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Discursive framing in private and public communication by pro-nuclear corporate, political and regulatory actors following the Fukushima disaster

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Purpose – The study examines a case of companies cooperating with the State to prevent a public controversy over nuclear power following the Fukushima disaster and achieve mutually beneficial policy outcomes. It analyses the private and public communication of pro-nuclear corporate, political and regulatory actors.

Design/methodology/approach – Drawing on political economy theory, the study examines how actors mobilised power by accessing an existing social network to agree a joint public communication strategy in order to ensure public support for the continuation of nuclear power generation in the UK. It traces discursive frames from their inception in private communication to their reproduction in public communication and their dissemination via the media.

Findings – The study provides evidence of pro-nuclear actors cooperating behind the scenes to achieve consistent public pro-nuclear messaging. It finds evidence of four discursive frames: (1) *avoiding knee-jerk reactions*, (2) *lessons learned*, (3) *safety*, and (4) *nuclear renaissance*. In combination, they guide audiences' evaluation of the consequences of the Fukushima disaster for the UK in favour of continuing the commercial use of nuclear energy.

Originality/value – The private e-mail exchange between pro-nuclear actors presents a unique opportunity to examine the mobilisation of less visible forms of power in the form of agenda setting (manipulation) and discursive framing (domination) in order to influence policy outcomes and shape public opinion on nuclear energy. This is problematic because it constitutes a lack of transparency and accountability on part of the State with respect to policy outcomes and restricts the civic space by curtailing the articulation of alternative interests and voices.

Keywords: Civil society, Discursive framing, Fukushima, Intertextuality, Nuclear industry, Power.

Article Classification: Research paper

1. Introduction

The commercial use of nuclear power as a means of meeting energy demands has been a contested issue since its inception in the 1950s (European Nuclear Society, 2017). Proponents argue that nuclear power is safe and necessary to ensure energy security and to prevent global warming, whilst keeping energy prices low. Opponents contend that nuclear power is "*dirty, dangerous and expensive*" (Greenpeace, 2012) due to the unsolved issue of nuclear waste storage, the military use of nuclear technology, the risk and adverse consequences of nuclear accidents, and the high construction cost of nuclear power plants. Nuclear accidents, such as the Three Mile Island accident in the US in 1979, the Chernobyl disaster in the former USSR in 1986, and the Fukushima disaster in Japan in 2011, tend to ignite public controversies over nuclear energy. Resulting anti-nuclear sentiment may put pressure on governments to change their energy policy and cause a legitimacy threat to nuclear operators. Governments of countries reliant on nuclear power to meet energy demands and the nuclear industry share an interest in the continuation of nuclear energy generation. They may thus cooperate to avert a public controversy over nuclear energy in the aftermath of nuclear accidents. We view companies as political actors, with politics constituting "*an activity that rearranges relations between people and the distribution of goods ... though the mobilisation of power*" (Fleming and Spicer, 2014, p. 239). We focus on the cooperation of powerful economic and political interests in the form of the UK nuclear industry and the State to influence the decisions, values, and preferences of civil society on nuclear energy in the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster. The overarching research question, which guides our study, is the following:

> RQ: How did UK corporate, political, and regulatory actors prevent a public controversy over nuclear power in the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster?

Public controversies constitute public debates on contested issues and conflicting ideas with the aim of influencing policy outcomes. They take place in the civic space, which is a site for open public debate and involves participation by individual citizens, groups of civil society actors, including social movement groups, NGOs, and the media (Castells, 2008).[1] The civic space is "*at the heart of democracy*", where "*the rights of civil society exist alongside other powerful economic and political interests*" (Murphy and Moerman, 2018, p. 1774). It plays an important role in "*structuring and channeling debates over diverse ideas and conflicting interests*" (Castells, 2008, p. 78). Conversely, stifling public debate over issues of public interest entails shrinking the civic space. This is detrimental for democracy, as it denies human and civil rights, jeopardises government accountability, silences citizen voices and erodes confidence in government authority (Malena, 2015, p. 14).

We examine a case where pro-nuclear corporate, political, and regulatory actors cooperated behind the scenes to stifle public debate on nuclear energy in the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster. Beelitz and Merkl-Davies (2012) examine how a Swedish energy company restored organisational legitimacy following an incident in one of their nuclear power plants in Germany by means of analysing managerial discourse ('CEO-speak') in corporate public communication. In contrast, we focus on the responses of corporate, political, and regulator actors to a nuclear accident in which none of the actors were implicated in nor responsible for, but which threatened the legitimacy of nuclear power. Cho *et al.* (2018) contrast the 'backstage' corporate political activities of oil and gas firms in the form of lobbying and political party contributions aimed at influencing US law to allow oil drilling in environmentally sensitive

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[1] The concept of the civic space is based on Habermas' (1970) work of the public sphere which denotes "*the ideal of a public deliberative space, or discursive arena, where all citizens have an opportunity to contribute to collective decisions*" (Murphy and Moerman, 2018, p. 1780).

areas in Alaska with their 'frontstage' discourse on environmental protection. In contrast, we examine the 'backstage' corporate political activities in the form of accessing existing pro-nuclear networks for agenda-setting purposes with the aim of agreeing a joint 'frontstage' public communication strategy on the Fukushima disaster. By tracing discursive frames from their inception in private communication (e-mails) to their reproduction in public communication (corporate, political and regulatory news releases and documents) and their dissemination via the media (newspaper articles), we provide linguistic evidence that pro-nuclear corporate, political, and regulatory actors cooperated behind the scenes to achieve consistent public pro-nuclear messaging in order to ensure continued public support for the continuation of nuclear power generation in the UK. For this purpose, they drew on and contributed to pre-existing dominant frames on nuclear energy and crisis response and resolution in order to prevent alternative frames from becoming prominent. This enabled them to reinforce their hegemonic interpretations of reality, thus preventing a public controversy over the commercial use of nuclear energy in the UK. We find evidence of four discursive frames, which originate in the private e-mail exchange and are reproduced in public communication and newspaper articles. These include (1) *avoiding knee-jerk reactions*, (2) *lessons learned*, (3) *safety*, and (4) *nuclear renaissance*. They guide audiences' evaluation of the consequences of the Fukushima disaster for the UK in favour of the continuation of nuclear power generation.

The theoretical assumptions underpinning our study are based on political economy theory, and Fleming and Spicer's (2014) conceptualisation of organisational power as manipulation and as domination. Political economy theory views economic activity as embedded in the political, social, and institutional framework in which it takes place (Gray *et al.*, 1995). Research therefore foregrounds power and conflict in society and the role of corporate reporting in balancing the interests of a range of interested parties, including the State (Guthrie and Parker, 1990). Corporate reports are viewed as a tool for "*constructing, sustaining, and legitimising economic and political arrangements, institutions and ideological themes, which contribute to the corporation's private interests*" (Guthrie and Parkers, 1990, p. 166). The study focuses on power as manipulation and as domination as a means of furthering the vested interests of nuclear industry and UK government. Manipulation is a mostly invisible form of power, which involves accessing social networks for agenda setting purposes. We focus on corporate, political and regulatory actors tapping into an existing pro-nuclear social network to agree a joint public communication strategy in order to ensure public support for the continuation of nuclear power generation in the UK. By contrast, domination entails mobilising discursive and ideological resources in order to attain desirable outcomes and goals, while curbing the articulation of other interests and voices (Fleming and Spicer, 2014, p. 260). We focus on the way pro-nuclear corporate, political, and regulatory actors drew on and contributed to dominant discursive frames to influence public opinion on nuclear energy in the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster, thus maintaining the *status quo*. For this purpose, we utilise the concepts of intertextuality (Fairclough, 2003) and discursive framing (Entman, 1993; Benford and Snow, 2000; Fiss and Zajac, 2006; Cornellisen *et al.*, 2011; Cornellisen and Werner, 2014).

The study draws on and contributes to three streams of literature, namely (1) the political economy of accounting focusing on the relationship between companies, civil society, and the State, (2) corporations as political actors exercising power to achieve either shared or contested goals, and (3) the cross-disciplinary literature on framing. The prior corporate reporting literature has largely neglected the relationship between companies and the State. We regard the State as an interested party in policy formation and therefore pursuing common interests with companies, which are not necessarily in the public interest. Prior studies on corporations

as political actors predominately focus on manipulation, i.e., corporate power abuse by means of lobbying and political party donations (Cho *et al.*, 2006; Cho *et al.*, 2018). The Freedom of Information request and subsequent publication of an e-mail exchange by pro-nuclear corporate, political, and regulatory actors by *The Guardian* provides us with a unique opportunity to examine power as manipulation by tapping into an existing pro-nuclear social network for agenda setting purposes, and power as domination by agreeing a joint public communication strategy to influence public opinion on nuclear energy. This is problematic for two reasons. First, it constitutes a lack of transparency and accountability on part of government. Second, it curtails the articulation of alternative interests and voices by both government and the nuclear industry (Fleming and Spicer, 2014). Finally, the concept of discursive framing has been used in the social movement and media studies literature to examine how social movement actors and the media construct the meaning of controversial issues in order to "*influence the interpretations of reality among various audiences*" (Fiss and Hirsch, 2005, p. 30). Only a handful of studies utilise the concept of framing in the analysis of corporate communication (e.g., Brennan and Merkl-Davies, 2014; Ascui and Lovell, 2011; Waller and Conaway, 2011). However, it has not been employed as a primary analytical framework in the corporate communication literature to explore how companies strategically draw on and contribute to frames to influence audience perceptions of either controversial issues or organisational decisions, actions or outcomes. What is more, while the prior literature predominantly seems to assume that frames "*arrive in 'raw form'*" (Abolafia, 2004, p. 351), we emphasise the extent to which corporate actors strategically reinterpret and recombine pre-existing frames to legitimate particular arguments and solutions.

The paper is structured as follows. Section Two reviews the prior empirical literature and develops the theoretical framework. Section Three discusses the background of the study, including the commercial use of nuclear power and reactions to the Fukushima disaster. The data and the method of analysis are outlined in Section Four. Section Five presents the findings. The paper concludes with a discussion of findings and provides recommendations for future research in Section Six.

2. Literature review and theoretical framework

We adopt a political economy perspective of corporate communication to examine the attempts of pro-nuclear corporate, political, and regulatory actors to legitimate nuclear energy in the UK after the Fukushima disaster. Viewing corporations as political actors, we employ an analytical framework based on the concept of discursive framing to analyse the private and public communication of pro-nuclear actors. For this purpose, we draw on three strands of literature, which are discussed in Sections 2.1 to 2.3.

2.1 A political economy framework of corporate reporting and organisational legitimation

A political economy lens of corporate communication recognises power and conflict in society and views corporate reports as "*a product of interchange between the corporation and its environment and attempt to mediate and accommodate a variety of sectional interests*" (Guthrie and Parker, 1990, p. 166). The majority of the corporate reporting literature employing political economy theory focuses on the relationship between companies and shareholders, stakeholders, or civil society (Gray *et al.*, 1995; Williams and Adam, 2013; Lauwo *et al.*, 2016). A small number of studies pay attention to interactions between companies and the State (Archel *et al.*, 2009; Soobaroyen and Mahadeo, 2016; Siddiqui and Uddin, 2016). Public interest theory assumes that the State acts as a neutral arbiter between interest groups (e.g., companies and their employees or companies and environmental NGOs) in an attempt to resolve conflict and represent public interest. However, in line with political economy theory,

we assume that the State has its own interests, which may not always align with public interest.[2] In this case, the government may pursue its own interests or cooperate with groups of social actors to pursue common interests. If the government cooperates with companies to pursue common interests, which are not in the public interest, this creates a problem of accountability for both companies and government. The notion of accountability is central to both the relationship between companies and its key stakeholders and civil society and to the relationship between government and citizens. In the case of companies, accountability arises from the responsibility to provide an account of their activities and impacts on stakeholders and civil society. In the case of government, accountability arises from the responsibility to represent the interests of the electorate. In this scenario, corporate reporting may be used strategically to advance and protect the interests of companies and politicians, rather than the public interest (Williams and Adams, 2013).

The prior accounting literature has investigated instances where the State did not act as a neutral arbiter, but cooperated with corporations to pursue common interests. Archel *et al.* (2009) examine the role of the Spanish State during Volkswagen's attempt to introduce a new production system in its plant in Spain, which was met with protests and strikes. They argue that the State and Volkswagen pursued common interests, as the State's ultimate goal of economic growth depended on Volkswagen's profit-making ability. The authors find that Volkswagen and the State aligned their discourses in their public reporting to oppose the discourse of employees. Specifically, both parties mobilised the same discursive and ideological resources in their public discourses, by highlighting the importance of economic growth and profitability. Siddiqui and Uddin (2016) examine the role of the Bangladeshi State with respect to corporate accountability following the collapse of a factory building housing the production of ready-made garments in April 2013. They identify a 'state-business nexus' (p. 679) which acted in their own interests in order to perpetuate their powerful positions, and at the same time enabled and perpetuated human rights violations. Both the State and businesses denied responsibility and avoided accountability, while silencing counter voices by trade unions or human rights organisations. In contrast, Soobaroyen and Mahadeo (2016) examine an instance where the interests of the State and corporations are not in line and where both parties compete over power. They investigate the changes in the corporate reporting on community issues by Mauritian companies in response to changing regulations and identify a discursive struggle between the corporate discourse and the government discourse. This resulted from corporate actors and government actors struggling for power over who controls the funds raised following the introduction of a mandatory corporate social investment levy. The study highlights that the State does not always necessarily privilege powerful actors, but may also act in the interests of other groups of social actors, or in their own interests.

