



Childlessness in Griffins: A Crisis Communication Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to reconstruct the Griffin dynasty's response to the existential threat posed by their childlessness, examining it through the lens of funerary prints. It seeks to understand the communication methods employed and assess their effectiveness. **Research concept and methods:** The analysis focuses on the dynasty's image crisis, utilizing funeral sermons, orations, and literature on crisis communication. **Conclusions:** The demise of the Duchy of Pomerania in 1637 highlights the early modern state's vulnerability to biological factors, particularly the fertility of its ruling class. The absence of heirs posed a significant risk of political upheaval, as evidenced by Pomerania's eventual territorial division and loss of political sovereignty in 1648. The Griffin dynasty and their advisors adeptly communicated the threat of their lineage's extinction to the Pomeranian populace. They endeavored to mitigate the societal unrest this revelation caused by rallying their subjects around shared values such as history and Lutheranism. They also implied collective guilt by suggesting that the princes' childlessness was a divine punishment for the people's sins. Their communication strategy, incorporating established patterns, framing, biblical references, metaphors, and rhetorical devices, aimed to preserve the dynasty's reputation and legacy. Notably, they highlighted their achievements, such as legal reforms, the founding of the University of Greifswald, the Stettin Pedagogical College, the endorsement of Lutheranism as the 'true faith', and their stewardship of the Church, to secure a favorable historical remembrance. **Cognitive value:** This article explores the Griffin dynasty's childlessness as a crisis scenario, analyzing the communication strategies employed to maintain the dynasty's image.

KEYWORDS

crisis communication, crisis, duchy of Pomerania, Griffins, childlessness



In the early 17th century, the Griffin dynasty's childlessness emerged as a profoundly emotive and politically significant issue in Pomerania. This situation, teetering on the brink of a dynastic crisis, had the potential to—and ultimately did—result in Brandenburg's annexation of the Duchy under the Grimnitz Treaty of 1529 and its subsequent amendments. The scale and intensity of the crisis faced by the Griffins eclipsed those commonly encountered by contemporary enterprises and institutions.

This article attempts to explore the Griffin dynasty's predicament as a crisis communication challenge. It does so by examining the crisis through the established rules and mechanisms of crisis communication, as outlined by scholars such as Benoit (1997, pp. 177-186), Cianciara (2010, pp. 2-3), Gędek (2018, pp. 120-123), and Ubl (2011, pp. 323-363). Viewing the dynasty — comprising the Ducal House, Pomeranian House, Familia Ducum Pomeraniae, Familia Gryphoniae, Fürstliche Haus Stettin Pommern — as an institution, akin to the self-characterization of the Windsor-Mountbatten dynasty as 'The Firm', allows for the application of contemporary crisis communication frameworks to retrospectively analyze the Pomeranian court's communication strategies. This approach acknowledges the dynasty's intricate structure, social role, cultural capital, and reputation, offering a novel lens through which to view and understand this historical crisis.

This article serves as a preliminary exploration, offering a partial view of the response to the dynastic crisis in Pomerania. This crisis, as a distinct subject of study, has not been extensively explored in historical research. The period under consideration begins with the death of Prince George II/III in 1617 and concludes with the demise of Bogusław XIV in 1637. The analysis also includes references to earlier generations of the House of Griffins, who similarly grappled with issues of childlessness. The primary sources for this study are funeral sermons (Leichenpredigten) delivered by superintendents and court preachers during obsequies, along with Latin orations pronounced on the day following the funerals. Additionally, funeral sermons (Klagpredigten) by Pomeranian intellectuals affiliated with the court are examined. These texts collectively represent the official stance of the court, or views closely aligned with it. As such, they provide crucial insights into how the dynasty communicated and managed the crisis pertaining to their childlessness.

Methodological background

This study draws significantly on the frameworks of Image Restoration Theory (IRT) developed by William Benoit (1997, pp. 177-186), and Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) by W. Timothy Coombs (2007, pp. 163-176; 2014, pp. 1-12). Additionally, it incorporates insights from Polish media scholars and communication theorists, including works by Kaczmarek-Śliwińska (2015, 2019), Tworzydło (2017, 2019), and Wojcik (2021, 2022).

