

BledCom

Reboot: Should Organizations Rediscover Communication with Internal & External Stakeholders?

BledCom 2022

29th International Public Relations Research Symposium
July 1-2, 2022

**Book of Abstracts of the 29th International
Public Relations Research Symposium BledCom**

EDITORS: Dejan Verčič, Ana Tkalac Verčič and Krishnamurthy Sriramesh

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Reboot: Should Organizations Rediscover Communication with Internal & External Stakeholders?

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EDITORS:

Dejan Verčič
Ana Tkalac Verčič
Krishnamurthy Sriramesh

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Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Welcome! Dobrodošli! Swagatam!



We are very excited to be back in person (offering a hybrid option for those who are still unable to travel to Bled) for the 29th edition of the International Public Relations Research Symposium (BledCom 2022)! Beautiful Bled is eager for your arrival as are we!

As we begin earnestly to resume our “normal” activities, we thought it wise to explore how organizations are beginning to “rediscover” their relationship with internal and external stakeholders prompting us to choose this year’s theme: **Reconnect: How Organizations Rediscover Internal & External Stakeholders**. We all have witnessed how the pandemic has demonstrated the fragility of humans and the societies we inhabit. During the pandemic, personal relationships were suspended and digitalized. As employees were asked to work from home, the very definition of the ‘workplace’ seems to have been redefined and still evolving. This year’s presentations from a global list of speakers will address these and other questions and issues relevant to our field.

We welcome you to BledCom 2022, with renewed enthusiasm and it is indeed a special pleasure to be back in person. As we are attempting a hybrid format for the first time in our 29-year history, we seek your patience and cooperation in making this maiden attempt a success for all participants.

Looking ahead, it is our hope that next year we all can meet in person to celebrate a milestone for BledCom – its 30th Anniversary! So, while we celebrate being back in person after a two-year hiatus, we are beginning to plan celebrations for the 30th International Public Relations Symposium (BledCom 2023), scheduled for **July 7 – 8, 2023!**

Thank you! Lep pozdrav! Namaste!



Dejan Verčič *University of Ljubljana and Herman & partners (Slovenia)*

Dejan Verčič is Professor, Head of Department of Communication and Head of Centre for Marketing and Public Relations at the University of Ljubljana, and Partner in strategic consulting and communication company Herman & partners Ltd. Slovenia. He received his PhD from the London School of Economics and Political Science, UK. A Fulbright scholar, recipient of the Pathfinder Award, the highest academic honour bestowed by the Institute for Public Relations (IPR) in New York, and named a Distinguished Public Relations Scholar by the European Public Relations Education and Research Association (EU-PRERA). In 1991 he was the founding director of Slovenian national news agency (STA). Organizing the annual International Public Relations Research Symposium – BledCom since 1994.



Ana Tkalac Verčič *University of Zagreb (Croatia)*

Ana Tkalac Verčič, Ph.D., is a Full Professor of Marketing communications and Public Relations at the Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Zagreb, Croatia. She is a former Fulbright scholar and a recipient of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations diploma. Ana Tkalac Verčič has authored, co-authored and edited numerous books including *Public Relations Metrics: Research and Evaluation* (with B. van Ruler and D. Verčič) and is the author of the first Croatian public relations textbook. She has published more than a 100 papers in various academic journals and serves in various editorial boards such as *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, *Journal of Public Relations Research* and *Public Relations Review*. Throughout her career professor Tkalac Verčič has received numerous awards, most recently, GrandPRx, the award for the development of public relations as a profession. She is a former president of the Croatian Public Relations Association.



Krishnamurthy Sriramesh *University of Colorado (USA)*

Krishnamurthy Sriramesh, is Professor of Public Relations at the University of Colorado, USA. He is recognized for his scholarship on topics such as global public relations, culture and public relations, corporate social responsibility, and public relations for development. Over 30 years he has advocated the need to reduce ethnocentricity in the public relations body of knowledge and practice in 8 books, over 110 articles and book chapters, and over 120 conference presentations around the world. His rich teaching experience includes teaching at 10 universities on four continents while also delivering seminars/talks in over 40 countries. He has won several awards for teaching and research at different universities including the 2004 Pathfinder Award from the Institute for Public Relations (USA) for “original scholarly research contributing to the public relations body of knowledge” and the PRIDE Award from the National Communication Association (USA).



Arrigoni, Adalberto, *Leeds Beckett University (UK)*



Avidar, Ruth, *The Max Stern Yezreel Valley College (Israel)* • Ruth Avidar (PhD) is the head of the marketing communications track in the Department of Communication at the Max Stern Yezreel Valley College, Israel. She is also a faculty member in the Department of Health Systems Management. Avidar earned her PhD at the University of Haifa and Master of Arts degree in communication and journalism at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Avidar is a former public relations practitioner, and her research has focused on online public relations, social media, customer and patient experience, dialogue and new technologies. Avidar is a member of the Center for Internet Research, University of Haifa.



Badham, Mark, *Jyväskylä University (Finland)* • Mark Badham, Ph.D., is Senior Lecturer in Corporate Communication at Jyväskylä University School of Business & Economics, Finland. His research is focused on digital crisis communication, social media engagement, relationship management, organizational legitimacy, and news media roles in mass communication processes.

Ban, Zhuo, *University of Cincinnati (USA)*



Barlik, Jacek, *University of Warsaw (Poland)* • He is an assistant professor at the Faculty of Journalism, Information and Book Studies, the University of Warsaw, Poland (full-time since 2014, previously straddled business career and part-time teaching). He is also a seasoned public relations practitioner, with vast experience as an advisor to major Polish and international corporations, public institutions and NGOs. He has authored articles, chapters and a book on public relations, communication strategies, awareness campaigns, crisis communication, social media, PR theory, sales and persuasion (in Polish and English), and was a Fulbright scholar at the University of Maryland, College Park (USA).



Benecke, Dalien René, *University of Johannesburg (South Africa)* • D Litt et Phil (2019) under supervision of late Prof Sonja Verwey with the title “ Social representation of PR activism in selected early-career South African Public Relations Practitioners. Rene is Associate Professor in Department of Strategic Communication and specializes in experiential learning for strategic communication students, activism, community influencers, network theory, internal communication and leadership. She is coordinating various work integrated learning placements for students and community engagements. She also mentors the Students’ Public Relations Association (SPRA). She served as President of the professional body the Public Relations Association of Southern Africa (PRISA) during 2019/20 and also holds the portfolio Education, Training and Research. Rene believes in providing students with the opportunity to make a difference in society through their experiential learning actions. Her community involvement includes the development of young practitioners through active citizenship. For more detail on her publications visit: <https://www.uj.ac.za/members/prof-rene-benecke/>



Bernardino, Paula, *Credibility Institute (Canada)* • Strategic Communication Management Professional (SCMP) with more than 15 years of experience working for large global corporations and not-for-profit organizations, Paula Bernardino is now a strategic consultant in communications and corporate social responsibility while also guest speaking at conferences and panels on sustainability, corporate social responsibility and strategic communications. She also collaborates with the Credibility Institute in Canada as their CSR Expert - Senior Strategist and Associate Research. She is also a course lecturer at McGill University in the Public Relations program and an instructor in the Professional Development Institute at the University of Ottawa. Her study “Engaging Employees through Corporate Social Responsibility Programs” won the “Best Paper – Practitioner” award at 2020 CCI Milan Conference on Corporate Communication on September 17, 2020.

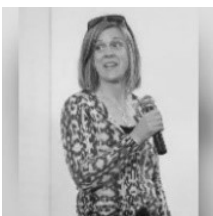


Bonaccorso, Giuseppe, *IULM University Milan (Italy)* • Giuseppe Bonaccorso is currently Ph.D. student in Markets, Communication and Society at IULM University in Milan. His field of research concerns the use of rhetoric in corporate sustainability communications, sustainability reporting and impression management.