2.2 Corporations as political actors
Corporations are political actors in the sense that they exercise power to achieve goals, with power constituting "*the capacity to influence other actors with these political interests in mind*" (Fleming and Spicer, 2014, p. 239). Corporate power manifests in four ways, namely coercion, manipulation, domination, and subjectification (Fleming and Spicer, 2014). Coercion is a direct and explicit mode of power whereby one person "*make*[*s*] *another person* [*...*] *do something they would not otherwise do*" (p. 242). By contrast, manipulation is more covert and involves agenda setting by means of persuasion or by accessing key social networks. Agenda setting entails prefixing the decision-making parameters civil society actors use to make sense of an

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[2] In line with ICAEW (2012) we consider public interest to have been satisfied, if *ex ante*, the welfare of the representative individual has been considered in the decision-making process.acc

issue (p. 256). Domination originates in Lukes' (2005) radical concept of power and entails shaping perceptions and ideological values of actors in such a way that hierarchical relations of power seem normal and inevitable and are thus largely invisible (Fleming and Spicer, 2014). Domination involves managing and controlling other social actors in the field by mobilising discursive resources to attain political goals, while curbing the articulation of other interests and voices (p. 260). Finally, subjectification entails influencing and shaping a person's emotions and identify in a way that their particular standing and way of being within a particular social order appears normal and inevitable to them (p. 245).

All four types of corporate power have been empirically examined in the accounting literature and linked to a lack of accountability and transparency to stakeholders and civil society. Our summary of the prior literature pays particular attention to manipulation and domination, as they are pertinent for the current study. Coercion and manipulation are episodic forms of power, which manifest in identifiable acts of exerting direct influence, including lawsuits, lobbying, and political party donations. Murphy and Moerman (2018) focus on coercion by McDonalds in the form of corporate lawsuits against individuals opposing the construction of a store in Australia. They argue that coercion is used to "*limit the "ability" of others to provide an "account" within participatory democratic accountability processes*", thus stifling public debate, impeding accountability mechanisms, and ultimately undermining democratic principles. By contrast, lobbying and electoral funding constitute direct, but less visible forms of corporate power as manipulation. Lobbying helps "*to facilitate the work of legislators with agendas consonant with business interests or other advocacy groups*" (Walker and Rea, 2014, p. 288). Alternatively, corporations may influence legislation to their advantage by funding electoral candidates or political parties. Cho *et al.* (2006) examine whether companies with poor environmental performance in environmentally sensitive industries spend more on election campaigns. They find that poorer performers disclose more environmental information and have higher political expenditure, which suggests that they strategically manage their political risk exposure. Cho *et al.* (2018) show how US oil and gas firms used lobbying activities and party contributions to influence the passage of a bill to allow oil drilling in environmentally sensitive areas in Alaska. They contrast these 'backstage' corporate political activities of US oil and gas firms with their 'frontstage' discourse on environmental protection. They find that firms used their CSR reports to present themselves as committed to environmental protection. We add to the literature on manipulation by focusing on agenda setting by means of accessing key social networks with the purpose of aligning public policy decision-making with the vested interests of companies and the State.

Domination and subjectification are systemic and less visible forms of power which entail the mobilisation of "*institutional, ideological, and discursive resources*" (Fleming and Spicer, 2014, p. 240) to achieve political goals. Corporate reports draw on and contribute to dominant discourses on contested issues, thus curbing the articulation of other interests and voices. For example, Spence (2007) notes that social and environmental reporting is a hegemonic practice motivated by obfuscating conflict and antagonism, rather than providing transparent information. This, in turn, endangers democracy and reinforces the hegemony of corporations. Against the background of public demand for and debate on sustainable development, Milne *et al.* (2009) highlight how an aggregate of businesses in New Zealand constructed a discourse of sustainability that drew both on economic and ecological ideologies and made them appear as experts and leaders on sustainable development, allowing them to "*reinforce rather than challenge the status quo*" (p. 1241). This demonstrates how the mobilisation of ideological and discursive resources can obfuscate underlying corporate behaviours and practices and thus serve economic, rather than ecological ends. The "*inconsistencies between publicly visible*

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corporate reporting and their less visible political activities" highlighted by Cho *et al.* (2018, p. 866) also demonstrate how corporations may use their corporate reporting strategically to influence audience perceptions of their social and environmental practices and performance, while influencing legislation to ensure the *status quo* in maintained in relation to CSR. Corporate reporting may thus serve as a means of providing accounts in a self-serving manner and marginalising alternative accounts of social movement groups or NGOs, thus inhibiting pluralist and democratic debates (Laine and Vinnari, 2017; Tregidga, 2017; Vinnari and Laine, 2017).

2.3 Discursive framing

The concept of framing originates in the work of Goffman (1974) and is based on the assumption that the meaning of events and issues is socially constructed. Frames are "*resources for ongoing meaning construction*" (Werner and Cornellisen, 2014, p. 1454). The concept has been applied in a variety of academic disciplines, including psychology, economics, linguistics, political science, and media studies, to study a range of phenomena, including decision-making and public opinion and policy formation (e.g., Kahneman and Tversky, 1984; Lakoff, 2010a; Benford and Snow, 2000; Chong and Druckman, 2007). We build on the social movement and media sociology literature on discursive framing, i.e., how social actors and the media construct the meaning of issues in order to influence audiences' interpretations (Fiss and Hirsch, 2005). In an organisational context discursive framing has been used to examine how individuals use frames to initiate and justify change, but also to resist change and maintain the *status quo* (Fiss and Zajac, 2006; Cornelissen *et al.*, 2011; Cornelissen and Werner, 2014). Although employing a rhetorical analysis as a primary analytical lens, Brennan and Merkl-Davies (2014) draw on the concepts of framing and reframing in their analysis of a controversy between multi-national apparel companies and *Greenpeace* over pollution in their supply chain. Our study is most similar to Waller and Conaway (2011) who employ the concepts of framing and counter-framing to explore how Nike restores its reputation after being targeted over poor labour practices in its supply chain in South-East Asia, resulting in widespread and sustained negative media coverage.

Discursive framing assumes that social actors use a range of linguistic and rhetorical devices, particularly figurative language, including metaphors and similes (Waller and Conaway, 2011), to influence audiences' perceptions, evaluations, and decisions. Framing is a sense-giving process, which involves strategically constructing schemata, which guide audiences' understanding and interpretation of an issue, with the attempt to influence their sense-making processes (Fiss and Zajac, 2006). It entails selecting a specific aspect of social reality and making it more salient, whilst obscuring other aspects, with the purpose of fostering a specific interpretation of the situation (Entman, 1993). Over time, frames become institutionalised in the form of cultural frames and internalised by individuals as cognitive frames (Lakoff, 2010b). What is more, discursive framing does not occur in a vacuum, but has to be considered in context (Cornellisen *et al.*, 2011). Social actors cannot simply impose any representation of reality on their audiences. Frames have to resonate with the norms, values and beliefs of target audiences in order to be accepted (Benford and Snow, 2000). When framing an event or issue in a particular way, social actors draw on and contribute to pre-existing cultural frames, which are strategically reinterpreted and recombined to legitimate particular arguments and solutions. As frames are used to promote goals and agendas and to achieve outcomes, which benefit specific groups of people, they are inherently political (Waller and Conaway, 2011). Social actors may reproduce pre-existing dominant frames in order to maintain the *status quo*. Alternatively, social actors may question the *status quo* by reframing an issue. If a particular

frame achieves sufficient prominence, it contributes to the resolution of an issue of public concern (Waller and Conaway, 2011).

The media plays an important role in this process, as it provides interpretive frames on specific events and issues to the public (Butler *et al.*, 2013). Ultimately, the range of interpretive frames provided in the media and whether a frame is more or less prominent will have an impact on public opinion formation. Social movement groups and policy elites therefore aim to get the media to pick up a frame, which promotes their own interests, and disseminate it to civil society in order to gain support for a particular issue or course of action (Waller and Conway, 2011). This is referred to as 'frame sponsorship' (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989). As crises undermine hegemonic interpretations of reality, they may give rise to 'framing contests' (Benford and Snow, 2000) or 'frame disputes' (Fiss and Hirsch, 2005) amongst different groups of social actors struggling for power over contested interpretations of reality (Carragee and Roefs, 2004; Fiss and Hirsch, 2005). The outcomes of such framing contests have an impact on policy formation. For this reason, social actors may have an interest in preventing public controversies from arising in the first place. They may do so by strategically reinforcing dominant frames to prevent alternative frames from becoming prominent.

Drawing on the three strands of literature outlined in this section, we view public controversies as taking place in the civic space, which is a discursive arena where civil society actors, companies, and the State debate issues resulting in public policy. Adopting a political economy perspective, we recognise that power is not equally distributed in society and that the State is not a neutral arbiter in public debates. Rather, companies and the State constitute powerful political actors with vested interests. They may cooperate to pursue common interests and aim to influence public policy outcomes. For this purpose, they mobilise power to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes and exclude civil society actors from decision-making on public policy, thus preventing alternative voices from being heard. This shrinks the civic space and results in public policy not being the outcome of pluralist decision-making (Archel *et al.*, 2009).

3. Case background
This section provides the context of our study, which includes the commercial use of nuclear power and nuclear policy in the UK (Section 3.1), the Fukushima disaster and resulting public and political responses across Europe and in the UK, as well as UK media coverage (Section 3.2).

3.1 The commercial use of nuclear power
The first nuclear power plants generating electricity for commercial use began operating in Russia in 1954 and in the UK in 1956 (European Nuclear Society, 2017). Nuclear energy generation flourished across the globe for over two decades, until two major nuclear incidents exposed the risks involved. The Three Mile Island accident in the U.S. in 1979 and the Chernobyl disaster in the former USSR in 1986 highlighted that nuclear accidents can result in major contamination of the environment and in health hazards for communities for decades to come. The popularity of nuclear energy declined in the late 1980s due to three factors, namely (1) increased public opposition following nuclear accidents, (2) high running costs of nuclear power plants (amongst others due to higher regulatory cost following the incidents), and (3) the increasing use of gas-generated energy (Elliot, 2013). However, at the turn of the 20th century governments worldwide began to actively promote nuclear power generation. This global trend was coined 'nuclear renaissance' and justified by supporters as a means of tackling climate change and providing energy security (Elliot, 2013, p. 11). With increasing global instability over the last decade governments worldwide have been concerned about future

energy security and have aimed to be independent from energy imports. Climate change has been an increasing concern for governments and civil society since the 1990s. The ratification of the Kyoto Protocol entailed 53 countries committing themselves to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2012 in order to combat global warming. Against this background, supporters of nuclear power generation have argued that it is the most affordable option to fight global warming due its low carbon emissions.

The 'nuclear renaissance' also played out in the UK with the government's attitude towards nuclear energy changing dramatically. When New Labour came into power in 1997 it emphasised the promotion of renewables and had no plans to promote nuclear power. In 2005, the possibility of expanding nuclear power was first suggested. This was heavily criticised, due to a lack of public consultation and perceived as the result of lobbying by the nuclear industry (Aldred and Stoddard, 2008). Despite criticism, New Labour went ahead with its plans for nuclear new builts, releasing White Papers on nuclear power in 2007 and 2008. The expansion of nuclear power generation in the UK was also pushed by the nuclear industry, especially by EDF and the German utility company E.On, which called for "*replac*[*ing*] *nuclear with nuclear*", which entails building new nuclear power stations on old sites (Elliot, 2013, p. 47). Both companies enjoyed "*strong state support, in kind if not in direct finance*" (p. 45). Any expansion had to be financed by the industry and not via government subsidies (Butler *et al.*, 2013). In return, the industry demanded a supportive investment environment and security (Elliot, 2013).

3.2 Reponses to the Fukushima disaster

The Fukushima disaster unfolded on Friday, 11th March 2011, when an earthquake with the magnitude of 9.0 erupted off the coast of Japan, triggering a powerful tsunami. The tsunami swept across the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, flooding buildings and the emergency generators. As the cooling system came to a halt, reactor buildings exploded due to mounting pressure and nuclear meltdowns occurred. Surrounding land, air and water were contaminated. The Japanese Government introduced a 30-kilometre exclusion zone around the plant, which is still in place to this day. Images of the disaster and its impact were distributed worldwide via the media. The Fukushima disaster represents the worst nuclear accident to date, after the Chernobyl disaster in 1986. Both events were ranked as a level 7 event on the International Nuclear Event Scale, representing a 'major event'. Consequently, the perceived risk of nuclear power generation increased across the globe and rekindled the public debate on nuclear safety. What is more, it called into question the future of nuclear power at a time, when governments worldwide were actively promoting nuclear power as a means of combatting climate change and providing energy security and independence (Elliot, 2013).

Consequently, governments of countries that had previously committed to nuclear power had to reassure the public of nuclear safety, as nuclear energy policies are heavily dependent on public acceptance and support. Public responses and subsequent policy outcomes to the Fukushima disaster differed significantly across Europe. Germany, Switzerland and Belgium decided to phrase out nuclear power due to strong anti-nuclear public sentiment. All three countries had an existing fleet of nuclear reactors, with plans to expand nuclear power generation. Germany experienced the strongest anti-nuclear sentiment. Having had just recently decided on expanding the lifespans of Germany's nuclear power plants, Chancellor Angela Merkel saw herself under such great pressure that she decided on 29 May 2011 to phase out all nuclear reactors by 2022 (Elliot, 2013). In the Netherlands, the government decided to abandon its plans to build a second nuclear power plant. Public opposition to nuclear power also increased in France, Spain, Sweden, Finland, and Eastern and Central Europe, but not to

the extent that governments were forced to change their existing nuclear energy policies. The Italian government saw itself forced to abandon plans to re-engage with nuclear power generation following a public vote (Elliott, 2013).