By examining the issue of childlessness from a communication standpoint, this research delves into the dynamics of how childlessness and its associated risks are discussed. It explores who communicates these issues, the methods and channels used, the timing of these communications, and the reasons behind the prince's silence. The analysis also investigates the content and informational effectiveness of messages that essentially served as 'dynastic alerts'. These analyses are inspired by questions raised by Ellen Widder and Christian Heinemeyer in 2018 (Widder & Heinemeyer, 2018, p. 7). Central to this research is Coombs' definition of a crisis as "A crisis is a sudden and unexpected event that threatens to disrupt an organisation's operations and poses both a financial and a reputational threat. (...) Crises threaten to damage reputations because a crisis gives people reasons to think badly of the organization" (2007, p. 163). While the Pomeranian case may not appear 'sudden' in a conventional sense, it aligns

with Fernand Braudel's concept of 'long duration' (*longue durée*) (Braudel, 1971, pp. 46-89), and was indeed 'unexpected', deeply impacting the state's foundation and reputation, and giving cause for negative perceptions of the dynasty. This crisis represents the climax of a prolonged crisis situation, as discussed in Kaczmarek-Śliwińska (2015, p. 54; 2019, pp. 321-322).

The concept of image/reputation in this study is informed by the insights of Krystyna Wojcik (2021, pp. 1063-1071; 2022). Wojcik elucidates that image/reputation performs essential functions in our perception of the world, including orientation, ordering, simplification, and risk reduction/minimization (2021, pp. 1067-1068). Wojcik (2021) observes:

"As a schematic form of interpreting reality, the image (like stereotypes) simplifies orientation in the world around the individual. It replaces special knowledge, it is a substitute for it, knowledge that is needed to satisfy a person's desire to achieve clarity and understanding of the world, to master its complexity. Image and reputation can be seen as a simplified form of communication, allowing one to orient oneself in the environment. It is the form and content of the message (the medium is the message)". (s. 1067).

Importantly, this article defines an image crisis as "a specific and unexpected event (or series of events) that causes considerable uncertainty and threatens or is perceived as a threat to the fulfillment of an organization's primary goals [...] and damages the image of the business entity" (Tworzydło, 2019, p. 2). The strategies for responding to an image crisis are explored through the lens of Image Restoration Theory (IRT) (Benoit, 1997, pp. 177-186; Benoit & Brinson, 1999, pp. 145-156; Tworzydło, 2019, pp. 3-4).

Historical background

The precariousness of the Pomeranian ruling family's lineage dates back to the latter half of the 15th century, when the dynasty was on the brink of extinction. This dire situation was temporarily alleviated by Anna Jagiellon, who bore Bogusław X (1454-1523) eight children. However, the 16th century was marked by significant challenges and uncertainties. Barnim the Old (1501-1573) fathered only daughters, and his nephew, Philip I (1515-1560), endured a prolonged wait for offspring. Philip's first son was born in 1540, followed by six more, of whom five survived into adulthood. Yet, only two of these sons, Bogusław XIII (1544-1606) and Ernest Ludwig (1545-1492), produced heirs. The lineage faced a critical juncture in the next generation; none of the five adult sons of Bogusław XIII left descendants, nor did Ernest Ludwig's sole son, Philip Julius (1584-1625).

Throughout the early modern era, the looming threat of the ruling house's extinction haunted the minds of the Pomeranians. However, initial funeral texts for Philip I's childless sons – John Frederick (d. 1600), Barnim the Younger (d. 1603), and Casimir VIII (d. 1605) – did not yet reflect any palpable tension or concern. The situation became more acute with the unexpected death of the unmarried Prince George III in 1617. This event prompted a heightened and more anxious scrutiny of the ruling house, particularly as none of the princely couples, despite long marriages (Philip II and Sophie of Schleswig-Holstein – 10 years, Francis I and Sophie of Saxony – 7 years, Philip Julius and Agnes of Brandenburg – 13 years), had produced any offspring since 1590. The frequency of deaths among the Griffins further compounded concerns. Between 1600 and 1617, five members of the dynasty passed away, followed by the successive deaths of Philip II (1618), Francis I (1620), Ulrich I (1622), Philip Julius (1625), and Bogusław XIV (1637).