Bouroncle, Linnéa, *Erasmus University Rotterdam (The Netherlands)*



Bowen, Shannon A., *University of South Carolina (USA)* • Shannon A. Bowen (Ph.D. Univ. of Maryland) is a full Professor at the University of South Carolina. Her research focuses on ethical decision making and issues management, as well as c-suite inclusion and contributions by public relations. Dr Bowen teaches and researches ethics across corporations, pharmaceutical firms, governmental entities, and the public relations industry. Her most recent book uses grant-based research to explicate “Excellence in Internal Communication Management” (2017; Business Expert Press) with Rita L. Men. Dr Bowen is one of three joint-editors for the journal *Ethical Space: The International Journal of Communication Ethics*. She sits on the Board of Trustees of the Arthur W. Page Society and has won numerous awards for her research.



Bridgen, Liz, *Sheffield Hallam University (UK)* • Liz Bridgen is Principal Lecturer in Public Relations at Sheffield Hallam University, UK. She is co-editor with Dejan Verčič of *Experiencing Public Relations: International Voices* and recently contributed a chapter, ‘The impact of diversity initiatives on practitioners and practice’ to *Platinum: Celebrating the CIPR and its members at 70*. Her research explores on the lived experience of public relations practitioners with a focus on gender and technology and is currently developing a project on the marginalisation of public relations and its attempt to sanitise and be seen as a respectable occupation.



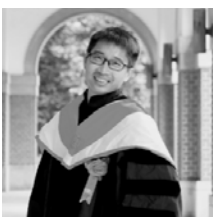
Butera, Alfonsa, *Università IULM (Italy)* • Alfonsa Butera is Adjunct Professor of Corporate Communication and Head of Coordination and Researcher of the Centre for Employee Relations and Communication at Università IULM, Italy. She is a freelance consultant in the field of corporate communication, dealing with the strategic planning and operational management of the communication activities of B2B and B2C customers operating in various industrial sectors. Her main research interests are employee communication and engagement, internal crisis communication, employee voice and silence, media relations.



Carignan, Marie-Eve, *Université de Sherbrooke (Canada)* • Marie-Eve Carignan, Ph.D, is an associate professor in the Department of Communication at the Université de Sherbrooke and director of the Media Division of the UNESCO Chair in Prevention of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism (UNESCO-PREV Chair). Her research focuses mainly on the impact of media in society, disinformation, risk and crisis communication, and communication strategies. She has contributed to several collective works and published in national and international journals in communication, health, journalism and history. She has extensive professional experience in communications and public relations in small and large organizations.



Champagne-Poirier, Olivier, *Université de l'Ontario (Canada)* • Olivier Champagne-Poirier is a professor in the Department of Communication at the Université de Sherbrooke in Québec, Canada. He holds a doctorate from the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières and has completed a postdoctoral fellowship at the Université de l'Ontario français. In the last 10 years, he has built an expertise in different fields, namely “communication and culture”, “mediatic discourse analysis” and “risk and crisis communication”. He specializes in qualitative research and has worked on numerous projects related to: COVID-19; different Canadian natural and industrial disasters; and various terrorist attacks in several countries around the world.



Chan, Chun-Hsiang, *Taipei Medical University (Taiwan)* • Chun-Hsiang Chan is a PostDoc at Taipei Medical University. He received his Ph.D. from the Department of Geography, National Taiwan University. His recent research on the human dynamics (human-to-human and human-to-environment interactions) during the geographical process provides policy insights to industry stakeholders and government. He has experienced Data Analysis with a demonstrated history of working in the academic and information industry. He has skilled in complex network analysis, social media engagement, spatial statistics, and the air transportation market. Strong spatial and social network professional with a Ph.D. focus on the Integrated Market Analysis of Aviation Market and COVID-19 impact on public health and social media engagement.

in the academic and information industry. He has skilled in complex network analysis, social media engagement, spatial statistics, and the air transportation market. Strong spatial and social network professional with a Ph.D. focus on the Integrated Market Analysis of Aviation Market and COVID-19 impact on public health and social media engagement.



Chen, Zifei Fay, *University of San Francisco (USA)* • Zifei Fay Chen, Ph.D., is an assistant professor of public relations in the Communication Studies Department at the University of San Francisco, San Francisco, CA, USA. Her research interests include corporate social responsibility, social media strategies, startup and entrepreneurial public relations, and crisis communication and management.



Chiu, Ariel, *The Chinese University of Hong Kong (Hong Kong, China)* • Ariel Chiu is a master student in Corporate Communication at The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) and a marketer. With the marketing and communication background, she is broadly interested in social media influence, user behaviour and engagement.



Chmiel, Michal, *Royal Holloway, University of London (UK)* • In his research, Michal compares advertising and public relations messages to identify how both types of communication work in unison to influence buying behaviour and produce the most favourable attitudes. Michal also analyses the societal impact of advertising and public relations communication. As a practitioner, Michal has more than 14 years of experience in incorporating social psychological evidence into PR and communications projects for multinational companies and public figures.



Clarke, Faye, *Pembroke and Rye (UK)* • Faye is a Senior Account Executive at London based strategic PR consultancy, Pembroke and Rye. She is an MA graduate from Cardiff University in International Public Relations and Global Communications Management. At Pembroke and Rye, she has been encouraged to maintain a keen academic interest in CSR, ESG and reputation management. As a practitioner, she works for a range of industry-leading clients in aviation, technology, aerospace and events. She has also developed a specialist interest in data analysis and the preparation of management information reports. She regularly uses her analytical skills to inform strategic decision making and client planning.



Colleoni, Elanor, *University of Georgia (USA)* • Elanor Colleoni, Ph.D. is currently Assistant Professor of Corporate Reputation at University IULM in Milan. Her work lies at the intersection of corporate reputation, organizational legitimacy, corporate social responsibility, and business ethics, with a particular focus on the impact of new communication technologies on corporate reputation and business ethics. Her research has been published in leading management and communication journals, such as *Academy of Management Review*, *Business & Society*, *Journal of Communication*, among others.

Čater, Tomaž, *University of Ljubljana (Slovenia)*

Čater, Barbara, *University of Ljubljana (Slovenia)*



Dabo, Krešimir, *University of Zagreb (Croatia)*



David, Marc D., *Université de Sherbrooke (Canada)* • He worked for more than 15 years on many projects in public relations and marketing communications before becoming a professor of communication at the Université de Sherbrooke, where he teaches strategic communication and marketing communications. His research interests focus mainly on two axes. The first axis revolves around the analysis of communications strategies and the methodology for a communications audit. The second axis is concerned with the study of risk and crisis. Professor David is the co-founder of the International Network on the Professionalization of the Communicator, which brings together professional researchers and university scholars from France, Belgium, Canada and Morocco.



Davids, Deidre, *Cape Peninsula University of Technology (South Africa)* • In June 2021, Deidre graduated cum laude with a master's degree in strategic communication management from the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa. Her thesis focused on understanding the role of the reflective communication strategist in environmental scanning – how social intelligence is key to developing enterprise and communication strategy. During the last 17 years Deidre has been working in the aviation and tourism industry at Cape Town International Airport. Her most recent position was in top management as Senior Manager Corporate Affairs. She has recently started her own company, specialising in strategic communication, stakeholder relations, media strategy, social engagement and facilitation.

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Dhanesh serves as Associate Editor for the *Journal of Communication Management*. A recipient of several research awards, Dhanesh actively consults for various national and multinational organizations. She is a lead researcher for the Global Capabilities Framework project in the UAE and university lead for the UN Women Unstereotype Alliance UAE chapter-Zayed University partnership.