Compared to other European countries, there was little public debate on nuclear energy following the Fukushima disaster in the UK (Elliott, 2013). This may be due to a sustained pro-nuclear campaign by the UK government and the nuclear industry preceding the Fukushima disaster portraying nuclear power as a means of reducing carbon emissions and securing future energy supplies (Poortinga *et al.*, 2013). We discuss the dominant pro-nuclear frames pushed by the UK government preceding the Fukushima disaster in Section 4.2. After a mere two-month consultation period and hardly any discussion of the implications of the Fukushima disaster on nuclear safety in Parliament, the UK government announced its plans to continue with nuclear power generation on 18 May 2011. A day after the disaster Chris Huhne, the Secretary of State of Energy and Climate Change, asked Mike Weightman, Chief Inspector of Nuclear Installations and Head of the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR), to compile a report on the implications of the events at Fukushima for the UK nuclear industry (the Weightman Report). The ONR is the UK regulatory body responsible for nuclear safety and security at nuclear sites in the UK. As Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, Chris Huhne represented the interests of the Government, which relied on the continued use of nuclear energy to ensure the future supply of affordable energy and to reduce carbon emissions. The UK Committee on Climate Change released a report on 9 May 2011, recommending that nuclear energy continued to be part of the UK's future energy mix in order to meet climate-change goals. The Weightman report was published on 18 May 2011 stating that, from a safety perspective, there was no need to phase out nuclear power in the UK. This report formed the basis for the National Policy Statement issued in July 2011, confirming the selection of eight sites for new nuclear reactors (Department of Energy and Climate Change, 2011). In fact, parliamentary support for nuclear energy increased from 80 percent in 2010 to 98 percent in July 2011 (Elliot, 2013, p. 45). Table 1 provides a timeline of events.

[Table 1 about here]

As events unfolded in Japan, the UK media coverage of the Fukushima disaster was extensive and detailed. However, it did not stay in the headlines for long and was not portrayed as a major catastrophe (Wittneben, 2012). The broadcast media "*adopt*[*ed*] *a sensationalist approach, but calming views concerning implications were usually also presented*" (Elliot, 2013, p. 51). What is more, the BBC allegedly broadcast programmes in support of nuclear energy very soon after the disaster. The UK media offered few critical views and displayed an "*apparent bemusement at the rapid policy shift in Germany*" (Elliot, 2013, p. 45). The difference in public acceptance of nuclear power generation between the UK and Germany may thus not only be the result of differing historical acceptance, but also of "*a greater intensity of reporting of the Fukushima accident in Germany*" (Poortinga *et al.*, 2013, p. 29). This suggests that the media played a crucial role in shaping public opinion on nuclear power.

Four months after the Fukushima disaster, on 30 June 2011, *The Guardian* published an article in which it exposed an e-mail exchange between pro-nuclear actors. The article was based on *The Guardian's* Freedom of Information request relating to e-mails focusing on the Fukushima disaster by civil servants and politicians associated with the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (DBIS) and the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC). The article did not result in widespread and sustained media coverage and was only picked up by

The Telegraph.[3] We discuss the e-mail exchange and the pro-nuclear actors involved in more detail in Section 4. 1.

4. Data and Research method
4.1 Data
The data consists of 55 private e-mails exchanged by pro-nuclear corporate and political actors in the six weeks following the Fukushima disaster and 32 public documents, including 15 press releases by nuclear energy companies operating in the UK, 14 documents issued by political actors, and three documents issued by regulatory actors between March and June 2011. Four companies were involved in the e-mail exchange, namely the two nuclear power operators in the UK, EDF Energy (EDF hereafter) and Horizon, and two firms specialising in the design, construction and servicing of new nuclear power reactors, namely French-based Areva and US-based Westinghouse. Both were involved in negotiations with the government to build new reactors in the UK at the time of the Fukushima disaster. EDF is the only publicly listed utility company in the UK and operates eight nuclear power plants. These were originally owned by British Energy, which was bought by the French utility EDF S.A. in 2009. Horizon Nuclear Power operates two nuclear power plants in the UK. It started out as a joint venture between E.On UK and RWE npower, which was still the case at the time of the Fukushima disaster. The company is currently owned by the Japanese multinational Hitachi. Table 2 lists the key pro-nuclear actors involved in the private and public communication following the Fukushima disaster.

[Table 2 about here]

Private e-mails
The e-mails were downloaded from *The Guardian* website (*The Guardian*, 2011). Table 3 lists the number of e-mails sent by groups of pro-nuclear actors by date. They include e-mails by political actors (OND/DEEC, DBIS), corporate actors (EDF, Horizon, Westinghouse, Nuclear Industry Association (NIA)), and academics (Sheffield University). Sixty-nine percent of e-mails were exchanged in the week immediately after the Fukushima disaster (38 e-mails out of 55). This indicates the perceived urgency of agreeing on a joint public communication strategy to safeguard their common interests in the continuation of nuclear power generation in the UK. Corporate and political actors were by far the most active in the private e-mail exchange (42 percent corporate actors, 53 percent political actors, five percent academics). The volume and frequency of e-mails exchanged over the six-week period of observation indicates the strategic importance pro-nuclear corporate and political actors attributed to public communication on the impact of Fukushima on UK nuclear power generation.

[Table 3 about here]

Public documents
Public documents included in the analysis comprise corporate, political, and regulatory documents. We analyse the press releases of two UK nuclear power plant operators, namely EDF and Horizon, both of which were involved in the private e-mail exchange. Press releases are an important means of communication, which allow firms to respond to legitimacy threats and to engage in public debates on current issues and events in a timely manner (Aerts and Cormier, 2009). They were collected from the news section of the company websites for a

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[3] It also did not result in public criticism by the opposition party (Labour), protests by anti-nuclear groups, or discussion in Parliament.

three-month period following the disaster. Press releases selected for analysis refer to the Fukushima disaster and/or nuclear power generation in the UK (eleven EDF press releases and four Horizon press releases). Government websites and websites of regulatory bodies were searched to collect relevant public communication by political and regulatory actors. The documents comprise letters exchanged between politicians, civil servants, and regulators, transcripts of speeches and statements, as well as news releases from the government ministries and regulatory bodies. Mike Weightman's foreword in his interim report was also included in the analysis, as this document concludes the political debate on the future of nuclear power in the UK, as well as a thank-you letter from Chris Huhne to Mike Weightman on 17 June 2011 for compiling the report. In total, the data comprises fifteen corporate documents, fourteen political documents and three regulatory documents (see Appendix 1 for an overview of public documents).

4.2 Method of analysis
Drawing on the prior empirical literature, we identify pre-existing discursive frames on nuclear energy and on crisis response and resolution and examine whether and how these frames occur in the data by paying particular attention to figurative language, including catch-phrases, similes, metaphors, and analogies (Cornellisen *et al.*, 2011; Cornellisen and Werner, 2014; Waller and Conaway, 2011). We trace the discursive frames from their inception in private e-mails to their reproduction in public communication and in the media by establishing intertextual links. This allows us to make inferences on the extent to which pro-nuclear actors used language strategically to ensure continued public support for nuclear power generation in the UK. We also check for evidence of counter-frames by examining UK newspaper articles and a *Greenpeace* report (2012).

Intertextuality
Intertextuality refers to "*texts draw*[*ing*] *upon, incorporat*[*ing*], <u>*recontextualiz*[*ing*]</u> *and dialogu*[*ing*] *with other texts*" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 17, emphasis in original) and manifests itself in words and phrases in a particular text that emanate from other texts. Intertextuality may be explicit when texts explicitly quote or paraphrase words and phrases from other texts, or implicit, when texts indirectly invoke other texts, for example by paraphrasing (Brennan *et al.*, 2013). For example, in our data the phrase 'knee-jerk reactions' is often paraphrased as 'rushing to judgement'.

The concept of intertextuality has been employed in accounting research to trace interactions between multinational companies and an NGO (Brennan *et al.*, 2013) and between a newly privatised company and the media (Lupu and Sandu, 2017). Brennan *et al.* (2013) examine how companies in the apparel industry and a powerful stakeholder engage in a dialogue during a public controversy by explicitly or implicitly reproducing key phrases from each others' press releases. Lupu and Sandu (2017) analyse how a newly privatise company in a transitional economy evokes dominant discourses propagated by the media to construct a sense of legitimacy. Thus, intertextuality provides linguistic evidence of the strategic use of language as a means of promoting agendas and achieving economic, social, and political goals.

Pre-existing frames
We focus on the (re)production of frames on nuclear energy and the Fukushima disaster by pro-nuclear corporate, political, and regulatory actors to legitimate the continuation of the commercial use of nuclear energy in the UK. However, as nuclear energy is a contentious issue, we also examine whether and how pro-nuclear frames were opposed. For this purpose, we draw on the prior empirical literature on frames on crisis response and resolution and on nuclear

energy. Although not explicitly conceptualised as such, the crisis communication and policy literature have identified a number of frames on crisis response and resolution, including *avoiding knee-jerk reactions*, *lessons learned*, and *wake-up call* (Ashlock *et al.*, 2006; Abolafia, 2004; Mitchell, 2006). There are two possibilities of framing a negative event, such as a disaster, depending on the argument or solution put forward, namely either obfuscating its negative aspects as a means of advocating a continuation of the *status quo* or emphasising its negative aspects in order to encourage change. *Avoiding knee-jerk reactions* is commonly used by social actors and the media to discuss crises adversely affecting public health or economic well-being to caution against an impulsive emotional response (Ashlock *et al.*, 2006; Abolafia, 2004). It suggests that change would be the result of an emotional overreaction to the crisis. *Lessons learned* serves to resolve a crisis by drawing a line underneath it and re-evaluating it as a positive learning experience. Interestingly, it was employed by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to refer to the Chernobyl disaster in the context of its 25th anniversary on 3 March 2011, i.e., just eight days before the Fukushima disaster. By contrast, *wake-up call* highlights negative aspects of the crisis or disaster as a means of advocating policy change (Mitchell, 2006).

Analysing US and UK newspaper coverage on nuclear energy from 1945 to the Chernobyl disaster in 1986 (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989) and from 2005 to 2008 (Doyle, 2011), the media sociology and media studies literature has identified three pro-nuclear frames (*progress*, *energy independence*, and *climate change*) and five anti-nuclear frames (*devil's bargain, runaway, not cost effective, public accountability*, and *soft paths*). Over this 60-year period, specific frames featured more or less prominently, depending on socio-political and economic events. Pro-nuclear frames highlight positive aspects of nuclear energy, whereas anti-nuclear frames emphasise negative aspects of nuclear energy. *Progress* denotes the contribution of nuclear power to economic and technological development and growth (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989). *Energy independence* refers to the use of nuclear power as a strategy to achieve independence from energy imports (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989). It goes hand in hand with the idea of 'energy security', which entails a country's ability to generate sufficient energy to meet demand. *Climate change* proposes nuclear energy as a solution for tackling global warming, due to its low-carbon characteristic (Doyle, 2011). From the 1990s onwards, the three pro-nuclear frames have often been blended together in an overarching frame referred to as *nuclear renaissance* in order to legitimate and justify the expansion of nuclear power (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989; Greenhalgh and Azapagic, 2009; Butler *et al.*, 2011; Doyle, 2011). *Nuclear renaissance* was the dominant frame on nuclear power in the UK at the time of the Fukushima disaster. It was promulgated by the New Labour government with the publication of White Papers on nuclear energy in 2007 and 2008 and widely disseminated by the UK media (Doyle, 2011). Plans to build new nuclear power plants were justified by the claim that nuclear energy was in the interest of the British public, as it could reduce carbon emission and secure future energy supplies (Greenhalgh and Azapagic, 2009). The anti-nuclear frame that has a bearing on our study is *not cost effective*. It portrays nuclear energy as more expensive than alternative energy sources, once construction, running, and decommissioning costs have been taken into consideration.

5. Intertextuality and discursive framing in private and public communication

Drawing on Fleming and Spicer's (2014) concpetualisation of power as manipulation and as domination, this section presents the findings of our analysis of e-mails and public documents by pro-nuclear actors following the Fukushima disaster. We first discuss how corporate, political, and regulatory actors tapped into an existing pro-nuclear social network in a private space for agenda setting purposes to agree a joint public communication strategy

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(manipulation). We then outline how pro-nuclear actors discursively framed the Fukushima disaster and nuclear power in their public communication in order to influence public perceptions to ensure public support for the continuation of nuclear energy generation in the UK (domination).

5.1 Agenda-setting

The publication of private e-mails relating to the Fukushima disaster by *The Guardian* rendered a previously invisible exercise of power as manipulation visible.[4] In the article accompanying the publication of the private e-mail exchange *The Guardian* criticises the lack of transparency and consultation in public policy decision-making by the nuclear industry and government, who are viewed as furthering their own private agendas, rather than the interests of the UK public. *The Guardian* accuses them of "*draw*[*ing*] *up a co-ordinated public relations strategy to play down the Fukushima nuclear accident* [*...*] *to try to ensure the accident did not derail their plans for a new generation of nuclear stations in the UK*" (Edwards, 2011). The article also quotes a *Greenpeace* spokesperson calling the e-mail exchange "*scandalous collusion*" which "*highlights the government's blind obsession with nuclear power*", concluding that neither the government nor the nuclear industry "*can be trusted when it comes to nuclear*" (Edwards, 2011). The private e-mail exchange indicates that corporate, political, and regulatory actors engaged in agenda setting by tapping into an existing pro-nuclear social network to agree a joint public communication strategy aimed at preventing a public controversy on nuclear energy. The use of the theatrical metaphors of 'lines' and 'script' suggests that pro-nuclear actors viewed public communication on the Fukushima disaster as a performance to an audience of civil society actors.