Authors of crisis messages

The dynasty, confronted with the issue of childlessness, faced significant communication challenges. The predicament, although impossible to conceal and undoubtedly the subject of widespread discussion, required an official announcement to the populace about the looming threat of familial extinction. Due to political, ceremonial, and image considerations – the latter stipulating that a ruler does not address such matters alone – the prince himself could not deliver this message. The severity of the situation – encompassing not only the dynasty's reputation and the confidence of the Pomeranians but, more crucially, the state's future – demanded full mobilization. A coherent strategy and guidelines for the content disseminated through the period's mass media were essential. This media included speeches by court preachers (*Hofpredigern*), who were officials of the ducal (state) government. In contemporary terms, the highest authorities of the Duchy engaging in such activities would be likened to 'risk management', and they themselves would be considered the management and decision-making team (C-suite, C-level). Their composition, comprising the Prince and the Councillors, also earned trust as they represented an 'internal voice'. This group was responsible for the court's information policy and, in the words of Coombs, developed 'crisis response strategies to protect reputations from the devastating effects of a crisis'. In essence, they performed functions akin to 'crisis managers' (Coombs, 2007, p. 163) in the field of public relations.

The speeches of court preachers on 'sensitive matters' were crafted in collaboration with the ducal family. The biographies of deceased members of the dynasty were typically authored by high-ranking government officials, often chancellors. This practice dates back to the biography of Philip I, penned by Valentin Eickstedt, a long-serving Wallachian chancellor. Julius Bohlen von Bohlendorf recorded that the biographies of Duke George II/III and Duchess Anna of Schleswig-Holstein, the widow of Bogusław XIII, were directly influenced by Philip II. He sent his annotations to Martin Chemnitz, the chancellor, who then engaged in correspondence with the duke to finalize the content. Only after obtaining the duke's consent was the biography published. Chemnitz was also responsible for chronicling the life of Bogusław XIII, whom he served for many years. The biography of Francis I was a collaborative effort between Chancellor Matthias von Carnitz, Paul von Damitz (the longstanding chancellor of the Duchy of Bishop), and Valentin Jurga Winther. After editing, Carnitz presented the biography to Bogusław XIV for his endorsement. Similarly, the biography of Ulric I was authored by Chancellor Andreas Bulgrin and, as was customary, only published post-approval from the duke (Bohlen, pp. VI-VII). In this manner, the most politically significant and sensitive subjects were introduced into the broader information sphere. They were not merely sensational 'hot topics' (Bombshell), but, given the dominant and privileged position of the broadcaster, messages interwoven with subtle layers of interpretation and manipulation.

The primary audience for the sermons were those in attendance at the castle church on the day of the funeral: members of the ducal family, envoys from foreign courts, government officials, courtiers, and the intellectual and clerical elite of the city. The reach of these sermons expanded as they were subsequently printed, distributed throughout the country, and sent to other courts as a form of funeral memento and propaganda. This method effectively addressed the challenge of disseminating information and, to some extent, facilitated interaction, as the sermon content served as a guide for pastors on how to communicate about the deceased princes to their congregations. These procedures employed various mechanisms to influence the audience, such as agenda setting, which involves directing the audience's attention to specific topics; framing, which shapes how the audience should think about these topics; and priming, which influences how the audience perceives and evaluates the issues (Maćkiewicz, 2020, p. 620).

Communication strategies of the Pomeranian court

Information regarding the ruler's childlessness was incorporated into the biography, typically featured in the final part of the sermon delivered on the day of the funeral. However, references to the absence of heirs might have also surfaced in earlier sermons or in different sections of the funeral oration. The context framing this message consistently involved details about the deceased's spouse, including the marriage date, the spouse's lineage, and the duration of the union. The message was conveyed with stark directness: the ruler's marriage had produced no offspring. The authors of these sermons and orations, unable to refute this fact, concentrated on highlighting that nothing occurs without God's will. In terms of Benoit's Image Restoration Theory, this approach aligns with a denial strategy. A key component of this strategy is identifying the 'real culprit' to evade responsibility. This was achieved by emphasizing the prince's lack of control over the situation and asserting that, as a devout and benevolent ruler, he did everything within his power to gain God's favor. This included devoutness, care for the Church and his subjects, adherence to Biblical teachings (which he read daily along with other pious texts and Luther's writings), maintenance of true faith (Lutheranism), and opposition to religious deviations, notably Calvinism, as frequently underscored.