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Fux, Patricia, *University of Ljubljana (Slovenia)*



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Holtzhausen, Lida, *North-West University (South Africa)*



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Hübner, Renate, *Alpen-Adria University of Klagenfurt (Austria)*

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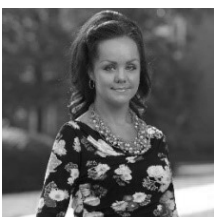
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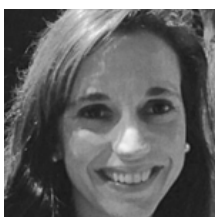
Meißner, Florian, *Macromedia University of Applied Sciences (Germany)*

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Mourão, Rita, *Escola Superior de Comunicação Social – Instituto Politécnico de Lisboa (Portugal)* • PhD student in the area of Communication Sciences, PhD in Communication Studies: Technology, Culture and Society, in Portugal. Lecturer in School of Communication and Media Studies-Bachelor degree of “Publicity and Marketing” and “Public Relations and Organizational Communication”, having taught curricular units of “Consumer Behavior” and “Organizational Theories”, in Lisbon,



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Sauter, Simon, *Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München (Germany)*



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Stranzl, Julia, *University of Vienna (Austria)*

Sueldo, Mariana, *ISM University of Management and Economics (Lithuania)*

Sun, Ruoyu, *University of Miami (USA)*



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Tao, Weiting, *University of Miami (USA)*

Tench, Ralph, *Leeds Beckett University (UK)*



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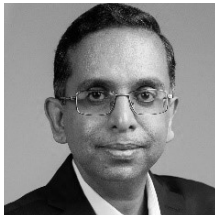


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A Decade of Theoretical Frameworks in Social Media Research in Public Relations

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Social media (SM) has become a key operating channel in public relations (PR) and triggered PR scholars to learn more about the value of SM. In addition to PR practitioners that perceive SM as changing the way PR is practiced (Wright & Hinson, 2014), PR scholars have also demonstrated an increased interest in this unique phenomenon over the last decade. However, from a scholarly standpoint, research has shown that PR scholars often borrow theories and concepts from mass communication, journalism, advertising, and other fields when exploring SM in PR rather than building a unique SM theory of PR (Kent & Li, 2020) or even suggesting a unified terminology (Verčič, Verčič, & Sriramesh, 2015). The aim of this study is to explore and analyze the theoretical frameworks used in SM-related PR research in the period of 2010-2020, to better understand the state of the field and future theoretical developments.

Literature review


SM research is the fastest growing area in the history of PR, and new media are changing the way PR is practiced and the way organizations communicate with stakeholders, gatekeepers and audiences (European Communication Monitor, 2021; Wright and Hinson, 2017). This might be due to the dominant features of SM: immediacy,

availability, convenience of use, personalization and rapid exposure to messages based on full media consumer participation and the ability of both consumers and organizations to respond at any time. The centrality of SM in the field of PR has driven scholars to try and build a normative SM theory specifically tailored for PR based on SM's unique attributes such as dialogue, engagement, social presence, and conversational human voice, in order to better understand the phenomenon and its practice.

Despite the above-mentioned studies, none of them have systematically identified peer-reviewed journal articles in SM or presented the theoretical growth of SM research from a PR perspective. To fill this gap, this study systematically investigated theoretical frameworks used in SM-related PR research in the last decade.

Methodology

This study is based on a systematic review and a content analysis of 575 articles addressing SM research from a PR perspective, published between 2010-2020 in nine PR-focused peer-reviewed journals (Public Relations Review, Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly, International Journal of Strategic Communication, Corporate Communications: An International Journal, Journal of Communication Management, Public Relations Journal, Journal



of Public Relations Research, Prism, and Public Relations Inquiry). Articles were included in the sample if they were (1) full-length articles, (2) published in one of the nine journals selected, (3) included one of 16 SM terms defined in advance in their title, abstract or keywords, (4) were conducted in the field of PR, and (5) were published between January 1, 2010 to December 31, 2020.

Results and conclusions

The search resulted in a total of 926 hits, and after cleaning the data (removing duplicates, commentaries, etc.) a total of 575 articles were included in the final sample.

A relatively high percentage (66.26%) of studies explicitly presented theoretical frameworks. The most frequently used theories were theories from the PR domain: Dialogic Theory and Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). It is interesting to note that while relationship management theory was the second most frequently used perspective in PR research during the first decade of the 21st century (Sallot, Lyon, Acosta-Alzuru, & Jones, 2003), it was less frequently present in SM research from 2010 to 2020, in the articles assessed in this research.

In addition to the popularity of SCCT, the increasing scholarly interest in crisis communication encouraged the development of Social-Me-

diated Crisis Communication Model (SMCC) over the past decade, and it became one of the most used PR theories. Finally, the findings also point to the multidisciplinary of the field of PR that still “borrows” theoretical frameworks from other related fields such as mass communication, journalism, and others. This finding is in line with Kent and Li’s (2020) argument that a specific SM theory for PR does not really exist, though it is much needed considering the abundance of scholarship on SM in PR.

Limitations

Our data collection procedure included only peer-reviewed articles published in 9 selected journals in English and no other venues, languages, and disciplines.

Implications for future research

Our study can be viewed as a starting point for the development of a stronger theoretical understanding of incorporating SM within PR. It is expected that future theoretical frameworks will relate to various developments in the field of PR, such as new SM platforms, increasing organizational capabilities to store and analyze big data, and various ethical and moral challenges related to privacy, transparency, personalization, and information security.

Keywords: *Social media, Systematic review, Content analysis, PR theory, PR Journals*



Power of words and angry online publics: A study of discursive muscularity in networked mobilization of fan groups in China

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As the communication technology (ICT) shifts and reshapes the modes and processes of social interactions, there is increasing interest among public relations researchers in various online activist publics and their impact on the strategic goals of organizations. In comparison to brick-and-mortar organizations in which members exercise embodied interactions with each other, online activist networks or collectives are characterized by exchanges in mediated and discursive forms. As the discursive aspect is central to understanding online publics, so is the question of discursive muscularity in their organizational processes. Does online activism have the same kind of social impact as protests in the street, for example? Can an angry internet-based collective pose similar challenges to business organizations that work offline? In other words, do discursively constructed online collectives have the ability to bring about substantive, material outcomes? The question about discursive muscularity becomes more important during the COVID pandemic, as more social collectives, even those that used to operate face-to-face, are moving more of their activities online.

In this study, I examine the characteristics and processes of discursive muscularity of online publics, using the example of activist mobili-

zations among online fan groups in China. Using data collected from Weibo, a China-based social media platform, I observe how members of fan groups combine the logics of ethical consumption, national pride, and celebrity-fan relationship, and successfully mobilize collective/connective actions that specifically target at non-discursive (i.e., material) outcomes using largely discursive means. In doing so, I argue that fan groups represent a discursively “porous” structure that can amplify the reifying power of language.

Social structures and organizations can be either “porous” or “impermeable” to material, substantive influences of discursive events. In highlighting the impact of social structural and organizational features on discursive muscularity, I recognize that fan groups in China serves as a “porous” organizational structure where member of the organization, fans of celebrities (most of them luminous figures in the entertainment industry), have found a clear and consistent pathway of using their individual or collective voices to influence socio reality that are otherwise impermeable.

Fan pressure is a routine part of the life in a fan group. Communication activities in the forms of discussions, petitions, informal sensus and votes, and picketing (both on and off-line), etc., rou-



tinely takes place in attempts to sway the decisions of the celebrity on matters both private and public, ranging from marriage decisions to sponsorship contracts, from outfit choice to stance on political issues. The porousness of the fan group stems, first and foremost, from the internal logic of the groups. Such relationship, based on the idea of a special celebrity-fan relationship, legitimizes open exchanges over the personal and professional lives of the celebrity and encourages impassioned pressure over their decisions, unbarred by ethical concerns for autonomy or privacy.

