forms of media capital identified and potentially sets up a dynamic exchange between forms generated within and external to a political field. This is because political performances are directed towards multiple audiences and, accordingly, are judged (or decoded) in alternative ways by those audiences. This mediated evaluation of others' performance takes place in a number of settings which can be linked to the more 'autonomous' (internal media capital) and 'heteronomous' (external media meta-capital) poles of a political field. Starting with the most autonomous, the first form of mediated judgement comes in personal exchanges between politicians and journalists, or performances observed by journalists in more private settings (exclusive meetings, briefings, lunches). The second is during recorded (print, broadcast, web) performances in public forums (debating chambers, public meeting spaces, conferences) established within the political field. Journalists and politicians frequently observe such performances, or review them again, if present, through media texts. A third form of evaluation comes as politicians and journalists, along with the general public, observe and evaluate others only through media outputs. This may be in elite-oriented, 'highbrow' media with particular symbolic significance to a political field (the *Today Programme* or *Question Time* in the UK). Moving towards the 'heteronomous' end come political performances in more accessible, daily mainstream news bulletins, followed by wider, cultural products such as satires, comedy programmes and chat shows.

Although these differing forms of media capital are distinctive, there is also a complex interplay and exchange at work between them. The ability to generate one form influences the accumulation of another. In terms of institutionalized and individualized forms of media capital, the perceptions of an individual over time, may shift according to changes in the public standing of the organizations and institutions they represent. The reverse is also true. The same is also apparent in terms of internal media capital and external media-meta capital. Politicians do not just generate media meta-capital outside the political field. A large part of the process involves generating media capital inside it and that, in turn, helps people to move into institutionally recognized positions that automatically bring media

coverage (media meta-capital) outside it. Similarly, the ability of an individual to generate media meta-capital, from outside the political field, may influence how others within the political field evaluate them personally.

### **Applying the analytical framework: the strange case of David Cameron and the UK political field**

The theoretical discussion is now further illustrated by a UK-based case study detailing David Cameron's rise to the head of the Conservative Party in 2005. The case presented focuses on the UK political field and its associated political and reporting structures. However, the analytical framework and applied research methods are potentially applicable to cases of political progression in many other 'mediated' democracies. Such issues are increasingly prominent across a range of political and media systems (see Corner and Pels, 2003; Lilleker and Lees Marshment, 2006; Stanyer and Wring, 2004).

The question posed here is: how did Cameron, a young, relatively obscure politician, with little internal, symbolic/political capital or external, media meta-capital, come from obscurity to lead his party? For many observers, Cameron was simply an instant news creation born of the over-enthusiastic reporting of a single conference speech. The sizeable bestowal of external media meta-capital that resulted catapulted him ahead of his rivals. However, as argued here, Cameron's success was based on his long-term accumulation of alternative forms of media and political capital. This accumulation continued apace during the extended party electoral period. Cameron's conference speech then confirmed what many insiders already suspected: that he was the candidate most capable of accumulating media capital in all its forms and among all key audiences. Members of Parliament (MPs), party members and journalists responded accordingly.

The arguments presented here are based on the findings of two research methods. One was a content analysis of four national daily newspapers and their equivalent Sunday titles: the *Daily/Sunday Telegraph*, the *Times/Sunday Times*, the *Daily Mail/Mail on Sunday* and the *Sun/News of the World*. These papers were selected on the basis that they were the ones most commonly read by Conservative MPs, party members and voters. The quantitative content analysis, which went from 6 May to 21 October 2005, looked at 813 pieces. The other method drew on responses gathered from 39 semi-structured interviews with elected politicians (24) and political reporters (15). Each was asked about their recollection of events during the leadership contest and why they thought David Cameron had triumphed.

### **David Cameron as instant media creation**

Following the party's general election, the then leader of the Conservative Party, Michael Howard, announced his resignation on 6 May 2005. The

party's leadership election was delayed while the existing electoral rules were debated. Over the summer, David Davis, the shadow Home Secretary, was the clear favourite to succeed out of more than 15 potential candidates. At the end of September five put themselves forward as the official election began in the week before the party's annual conference in Blackpool: David Davis, Ken Clarke, Liam Fox, David Cameron and Malcolm Rifkind. Rifkind then dropped out. According to the party's electoral rules, to win the contest candidates first had to gain the support of MPs, whose two ballots would decide who the two final candidates would be. Party members would then cast the final vote. Accordingly, gaining internal media capital, among the party's 198 MPs, and external media meta-capital, among its 240,000 members (PM), would have been essential. There were two further, non-voting audiences that could influence the outcome: political lobby reporters<sup>2</sup> and general voters (GV). The support of this last group would be necessary in any future general election fought against Tony Blair's Labour Party, and was a background consideration during the contest.