In the childlessness of princely couples, preachers and orators perceived a 'heavy domestic cross' borne with humility. At John Frederick's funeral, superintendent Jacob Faber highlighted the duke and his wife Erdmutha's conjugal love and fidelity (*liebe und grasse*), noting that they supported each other with 'counsel, comfort, and deed' (*mit raht, trost und that*). Faber stressed that 'nothing can do without cross and adversity', including marriage, which 'cannot do without the cross, but heartfelt love will overcome everything' (Faber, 1600, p. B iij-v, also p. K; cf. also Rubenovius, 1624, p. aiiij-v). Similarly, Daniel Cramer referred to a 'conjugal cross' (*crux conjugii*) for a couple living 'in true love, concord and respect' (*in vera charitas, concordia, reverentia*), who understood 'that by God's paternal design they should remain childless' (Cramer, 1600, p. Q). This theme and even the specific wording were echoed by Faber in his portrayal of Barnim the Younger and Anna Maria's childlessness (Faber, 1603, p. Lij-v-Liij). Paul Friedeborn, while almost verbatim quoting Cramer, notably shifted the emphasis, writing that the duke 'lived with his wife in great love and unity, bore her heavy domestic cross of infertility with great forbearance, and truly kept his pledged marital fidelity' (Friedeborn, 1613, p. 17). Thus, according to the secretary of the city of Stettin, it is the woman who bears the cross, while the man supports her in this. Johannes Butovius similarly remarked on Barnim: 'although in the ongoing marriage His Princely Grace was not blessed with descendants of his own, he showed his beloved wife understanding in every way and not the slightest impatience could be discerned' (Butovius, 1619, p. N-v). Superintendent Barthold Krakewitz (1582-1642) assured his audience that Philip II lived until his death in a childless yet love-filled marriage, where both spouses "carried the cross sent by God with Christian patience, with united hearts and through prayer overcame everything" (Krakewitz, 1618, p. 38; also Reutz, 1618, p. Cij-v).

The preachers employed a strategy of bolstering by crafting an exceptionally positive portrayal of the deceased. They highlighted his remarkable achievements and lauded his virtues, meticulously constructing an image devoid of any "blemish." Part of this image-building involved emphasizing the deceased's physical attributes – *structura corporis et membrorum* – underscoring his attractiveness, vigor, and physical strength, all aimed at safeguarding his reputation (cf. Benoit & Brinson, 1999, pp. 145-156). As a corrective action, the clergy, seemingly representing the ruling family, declared that, with God's assistance, the issue of childlessness would be resolved.

Furthermore, the texts under scrutiny frequently incorporated a theme centered around the topos of guilt and punishment. This narrative suggested that rulers died childless not only due to the inscrutable judgments of Heaven but also because of the sins of their subjects. Among these sins were cited lack of faith, forgetfulness of God, malice and cursing, self-will, disobedience to superiors, marital infidelity, pursuit of luxury, extravagance in dress, promiscuous and wicked living (Cramer, 1620, pp. Aijj-r; Grantzin, 1605, p. B-v). The implication was that these transgressions prompted divine retribution: “the crown falls from our heads,” leading to the prince’s demise, sometimes without an heir.