Members of the fan group can set and reset, draw and undraw organizational boundaries often with no more than an impassioned exchange of words. Fan group activism is founded on the economic logic of “liking”. It is this economic logic that gives an online fan group its discursive porousness. As industries tap into the popularity of the celebrities for commercial success,

ROI, and brand image, the fan base largely determines the professional and commercial value of the celebrity. In this sense, fan power is not real grassroots power, but power granted by the multi-billion dollar celebrity-based industry, and more fundamentally, the “separation of labor” or “outsourcing” of the communication-relationship aspect of business by giant, consumer-based, industries.

Based on my observation and analysis of online fan groups in China, I discuss how online activist group like these gain ‘discursive teeth’, resulting in effective and consequential mobilization and organization of connective actions. I also discuss the theoretical and practical implications of new forms of connected activism, in particular the strategic maneuver of polarization and suppression that are demonstrated in the selected cases.

Keywords: *fan group, online activism, chinese social media*



PR Education: Reloaded. The Pandemic's Legacy for Public Relations Teachers and Students

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Introduction and purpose of the study

After two years of primarily remote public relations teaching due to the pandemic (which is expected to be over soon), PR educators and students prepare to shift to an in-person instruction that had been common before spring 2020. This task will require reestablishment (or reboot) of relationships between instructors and their students to meet the new, post-pandemic expectations of the PR industry. After the pandemic, some technology-based teaching methods are likely to stay on for longer. In contrast, others will be dropped as ineffective and harder to implement, especially in such areas as PR ethics and professional standards in the industry. Research among PR students should help educators and PR industry leaders to improve PR studies curricula in the post-pandemic era and to better respond to many challenges (like a lack of in-person relationships and online instruction at schools) PR students have been facing over the last two years.

Research questions

Therefore, several research questions on PR students' level of preparedness to work in their chosen field, their attitude towards the ethical problems and professional standards in the PR industry, and the pandemic's influence on preferred teaching methods and effectiveness of online instruction should be asked:

RQ1 – How do PR students perceive the role of the PR industry, especially during the pandemic (and beyond)? Are they aware of reputational issues that have been plaguing the field?


RQ2 – What are PR students' expectations towards their careers? Do PR studies prepare them adequately for PR jobs, also in pandemic (by mostly online instruction)?

RQ3 – Which online instruction methods have been proven effective during the pandemic and should be kept on in the PR curricula when the situation gets back to normal?

Literature review

Scholars pointed out that during the pandemic and later, a heavy reliance on online educational techniques will create both threats and opportunities to PR education: the former include declining academic standards and the lack of situational (in-person) learning, while the latter refers to collaborative learning, open education resources, extended dialogic and feedback mechanisms, and to applying new technologies, more student-friendly, especially online- and mobile-based (Vujnovic, & Kruckeberg, 2021; Fullerton, & McKinnon, 2015).

Calls for ongoing dialogue among the PR industry, practitioners, and educators to develop a PR curriculum relevant to contemporary challenges



and needs of clients and employers, also created by the pandemic and post-pandemic era, have been consistently voiced by PR experts and leaders. They address many vital themes in PR education, including a mix of theory and practice in the PR curriculum, a list of required courses, skills and competencies of teachers, and technological, cultural, and social aspects of communication (Kim, Quesenberry, Sutherland, & Freberg, 2021). However, they overlook the opinions and experience of PR students who have to struggle and adjust to the PR industry's requirements during their first professional efforts, like internships and entry-level jobs.

Methodology

The study will be based on quantitative research among undergraduate and graduate PR students in a European country. Respondents (at least 200 students) will be recruited by their teachers (by request of this researcher) at several universities that run PR sequences. As similar research was conducted previously (before the pandemic in 2019 and at the height of it in 2021), the results will allow for comparisons of PR students' attitudes and expectations towards their field, their preferred teaching methods (including online ones), and awareness of ethical issues and professional standards in the more extended period.

Results and conclusions

The research will find out whether PR students (as would-be practitioners) are prepared adequately to make it in their field and whether PR curricula – primarily based on online methods during the pandemic – are functional and effective from their point of view. The results will also suggest which remote teaching techniques should be kept in PR schools beyond the current pandemic, thus improving the overall quality of PR education.

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Keywords: *functionalism, online teaching, public relations education, public relations students*



Adopting a network perspective for stakeholder engagement and research during Covid- 19: The case of GBV research among private sector organisations in South Africa

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Introduction and purpose of the study

We aim to show how the new paradigm of strategic public relations that embraces a network perspective (Yang & Saffer, 2019), supported and enabled ground breaking GBV research that not only fostered meaningful stakeholder engagement, but also created new platforms for multi-sectoral partnerships and collaboration in future research. This paper presents a case study on how a network approach was used to engage with leaders in private sector organisations in South Africa to explore their views and opinions about the private sector's role and responsibility in addressing GBV as in issue that affects all sectors of society and that necessarily impacts employees in all sectors.

Literature review

Over the past three decades there has been a noticeable paradigm shift in public relations theorising, placing increasing emphasis on the relationships between organisations and society (Holmström, 2006). The central tenet is that all stakeholders, including private sector organisations, universities, government organisations, non-government organisations and civil society

must engage in issues that affect sustainability locally, as well as globally (Benecke, 2019). Public relations scholars have been researching the development of stakeholder networks, the various nodes and actors involved, how these relate to each other and the issue at hand as well as the influence of these networks on society (Yang & Saffer, 2019). Networks increase interaction, variation and selection (Davis, 2011) and in doing so they enable communication that would not have occurred otherwise.

Since the publication of the National Strategic Plan in South Africa on 11 March 2020, there has been an increasing call on private sector organisations to participate in addressing gender-based violence (GBV) that is five times more prevalent in South Africa than in other countries. Previously, GBV has been addressed predominantly as a public health concern and the private sector, as well as most social scientific disciplines focused on organisations, business, or strategy, had been excluded from GBV discourses and engagement (Davis, 2020). However, the business case for global sustainability has long been established and the Economic, Social and Government (ESG) scores have become a key



driver of strategy for the private sector. Since GBV has been flagged as a critical global sustainability issue, estimated at costing the global economy more than \$10 trillion annually (UN Women, 2016), it is indisputable that it is an issue that necessitates all stakeholders to collaborate in addressing it.

Research approach and data collection

A case study research approach (Cutler, 2004) is followed to investigate these stakeholder networks with a key focus being placed on the various nodes and actors involved and how inter-connectivity features and what the effects of the various affiliations were on inter-organisational networks. Secondary data as presented by the various engagements between actors as well as interviews with selected organisational representatives will be used to inform the findings.

Contribution of the study

This study forms part of a bigger study involving the development of multi-organisational structures to address the GBV crisis in South Africa. This study will contribute in documenting the various networks actors and nodes, their interactions and the influence of these interactions at the onset of the project.

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Reboot: Rediscover Communication with Internal and External Stakeholders through Engagement on Social Issues

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in March 2020 brought an opportunity to better define the “S” of ESG (Environment, Social and Governance). Investors were quick at expressing wanting to see a greater emphasis on the “S” of ESG by getting companies to reflect how they were treating their employees during these difficult times and making it clear it was going to be a consideration when analyzing their ESG reports moving forward.

Shortly after the pandemic outbreak, major societal issues emerged in 2020, whether the death of George Floyd in the United States in May 2020 which prompted the Black Lives Matter movement, or the discovery of unmarked graves at a former residential school sites in Canada in 2021, opening an era of communication expectations from businesses on engaging and addressing social issues.