Looking at Table 1, summarizing poll data of the time, it becomes clear that the main audiences differed considerably in their levels of support for the candidates. For most of the period, only David Davis had clear MP support although he never gained strong general voter support and his party member support fell away dramatically after the conference. In contrast, Ken Clarke became a clear leader with those general voters and party members outside the political field, but he lacked strong support from fellow MPs inside it and went out at the first ballot. David Cameron struggled to make an impact on any of the audiences until the week of the conference, but then leaped ahead of his rivals for all audiences almost simultaneously.

This dramatic transition makes little sense when looking at the more overt indicators of support in terms of political and media meta-capital. Cameron was relatively little known to MPs, having only been elected in 2001, and then appointed to his first shadow cabinet position in May 2005. He also evidently lacked in external media meta-capital, in terms of having the least media exposure (number of articles mentioned in), and drawing little public recognition. Table 2 shows the media mentions of the lead candidates in the eight selected news titles for the three years prior to the election period. Cameron's coverage was less than a quarter of that of Ken Clarke and less than a ninth of that of David Davis. Ken Clarke was the most politically experienced and publicly recognized of the candidates having previously been a minister (1979–87) and cabinet minister (1987–97). Subsequently, as a prominent backbench MP, his institutional media capital had dropped. Liam Fox, as a senior shadow cabinet member and co-party chairman (1999–2005), came second in the three-year period with 1057 mentions. David Davis, who had been a Conservative government minister (1994–7), Chair of the party (2001–3) and then shadow Home Secretary (2003–5), was a clear leader in terms of recently accrued political capital and institutional position. As would be expected he was also ahead of each of his rivals in media meta-capital

**TABLE 1**  
**Polls of candidate support 29 May to 21 October 2005, from General Voters (GV), Party Members (PM), and Conservative Members of Parliament (MP)**

Date and poll	D. Cameron %			D. Davis %			Ken Clarke %		
	GV	PM	MPs	GV	PM	MPs	GV	PM	MPs
29.5 Telg/YouGov			15			35			10
27.7 Times/Populus	4			12			29		
4.9 S Times/YouGov			9			28			8
6.9 Times/Populus	2			10			41		
6.9 Times/Populus		3			16			55	
7.9 MORI	2			6			32		
9.9 Newsnight/ICM	4			10			40		
10.9 Telg/YouGov		17			27			33	
11.9 S Times/YouGov	6			16			42		
30.9 YouGov		16			30			30	
7–9.10 S Times	18			16			25		
9.10 YouGov		39			14			26	
10.10 Decl MPs			17			35			11
11.10 Times/Populus		45			15			22	
13.10 Decl MPs			16			33			12
17.10 D Mail/ Const Chairs		51			21			22	
17.10 D Mail/ Decl MPs			17			34			12
18.10 1st Ballot MPs (198)			(56) 28			(62) 31			(38) 19
19.10 YouGov		59			15			–	
20.10 2nd Ballot MPs (198)			(90) 45			(57) 29			–
21.10 MORI	33			13			–		
6.12 Members Ballot		68			32			–	

**TABLE 2**  
**Media exposure, in eight news titles, of candidates three years prior to the campaign period (6 May 2002 to 5 May 2005)**

	D. Cameron	D. Davis	K. Clarke
<b>6.5.02–5.11.02</b>	17	327	170
<b>6.11.02–5.5.03</b>	14	181	215
<b>6.5.03–5.11.03</b>	21	213	183
<b>6.11.03–5.5.04</b>	26	343	91
<b>6.5.04–5.11.04</b>	49	290	56
<b>6.11.04–5.5.05</b>	64	444	90
<b>Total</b>	<b>191</b>	<b>1798</b>	<b>805</b>