The private e-mail exchange was initiated by Mark Higson two days after the Fukushima disaster, on Sunday, 13 March 2011. In his role as the Chief Executive of the Office for Nuclear Development (OND) he was responsible for removing potential barriers to investment in nuclear energy. The purpose of his first e-mail was to obtain agreement on official government 'lines' on the Fukushima disaster. He stated that "*if pressed*" Chris Huhne might "*wish to say he is asking Mike Weightman to provide a full assessment of the implications and lessons to be learnt*" (Higson, E[1], 13 March 2011). He further noted that "*it would be good if EdF could welcome* [*the full assessment of the implications and lessons to be learnt by Mike Weightman*]" (ibid.). Only an hour later a DBIS civil servant replied to Mark Higson's e-mail, stating that it was "[*g*]*ood to see* [*Higson*] *on Friday*" and agreeing that the "[*e*]*vents in Japan have the potential to set the nuclear industry back if* [*they*] *do no counter quickly and accurately*" (DBIS civil servant, E[2], 13 March 2011). Using military metaphors, he[5] compared the threat of a public controversy on the continutation of nuclear power in the UK to a battle between pro-nuclear and anti-nuclear actors, stating that "*HMG and the NIA should coordinate lines*" in order "*to own the ground on this and not allow the anti-nuclear people to take up occupancy of it*" (ibid.). He emphasised that pro-nuclear actors "*need to ensure* [*they*] *have strong messages on it and that* [*they*] *are coordinated with the industry and Whitehall*" (DBIS civil servant, E[3], 13 March 2011). He added that "[*f*]*rom web searches* [*he*] *can see anti-nuclear people across Europe have wasted no time of blurring this all into Chernobyl and the works*" and that they "*need to quash any stories trying to compare this to Chernobyl – by using the facts to discredit*" (DBIS official, E[4], 13 March 2011). This suggests that he not only intended to marginalise anti-nuclear actors, but also to discredit and delegitimate them in order to

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[4] The exposure of the covert e-mail exchange did not result in widespread and sustained media coverage. It was only picked up by one UK newspaper, namely *The Telegraph*. It also did not result in public criticism by the opposition party (Labour), protests by anti-nuclear groups, or discussion in Parliament.

[5] We cannot be sure of the civil servant's gender, but take an educated guess based on the language used.

exclude their interests and voices from the public debate, thus shrinking the civic space. He also called on other actors in the pro-nuclear network to share their 'lines':

"*If you have lines / messaging work through ... and ... and they can get these into the HMG messaging as well as briefs to Ministers. OND can also work on communication to the local communities where new build is proposed in the UK. We need to all be working from the same material to get the message through to the media and the public – including the NIA.*" (DBIS civil servant, E[5], 13 March 2011)

This suggests that the DBIS civil servant strategically and consciously implements a pubic communication strategy by pro-nuclear actors to ensure media coverage in line with their interests.

Westinghouse was the first corporate actor to reply to the e-mails sent by political actors, emphasising that they would use government 'lines' only "*in reactive mode*" and otherwise "*defer any media requests to industry bodies*", such as the NIA, as Westinghouse does not "*want [their] company name drawn into this*" (Westinghouse, E[6], 13 March 2011). EDF shared their public statements to local communities at nuclear sites with other pro-nuclear actors in the network via e-mail on 14 March 2011. The same 'lines' were published by EDF as a press release the following day. Throughout the private e-mail exchange pro-nuclear actors kept each other updated on their public 'lines' to ensure coordinated messaging to the public and the media. They also kept each other informed on media reports on the Fukushima disaster. Pro-nuclear actors also referred to a Nuclear Development Forum, scheduled to take place on Thursday, 17 March 2011, noting that the event would be an opportunity to discuss their public communication strategy in person.

5.2 Discursive framing
We identify four discursive frames on the Fukushima disaster and on nuclear power in the private and public communication by pro-nuclear actors. They originate in the e-mail exchange and were deliberately and consciously reproduced in public communication and subsequently disseminated by the media. These include (1) *avoiding knee-jerk reactions*, (2) *lessons learned*, (3) *safety*, and (4) *nuclear renaissance*. They constitute pre-existing frames on nuclear power and on crisis response and resolution, which are strategically reinterpreted and recombined to influence public opinion on nuclear power. *Avoiding knee-jerk reactions* and *lessons learned* obfuscate negative aspects of the Fukushima disaster, whereas *safety* and *nuclear renaissance* highlight positive aspects of nuclear energy. In combination, they serve to legitimate the continuation of nuclear power generation in the UK and to silence alternative voices. Appendix 2 provides examles of the four discursive frames from both private and public communication, thus illustrating intertextual links. A more detailed discussion is provided below, which considers the frames by pro-nuclear actors in the context of emerging counter-frames articulated by *The Guardian* and *Greenpeace*. Figure 1 summarises our findings in schematic form by setting the four dominant pro-nuclear frames against anti-nuclear counter-frames.

Frames on the Fukushima disaster
Pro-nuclear actors aimed to obfuscate negative aspects of the Fukushima disaster in order to advocate and legitimate the continuation of nuclear power. For this purpose, they employed two pre-existing frames, namely *avoiding knee-jerk reactions* and *lessons learned*. *Avoiding knee-jerk reactions* is aimed at averting anti-nuclear sentiment in the UK in the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster by portraying such responses in a negative light. The phrase 'avoiding knee-jerk reactions' is used interchangeably with 'avoiding snap judgements' to denote a hasty

emotional response based on an overestimation of the risks and danger inherent in nuclear power generation. It establishes an implicit link to the dominant pro-nuclear *safety* frame discussed below and stands in opposition to the anti-nuclear *dangerous* frame, which was gaining ground in Germany. *Avoiding knee-jerk reactions* originates in the very first e-mail sent by Mark Higson warning that "[*w*]*e shouldn't make snap judgements at this point*" (Higson, E[1], 13 March 2011, emphasis added). Indirectly quoting the nuclear industry, the media reproduces the frame, as evidenced by a newspaper article on the Fukushima disaster in *The Telegraph* on 15 March 2011:

> "*The nuclear industry has expressed alarm about a possible "knee jerk" response to a disaster that was caused by an earthquake and tsunami sequence, the likes of which has never happened in European recorded history*" (Waterfield, 2011, emphasis added).

The article states the concern of pro-nuclear actors regarding emotional responses to the Fukushima disaster. This concern was triggered by the strong anti-nuclear sentiments to the disaster in Germany resulting in the eventual phase-out of nuclear power. *Avoiding knee-jerk reactions* can thus be seen as an attempt by UK pro-nuclear actors to reinforce the dominant *safety* frame and pre-empt the traction of the anti-nuclear *dangerous* frame, thus preventing the rise of anti-nuclear sentiments in the UK.

Avoiding knee-jerk reactions was reproduced extensively in both corporate and political public documents and in the UK media. EDF's CEO Vincent de Rivaz praised the leadership by UK politicians with respect to their handling of the Fukushima disaster. He noted that "[*a*]*ll have shown clear-headedness in their response – avoiding knee-jerk reactions*" (EDF CD[3], 17 March 2011, emphasis added). Vincent de Rivaz contrasts 'clear-headedness' with 'knee-jerk reaction', thus presenting the two responses as a dichotomy of rationality versus emotion. His negative evaluation of actions driven by emotions is in line with the cultural dominance of rationality in Western society and thus resonates with audiences' values. On 17 March 2011, Chris Huhne was quoted in a press release by the DECC saying:

> "*We should not rush to judgment. It is important that we have the full facts at our disposal. I have asked the Chief Nuclear Inspector for a full report so that the implications for the UK are clear*" (PD[5], 17 March 2011, emphasis added).

Phrases associated with the frame also occur in other policy documents, emphasising the value and importance of "*full facts and their implications*" (PD[2], 14 March 2011) and stressing that any assessment must be "*based on firm evidence*" (PD[11], 18 May 2011), thus clearly valuing rational and fully-informed decision-making. The frame *avoiding knee-jerk reactions* was also reproduced by *The Times*, particularly in the context of depicting Germany's response to the Fukushima disaster. They referred to "*Germany's kneejerk decision to slow extensions to the lives of its fleet of nuclear power plants*" (*The Times*, 2011b, emphasis added), thus portraying the reaction of the German government in a negative light. However, it is worth noting that *The Times* is supportive of the Conservative Party and are therefore inclined to reproduce the pro-nuclear frames pushed by the coalition government at the time. Interestingly, no counter-frame emerged and *avoiding knee-jerk reactions* remained unopposed. In Figure 1 we indicate *wake-up call* as a potential alternative frame as a means of questioning the legitimacy of nuclear energy after the Fukushima disaster.

Lessons learned is a pre-existing frame used by social actors to draw a line under a crisis and move forward. It had already been employed in the context of the Chernobyl nuclear accident

(Reynolds and Seeger, 2005; Seeger, 2006). On 3 March 2011, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) released a news item on their website announcing a conference to be held in Kiev on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster on 26 April 2011:

"*To commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, the IAEA, which has monitored radioactivity in the region and worked to reduce exposure to it since the accident, will participate in an international conference designed to ensure that the <u>lessons learned</u> from the accident will bring about lasting improvements in nuclear and radiation safety globally.*" (IAEA, 2011a, emphasis added).

UK politicians, and especially regulators, who interacted with the IAEA on a regular basis, thus had access to the frame. For example, Mark Higson stated in the first e-mail on 13 March 2011 that they "<u>*will be working closely with the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) and Japan to carefully establish what lessons can be learned.*</u>" (E[1], 13 March 2011, emphasis added). What is more, Mike Weightman was appointed by the IAEA as the independent regulator to lead the IAEA's "*International Fact Finding Mission*" (IAEA, 2011b), which he asserted would "*help inform* [*his*] *final and more comprehensive <u>lessons learned</u> report which* [*he would*] *publish in September*" (RD[3], 18 May 2011). It is therefore highly likely that UK pro-nuclear actors deliberately drew on the frame *lessons learned* in their public communication in an attempt to influence the way the UK public interpreted the Fukushima disaster, namely by obfuscating negative aspects of the disaster and by portraying it as an opportunity to improve current and future nuclear safety in the UK.

In fact, the frame originated in the first e-mail sent by Mark Higson in which he stated that Chris Huhne would be interviewed by the media that day. Quoting an earlier statement by Chris Huhne in relation to the Fukushima disaster, Mark Higson said that Chris Huhne "*may stick with current lines*":

"*The incident at Fukushima is clearly a very serious matter. It is much too early to say what the impact and <u>implications</u> are. We will be working closely with the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) and Japan to carefully establish <u>what lessons can be learned.</u>*" (Huhne quoted in E[1], 13 March 2011, emphasis added).

In corporate and political public communication *lessons learned* is often reproduced in conjunction with the term 'implications' as a means of suggesting a positive way forward after the disaster. The term 'implications' also featured prominently in the title of Mike Weightman's interim report published on 18 May 2011: "*Japanese earthquake and tsunami: <u>Implications</u> for the UK Nuclear Industry*" (ONR, 2011, emphasis added).

EDF and Horizon also extensively reproduced the frame *lessons learned* in their public communication in various modifications over time. For example, EDF stated in their second press release:

"*On nuclear, we welcome the fact that the UK Government has asked the safety regulator to report on the <u>implications</u> of the events in Japan. EDF Energy is happy to support this work in whatever way it can <u>to ensure lessons are learned</u>. The nuclear industry puts great weight on <u>learning</u> from any such events.*" (EDF CD[2], 15 March 2011, emphasis added).

Horizon's first press release stated:

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"*we welcome the announcement by the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, Chris Huhne, that the Chief Nuclear Inspector, Dr Mike Weightman, will prepare a report on the* implications *and* lessons learned *from the situation in Japan.*" (Horizon CD[1], 17 March 2011, emphasis added).

What is more, both nuclear power operators repeatedly asserted their determination and commitment "*to* learn all the lessons *from this event in Japan*" (EDF CD[5], 5 April 2011, emphasis added). EDF's CEO Vincent de Rivaz even referred to the events following the Fukushima disaster as a "*lessons learnt exercise*" (EDF CD[3], 17 March 2011). The frame was also reproduced by politicians, such as, for example, by then Prime Minister David Cameron in a speech on 14 March 2011:

"*Mr Speaker, the Energy Secretary* [*Chris Huhne*] *has asked Chief Nuclear Inspector, Dr. Mike Weightman, for a thorough report on the* implications *of the situation in Japan. The UK does not have reactors of the design of those in Fukushima and nor does it plan any. Nor are we in a seismically sensitive zone.* But if there are lessons to learn, then we will learn them." (PD[3], 14 March 2011, emphasis added).

In fact, David Cameron continued to use phrases relating to the frame *lessons learned* throughout the political debate on Fukushima, thereby tapping into and reinforcing pro-nuclear sentiment.