Purpose

Edelman’s 2022 Trust Barometer identified a state of “cycle of distrust” where people do not trust businesses to actually “walk the talk” when it comes to social issues and values, which clashes with people’s expectations wanting more from businesses when it comes to engagement on social issues. In most cases, respondents said “companies aren’t doing enough to address is-

sues like climate change or economic inequality – which contributes to the lack of trust”.

Employees and consumers, especially Millennials, are increasingly becoming more socially conscious (and that trend is likely to continue with Gen Z). Younger consumers tend to research companies before they make purchasing decisions to identify these companies’ actions towards social issues. Younger employees do similar research before applying to a job posting. This provides an opportunity for how organizations interact with their publics. Communication and public relation practitioners must play a role to earn back trust from their organizations’ stakeholders.

Methodology

A media content analysis

Research Problem and Questions

- (1) What is the history of organizations engaging on social issues?
- (2) Which stakeholders voice stronger opinions on businesses embracing social issues?
 - shareholders
 - employees
 - consumers
 - board members



(3) What is the state of businesses communicating social issues around the world?

- USA
- Canada
- Europe

(4) What are the current trends in communicating social issues?

(5) What are future perspectives in social issues management?

Conclusions and Key Take Aways

Answers to the five research questions helped:

- Determine what is “responsible, sincere and authentic communications”.
- How communications and public relation practitioners can avoid the trap of “washing” their messages on social issues.
- Which social issues businesses need to embrace and communicate based on their stakeholders.

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Keywords: *corporate social responsibility, CSR, corporate responsibility, corporate reputation, social issues, authenticity, trust, issues management, credibility*

Governmental Use of Social Media and AI during Disasters, Crises, and Emergency Response

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Introduction and Purpose

This paper explores the conference theme of whether social media could use a reboot in communicating with stakeholders during disasters, crises, or emergencies. To some extent, this “reboot” is not optional: it is happening due to rapid changes in technology such as AI and machine learning, and due to social changes and pressures from the sustained crisis of the global Covid-19 pandemic.

Literature Review

This study examines the literature of crises, emergency, and disaster management, as well as government and public affairs, ethics of governmental relations, and applications of artificial intelligence in communication and social media use. **RQ:** This paper asks, to what extent are public affairs officers (PAOs) - or Public Information Officers (PIOs) - using social media and Artificial Intelligence (AI) to help manage crises, emergencies, and disasters? **Method:** Data collection and analyses is still ongoing: Two focus groups and 8 in-depth interviews with 40 PAOs working in governmental agencies were conducted to understand how social media is used during a crisis, the extent to which misinformation interferes with accurate information, and the potential for AI application in optimizing efficiencies during a crisis or natural disaster.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Hurricane response was used as an example in a coastal southeastern state in the USA. This research is illustrative of response in that state but due to variances in states and governing structures, and across nationalities, the conclusions should not be applied to other areas without further study. Future studies could compare and contrast other states, public sector organizations, and nationalities in use of social media and AI in emergencies.

Results and Conclusions

Officials detailed the extent to which they used different social media platforms during such an emergency, how media relations takes place, how misinformation is handled (from honest mistakes to maleficent bad actors), and how citizen-stakeholders are communicated with via social media during crises. Participants want an AI that can show sentiment analysis, monitor news sources, measure the reach of their own messages disseminated via social media, and find problematic or incorrect information. Currently, research, data analytics, and AI are little-used in governmental public affairs, especially during crises. This finding shows a need for formative and evaluative research, as well as a potential for marked improvement in efficiencies via AI applications.



Practical and social implications

PAOs/PIOs could have a revolutionized ability to identify information reach, flows, provenance, and authenticity as well as to address misinformation on social media via the use of AI. As a computer science team develops the AI supporting this research, the use of AI and machine learning will be tested which can speed the efficiency and accuracy of responses to hurricanes and other crises/disasters. Emergency management could be improved in numerous ways and used in many locales.

Keywords: *Public Affairs; Social Media; Crisis; Disaster; AI*

Acknowledgment: Research funded by a grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF).



“It’s just a job” Public relations careers in the sex industry

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Introduction and purpose of study

The positioning of public relations as a strategic management function is the result of it drawing its body of knowledge and justification from a reasonably mainstream range of organisational types and cultures. Public relations may be more – or less – than this. We do not know because the research around the value of public relations to organisations has given little space to the opinions, innovations and experiences of those working in marginalised or ‘dirty’ roles or occupations. As Edwards points out: “the other must be allowed to speak [...] be able to construct a narrative of the world that reflects their own experience.” (2015:8) and as researchers, we have a duty to include all worlds when we talk about the public relations industry and not just draw our understanding from those we see as acceptable or performing the ‘right’ type of public relations.

To play a small part in including the views of ‘others’, my paper explores **the lives and work of women working in public relations and communication roles in the ‘adult’ industry** (worth an estimated \$15 billion worldwide). Tibbals notes that “the voices and experiences of women working in the adult film industry are often overlooked” (2013:21). In other words, just because we find an organisation distasteful, should it mean that we disregard the experiences of those who work in it?

Practical and social implications

The ‘public relations’ experienced by older practitioners, freelancers, and those working in marginalised occupations (such as the sex industry and for ‘unethical’ causes such as tobacco as well as for radical causes) and those whose appearance, abilities, culture, religion or nationality marks them as ‘different’ are excluded as subjects from most public relations research. As a result, the industry’s desire for ‘diversity’ falls short – sometimes diversity of thought appears only to be acceptable when it comes from people considered worthy of inclusion by industry leaders and researchers. This, of course, excludes many modes of public relations practice that fall outside the dominant paradigm.

Literature Review

Some may find the idea that the adult industry has public relations roles and a career structure problematic – how, for instance, does this sit with the notion that a public relations professional should be the “conscience of an organisation” (e.g. Neill, & Drumwright, 2012)? But dismissing a highly profitable but ‘dirty’ sector is to overlook and denigrate the people who work in it and the experiences and knowledge created therein. For instance, Calvert and Richards (2006), who interviewed five women working in professional roles in the adult film industry, noted that it was important to “benefit from understanding the viewpoints and options of real people who produce and perform the content

which is of scholarly debate” (261).

Within the adult industry the role of public relations is acknowledged and foregrounded. Cormella (2008), writing of the AVN Adult Entertainment Expo, Las Vegas observed that attendees included “adult retailers, manufacturers, porn producers, industry talent, fans, public relations experts, and members of the media.” And Tibbals noted that the adult industry was more diverse in its recruitment than mainstream public relations, giving employment to those who did not have “both a relevant degree and the class privilege required to complete an unpaid internship” (2013:30).

Research questions

What is the lived experience of women working in public relations and communications in the adult industry?

What do these women think about the ‘mainstream’ public relations industry and their marginalised position within it?

Methodology

To explore my research questions, I gathered informal interview data from women working in public relations and communications roles in the adult industry.

Results and conclusions

My early research demonstrates that high quality public relations work is carried out within the adult industry and that professional qualifications are not unusual but those working in the industry feel excluded from many discussions about the role of public relations.

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Keywords: *Public Relations; adult industry; professionalism; lived experience; practitioners; pornography*



The impact of marketing communication strategies on online consumer-brand community engagement during COVID-19 pandemic

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Online brand community engagement plays a vital role in developing and sustaining consumer-brand interaction to disseminate the latest news to drive purchase intention (Bilro & Loureiro, 2020). Due to the social distancing and lockdown policies that led to various measurements against the local epidemic, the online brand community became the major communication channel for brands during the COVID-19 pandemic. In turn, various waves of pandemic measurements may affect consumer-brand interactions differently. To investigate the phenomenon, this study aims to quantitatively evaluate the changes in consumer-brand interactions on social media between two pandemic waves, including pre-, during, and post-pandemic periods.