Jacob Runge, in his sermon at Philip I’s funeral in 1560, presented an early example of this perspective on the death of a ruler, although it’s possible he too was following a pre-existing template. The superintendent described the subjects as losing “a good and virtuous prince and father of the country” in “these perilous times.” He added, “we are in mourning, but at the same time we owe it to ourselves to recognize God’s gift [implicitly referring to what Philip’s reign represented] and to praise him with gratitude” (Runge, 1560, p. Biiij-v). Runge argued that through the ruler’s death, God summoned the entire nation to account for “all our sins and ill-will,” using this “rod” to warn of his wrath and call for repentance (Runge, 1560, p. Biiij-v). The Almighty, he suggested, punishes the subjects’ sins by changing rulers, as reflected in Proverbs 28:3: “For the transgression of the land the princes are often changed” (*propter peccata populi mutantur Principatus*). He cited the early deaths of pious rulers like Hezekiah and Josiah in Israel as examples of God’s wrath upon the land and people, not mere accidents (Runge, 1560, p. Cijj-v). Runge urged a reformation of life and called for support of ‘our bereaved pious motherland [*Landesmutter*] and the young princes [*jungen Herrschaft*]' to ease their burden and seek God’s mercy (Runge, 1560, p. Cijj-v). He employed the motif of the falling crown (diadem) in sermons for both Philip I and his son Ernest Ludwig, lamenting the loss of a “Christian, good church father [*Kirchen Vater*], our pious father of the fatherland [*Lands Vater*], ... our protector [*unser Bischirmer*], our head [*unser Haupt*]. We have lost the crown of our head” (Runge, 1592, p. Biiij-v). This notion was echoed by preachers and orators at the funerals of all Philip I’s descendants (e.g., Riccius, 1603; Grantzin, 1605, p. B-v; Cradelius, 1618, p. Aijj-Aijj-v). They called on the faithful to repent and pray for the ‘reversal of righteous anger’. By interpreting infertility as divine punishment for the subjects’ sins, they suggested that anyone holding grievances against the princes should first examine themselves.

Towards hope

The sermons prominently featured the theme of trustful waiting, suggesting that God tests the elect and delays fulfilling promises, ultimately rewarding those who pray fervently and wait patiently. This notion was encapsulated in the phrase “it is good to wait in silence for rescue from the Lord” (Lamentations, 3:26) and echoed in Scholastke’s 1623 sermon: *im Creutz muss man hoffen* – “in the cross one must hope” (Scholastke, 1623, p. 24, *Das Fünffte Predigt* – fifth sermon). Paradoxically, this theme lent an air of legitimacy, as Pomerania’s history had witnessed such ‘miracles’ with key dynastic figures like Bogusław X and his grandson Philip I, who had offspring after prolonged periods of childlessness.

Daniel Cramer, in 1617, urged his listeners to recall their ‘native history’, particularly the period following Warcisław X’s death when Bogusław X was the sole surviving Griffin. God, he said, favored the dynasty, leading to the revitalization of the ‘Pomeranian Tree’. After Bogusław’s first wife’s death and his subsequent marriage to Anna Jagiellon, the couple had, thankfully, five princes (Cramer, 1617, pp. V-v-v). With none of the dynasts mentioned having children, Cramer rhetorically asked: ‘Does God want us to believe in hope against hope?’. He

implored the audience to plead fervently with God for salvation (Cramer, 1617, p. V-v). The preacher's hopes were particularly vested in the young, unmarried Ulricus. He found an anagram in Ulricus's name – *surculus*, meaning branch, sapling, vine, shoot – and confidently predicted that once Ulricus wed, he would become a new branch of the family tree. This wish extended to Philip Julius, Philip II, Bogusław, and Francis, hoping they would live, grow, and flourish perpetually (*vivant ut surculi, vigeant ut surculi, floreant, ut surculi & nunc & semper & omne in aevum*) (Cramer, 1617, pp. V-v). This intense longing for the continuation of a distinguished family was an impassioned call to life amidst death.

Similarly, Andreas Scholastke, speaking at Ulric's funeral in 1623, reminded listeners of a time when Bogusław X “remained alone in Pomerania, [because] with his exception all had passed away, [he] made the princely family of the Griffins famous and multiplied it, so that he is rightly called ‘secundus conditor familiae suae Pomeraniae’, the second founder of his Pomeranian family” (Scholastke, 1623, quoted in Bohlen, 1869, p. 365). The message of this phrase was clear: although there were only two Griffins left, Philip Julius and Bogusław XIV, there is still room for a miracle and divine intervention.