Lessons learned was also extensively reproduced by the media. For example, on 14 March 2011, *The Times* science editor Mark Henderson stated that "*Chris Huhne, the Energy Secretary, has asked the chief nuclear Inspector to examine its* implications" (*The Times*, 2011a, emphasis added). The *Daily Mail* featured an article on 15 March 2011 explaining that "*Energy minister Chris Huhne has begun a review of Britain's nuclear programme to assess* lessons to be learned *from Japan*" (*Daily Mail*, 2011, emphasis added). This demonstrates that pro-nuclear actors succeeded in disseminating pro-nuclear discursive frames on the Fukushima disaster via the media. Interestingly, the frame was also picked up by anti-nuclear groups who turned it on its head by questioning whether any lessons had been learned. On 24 June 2011, the *Independent* quoted Louise Hutchins, a climate and energy campaigner for *Greenpeace*, saying:

"*It's illogical, and possibly illegal, for the Government to keep pushing for a fleet of new nuclear reactors before we've even* learned the lessons *from the Fukushima meltdown. Countries around the world are dropping their nuclear programmes as costs soar*" (Morris, 2011).

This indicates that the frame was appropriated by anti-nuclear social actors to make a case against nuclear power.

In summary, the frames *avoiding knee-jerk reactions* and *lessons learned* obfuscate the negative aspects of the Fukushima disaster and are linked to the pro-nuclear frames *safety* discussed below. *Avoiding knee-jerk reactions* asks audiences to refrain from an emotional response to the Fukushima disaster based on an overestimation of risk inherent in nuclear energy and thus an underestimation of its safety. *Lessons learned* constructs the Fukushima disaster as an opportunity to improve nuclear safety.

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Frames on nuclear energy

Following the Fukushima disaster, pro-nuclear actors in the UK employed two pro-nuclear frames, namely *safety* and *nuclear renaissance*. The *safety* frame emphasises a crucial aspect of nuclear energy on which the acceptance of its commercial use depends. Reinforcing this dominant pre-existing frame was a key aspect of the communication strategy adopted by social actors to prevent the traction of the anti-nuclear counter-frame of nuclear energy as *dangerous*. This was particularly crucial in light of the anti-nuclear sentiments in Germany, Belgium and Switzerland. The *safety* frame originated in the private e-mail exchange and was repeatedly reproduced by corporate and political actors in their public communication. What is more, a DBIS civil servant explicitly asked e-mail recipients to emphasise the safety of UK nuclear installations in their communication with the public and the media. He stressed the need "*to get positive messaging ... that nuclear is <u>safe</u>*" (E[2], 13 March 2011, emphasis added) and "*to show the <u>safety of nuclear</u>*" (E[4], 13 March 2011, emphasis added). Corporate actors heeded this request. EDF's first press release highlighted the safety of their nuclear power plants:

> "[*a*]*ll EDF Energy's nuclear power stations are <u>protected</u> against the effects of seismic events. These measures are detailed in <u>approved safety cases</u> which are agreed with the regulator and cover all credible seismic events in the UK*" (EDF CD[1], 14 March 2011, emphasis added).

Horizon also emphasised the safety of their operations in their first press release:

> "*UK nuclear installations are built with a <u>wealth of safety measures</u> in place to ensure that they can withstand a range of natural disasters and avoid causing harm to the public or to the environment*" (Horizon CD[1], 17 March 2011, emphasis added).

The *safety* frame is epitomised by the phrase 'safety is our top priority'. In our dataset, the phrase was first used in the public letter by Chris Huhne on 14 March 2011 requesting Mike Weightman to prepare a report on the implications of the Fukushima disaster on the UK nuclear industry. Chris Huhne stated:

> "*it is essential that we understand the full facts and implications, both for existing nuclear installations and any new reactor programme, as <u>safety is always my number one priority</u>*" (PD[1], 14 March 2011, emphasis added).

The phrase was picked up and reproduced by EDF in their public communication the following day, when they stated their intention to "*continue to ensure that <u>safety is [their] top priority</u>*" (EDF CD[2], 15 March 2011, emphasis added). During the time period of observation, the phrase was repeatedly used by pro-nuclear corporate and political actors in their public communication. A press release by the DECC quoted Chris Huhne stating that "[*s*]*<u>afety is and will continue to be the number one priority</u> for existing nuclear sites and for any new power stations*" (PD[6], 17 March 2011, emphasis added). EDF emphasised that "[*s*]*<u>afety remains the priority</u> at [their] existing plants and in [their] new build plans*" (EDF CD[8], 9 May 2011, emphasis added). Political and corporate actors related the *safety* frame to both existing nuclear power plants and to planned new builds, as a means of safeguarding prior investments. The *safety* frame was also reproduced in the Weightman report and in responses by the UK nuclear industry to its publication. Horizon's Chief Operating Officer Alan Raymant is quoted stating that "[*s*]*afety will always be our number one priority*" (Horizon CD[4], 16 June 2011). EDF's response to the report contained several quotes from the report itself, including, for example:

"*EDF Energy welcomed the interim conclusions that the UK nuclear power industry has reacted "responsibly and appropriately" to the Events in Japan, "displaying a leadership for safety and a strong safety culture"*" (EDF CD[10], 16 May 2011, emphasis added).

Similarly, Horizon referred to the Weightman report in a press release by noting the author's "*recognition of the strong safety culture in the UK nuclear industry*" (Horizon CD[2], 18 May 2011, emphasis added). The *safety* frame is a crucial aspect of pro-nuclear actors' communication strategy, as it highlights a potentially contested aspect of nuclear energy, with the aim of reassuring the public of the safety of nuclear power to ensure their continued support and to maintain the legitimacy of the nuclear industry in the UK.

Nuclear renaissance frame constitutes a secondary pro-nuclear frame, which is used in conjunction with the *safety* frame to reinforce dominant pre-existing frames on nuclear energy. Blending three pro-nuclear frames, namely *progress*, *energy independence*, and *climate change*, it is crucial for the government to safeguard its twin interests of meeting climate change targets and ensuring a sustainable energy supply for the future (Greenhalgh and Azapagic, 2009). At the time of the Fukushima disaster, *nuclear renaissance* was the dominant frame on nuclear power in the UK. Following the disaster, political and corporate actors continued to draw on the *nuclear renaissance* frame in their public communication to maintain the *status quo* of nuclear energy. For example, Chris Huhne noted in a speech that the UK's "*challenge is to come up with an energy policy that delivers safe, secure and low-carbon energy to 2050 and beyond*" (PD[8], 22 March 2011, emphasis added). Although he did not explicitly refer to nuclear power as the source of such energy, it is implied in the discursive framing. EDF also reproduced the *nuclear renaissance* frame in its public communication. Only six days after the earthquake and tsunami, EDF's CEO Vincent de Rivaz spoke at the Nuclear Development Forum stating that "*[t]he critical task in front of us today is to deliver a secure, clean and affordable energy mix*" (EDF CD[3], 17 March 2011, emphasis added). In response to the events still unfolding in Japan, he reproduced the frame to justify the expansion of nuclear energy generation. He also highlighted that "*[t]he events in Japan do not change the need for nuclear in Britain*" (ibid.). What is more, a reoccurring paragraph at the end of EDF's press releases stated:

"*EDF Energy's safe and secure operation of its eight existing nuclear power stations at sites across the country makes it the UK's largest generator of low carbon electricity. EDF Energy is also leading the UK's nuclear renaissance and has published plans to build four new nuclear plants, subject to the right investment framework. These new plants could generate enough low carbon electricity for about 40% of Britain's homes. They would make an important contribution to the UK's future needs for clean, secure and affordable energy. The project is already creating business and job opportunities for British companies and workers.*" (EDF CD[6], 11 April 2011, emphasis added).

This quote epitomises the *nuclear renaissance* frame by emphasising that nuclear energy helps secure low-carbon energy supplies at low cost. EDF also explicitly used the term 'nuclear renaissance' in its press releases. Tapping into the positive global sentiment regarding nuclear power, EDF pushed for the expansion of nuclear energy, including nuclear new builds in the UK.

The *safety* and the *nuclear renaissance* frame, with its sub-frames of *progress*, *energy independence*, and *climate change* stand in opposition to alternative anti-nuclear frames

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circulating through society, including *dangerous*, *dirty*, and *not cost effective*, which emphasise negative aspects of nuclear power. The publication of a *Greenpeace* report in February 2012 also made no waves in the UK. Entitled '*Nuclear power: dirty, dangerous and expensive*' (*Greenpeace*, 2012), it presented counter-frames to the *safety* and *nuclear renaissance* frames by confronting the view of nuclear energy as "*secure, clean and affordable*" (EDF CD[3], 17 March 2011). However, alternative anti-nuclear frames did not gain any traction. We can therefore infer that the framing strategy by pro-nuclear actors was successful in preventing the dissemination of anti-nuclear frames, thus asserting the dominance of pro-nuclear sentiment and reinforcing the *status quo*.

In combination, the four pro-nuclear discursive frames constituted orchestrated messaging by corporate, political, and regulatory actors as a response to the Fukushima disaster with the purpose of reassuring the public of the safety of UK nuclear power plants in the UK, thus maintaining the public acceptance of nuclear energy and the legitimacy of the UK nuclear industry. The frames *avoiding knee-jerk reaction*, *lessons learned*, and *safety* were used as precursors to lay the ground for the *nuclear renaissance* frame, which implies that nuclear energy provides energy security and combats climate change, whilst keeping energy prices low. It thus served to defend the *status quo* by portraying nuclear power as a safe and indispensable energy source for the UK. Figure 1 illustrates how the four pro-nuclear frames, in combination, guided audiences' evaluation of the consequences of the Fukushima disaster for the UK in favour of continuing nuclear power generation. They facilitated positive, forward-looking messages on nuclear energy by reinforcing pre-existing dominant frames on crisis response and resolution and on nuclear energy, thus preventing alternative anti-nuclear frames from gaining traction.

[Figure 1 about here]

The framing strategy appears to have been successful, as the public reaction to the Fukushima disaster in the UK was rather 'muted' in comparison with other European countries (Elliot, 2013, p. 4). This allowed pro-nuclear actors to secure public support for nuclear new builds in the UK. What is more, survey evidence suggests, in contrast to other European countries, such as Germany, Belgium and Switzerland, public acceptance of nuclear power seems to have increased in the UK after the Fukushima disaster (Poortinga *et al.*, 2013). Public opinion polls show that between 2005 and 2013 support for nuclear power generation in the UK increased (from 26 to 32 percent), while public concern about nuclear power decreased (from 58 to 47 percent). Similarly, the perceived risk of nuclear power generation decreased from 73 percent in 2005 to 55 percent in 2013. The most recent UK survey in 2013 shows that more respondents supported (42 percent) than opposed (32 percent) nuclear new builds. The surveys also indicate that the UK public was willing to accept new builds, especially in the context of combatting climate change and securing future energy supplies.

5.3 Discussion
The private e-mail exchange provides evidence that pro-nuclear corporate, political, and regulatory actors accessed existing social networks for agenda setting purposes to influence public policy in their favour. Similar to lobbying and political party contributions (Cho *et al.*, 2006; Cho *et al.*, 2018), tapping into social networks for policy agenda setting purposes constitutes a direct, but less visible form of corporate power as manipulation (Fleming and Spicer, 2014). In contrast to lobbying and political party contributions, which entail corporate actors attempting to influence the work of legislators so that policy agendas are in line with business interests, networking between corporate and political actors entails pursuing common

goals to serve the vested interests of both parties. Specifically, pro-nuclear corporate, political, and regulatory actors cooperated interacted via e-mail to agree a joint public communication strategy with the purpose of providing consistent pro-nuclear messaging to the UK public and the media and marginalising anti-nuclear voices. For this purpose, they aligned their public communication by drawing on and contributing to dominant discursive frames on nuclear energy and crisis communication and resolution. Mobilising discursive resources to attain a common goal, while curbing the articulation of other interests and voices constitutes power as domination (Fleming and Spicer, 2014, p. 260).

We provide evidence that pro-nuclear corporate, political, and regulatory actors cooperated to use public communication strategically to influence public opinion on a matter of public interest in order to serve their own sectional interests and to suppress social conflict (Michelon *et al.*, 2016). They actively sought to shape public opinion on nuclear power to avoid public consultation because the *status quo* served the combined interests of the government and the nuclear industry, who had already committed resources to nuclear new-builds. This indicates that the UK government cooperated with the nuclear industry to safeguard common interests without considering public interest. Put differently, the UK government presumed that it was in the best interests of the UK public to continue with the commercial use of nuclear energy after the Fukushima disaster without prior public consultation. This is inherently problematic as political actors purposefully excluded alternative voices from the public debate, thereby violating democratic principles. They deliberately curtailed the civic space in order to prevent a public controversy from arising, thus restricting citizen participation in decision-making on matters of public interest. This, in turn, undermines democracy, which is based on public policy being the outcome of public debate, rather than decision making in a private space (Malena, 2015).

What is more, our findings suggest the existence of a powerful 'state-business nexus' (Siddiqui and Uddin, 2016, p. 679) which sought to protect the commercial use of nuclear energy in the UK. We thus confirm Siddiqui and Uddin's (2016) and Archel *et al.*'s (2009) findings that the State is not a neutral arbiter, but an interested party who may support business interests, if it is in its own interest. This 'blurring of the political and economic sphere' (Scherer *et al.*, 2014) is particularly problematic with respect to the provision of public goods, such as energy or transport, due to the lack of consultation and accountability on a matter of public interest. Accountability is essential when decisions, actions, and outcomes impact on civil society and entails transparency in the decision-making process so that it can be determined whether and how public interest is served by actions and their outcomes (ICAEW, 2012).