Since the outbreak of Covid-19, Taiwan has been one of the few areas with less confirmed cases after adopting solid epidemic prevention policies. Both moderate and rigorous epidemic prevention policies have been implemented, respectively, from January to April 2020 and from May to July 2021. Therefore, using Taiwan as an example to assess longer term consumer engagement behavior on an official brand social me-

dia account would be appropriate. Considering the high social media penetration rate and industry characteristics (one of the most affected industries), the official Facebook account of a premium chain restaurant brand in Taiwan was selected.

Literature review

The process of behavioral engagement of community members on social media could be explicitly elaborated by stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R model), brand-generated content stimulates (S) consumer's emotional reaction (from brand learning, entitativity, and hedonic values) that drives consumer's behavior response (Carlson, Rahman, Voola, & De Vries, 2018). Moreover, the stimulation of behavior engagement is based on service-dominant (S-D) logic, referring to an inherently beneficiary-oriented and relational framework (Chandler & Lusch, 2014). From a practical perspective, Raïes, Mühlbacher, and Gavard-Perret (2015) mentioned that behavioral engagement could be quantified by the frequency and level of brand-consumer interactions. The context of behavioral engagement on Facebook is adequate to elaborate its changes due to epidemic prevention policy be-



cause consumer-brand interaction is multilevel (posts, comments, and shares) and multivariate structure (reacts and replies) (Ángeles Oviedo-García, 2014).

Methodology

The engagement data from the Facebook fan page of the premium chain restaurants were collected in 2020 and 2021 via web crawler technique, including posts (numbers of likes, comments, and shares within a post), comments (numbers of likes, replies within a comment, and the daily number of comments), and shares (numbers of likes, comments, shares within a shared post, and the daily number of shares). Two pandemic waves in Taiwan were examined from January 23 to April 13, 2020 (level 2 epidemic alert – L2EA) and from 15 to July 26, 2021 (epidemic alert – L3EA).

The pre- and post-pandemic periods were determined by the range of available data in the two epidemic periods, covering one month of the pre-pandemic period of L2EA and L3EA and four months after the two pandemics. In total, 192 posts, 19,912 comments, and 15,400 shared posts were collected. An independent t-test was adopted to examine the engagement variation between the two pandemic periods.

Results and Conclusion

In the pre-pandemic period, numbers of likes ($p < 0.001$) and replies within a comment ($p = 0.004$) in the comment level in L3EA was significantly higher than L2EA, while numbers of likes within a shared post ($p = 0.006$) in the L2EA share level was significantly higher than L3EA. During the pandemic, the comment level in L2EA was similar to L3EA, while numbers of likes ($p = 0.001$) and comments within a shared post ($p = 0.056$) in the share level in L2EA were significantly higher than L3EA. In the post-pandemic period, the daily number of comments in the comment level ($p = 0.011$) and numbers of

likes ($p < 0.001$), comments ($p = 0.091$), and the daily number of shares ($p = 0.004$) in the share levels in L2EA were significantly higher than L3EA. Though L3EA showed a higher engagement in the pre-pandemic, this trend did not sustain during the pandemic and post-pandemic periods.

Practical implications

As one of the most affected industries during the pandemic, restaurants initiated many new ways to engage consumers through their online brand community by posting food delivery services, takeout, and food tips. During both pandemics, the restaurant brand attempted to capture consumers' attention and to stimulate their intrinsic motivation into behavior engagement response with similar services. One possible explanation of higher engagement in L2EA is that consumers had strong emotional needs of having restaurant services in the beginning of the pandemic that is in line with the S-O-R model.

L3EA, one year after the pandemic, did not perform a higher engagement that may result from the anticipated hedonic or utilitarian services from the restaurants that may not be able to satisfy consumers. The use of similar stimuli (the post content) could not raise the same engagement response or sustain engagement of brand-consumer interactions, resulting in a diminishing marginal utility effect in the online brand community. Hence, in the restaurant industry, the descending trend of online brand-consumer engagement could be expected in the future possible pandemic periods if no new or strong intervention.



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All the lonely people: Considering the attributes of audiences who consume and share untruthful content

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has had profoundly negative effects globally. Beyond the immediate challenges to physical health of the virus itself, the policies and associated public communication of many national governments to protect their populations from physical harm – such as the authoritarian advocacy of lockdowns, self-isolation and social distancing – have generated unintended consequences in the form of mental health issues. In particular, while many people have reported a combination of anxiety, isolation and loneliness during the pandemic, Jones et al. (2021) identified that vulnerable minority groups such as ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ communities, low-income families and those already in poor health were at significantly greater risk of experiencing loneliness.

The public communication style of many governments has combined authoritarianism with paternalism in order to compel citizens to comply with loose guidance and obey new and often hastily-imposed laws restricting freedoms. Despite this public communication effort, a proportion of citizens in many nations remains indifferent or opposed to public health messages on topics such as vaccination. Moreover, over two years on from the initial reports of COVID-19, groups and individuals continue to generate and distribute untruthful content, fake news and

conspiracy theories relating to COVID-19 and measures to mitigate the pandemic.

Purpose

Scholars in public relations, public health and other fields have already diligently attended to senders and their messaging in relation to the pandemic and other crises. The focus of this project is to help public relations practitioners to better understand audiences in these situations. In particular, the purpose of the study that follows is to explore how various individual psychological attributes affect an audience's susceptibility to receive and accept untruthful content, as well as drive their propensity to share such material on social media.

Literature Review

Previous studies suggested that supporters of right-wing ideologies manifest a stronger tendency to share fake news (FN) but political orientation alone did not explain the tendency to spread FN. Collective Narcissism (CN, de Zavala *et al.* 2009) defined as an unrealistic and exaggerated belief in greatness of one's ingroup was identified as a moderator of sharing FN. The more in-group self-esteem on an implicit level was lower the higher was the tendency to share fake information.

In the domain of conspiracy theories, Albarracín (2021) suggested a motivational continuum, ranging from knowledge to social integration whereby believing in conspiracy theories can serve an ego supporting function. More specifically, *this motivation entails defending the ego from unpleasant thoughts about the self* (p. 206, Albarracín, 2021). Several other motivational forces are also said to play a role in support for conspiracy theories: reduction of uncertainty, need for cognitive closure and need for uniqueness. These factors have been separately investigated as correlates of loneliness (e.g. Joubert, 1987; Parlapani *et al.* 2020).

Given this pattern of evidence, it would be interesting to investigate how a state of very few links with others (=loneliness) can further affect sharing fake information. The present study focuses specifically on the phenomenon of sharing fake information and its potential ascendants: loneliness, need for uniqueness and need for cognitive closure and CN. Fake News sharing (for the definitional discussion see Edson *et al.* 2017) is distinguished from disinformation as the latter of the terms implies the deceptive intent of the source (e.g. Greifeneder *et al.* 2021), while the goal of the study is to identify motivations of sharing fake information without making assumptions about harming or deceiving others.

Methodology

Experimental design was proposed to establish causal relationships between investigated variables. Responses from 240 participants were collected as per sample size calculations provided by G*Power (Faul *et al.* 2009). After collecting demographic and social media use information, Collective Narcissism (de Zavala *et al.* 2009), Need for Cognitive Closure (Roets & Hiel, 2011) and The Self Attributed Need for Uniqueness (Lynn & Harris, 1997) scales were administered.

In the next stage loneliness was experimentally induced. Finally, participants were shown fake news information about risks associated with COVID-19 vaccine and asked to assess it on several scales, including probability of sharing (separately) it on social media and among their peers. Participants also completed the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russel *et al.* 1980) twice – before and after experimental manipulation.