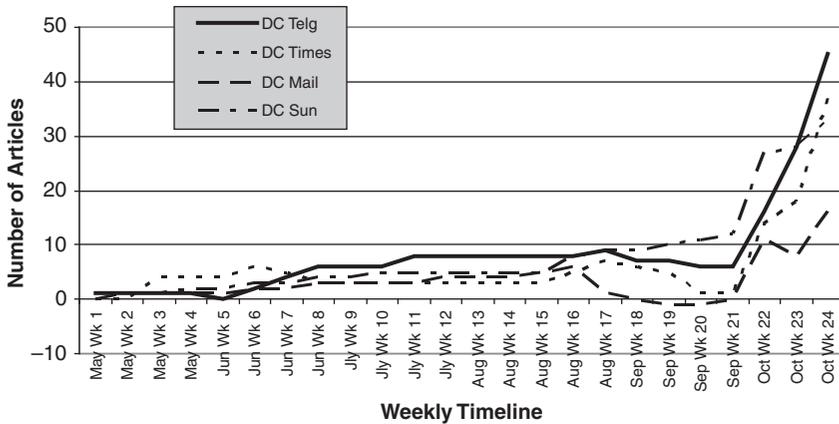
terms. Many journalists at the time accordingly concluded that he was the most likely winner. In May and June, before the contest officially opened, some 52 articles commented on Davis's favourite status.

As the official contest began in late September, it seemed that Cameron's campaign would not come close to overcoming his political and media capital deficits. Cameron's support with MPs was still low. His long-term media meta-capital deficit was reflected in weak external recognition with only 3 percent of party members supporting his candidacy. His age, wealthy public school background and identification as one of the 'Notting Hill set' (a term used in some 77 articles), all counted against him being considered as a serious candidate capable of attracting wider electoral support. Most of those interviewed concurred. According to Ben Brogan, political editor of the *Daily Mail*: 'There seemed to be a collective decision that David Davis was going to be a shoo in for the Conservative Party. They all said it was too early for David Cameron.'

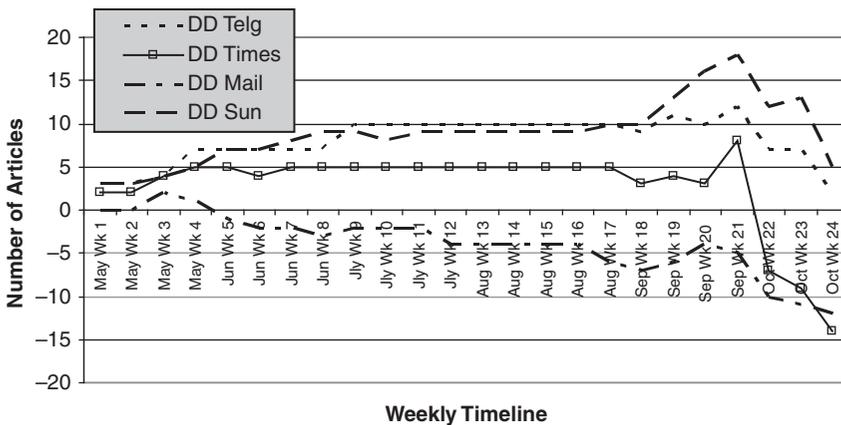
However, everything changed dramatically during the few days of the conference where all five candidates were due to give speeches. After a well-received speech by Cameron on 4 October, and a poorly received one by David Davis the next day, Cameron was suddenly catapulted out of obscurity to become the front-runner. Television reporters focused on these performances and enthusiastically backed Cameron while criticizing Davis. As Figures 1 and 2 show, press coverage did the same. The Figures show the cumulative positive or negative coverage (linked to individualized media meta-capital) for each of the four daily papers in question.<sup>3</sup> In the first week of October, Cameron has a sharp rise and Davis an equally sharp fall as all four papers simultaneously passed strong judgements on the two candidates.