6. Summary and Conclusion

Drawing on political economy theory and the concept of power as manipulation and as domination, we examined how pro-nuclear corporate, political, and regulatory actors covertly stifled legitimate political expression by preventing a public controversy from arising in the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster. For this purpose, we analysed the private and public communication of pro-nuclear actors following the Fukushima disaster. We found that social actors mobilised power by tapping into existing pro-nuclear social networks in order to cooperate behind the scenes to influence public opinion and public policy on nuclear power. They arranged consistent, pro-nuclear public messaging as a means of influencing energy policy outcomes in their favour, rather than to serve public interest. For this purpose, they drew on pre-existing dominant frames on nuclear power and crisis response and resolution in order to prevent alternative frames from becoming prominent. These included (1) *avoiding knee-jerk reactions*, (2) *lessons learned*, (3) *safety*, and (4) *nuclear renaissance*. Drawing on the concept

of intertextuality, we traced these frames from their inception in private communication to their reproduction in public communication and their dissemination via the media. In combination, they guided audiences' evaluation of the consequences of the Fukushima disaster for the UK in favour of continuing nuclear power generation.

Our findings provide evidence of the State not necessarily being a neutral arbiter, but an interested party. The State strategically cooperated with corporations to achieve a common goal (Archel *et al.*, 2009), which may not necessarily be in the public interest. Public interest is based on the consideration of "*the welfare of the representative individual … in the decision-making process*" (ICAEW, 2012), which, in turn, rests on transparency in the decision-making process. Thus, decisions on contentious issues, such as nuclear power generation, need to be made openly and democratically so that they represent the interests and will of the UK public. By marginalising alternative voices in order to stifle open public debate over an issue of public interest, the civic space is restricted, which is detrimental to democracy.

Our findings also provide further evidence of corporations as powerful political actors (Scherer *et al.*, 2014). We add to the literature by providing evidence that companies may not only influence public policy by means of lobbying and political party funding, but by accessing powerful social networks and influencing public opinion by drawing on and contributing to dominant discursive frames to favour policy outcomes, which benefit their vested interests, rather than the public interest. This suggests that corporate communication is a hegemonic practice motivated by obfuscating conflict and antagonism, rather than providing transparent information (Spence, 2007). In line with Cho *et al.* (2018), we find evidence of 'backstage' corporate political activities aimed at influencing public policy to serve vested interests (manipulation). These provide insights into the strategic nature of the 'frontstage' political activities in the form of the mobilisation of discursive resources to maintain the *status quo* on nuclear energy and to curb the articulation of anti-nuclear voices (domination).

We invite further research on corporate power as conceptualised by Fleming and Spicer (2014). Future research may investigate whether corporate reporting is used for subjectification, i.e., the shaping of identities to further corporate interests by suppressing conflict, for example, between management and employees. Power may also be mobilised 'against' organisations by civil society actors, such as stakeholders, NGOS, and social movement groups. Future research may employ the concepts of framing and counter-framing as conceptual and analytical tools to investigate how dominant discursive frames may be resisted by alternative frames (Lakoff, 2004). In this respect, the concept of counter-framing may be particularly useful to investigate counter or shadow accounting (Laine and Vinnari, 2017; Tregidga, 2017; Vinnari and Laine, 2017). The concepts of framing, counter-framing, framing contests and frame sponsorship may also be employed to examine corporate communication in controversial decision-making contexts, such as privatisation, mergers and takeovers, and relating to issues and events where the opinions of companies and audiences are divided, such as tax avoidance and human rights issues. We also call for further research employing the concept of discursive framing to conceptualise and analyse the strategic use of language in corporate reports to influence audience perceptions of organisational practices, policies, or performance traditionally viewed through an impression management or greenwashing lens (e.g., Merkl-Davies *et al.* 2011; Mahoney *et al.*, 2013).

In conclusion, as critical accounting researchers we need to be vigilant to the more invisible ways corporations mobilise power to achieve political and economic goals. Discursive framing constitutes a particularly insidious use of power (Lukes, 2005), as "*frames … shape the way*

we see the world […,] *the goals, we seek, the plans we make, the way we act, and what counts as a good or bad outcomes of our actions*" (Lakoff, 2004, p. xv). This is problematic, because they may be used to suppress conflict and stifle debate over controversial issues and thus shrink the civic space, which lies at the heart of democracy. However, the civic space can be expanded by offering alternative discursive frames which construct a particular issue in a different way, thus offering alternative solutions to a problem. "*Reframing is social change*" (Lakoff, 2004, p. xv; emphasis in original).

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Table 1: Timeline of main events in the UK following the Fukushima disaster	
Date	**Event**
11 March 2011	Earthquake and tsunami
12 March 2011	Chris Huhne, Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, commissions Weightman Report
9 May 2011	Release of the Renewable Energy Review by the Committee on Climate Change
18 May 2011	Release of the interim report on implications for the future of nuclear power in the UK (Weightman Report)
July 2011	Release of National Policy Statement for Nuclear Energy Generation
September 2011	Release of final report (Weightman Report)

	Table 2: Pro-nuclear actors	
	Name	**Organisation**
Corporate actors	Vincent de Rivaz	Chief Executive Officer of EDF Energy
	Alan Raymant	Chief Operating Officer of Horizon Nuclear Power
Political actors	Chris Huhne	Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (DECC)
	Mark Higson	Chief Executive of the Office for Nuclear Development (OND) at the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC)
Regulatory actor	Mike Weightman	Chief Nuclear Inspector and Head of the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR)

	Political actors		Corporate actors				Academics	
Date	**OND/ DECC**	**DBIS**	**Westing- house**	**EDF**	**Horizon**	**NIA**	**Sheffield University**	**Total number of e-mails**
13/03/2011	1	4	1	-	-	-	-	6
14/03/2011	4	1	2	1	-	-	-	8
15/03/2011	2	-	-	-	-	2	-	4
16/03/2011	1	-	-	2	3		-	6
17/03/2011	5	1	-	3	1	-	2	12
18/03/2011	1	-	1	-			-	2
25/03/2011	4	-	2	-	-	-	1	7
28/03/2011	2	-	1	-	-	-	-	3
30/03/2011	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
05/04/2011	2	-	-	1	-	-	-	3
07/04/2011	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	2
26/04/2011	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
Total	**23**	**6**	**8**	**9**	**4**	**2**	**3**	
	29 (53%)					**23** (42%)	**1** (5%)	**55** (100%)

Table 3: Private communication – private e-mails (frequency by sender and date)

	Appendix 1: Public documents			
	No	**Date**	**Type of press release**	**Content**
1	**Corporate documents**			
	EDF CD[1]	14/03/2011	EDF press release	Initial statement on incident in Japan
	EDF CD[2]	15/03/2011	EDF press release	Further statement on incident in Japan
	EDF CD[3]	17/03/2011	EDF press release containing CEO speech	Statement by Vincent de Rivaz following Nuclear Development Forum
	Horizon CD[1]	17/03/2011	Horizon press release	Statement on recent events in Japan
	EDF CD[4]	23/03/2011	EDF press release containing CEO quotes	Carbon Price Floor
	EDF CD[5]	05/04/2011	EDF press release	Statement on Generic Design Assessment
	EDF CD[6]	11/04/2011	EDF press release	Statement in response to London protest
	EDF CD[7]	19/04/2011	EDF press release	Submission of evidence to the Weightman Report
	EDF CD[8]	19/04/2011	EDF press release	EDF Energy and Daikin announce partnership
	EDF CD[9]	09/05/2011	EDF press release	Reaction to Committee on Climate Change's Renewable Energy Review
	EDF CD[10]	16/05/2011	EDF press release	Responds to Energy and Climate Change Committee report
	EDF CD[11]	18/05/2011	EDF press release	Response to the interim Weightman Report
	Horizon CD[2]	18/05/2011	Horizon press release	Statement on Weightman Interim Report
	Horizon CD[3]	25/05/2011	Horizon press release	Statement on new build programme
	Horizon CD[4]	16/06/2011	Horizon press release	Response to the Interim Weightman Report
2	**Political documents**			
	PD[1]	14/03/2011	Letter from Chris Huhne to Mike Weightman	Commissioning of Weightman report
	PD[2]	14/03/2011	DECC release	Chris Huhne's initial response
	PD[3]	14/03/2011	Transcript of speech by David Cameron	Initial response; offering help and assistance to Japan
	PD[4]	14/03/2011	PM's office release	Initial response; commissioning of Weightman report
	PD[5]	17/03/2011	DECC release	Chris Huhne on nuclear power

Appendix 1: Public documents			
No	**Date**	**Type of press release**	**Content**
PD[6]	22/03/2011	Transcript of speech by Chris Huhne	Scottish renewables
PD[7]	25/03/2011	Transcript of speech by David Cameron	David Cameron on nuclear power
PD[8]	28/03/2011	Statement by David Cameron	Statement to parliament
PD[9]	15/04/2011	Letter from Mark Higson to Mike Weightman	Weightman report
PD[10]	17/05/2011	Letter from Mike Weightman to Mark Higson	Weightman report
PD[11]	18/05/2011	Foreword of Weightman report	Results of Weightman report
PD[12]	18/05/2011	Written Ministerial Statement by Huhne	Huhne on release of Weightman report
PD[13]	18/05/2011	DECC release	Release of Weightman report
PD[14]	17/06/2011	Letter from Chris Huhne to Mike Weightman	Chris Huhne thanks Mike Weightman for report

3 Regulatory documents

RD[1]	14/03/2011	ONR press release	Initial response
RD[2]	29/03/2011	ONR release	Weightman report
RD[3]	18/05/2011	ONR release	Release of Weightman report

Key:
EDF - Electricité de France
ONR - Office for Nuclear Regulation;
DECC - Department of Energy & Climate Change.

Appendix 2: Pro-nuclear discursive frames in private and public communication

<u>**Frames on the Fukushima disaster**</u>

(1) *Avoiding knee-jerk reactions*

Private Communication

"*We should not make <u>snap judgements</u> at this point*" (Quote Chris Huhne, E[1], 13 March 2011)

"*I think that in this country we have a good, long-standing tradition of trying ... to base public debate on <u>informed assessment</u> [...] I know it can be frustrating in terms of those who want to come to more rapid conclusions but we <u>should not rush to judgment</u>. Let's wait until we have got the <u>full facts</u>. And I regret the fact that some continental politicians do seem to be <u>rushing to judgments</u> on this before we have had a <u>proper assessment</u>.*" (Quote Chris Huhne, E[17], 15 March 2011)

Public communication

"*All have shown <u>clear-headedness</u> in their response – <u>avoiding knee-jerk reactions</u>.*" (Statement Vincent de Rivaz, EDF CD[3], 17 March 2011)

"*I welcome the mandate given to Mike Weightman to report on the <u>facts</u>, to analyse them and to draw lessons from them.*" (Statement Vincent de Rivaz, EDF CD[3], 17 March 2011)

"*It is essential that we understand the <u>full facts</u> and implications, both for existing nuclear installations and any new reactor programme, as safety is always our number one priority.*" (Quote Chris Huhne, PD[1], 14 March 2011)

"*We must establish the <u>facts</u>, which are emerging and not yet fully known.*" (Quote Mike Weightman, RD[1], 14 March 2011)

(2) *Lessons learned*

Private communication

"*But he [Chris Huhne] might, if pressed, wish to say he is asking Mike Weightman to provide a full assessment of the <u>implications</u> and <u>lessons to be learnt</u>. If he does it would be good if EdF could welcome.*" (Mark Higson, E[1], 13 March 2011)

"*It is much too early to say what the impact and <u>implications</u> are. We will be working closely with the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) and Japan to carefully establish what <u>lessons can be learned</u>.*" (Quote Chris Huhne, E[1], 13 March 2011)

"*I have called on the Chief Nuclear Inspector, Dr. Mike Weightman, for a thorough report on the <u>implications</u> of the situation in Japan and the <u>lessons to be learned</u>.*" (Quote Chris Huhne, E[8], 14 March 2011; E[9], 14 March 2011; E[16], 15 March 2011)

Appendix 2: Pro-nuclear discursive frames in private and public communication

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"*On nuclear, we welcome the fact that the UK Government has asked the safety regulator to report on the <u>implications</u> of the events in Japan. EDF Energy is happy to support this work in whatever way it can to ensure <u>lessons are learned</u>.*" (EDF, E[14], 14 March 2011)

"*The Energy Secretary has asked Chief Nuclear Inspector, Dr. Mike Weightman, for a thorough report on the implications of the situation in Japan* [...] *if there are lessons to learn, then we will learn them.*" (Quote PM David Cameron, E[16], 15 March 2011)

Public communication

"*On nuclear, we welcome the fact that the UK Government has asked the safety regulator to report on the <u>implications</u> of the events* in Japan. EDF Energy is happy to support this work in whatever way it can to ensure <u>lessons are learned</u>." (EDF CD[2], 15 March 2011)

"*However we welcome the announcement by the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, Chris Huhne, that the Chief Nuclear Inspector, Dr Mike Weightman, will prepare a report on the <u>implications</u> and <u>lessons learned</u> from the situation in Japan.*" (Horizon CD[1], 17 March 2011)

"*Following the unprecedented events in Japan during the last few days I am writing to formally ask you to provide a report to Government on the <u>implications</u> of the situation and <u>lessons to be learned</u> for the UK nuclear industry.*" (Chris Huhne in letter to Mike Weightman, PD[1], 14 March 2011)