After the study, all participants received thorough debrief information explaining the manipulation, fake COVID-19 information and were suggested several credible sources with vaccination information. They were also encouraged to participate in the Covid 19-vaccination programme.

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Keywords: *Fake News, Collective Narcissism, Need for Uniqueness, Loneliness.*

Establishing ‘tacit’ support as ‘CSR risk’: The case study of Boohoo and Black Lives Matter

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Introduction

During the pandemic, and following the COP26 summit, there has been growing pressure, especially from millennials, Gen Z, consumer activists and institutional investors for Governments and corporations to pursue a wider range of CSR initiatives. Whilst many new initiatives are underway, there has also been a growing number of enterprises deciding to communicate public support for specific causes. This paper will explore whether publicly offered support can represent a significant reputational risk.

Literature review

Coombs and Holladay (2015) acknowledged that CSR can be harmful for an organisation’s reputation if it is poorly executed. Both greenwashing (Lim et al., 2013), inconsistencies and mismatches of actions (Bhattacharya et al., 2011) are highlighted as potential stimulants for reputational challenges. However, these reactions assume that the policy or action taken is intended to tackle or highlight issues that relate to specific corporations’ intentions. They relate to when CSR activity is used to mitigate potential corporate risks (Bebbington et al., 2008) and cover when it aims to enhance a pre-existing reputation or counter activist engagement.

Critique

This framework, whilst useful for helping to understand activists’ reactions to specific policy or corporate action, is less helpful when trying to understand the impact that tacit support for a cause might have for an enterprise. For example, during 2020 many corporations offered their support for the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. Such support was not always linked directly to pre-existing CSR policies and in part was often an expression of abhorrence about the murder of George Floyd.

Purpose

This exploratory paper will study the consequences for the UK based Boohoo fashion group, whose brands include Pretty Little Thing, Karen Millen and Wallis, of tacitly supporting the BLM movement in the summer of 2020. Their act of support stimulated a rapid and powerful consumer activist response. Boohoo’s support for a cause rather than a specific set of actions linked to pre-existing CSR policies and programmes, stimulated hostile consumer reactions. This raises a number of new questions around tacit support that require exploration.



Core Questions

Firstly, can tacit support for a cause, unrelated to previous CSR activity or policies, be deemed a CSR risk? Secondly, will support for different types of cause stimulate different levels of reaction and types of consumer activism? Furthermore, if tacit support causes a strong reaction, will a previous track record as a 'good' corporate citizen with effective engagement with stakeholders, help mitigate against hostile consumer activism? Finally, when tacit support triggers consumer activism, are there preferred strategies to help deal with the type of risk?

Research

To initially address these questions, findings from Clarke's (2021) study of the Boohoo crisis will be presented for the first time. They are based on an interpretivist and multi-method approach that allows for individual perceptions to be used to help create new thinking around how we can understand 'tacit support' and 'CSR risk'.

The study draws upon content analysis of 180 tweets from consumer activists criticising Boohoo's support for the BLM movement and subsequent accusations of failing to pay workers the National Minimum Wage in their garment factory in Leicester, England. Focus group work will also reveal attitudes of consumers and activists with regard to tacit support for causes.

The 2021 study looks at the circumstances of Boohoo providing tacit support for the BLM movement. It meticulously considers tacit support as a crisis risk.

The key focal point being whether Boohoo had the moral legitimacy to support BLM when they had failed to ensure that those producing their high street garments received the National Minimum Wage.

The speed and intensity of the consumer activists' threats are highlighted along with an exploration of the notion that race was a particularly intense trigger for action.

Limitations

This initial study is not designed to present a complete framework for understanding tacit support as a CSR risk. Further research is required in relation to other circumstances where tacit support has promoted a hostile reaction. Equally, further work is required to help develop a classification of risk. Potential corporate reactions also need to be studied further.

Application of Findings

Learnings from this study can be used by corporates to help assess the level of risk that is being taken when tacit support is publicly offered for a cause.

It will also be suggested to corporates and consultants that tacit support for a cause may vary widely according to the issue that is being discussed. For example, it is speculated that issues of race represent a higher level of risk.

Finally, this study is set to open a dialogue with PR professionals about relevant ways to respond to activist challenges that arise from tacit support for a cause.

Keywords: *CSR risk, BLM, Boohoo, Tacit CSR Support*



Reboot communication job search after Covid-19 pandemic: an empirical analysis

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Purpose

“If last year was about responding to an unprecedented shock, this year is about recovering” (Deloitte, 2022). Covid-19 pandemic has totally affected the scenario where public relations and communication practitioners operate by increasing risk perception and a sense of uncertainty towards different aspects of social and professional life (Zerfass et al. 2021). Professionals have been forced to reinvent themselves and their work tasks due to the pandemic effects of digital transformation of workflows and disintermediation of relationships with isolated stakeholders.

Moreover, according to OECD, Covid-19 has upended how we approach our economies and society, by underlining the urgency to reconstruct a more resilient labour market addressed to be sustainable and socially responsible (Laubiger et al., 2020). More specifically, empirical studies conducted by OECD have underlined how much Covid-19 pandemic has emphasised the importance of strategically addressing the issues of circular economy, sustainable development, diversity, equity, and inclusion. During the pandemic, we have assisted to short-term reduction in environmental pressure (for instance energy-related emissions have been reduced by 7%). The short-term results have heightened environmental and social awareness and has awakened consciences of public and private organiza-

tions about sustainability issues.

The health emergency has provided an opportunity to change the games rules in the professional development field by creating new jobs linked to sustainable issues; by replacing jobs in industries characterised by negative environmental impact with more sustainable jobs; by satisfying the educational need for competences, skills, and capabilities to manage socially responsible issues and activities. According to this scenario, it seems necessary to investigate how communication jobs and skills demand has changed during and after Covid-19 emergency with a specific focus on the area of sustainability and social responsibility.

Methodology

A systematic analysis of communication job listings published on LinkedIn platform within the geographical area of European Union will be implemented. The research approach will include the following steps: a) the application of a multi-keyword search for monitoring job advertising within communication field including keywords linked to sustainability (i.e. “CSR”, “Corporate Social Responsibility”; “Circular Economy”, “Sustainability”, “Green Economy”, “Environmental Communication”; “Sustainable Report”); b) the implementation of webscraping technique, which extracts information from LinkedIn announcements by retrieving the con-



tent based on a query, aggregating it, and converting it from unstructured data into structured forms (Mitchell, 2018); c) the implementation of a semantic analysis and the machine learning-based technique of topic modelling which identifies and organises words co-occurrence in large collections of textual data, by attributing categories or labels based on topics or themes identified within the text (Hu et al. 2014).

Research Findings

A total amount of 59581 job postings have been emerged in the first part of the analysis.

| Keywords | Number of job listings |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|
| Sustainability | 20595 |
| CSR | 17200 |
| Environmental Communication | 9860 |
| Sustainable Report | 6286 |
| Corporate Social Responsibility | 4129 |
| Circular Economy | 1279 |
| Green Economy | 232 |

A classification of professional competences linked to sustainability will be provided to identify professional activities required in the communication field.

Research Limitations

The study is characterised by some limitations. First, on LinkedIn, job advertisements are user-generated contents, inserted and modified manually by LinkedIn users. This means that information included in the job posting could change or job advertisement could be deactivated during the analytical process. Therefore, the crawlers used for collecting data need to be maintained and fixed. The second limitation is

related to the topic model analysis, as the short text, the lack of structure and the lack of context characterising LinkedIn job postings could affect the machine learning techniques.

Practical and Social Implications.