Subsequently, all four audiences (journalists, MPs, party members and general voters) came into alignment in terms of Cameron gaining the largest support. By the time of the second ballot, on 20 October, Cameron had gained

**FIGURE 1**  
**Cumulative coverage, negative or positive, for David Cameron in *The Times*, *Telegraph*, *Mail* and *Sun* newspapers, 6 May to 21 October 2005**



**FIGURE 2**  
**Cumulative coverage, negative or positive, for David Davis in *The Times*, *Telegraph*, *Mail* and *Sun* newspapers, 6 May to 21 October 2005**



a strong lead among Conservative MPs and was clearly ahead in polls of public and party member opinion. For the next six weeks little changed and, on 6 December, Cameron won with more than two-thirds of the final vote. For many interviewees who witnessed events everything completely changed in a one- or two-day period. Ten of the 24 MPs interviewed, half of whom were Conservatives, believed the media were responsible for Cameron’s rise

from nowhere. As one Labour politician remarked (Sion Simon MP): 'I think they made him up overnight ... one of the most startling examples of the modern era, I think, of the media just changing the course of political history in an instant.' Seven of the 15 journalists also stated that the media coverage had played a pivotal role in boosting Cameron, if not during then after the conference. Five said that television coverage, particularly that of ITN's Tom Bradby, was particularly significant:

Davis goes into that weekend ahead, big time ahead, and Cameron is one of a group of possibles.... [Tom] Bradby called it, he had the guts to go out there and call it. 'Davis has bombed' and it became a reality.... There was an unconscious or conscious, bit of both, media desire to create Cameron. And he was created by the media over those 24 hours, just as David Davis was destroyed by the media in those 24 hours. (Peter Osborne, journalist, commentator)

### **David Cameron's long-term accumulation of political and media capital forms**

As argued here, Cameron's success was not as instant as portrayed. While he lacked in the obvious measures of capital (social and symbolic capital with MPs and media meta-capital), he had spent many years building up alternative, internal forms of capital. These accumulations increased apace over the five-month period prior to the party conference and were vital in triggering the cultural tipping point reached during the conference.

Cameron had begun accumulating political capital, in its social (network) and cultural (education, experience) forms, from an early age. After graduating in 1988, with an Oxford University BA in Politics, Philosophy and Economics, he spent six years working closely with many of the party's most senior leaders. This included stints at the CRD (Conservative Research Department), briefing and election strategy work for the Prime Minister John Major, then roles as a special advisor to the Chancellor Norman Lamont and Michael Howard the Home Secretary (see Elliott and Hanning, 2007). In effect, Cameron had worked in four of the key power centres of the party, when in government, and had established social capital at the highest political levels. Cameron's connection to Howard, the 2005 party leader, was important. Howard, who clearly backed Cameron over Davis (mentioned in 44 articles by 25 journalists in May and June), immediately promoted Cameron and several allies, such as George Osborne, to the shadow cabinet. In delaying the contest by several months he allowed time for Osborne and Cameron to develop their stocks of media and political capital within and outside the political field.

Cameron, although lacking media meta-capital, had steadily accumulated internal forms of media capital over many years. In his roles at the CRD, and as an advisor to party leaders of the time, he had had extensive dealings with political journalists. He then went on to spend seven years working at Carlton

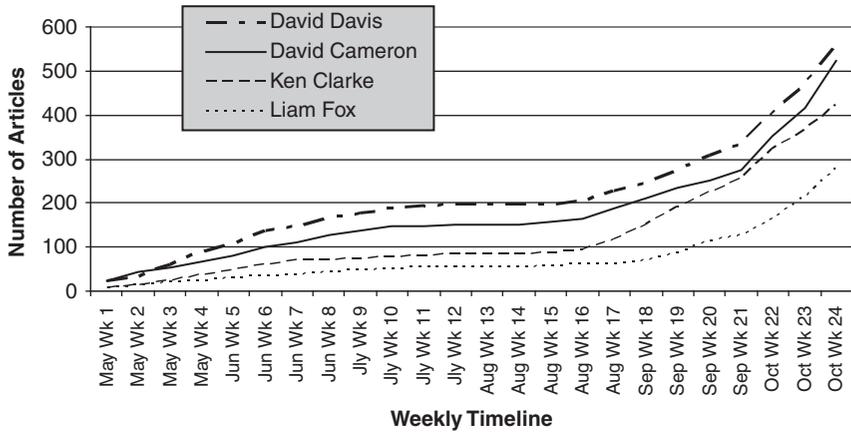
Communications (1994–2001), one of the dominant television companies of the 1990s. As Head of Communications, then Director of Corporate Affairs, he continued to have regular exchanges with journalists, as well as learning more about the business of television production. In effect, Cameron had accrued extensive insider media capital, in its cultural and journalist-based social forms. His core campaign team provided additional such capital. It included several experienced professional journalists (Ed Vaizey, Michael Gove and Boris Johnson), as well as Steve Hilton, a Saatchi and Saatchi PR strategist who had worked on the Conservatives' winning 1992 election campaign. Several interviewees commented on these elements of Cameron's past as well as his present media knowledge and social networks:

David Cameron started off being very well connected in the media, and there's no doubt it helped him because he got a lot of early air time. A lot of people in the media were batting for him ... but then that's because he'd done the work over the years to cultivate those contacts. (Chris Grayling, Conservative shadow minister)

Davis, in contrast to Cameron, had high levels of external media meta-capital but relatively little in the way of internal media capital. He was thought to be a weak public speaker and did not cultivate journalist contacts (see Elliott and Hanning, 2007; Montgomery, 2006). Such differences directly influenced the campaign strategies of the two candidates. Cameron's individual presentation attempted to appeal to the wider electorate beyond the Conservative Party. He made several approaches to left-leaning journalists and publications, and consciously positioning himself as the 'heir to Blair'. Some 70 articles, from 43 journalists, drew such Cameron–Blair comparisons. Davis instead focused more on maintaining his strong support among MPs, appealed to core party members and made little additional effort with lobby correspondents. Several pieces accordingly questioned these tactics and his support (e.g. Jones and Helm, 2005; Kavanagh, 2005; Sylvester, 2005a). As Iain Dale, Davis's campaign manager admitted: 'There was a feeling among the media that they were being intimidated by certain members of the Davis leadership team ... it all crystallized obviously around the conference when David made the speech.'

Through the summer period, Cameron and his team proved to be more active than any other group. The media activity levels of the two lead candidates is illustrated in Figure 3 and Table 3. David Davis got the most media exposure (561 articles, 75.2 percent of the total) of the four candidates, followed by Cameron (524, 70.2 percent), Clarke (424, 56.9 percent), and Fox (279, 34.3 percent). However, when compared to the earlier six-month pre-election period (see Table 2), it is Clarke and Cameron who have the most significant upward shifts in external media meta-capital accrual. Davis's total exposure for the campaign period was up by a quarter on the previous six months. Clarke had almost a five-fold rise and Cameron a nine-fold increase. Cameron and his allies were also the most proactive as news sources in terms of supplying information to journalists. Looking at Table 3, Cameron, whether cited as a direct or indirect

**FIGURE 3**  
**Cumulative media exposure for four lead candidates in *The Times*, *Telegraph*, *Mail* and *Sun* newspapers, 6 May to 21 October 2005**



**TABLE 3**  
**Sources cited/referred to between 6 May and 21 October 2005**

Source	Total (%)	Direct	Indirect	Interview/article
D. Cameron	121	34	79	8
Cameron ally	104	74	28	2
<b>Cameron total</b>	<b>225 (20.6)</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>10</b>
D. Davis	111	34	72	5
Davis ally	98	67	28	3
<b>Davis total</b>	<b>209 (19.1)</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>8</b>
K. Clarke	97	25	69	3
Clarke ally	102	53	49	0
<b>Clarke total</b>	<b>199 (18.2)</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>3</b>
L. Fox	72	22	45	5
Fox ally	35	21	14	0
<b>Fox total</b>	<b>107 (9.8)</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>5</b>
M. Howard/Spokesp	28	13	15	0
Other Conservative MP/Senior Pty	253	154	94	5
Local chair/memb	49	45	4	0
Other	23	15	6	2
<b>Other total</b>	<b>353 (32.3)</b>	<b>227</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>All source total</b>	<b>1093 (100)</b>	<b>557</b>	<b>503</b>	<b>33</b>

source, was the most active individual.<sup>4</sup> He wrote more articles and/or was the subject of an interview piece, more than anyone else. Cameron's allies appeared more than any other candidate's team. This activity by Cameron was clearly noticed by those who regularly reported political affairs:

There had been a number of [Cameron] speeches that hadn't really made it onto the telly ... we all go to many, many, many events that don't end up on the telly.... But, of course, it informs our opinion ... so a lot of journalists had been following his progress for quite a while, but hadn't really talked about it much in their newspapers or on the telly because they hadn't had much of an opportunity. (Daisy McAndrew, political broadcast editor)

Clearly, throughout the summer period, Cameron had done more than any other candidate to increase his levels of media capital, both inside and outside the field. His exposure in print media (external media meta-capital) was significantly higher than would be expected in terms of his institutional position as a minor shadow cabinet member. He had continued to build on his social capital with lobby journalists and had accumulated a certain level of mediated performance capital at the autonomous end of the field in several private addresses witnessed by journalists. At the end of September what he was most missing was individual-form, mediated performance capital at the heteronomous end of the scale. His ability to potentially establish a 'para-social relationship' with party members and general voters, beyond the political field had yet to be tested. Three particular events changed that and encouraged the relatively small journalist interpretive community, dominated by 20–30 political lobby reporters, towards a Cameron endorsement.<sup>5</sup>

The first of these was Cameron's official campaign launch to journalists on 29 September. The launch was chosen especially to follow Davis's own launch earlier on the same day and contrasted strongly. Davis's was in a dark, old oak-panelled room whereas Cameron's was set in a modern, light room with 'fashionable' music and refreshments. According to several accounts, Davis performed hesitantly whereas Cameron performed confidently. The immediate news coverage was politely positive about both candidates but a handful of established reporters were obviously impressed with Cameron (Bennett, 2005; Letts, 2005a; Parris, 2005; Riddell, 2005). Days later, this opinion had spread more widely across the reporting community (e.g. Sylvester, 2005b; Thompson, 2005). William Rees-Mogg (2005) wrote in the *Mail on Sunday* that: 'Most journalists thought that David Cameron had a much better launch than David Davis. David Cameron has some of Blair's skills.' The launches were clearly remembered by several political journalist interviewees who commented on them without prompting:

the whole political lobby was there for both of them [launches], we went to David Davis' first.... Davis was not intellectually self-confident enough to take more than three questions ... then we went down the road and we went into Cameron's

launch, and they'd made some effort with the production ... and on comes Cameron, he talks without notes, and is intellectual and self-confident enough to take virtually every question in the room. And everybody felt that difference ... and people were coming and saying well, you know, 'We're going to give this guy a good press, he's a lot better than the other guy', and 'Davis looks like he's going nowhere.' (Gary Gibbon, political broadcast editor)

The second, significant event was a BBC *Newsnight* piece, broadcast on 3 October, the eve of Cameron's speech. In the piece, Frank Luntz, a political consultant, had organized a focus group of potential Conservative voters. Clips of the five candidates speaking in public were presented to the audience and David Cameron received the most favourable response. One week later, during the conference, the Cameron team sent round DVDs, which included this piece, to all Conservative MPs and several journalists. This in itself drew some favourable journalist commentary (e.g. Aaronovitch, 2005; Hurst, 2005; Portillo, 2005).

The third event was the conference speeches where, once again, the mediated performance skills of the five candidates were going to be directly compared. By almost all accounts, print and interview, Cameron's speech made a strong impact but was not considered the best of the five (in most opinions it was either Rifkind or Clarke). The lead editors and commentators of the *Times*, *Mail* and *Telegraph* were impressed with both Clarke and Cameron, but each endorsed Clarke (e.g. Jones, 2005; Letts, 2005b; Webster, 2005). However, several interviewees stated that broadcast coverage was particularly enthusiastic about Cameron. Davis's speech followed the next day and, as many political journalists had privately predicted, it failed to 'inspire'. This perception was, according to Iain Dale: 'helped by some good briefing by the Cameron people who also made sure that a lot of their supporters were sat in front of the press desks and didn't give David Davis a standing ovation'. Bradby's early bulletin, declaring it to be a speech that 'bombed', once again led the coverage that followed. By that evening a clear tipping point within the journalist interpretive community had been reached as support moved strongly towards Cameron and away from Davis. The next day all press reports, even if supportive of Davis's policy statements, condemned his delivery and presentation with terms such as: 'uninspiring', 'smug', 'monotonous', 'dismal', 'underwhelming' and 'lacklustre'. The contrast in how mediated performance capital was accumulated inside and outside the political field by the two candidates was summed up by David Blunkett MP:

the collective, instinctive decision of the media gathered in Blackpool, that David Davis had failed and that David Cameron was the born-again Blair, was absolutely profound ... it was a judgement on a particular type of performance, because David Davis did much better on the [Radio Four] *Today Programme* that same day than David Cameron, but he undoubtedly flopped in his formal [televised] platform speech. And, therefore, the platform speech became the new benchmark.