The concept of “hope against hope” was further exemplified by Philip I and Maria of Saxony. They are remembered not only as the parents of many children but also for their marriage, which was personally blessed by Martin Luther. This event ties into the second great proto-myth of Pomerania – the belief in the Principality's special role in God's plan and His unique protection of the Griffin family. This belief is rooted in the emblematic scene at the Torgau nuptials, where Dr. Martinus Lutherus, addressing the prince, is said to have made a prophetic promise: “May God be with you and may your offspring not expire” (*Dominus Deus sit tecum et semen tuum non deficiat!*) (Wedel, 1882, p. 124). The early years of Philip and Maria Saxon's marriage were recalled in 1600 by Daniel Caesar, the rector of the Pedagogium. He referred to Luther's ‘prophecy’ (*vaticinium Lutheri*) and noted that, despite the blessings expressed at their marriage, the couple initially remained childless, casting uncertainty on the family's future. Both the princes and their subjects were steeped in sorrow. However, according to Caesar, God did not withdraw His support but merely postponed His favor for four years, with the waiting period ultimately culminating in joy (Caesar, 1600, pp. C4-C5). Philip and Mary eventually had children, paralleling the biblical story of Elkanah and Anna, the parents of Prophet Samuel. The arrival of their children was seen as the fulfillment of Luther's prayers, providing clear evidence that God had preserved and miraculously multiplied the Pomeranian princes' lineage, never intending these lands to fall under another lord's dominion (Caesar, 1600, p. C5). This narrative, particularly Luther's words *semen tuum non deficiat* (“thy offspring shall not expire”), formed the basis of a long-held belief in the dynasty's continuance until the end of the world (cf. Krackewitz, 1625, p. Aij-v).

The third and last extended ducal family, that of Bogusław XIII and Clara of Brunswick-Lüneburg (1550-1598), also served as an exemplum. In their marriage, eleven children were born, with two daughters and five sons reaching adulthood. These children, along with Philip Julius, the sole son of Ernest Ludwig, represented the final infertile generation of the family.

The unions of Bogusław X and Anna Jagiellon, Philip I and Maria of Saxony, and Bogusław XIII and Clara of Brunswick-Lüneburg were not only showcased as models of fertility but also as tangible proofs of God's protection over the Griffins and as sources of hope for their descendants and subjects. The mention of these couples subtly highlighted the political dimension of (un)fertility, as each marriage played a role in delaying, albeit temporarily, the succession of the Hohenzollerns.

From a crisis theory perspective, this fervent search for hope can be viewed as an element of contingencies (contingencies, contingency planning in crisis management). Despite the deceased

ruler leaving no offspring, historical precedents suggested that expecting heirs in royal marriages was both legitimate and rational, as embodied in the sentiment ‘as long as I breathe, I hope’ (*dum spiro, spero*). “Our prince full of virtues died [...]. Our prince passed away without a descendant, without an heir; [but] Pomerania will last as long as there are Pomeranian princes, it will [exist] as long as there is still hope in the Pomeranian princes!” (*Princeps noster in omni virtuti obiit [...]. Princeps noster sine prole, sine haerede abiit, hic vero quid remedii? Erit Pomerania, dum Principes erunt Pomeraniae, erit, dum adhuc spes est in Pomeraniae Principibus!*) (Trigophorus, 1625, p. I). The funerary texts’ authors, acknowledging the ruler’s childlessness yet asserting that all was not lost due to the surviving young branches of the family, employed minimization. By placing childlessness within a broad historical and dynastic context through transcendence, they contextualized the issue. The sermons’ commendation of Christian marriage, in which the ‘cross of childlessness’ unified rather than divided spouses, also aimed to preserve the dynasts’ reputation. Such a strategy aligns with Benoit’s concept of bolstering, which involves highlighting the positive attributes of those in crisis.

Furthermore, the sermons included efforts to consolidate society by recalling shared history and values, particularly Lutheranism. Since its establishment in Pomerania in 1534, Lutheranism had become a cornerstone around which Pomeranian identity was constructed.

Childlessness of the Griffins as an image crisis

The childlessness of rulers inherently constituted an ‘image crisis,’ a ‘face crisis,’ and a ‘reputation crisis’ (cf. Wojcik, 2021, pp. 1062-1063; Wojcik, 2022). Handling such a delicate issue in encomium texts (praise of the deceased) required a fine balance. It was necessary to navigate between what needed to be articulated about the prince, what should be avoided (such as the intimate details of his life), and what could not be omitted.