"*Chris Huhne, Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, has asked me to provide a report on the <u>implications</u> of the unprecedented events in Japan and the <u>lessons to be learned</u> for the UK nuclear industry.*" (Quote Mike Weightman, RD[1], 14 March 2011)

<u>**Frames on nuclear energy**</u>

(3) *Safety*

Private communication

"*We really need to show the <u>safety</u> of nuclear.*" (DBIS official, E[4], 13 March 2011)

"*It is essential that we understand the full facts and their implications, both for existing nuclear reactors and any new programme, as <u>safety is always our number one concern</u>.*" (Quote Chris Huhne, E[8], 14 March 2011; E[9], 14 March 2011; E[16], 15 March 2011)

"*We need a good industry response showing the <u>safety</u> of nuclear – otherwise it could have adverse consequences on the market.*" (DBIS official, E[10], 14 March 2011)

"*In our existing stations and in any new nuclear power stations we will continue to ensure that <u>safety is our top priority</u> and that we meet all regulatory requirements.*" (EDF, E[14], 14 March 2011)

Public communication

Appendix 2: Pro-nuclear discursive frames in private and public communication

"*In our existing stations and in any new nuclear power stations we will continue to ensure that safety is our top priority and that we meet all regulatory requirements.*" (EDF CD[2], 15 March 2011)

"*UK nuclear installations are built with a wealth of safety measures in place to ensure that they can withstand a range of natural disasters and avoid causing harm to the public or to the environment.*" (Horizon CD[1], 17 March 2011)

"*Safety is and will continue to be the number one priority for existing nuclear sites and for any new power stations.*" (Chris Huhne, PD[6], 22 March 2011)

"*We have provided specialist technical advice to the UK Government and ensured there are no immediate implications for the safety of the UK nuclear facilities.*" (Quote Mike Weightman, RD[1], 14 March 2011)

(4) *Nuclear renaissance*

Public communication

"*The critical task in front of us today is to deliver a secure, clean and affordable energy mix.*" (EDF CD[3], 17 March 2011)

"*EDF Energy is also leading the UK's nuclear renaissance and has published plans to build four new nuclear plants, subject to the right investment framework.*" (EDF CD[6], 11 April 2011)

"*Our challenge is to come up with an energy policy that delivers safe, secure and low-carbon energy to 2050 and beyond.*" (Chris Huhne, PD[6], 22 March 2011)
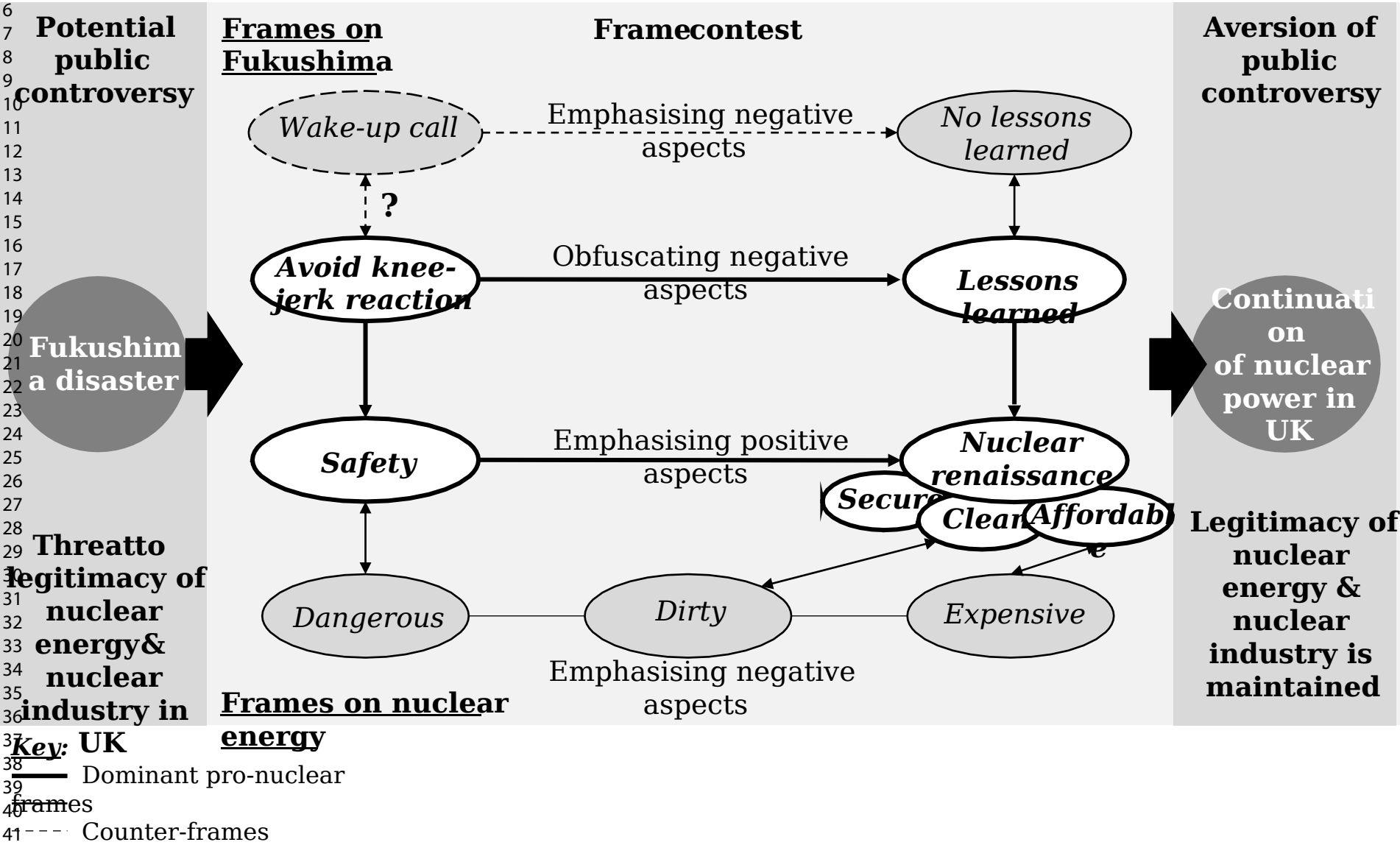
Key:
CD = Corporate document
E = E-mail
PD = Political document
RD = Regulatory document

Figure 1: Frames and counter-frames on the Fukushima disaster and nuclear energy

Potential public controversy

Frames on Fukushima

Framecontest

Aversion of public controversy

Wake-up call

Emphasising negative aspects

No lessons learned

?

Avoid knee-jerk reaction

Obfuscating negative aspects

Lessons learned

Fukushima disaster

Safety

Emphasising positive aspects

Nuclear renaissance

Secure ***Clean*** ***Affordable***

Continuation of nuclear power in UK

Threat to legitimacy of nuclear energy & nuclear industry in UK

Dangerous

Dirty

Expensive

Emphasising negative aspects

Frames on nuclear energy

Legitimacy of nuclear energy & nuclear industry is maintained

Key: **UK**

——— Dominant pro-nuclear frames

- - - - Counter-frames

AAAJ-05-2017-2928:
"Discursive framing in private and public communication by pro-nuclear corporate, political and regulatory actors following the Fukushima disaster"

Editor's comments

Manuscript ID AAAJ-05-2017-2928.R1 entitled "Discursive Framing in Corporate Communication following the Fukushima Disaster" which you submitted to the Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal, has been reviewed. The comments of the referee(s) are included. Please check both below this email and in any attachments to this email for referee reports.

As you will see from these reports, the referees believe that the paper is still not ready to be published. However my inspection of their reports convinces me that the subject itself and the quality of your study thus far justify offering you another opportunity to revise and resubmit it.

> [RESPONSE:
> Thank you for giving us the opportunity to revise the paper.]

Please prioritise the advice of the third arbitrating referee, while at the same time returning to the concerns of referee 1 and addressing these as far as you feel able. I encourage you to carry out the revisions as suggested by the referees in the reports I have included.

> [RESPONSE:
> We have addressed the comments of the third arbitrating referee. This entailed reverting to the Introduction of the earlier version of the paper and re-introducing the concept of power by using Fleming & Spicer's (2014) work whose concept of dominance builds on Lukes' (2005) work. We have included a section in the literature review and theoretical framework (Section 2.2) which discusses corporations as political actors and which outlines the four concepts of power drawing on Fleming & Spicer's (2014) work.]

As part of your revision process, please produce a revised version of your paper that does not exceed 16,000 words (including text, tables and bibliography).

> [RESPONSE:
> Our revised version is 15,357 words.]

In the course of undertaking your revision, please be mindful that you are aiming to contribute to the interdisciplinary research community's discourse on your paper's subject area. So it will be important to ensure that you draw on and engage with both prior and latest relevant literature as exemplified by such journals as 'Accounting, Organizations and Society'; 'Critical Perspectives on Accounting'; and 'Accounting, Auditing and Accountability Journal'. We welcome your reference to interdisciplinary papers from across the full spectrum of accounting research journals.

> [RESPONSE:

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Noted.]

To revise your manuscript, log into https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/aaaj and enter your Author Centre, where you will find your manuscript title listed under "Manuscripts with Decisions." Under "Actions," click on "Create a Revision." Your manuscript number has been appended to denote a revision. You will be unable to make your revisions on the originally submitted version of the manuscript. Instead, revise your manuscript using a word processing program and save it on your computer.

Once the revised manuscript is prepared, you can upload it and submit it through your Author Centre.

When submitting your revised manuscript, you should respond to the comments made by the referee(s) in the space provided in 'Author's Response', WHICH WILL BE FORWARDED TO THE REFEREES. Please be reminded that ANONYMITY IS REQUIRED and also no special formatting will be preserved, i.e. do not put your comments in a table or with highlighting etc. Alternatively, you may provide your response in a separate file as a 'SUPPLEMENTARY FILE FOR REVIEW' which will be shown in the manuscript.

In order to expedite the processing of the revised manuscript, please be as specific as possible in your response to the referee(s). In your replies to each referee, specify how and where you have dealt with each of their suggestions, and clarify any areas of divergence or inability to adopt specific recommendations.

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Please note that Emerald requires you to clear permission to re-use any material not created by you. If there are permissions outstanding, please upload these when you submit your revision. Emerald is unable to publish your paper with permissions outstanding.

Once again, thank you for submitting your manuscript to the Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal and I look forward to receiving your revision.

[RESPONSE:
Done.]

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Referee 1's comments

Thank you for the opportunity to read your revised paper. I appreciate your efforts to respond to the concerns of myself and the third reviewer. However, my view is that the revisions have not substantively addressed these concerns.

[RESPONSE:
We regret that you still do not see any value in our paper.]

I continue to regard this paper as fundamentally ill-conceived. The paper is premised on the idea that government is supposed to be a neutral arbiter but that, in the case presented, government actors have been found to be corresponding with corporate actors. This is described in the paper's conclusion as 'a unique case of corporate actors cooperating with political and regulatory actors behind the scenes to align their public communication strategy as a means of influencing public opinion' (p. 23). Similarly, the discussion section argues that the 'findings suggest that the public communication by the UK government, energy companies, and the nuclear regulator was not used for accountability purposes, but opportunistically to influence public opinion … [which] indicates that political and regulatory actors are not necessarily neutral arbiters, who act in the public interest' (p. 22). The paper presents this as if it is a surprising, or even shocking, result. In contrast, I find it mundane. Regulators and the companies they regulate correspond frequently (it would be worrying if they didn't).

[RESPONSE:
Thank you for your comments. We have addressed your concern by revising our theoretical framework and literature review (Section 2). The revised version draws more specifically on the political economy perspective of corporate communication (Section 2.1), and we have re-introduced the concept of power by drawing on corporations as political actors and drawing on the conceptualisation of corporate power by Fleming and Spicer (2014) (Section 2.2).
While it may not be surprising that the State is not a neutral arbiter, we highlight the problematic aspects arising from it. We provide evidence that pro-nuclear corporate, political and regulatory actors purposefully intended to shrink the civic space in which open public debates occur. This indicates a lack of transparency and accountability on part of both the State and companies, and thus undermines democratic principles.]

The paper refers to the emails obtained by the Guardian newspaper as being "covert". This implies some kind of underhand conspiracy. But the emails themselves, as presented in the paper, do not point to that. There is no evidence presented that there was any kind of overt effort made to subvert transparent governmental decision-making. Furthermore, the government emails were sent from official email addresses, subject to Freedom of Information requests, which is why the Guardian was able to obtain them. Public officials

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tend to be very aware of this, so using these email addresses for "covert" communications is
highly unlikely.

[RESPONSE:
We analyse quotes from the e-mails (Section 5.1) to provide evidence of political actors
explicitly stating the aim to exclude anti-nuclear actors from the public and media debate
on the future of nuclear power generation in the UK in order to influence public opinion
on nuclear power, which constitutes power as manipulation. We introduce power as
manipulation and as domination on p. 4:
The study focuses on power as manipulation and as domination as a means of furthering
the vested interests of nuclear industry and UK government. Manipulation is a mostly
invisible form of power, which involves accessing key social networks for agenda setting
purposes. We focus on corporate, political and regulatory actors tapping into existing
pro-nuclear social network to agree a joint public communication strategy in order to
ensure public support for the continuation of nuclear power generation in the UK. By
contrast, domination entails mobilising discursive and ideological resources in order to
attain desirable outcomes and goals, while curbing the articulation of other interests and
voices (Fleming and Spicer, 2014, p. 260).]