## Conclusion

This piece has adapted Bourdieu's interpretive research framework to the field of politics and developed the concept of 'media capital'. It has suggested that 'media capital' is accumulated in several forms, among contrasting audiences and by various means. Most significantly, it has argued that successful public figures need to generate media capital both within and external to their field. Although these forms and means of accumulation are distinct, they are also connected and, therefore, link field participants, cultural intermediaries and their publics. This helps to explain the cultural mechanisms by which symbolic power, established in institutionally based hierarchies, shifts over time and, also, how individual 'primary definers' rise and fall.

This schema was used to interpret a UK-specific case of political advancement – the rise of David Cameron. Cameron's particular success was, in large part, down to his long-term accumulation of less visible forms of media capital within the UK political field. His accrual of journalist-based social capital, media cultural capital and internal, mediated performance capital, especially during an intense five-month period, did much to influence opinion inside Westminster. Davis's own media capital was mainly in the form of institutionalized, external media meta-capital, with little equivalent inside the field. The televised speeches, as well as less publicized events, demonstrated that Cameron was more capable than Davis of generating external, individualized media meta-capital and, consequently, achieving electoral success. Cameron's potential here clearly influenced his internal symbolic/political and media capital generation. What is clear from the timeline (see Table 1) is that party member support trends, for both Cameron and Davis, were ahead of MP support trends. Coverage of the conference speeches, particularly that of television journalists, was crucial in redirecting party member support for the candidates. Continued journalist support, combined with striking member and public poll support, then persuaded MPs to switch in large numbers towards Cameron. In effect, those inside the political field (journalists and MPs), within their interpretive communities, were led to redirect their support according to how they believed party members and future general voters would be directing their votes.

The forms of media capital framework, although applied to a UK case study, may equally be applied to other political and media systems in mature, 'mediated' democracies. Such comparisons of media capital forms, and their means of accumulation, may also shed light on competitive elections between, for example: Gerhard Schröder and Edmund Stoiber (2002) or Angela Merkel (2005), Nicolas Sarkozy and Ségolène Royal (2007), Al Gore and George W. Bush (2000) or Hilary Clinton and Barack Obama (2008). In each case, strong contrasts between the candidates' forms and stocks of media and political capital played a part in overall campaign outcomes.

## Notes

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1. For some in-depth discussions of Bourdieu's work and its potential incorporation into media studies see Benson (1998), Couldry (2003), Benson and Neveu (2005) and Hesmondhalgh (2006).

2. Specialist political correspondents reporting on Parliament in the UK are also referred to as 'lobby journalists'.

3. All articles were given a positive/negative rating from plus two (outright endorsement) to minus two (unequivocal criticism). A majority were neutral or balanced, scoring 0. When there were more negative or positive pieces, in total in a week, that pushed the cumulative coverage up or down.

4. In Table 3 'direct' sources means either directly talking to the newspaper or a likely general briefing. 'Indirect' sources refers to interview, statement or article in other titles, television or press release. The last column refers to an interview with, or a piece written by, the individual.

5. Just 14 journalists accounted for 51 percent (413 pieces) of the 813 recorded pieces of the eight titles. Adding those from excluded titles and lead television and radio journalists, and one might estimate that no more than 20–30 journalists dominated the coverage received by the public.

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- Garry Gibbon, political editor for Channel 4 News, 25 January 2007.
- Chris Grayling, Conservative MP for Epsom and Ewell, shadow Secretary of State for Transport, 14 June 2006.
- Daisy McAndrew, political editor for ITN, 30 January 2007.
- Peter Osborne, political columnist for the *Daily Mail*, contributing editor for *The Spectator*, political journalist and commentator, 19 March 2007.
- Sion Simon, Labour MP for Birmingham Erdington, 31 January 2007.

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