The funeral sermons adhered strictly to the societal norms of the time, portraying the prince as a steadfast support for his wife. This constructed image subtly suggested that infertility was not an issue with the Griffins but rather with their wives, who were from families like the Hohenzollerns, Oldenburgs, or Welfs. This perspective, arguably detrimental to the duchess, was shaped by cultural norms (where the primary role of the duke’s wife was to ensure the continuation of the lineage) and the androcentric nature of the era. In this period, even female rulers occupied an ambiguous position “between the throne room and the grandmother/female court” (*zwischen ThronSaal und FrawenZimmer*) (cf. Schleinert & Schneikart, 2017). Their biographies often revolved around marriage, childbirth, and eventually, their husbands’ deaths. The fact that the authors of these sermons and orations were men representing male interests significantly influenced the portrayal of the prince’s widows. Thus, they became the ‘male voice’ shaping the narrative of the childless ruler. From this angle, the topic under discussion contributes to the cultural history of childlessness, offering insight into the gendered dynamics and societal expectations of the time.

Conclusions

This crisis could not be effectively alleviated, let alone resolved. The rulers and their entourage acutely recognized that a situation potentially leading to a state catastrophe could not be addressed through dignified silence or any approach that might heighten public anxiety. Within the circles of power, the severity of the problem was acknowledged. The so-called “mobilization marathon” of the court persisted from 1617 to 1637. A keen awareness of the gravity of the situation is evident, along with a firm belief that the discussion regarding the ruling family’s childlessness was a matter of public concern and should, therefore, be conducted as an open dialogue. This

perspective is reflected in the texts underpinning this article. Consequently, the sermons' content became an integral part of the political discourse, thereby assigning a significant level of responsibility for their substance and elucidating the personal involvement of the princes-in-waiting in documenting the lives of their deceased kin. The efforts of the top-level team were also directed towards preparing the populace for the most challenging outcomes.

From a communication theory perspective, the definition of the risk and its management, including the selection of direct message conveyors, information channels, and content, were aptly chosen. The decisions regarding how and when to communicate the risk were made amidst the unpredictability of human behavior and in anticipation of changes in the princes' familial circumstances. There was a hope for a miraculous turn of events, akin to the historical instances of Bogusław X or Philip I, where unexpected changes had occurred.

The duke, chancellor, and councilors endeavored to cultivate a positive, reassuring image of the dynasty, portraying it as a robust tree under whose shelter Pomeranian life had thrived for five hundred years, as exemplified in Grantzin's 1605 work (pp. Bij-Bij-v). They emphasized the reciprocal bonds between the princes and their subjects, highlighting the system of interdependence inherent in the state. The gratitude owed by the subjects to the Griffins was underscored by enumerating the numerous favors bestowed upon them over centuries, including the granting of laws, the introduction and consolidation of Lutheranism, care for the Church and education, notably the University of Greifswald and the Princely Pedagogical College in Szczecin. Efforts were also made to maintain optimism and encourage prayers for the continuation of the family line. Concurrently, there was a tendency to blame the subjects, seen as offending God with their sins, for the dynasts' lack of offspring, creating a "community of the guilty." Notably, it is commendable that improper propaganda and deliberate misrepresentation were not employed in these efforts.

The management group adeptly navigated crisis communication, successfully avoiding the pitfalls identified by Marek Kochan in 2019, which include "1. Failing to tell the truth, 2. Failing to address allegations, 3. Aggression in crisis communication, 4. Lack of empathy, 5. Inconsistency of the message, 6. Going against the grain of public expectations and therefore ignoring the concerns of the audience" (pp. 8, 14). It is crucial to highlight the C-suite's careful selection of message content and its consistent reliance on enduring cultural structures. These structures encompass the cultural capital of the dynasty, tradition, religion, law, shared history, symbols, and values – elements that public relations specialists, as noted by Wojcik in 2021 and Tworzydło in 2017 (pp. 80-82), would likely still endorse today. The crisis communication strategy employed by the Pomeranian court was competent: they utilized available means, communicated the problem systematically, which was unfortunately accentuated by the frequent funerals of the Griffins, and endeavored to reassure the public and sustain hope, even if it hinged on waiting for a miracle. However, whether such a deliberately constructed narrative could be effectively imposed on the public remains an open question.

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... sunt impositi, atq[ue] inserti Subiectissimae devotionis, & devotissimae subiectionis ergo a M. Johanne Trygophoro ... Praemissae sunt solennes Intimationes ... Dn. Bartholomaei Batti ... Dn. Friderici Gerschovi. Gryphiswaldi[i]: Albinus.

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