The whole exchange only appears to be sinister if you already hold the view that nuclear
power is wrong. The paper does not take an explicitly anti-nuclear stance, but the whole
tone strongly implies that the UK government is wrong to pursue a nuclear power
programme. For any reader who is not already committed to a strong anti-nuclear power
stance, the paper is unconvincing.

[RESPONSE:
We analyse quotes from the private e-mail exchange focusing on figurative language
used by pro-nuclear actors (use of theatrical and military metaphors, Section 5.1, p.
23). The language used provides evidence of the hostile stance of pro-nuclear actors
against anti-nuclear actors who are depicted as enemies who need to be outwitted and
defeated.]

Furthermore, the revised paper offers no serious theoretical development of the case. The
references to Luke's invisible power have been removed. However, the rather loose
positioning of the paper in the framework of political economy theory offers little in the way
of theoretical explanation or insight. Political economy theory is simply held up as a challenge
to public interest theory (in which regulators are seen as neutral arbiters), so that the case is
presented as an example of collusion between political and economic interests.

[RESPONSE:
Thank you for your comments. We have strengthened the theoretical framework by re-
introducing the notion of power. We have linked political economy theory, which

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regards the State as an interested party, to the concept of corporate power as manipulation and domination (Fleming and Spicer, 2014). We view corporate actors as exercising power over public policy decision-making by means of manipulation (policy agenda setting by accessing existing social networks) and domination (mobilising discursive resources to influence public opinion).]

The paper claims that this is a story of accountability because there are email exchanges going on between government and these companies, so the decision-making is not transparent – i.e. there is an apparent lack of accountability. But there is no theorisation of what kind of accountability could be expected here. There is no theorisation of how accountability is related to discursive framing. The fact that emails between actors in this industry use similar language to each other, and to publicly available reports and press-releases, does not in itself imply some kind of lack of accountability. The paper claims to say something about the role of the media in ensuring accountability, but this is not developed in any meaningful way.

> [RESPONSE:
> We have removed the concept of accountability and refocused the paper on the relationship between the State, corporations, and civil society. We view companies and the State as acting in their own interests, rather than in the public interest, which shrinks the civic space and undermines democratic principles. We introduce this argument on pp. 1-2:
> Public controversies constitute public debates on contested issues and conflicting ideas with the aim of influencing policy outcomes. They take place in the civic space, which is a site for open public debate and involves participation by individual citizens, groups of civil society actors, including social movement groups, NGOs, and the media (Castells, 2008). The civic space is "*at the heart of democracy*", where "*the rights of civil society exist alongside other powerful economic and political interests*" (Murphy and Moerman, 2018, p. 1774). It plays an important role in "*structuring and channeling debates over diverse ideas and conflicting interests*" (Castells, 2008, p. 78). Conversely, stifling public debate over issues of public interest entails shrinking the civic space. This is detrimental for democracy, as it denies human and civil rights, jeopardises government accountability, silences citizen voices and erodes confidence in government authority (Malena, 2015, p. 14).]

Ultimately, I find the arguments of the paper to be contrived, offering no useful contribution to the accounting/accountability literature.

> [RESPONSE:
> We hope that you will see more value in our paper and that you will find the arguments made more convincing in the new version of the paper which draws on Fleming and Spicer's (2014) conceptualisation of power as manipulation (accessing existing social

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networks for agenda setting purposes via email) and as domination (drawing on and contributing to dominant discursive frames in public communication).]

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Referee 3's comments

Thank you again for the opportunity to review and engage with this manuscript. I note that it has been substantively revised from the previous version and many of my concerns with the previous version of the paper have been resolved. I think the paper and study is now more clearly focused and logical in its presentation and some of the previous concerns regarding use of theory etc have been addressed.

[RESPONSE:
Thank you.]

However, I still note some areas where the manuscript requires further consideration. These are not as substantive as with the previous version. They essentially relate to the framing of the paper within the literature and strengthening aspects of the study which I think have been lost in this version of the paper. I note these here for the author(s) to reflect on.

[RESPONSE:
Thank you for clearly highlighting further areas for improvement in the paper. We have rewritten the paper based on your feedback which has resulted in the following changes:
(1) We have rewritten the Introduction (Section 1) which reverts back to the original focus on nuclear power and legitimacy threats caused by nuclear accidents. The RQ states 'How did UK corporate, political, and regulatory actors prevent a public controversy over nuclear power in the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster?
(2) We have strengthened the theoretical framework by including a discussion of corporations as political actors exercising power to achieve either shared or contested goals (Section 2.2).
(3) The focus on companies as political actors has allowed us to theorise the e-mail exchange as power as manipulation, thus resulting in a new two-part structure of Section 5, namely *5.1 Agenda-setting* which focuses on power as manipulation and *5.2 Discursive framing* which focuses on power as domination.]

I believe in this version of the paper the framing of the analysis is unclear. This lack of clarity takes two forms, each of which, in my opinion, needs to be addressed.

[RESPONSE:
Thank you for pointing out the lack of clarity and inconsistencies.]

First, the focus of analysis in the paper is unclear and I believe problematic. In many places in the paper, including on page 2, the authors state the study is motivated by a question of "how companies succeed in averting public controversies and remain legitimate in times of crisis". The author(s) then often refer to the way in which "corporations" or "corporate actors" respond. At other times in the paper the author(s) note that the focus is on corporate,

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political and regulatory actors. For me, the latter is more accurate and needs to be consistent
throughout the paper.

[RESPONSE:
We have changed the title, the abstract, and the research question in line with the focus
of analysis on corporate, political, and regulatory actors. We have also made changes
throughout the paper.]

The data set, which I believe is a key strength of the paper (see more below), are the email
exchanges between corporate, political and regulatory actors. It is also unclear as to whether
the corporate actors are working on behalf of their individual company or the industry in
general (not an issue depending on how the paper is framed). As such, I think the focus of
the paper is not on the corporate response but rather, importantly, the communication
between individuals/interested actors. As such, I think some statements as to what the paper
does are inaccurate. For example, the first line of the abstract reads "This study examines
how companies prevent public controversies". I do not think the study and the data set
enables an examination of this.

[RESPONSE:
By incorporating the concept of power as manipulation and as domination we have
shifted the focus of analysis on pro-nuclear actors accessing existing pro-nuclear
networks for agenda setting purposes and to influence public opinion by drawing on and
contributing to dominant discursive frames We introduce the concept of power as
manipulation and domination in Section 2.2 and add Section 5.1 when discussing the
results which focuses on the analysis of power as manipulation by analysing the private
email exchange by pro-nuclear actors.]

Second, the data set is different and unique, it is not corporate reports, so I am unsure why
the author(s) are positioning the paper as they do in relation to the reporting research. Yes,
this is an important literature to engage with as it addresses the previous reviewers concern
about the connection to the accounting/accountability literature, but I think the author(s)
could strengthen the paper by the way they position this study in relation to that literature.
For me the strength of the study is the focus on what is happening "backstage". This is not
well investigated in the literature and therefore the author(s) have a unique opportunity here.
As such, I would encourage the author(s) to think more critically and reflectively about how
this study connects with and adds to the extant literature which they identify. I think the
study is undersold at present. In short, the author(s) do not look at reports, so this is not a
reporting paper. I think this is a strength of the paper. This does not mean that I think the
author(s) need to change the literature they are connecting with, but rather, rethink the way
in which they position the paper within that literature to highlight the contribution of this
work.

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[RESPONSE:

Thank you for pointing out the uniqueness of your dataset as the key strength of our paper. We have refocussed and strengthened our theoretical framework in relation to the dataset.

We have revised the theoretical framework and literature review and thus the paper's poisoning in the literature (Section 2). We draw more specifically on the political economy perspective of corporate communication (Section 2.1), and we have re-introduced the concept of power. We view corporations as political actors and conceptualise corporate power as manipulation and domination (Fleming and Spicer, 2014) (see Section 2.2). Our analysis and findings are informed by a focus on these two less visible forms of power.

In the Introduction (p. 3) we situate the paper in the prior literature:

We examine a case where pro-nuclear corporate, political, and regulatory actors cooperated behind the scenes to stifle public debate on nuclear energy in the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster. Beelitz and Merkl-Davies (2012) examine how a Swedish energy company restored organisational legitimacy following an incident in one of their nuclear power plants in Germany by means of analysing managerial discourse ('CEO-speak') in corporate public communication. In contrast, we focus on the responses of corporate, political, and regulator actors to a nuclear accident in which none of the actors were implicated in nor responsible for, but which threatened the legitimacy of nuclear power. Cho *et al.* (2018) contrast the 'backstage' corporate political activities of oil and gas firms in the form of lobbying and political party contributions aimed at influencing US law to allow oil drilling in environmentally sensitive areas in Alaska with their 'frontstage' discourse on environmental protection. In contrast, we examine the 'backstage' corporate political activities in the form of accessing existing pro-nuclear networks for agenda-setting purposes with the aim of agreeing a joint 'frontstage' public communication strategy on the Fukushima disaster. By tracing discursive frames from their inception in private communication (e-mails) to their reproduction in public communication (corporate, political and regulatory news releases and documents) and their dissemination via the media (newspaper articles), we provide linguistic evidence that pro-nuclear corporate, political, and regulatory actors cooperated behind the scenes to achieve consistent public pro-nuclear messaging in order to ensure continued public support for the continuation of nuclear power generation in the UK.]

The author(s) at various times in the paper refer to a "lack of accountability". I would invite the author(s) to reflect on this a bit more. From reading the case study it did not appear that in the UK context they were being called to account - required to be accountable. Furthermore, is what is being investigated a lack of accountability, or is it accountability taking a particular form? Taking this further, the disaster did not appear to have much traction in the UK – so why is this analysis needed? Are the author(s) claiming that what they are analysing resulted

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in the lack of traction in the UK? If so, I think this aspect of the argument could be a little stronger.

[RESPONSE:
We have refocussed the paper from accountability to the relationship between the State, corporations and civil society, and on the State and companies as powerful actors cooperating to serve their vested interests, rather than public interest. We introduce this argument on pp. 2-3:

Public controversies constitute public debates on contested issues and conflicting ideas with the aim of influencing policy outcomes. They take place in the civic space, which is a site for open public debate and involves participation by individual citizens, groups of civil society actors, including social movement groups, NGOs, and the media (Castells, 2008). The civic space is "*at the heart of democracy*", where "*the rights of civil society exist alongside other powerful economic and political interests*" (Murphy and Moerman, 2018, p. 1774). It plays an important role in "*structuring and channeling debates over diverse ideas and conflicting interests*" (Castells, 2008, p. 78). Conversely, stifling public debate over issues of public interest entails shrinking the civic space. This is detrimental for democracy, as it denies human and civil rights, jeopardises government accountability, silences citizen voices and erodes confidence in government authority (Malena, 2015, p. 14).]

Does Table 5 sufficiently show the link between private and public communication? One statement from the emails only is provided. I wonder if the author(s) could be stronger in this claim.

[RESPONSE:
We have moved Table 5 into an appendix (Appendix 2) and incorporated more quotes from the private e-mails to provide stronger evidence of intertextual links between private and public communication.]

By taking power out of the analysis I think the importance and value of analysing the emails is perhaps lost and I would argue that the paper would be strengthened by explicitly identifying the uniqueness of this data. This does not mean going back to an analysis of power as in the previous version – but a clearer articulation as to why analysing this type of data, considering the links between the private and the public is important/useful.

[RESPONSE:
Thank you for this comment. We have re-introduced the concept of power as conceptualised by Fleming and Spicer (2014). We conceptualise the private e-mail exchange as an exercise of power by accessing existing social networks to influence policy agenda setting, i.e., power as manipulation.

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We focus our attention on the unique dataset by analysing the e-mail exchange (Section 5.1). The analysis indicates that social actors explicitly stated the aim to marginalise anti-nuclear actors in the public debate on nuclear power, thus intending to influence policy outcomes in their favour.
We appreciate your comment that we had previously undersold the uniqueness of our data and our case, and we think that re-introducing the concept of power, especially less visible forms of power, helped us to strengthen our theoretical framework as well as our analysis and interpretation of findings.]

On page 20 the author(s) talk about the public accountability frame. I wondered if this could come earlier to again provide essential context – this is an important aspect I think and helps justify the analysis of emails – indeed, this discussion on page 20 and top of page 21 would be useful to come earlier and would help address my above point about the strength of this analysis.

[RESPONSE:
We have removed the reference to the public accountability frame and refocused the analysis of emails on the concept of power as manipulation.]

I do have some slight concerns as to the use of political economy theory and the way it is used (or more correctly not used) in the analysis and presentation of findings – indeed, the focus is on framing. However, this discussion does help frame the paper and context and therefore I would just invite the author(s) to think if there would be any value in referring back to this theory in the final sections of the paper.

[RESPONSE:
In our discussion of findings and in the conclusion, we refer back to the political economy perspective of corporate communication and prior literature employing this theoretical lens in order to interpret our findings and to position our paper and findings in this literature.]

Overall, I think that the paper has been substantially improved from the previous version. However, I think some of the novelty and what makes this paper and the data set which it draws upon has been lost in the process. As such, what I provide above are some comments as to how I think the author(s) could "reclaim" some of the novelty of the manuscript. I hope they are useful in providing points for the author(s) to consider.

[RESPONSE:
Thank you for your comments. We hope that changes made in the current version of the manuscript have addressed your suggestions and concerns. We feel that based on your comments we were able to strengthen our theoretical framework and to focus more attention on the unique characteristics of our dataset and case.]