The study provides useful insights for aligning job and skills demands from communication market labour and educational programs offered by universities and business schools. The study contributes to delineate a draft of hypothetical professional profiles within the sustainable communication field.

Originality and Value

This study enriches the stream of research focused on analysing the development of communication profession with a specific interest to the new trending disciplinary area of sustainability.

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Keywords: Sustainability; CSR; Job search; Professional Development



Analysis of the WHO's social networking communication strategies during the COVID-19 infodemic: The consequences of managing Facebook page according to a diffusionist logic

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The COVID-19 pandemic, who could be described as a “megacrisis” (Sellnow-Richmond & al., 2018), has given rise to a second crisis—the “infodemic.” This last word refers to an overabundance of online and offline information of varying degrees of veracity, including inaccurate, misleading or fabricated news, images and videos circulating about the disease (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020a). The effects of disinformation are not insignificant, as they can weaken the actions of agencies tasked with effectively managing the crisis (Brünker et al., 2017), undermine the communication of trustworthy information to the public (Dornan, 2020), and potentially damage the reputations of healthcare organizations.

In the context of a global crisis such as COVID-19, the World Health Organization (WHO) has an obligation, as part of its mandate, to communicate scientific information (Blouin Genest, 2015) on public health. To this end, the WHO uses both public relations media (press releases and press conferences) and social networking sites to communicate public health messages to

the public (WHO, 2020b).

Methodology

This paper explores how the WHO has used Facebook as an international strategic information and/or communication strategy in order to fulfil its mandate during the COVID-19 pandemic. More specifically, we analyzed content published on the WHO page (4.8 million members at the time of conducting the study) between January 10 and September 19, 2020. We then performed a socio-technical analysis of the platform (Champagne-Poirier & Ben Affana, 2016) focused on 1) the page's technical architecture, 2) its interaction structures, and 3) the experiences and contributions of the users. Our analysis is mixed in that it qualifies and quantifies WHO practices as well as providing a better understanding of how the users participate in and contribute to the platform. Finally, linking our data to WHO obligations and objectives allowed for an analysis and interpretation of the communication strategies put in place.

A total of 481 WHO Facebook posts about the COVID-19 pandemic published during the study period were analyzed. These posts generated more than 3,343,636 comments, 250,000 of which we processed in order to reach what we consider to be “theoretical saturation” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Results

Our mixed analysis of the 481 posts led, among other things, to the observation that the publication types used most frequently by the WHO are infographics (42%), Facebook Lives (38%) and animated videos (11%). The three themes most addressed by the WHO in its 481 publications are preventive measures (26%), current events (20%) and conceptual and medical explanations (16%). Our qualitative analysis of the comments helped identify nine types of communicative intentions and twelve interrelated user profiles. Modeling of these relationships, as well as the specificities of the intentions of the WHO and user profiles, revealed that (unidirectional) diffusionist information strategies did not allow for an effective management and moderation of alarming, misinformative, disinformative or conspiratorial comments and contents (Landi & al., 2021; Malecki & al, 2021).

Conclusion and implications

Globally speaking, the extent of interactions on the WHO Facebook page during the pandemic and the different ways it has been used show its importance in the WHO’s communication strategy. This project demonstrates the many different attempts made by users (the users/receivers) to participate in mediatization and sensemaking around the COVID-19 crisis through this page (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015; Généreux & al., 2020).

The page also exhibits a lack of moderation on the part of the WHO. This is particularly problematic considering that a large number of comments made on the page went against

the measures and information dictated by the WHO. The contamination of the WHO’s statements is a concern in that it may undermine the fight against COVID-19 (Bridgman & al., 2020; Pavelea & al., 2021). Indeed, the WHO’s communication efforts were not adapted to the reality of the multidirectional exchanges on its Facebook page.

In sum, our paper aims to enable the WHO and more importantly all public health organizations to better understand the communicative nature of social networking sites in order to better use them in their communication strategies aiming to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic on citizens and users.

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Keywords: Strategic communication, COVID-19; Facebook, World Health Organization, public health



Role of the reflective (communication) strategist in obtaining social intelligence as part of environmental assessment: A case study of International Airport X

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Introduction and purpose

The case selected for this multidisciplinary research in the corporate communication and strategic management domains is International Airport X -- Africa's third largest, most award-winning airport (e.g. Skytrax World Airport Awards ranked it 22nd Best Airport in the World in 2019). Seven of its eight senior management team members were the respondents in the descriptive survey conducted. As the researcher, the eighth (Senior Manager: Corporate Affairs) was excluded.

The main problem of this **intrinsic** case study is that the Airport's stakeholder/issues landscape is shifting drastically, inter alia due to pending infrastructural developments and extensive land acquisitions (e.g. a new runway has major consequences for the three surrounding informal settlements/shanty towns). Although competitive intelligence is gathered as part of the *environmental assessment* process, the need for and importance of obtaining *social intelligence* as a tool to address stakeholder/societal expectations and values as well as the early identification of concerns/issues, do not appear to be fully understood by senior management.

The secondary problem of this **instrumental** case study is theoretical: Firstly, to relook the

reflective strategist role in the corporate communication domain, conceptualised and empirically verified in South Africa (SA) by Steyn (2000); and to **explore** it in the context of obtaining *social intelligence* as part of the *environmental assessment* process. Secondly, to **reaffirm** this role empirically, according to senior management's normative *expectations* and their *perceptions* of its performance.

The **major research objective** set to address this two-fold problem is to **explore** and **describe** the role of the *reflective (communication) strategist* in obtaining *social intelligence* as part of the *environmental assessment* process at the societal (macro) level of an organisation, to be used as input into enterprise strategy development.

Literature review

In the field of **corporate communication**, the focus was to identify questionnaire statements for the descriptive survey (in November 2019) to reaffirm the relevance of the *reflective (communication) strategist* role two decades later. The point of departure was the stream of research on the "PR strategist role" initiated by Steyn (2000); Steyn and Green (2006) who added a reflective dimension (based on the EBOK project); Everett (2006); Niemann (2009); and US researchers Tindall and Holtzhausen (2011).

Other strategic roles research -- notably Beur-Züllig, et al. (2009); Zerfass and Viertman (2017) -- provided conceptual guidance in developing new statements.

In the field of **strategic management**, the focus was on obtaining an initial understanding of the other major concepts *environmental assessment* and *social intelligence* ("competitive intelligence" from marketing provided most guidance).

Methodology

Mixed methods (triangulation) was selected by conducting secondary research (literature review) and primary research (descriptive survey). The sample size of seven was small but represented a census. Eight previously verified measurement items (i.e. 25% of the 32 items) from the early stream of research was *replicated* in order to reaffirm the original "PR strategist/reflectionist" role. The other 24 items were developed based on the literature review. Hypothesis testing (paired samples t-tests) was done on the findings of all 32 items.

The rationale for a descriptive survey was to **maximise the valuable time** of senior executives; establish the **purpose** through the statements provided; provide a **common framework** amongst respondents to improve validity; and serve as an **educational tool** re the major concepts.

Implications of results and conclusions

The survey provided senior management's *expectations* and *perceptions of performance* with regard to gathering *social intelligence* as part of the *environmental assessment* process and the potential role of the *reflective strategist* therein. Organisations of today need to adopt a structured, formalised environmental assessment approach whereby senior management listens to, interacts with, and obtains feedback from their external (and internal) stakeholder and societal environ-

ment on a regular basis.

The above strategic and applied research findings contribute substantially towards addressing the ***intrinsic case problem***. Although the findings cannot be generalised, they provide guidelines to senior management in the private, public and non profit sector.

(While not a research objective), the findings of the survey's 32 items provided the foundation for the reconceptualisation of the *reflective strategist* role in providing *social intelligence* as part of the *environmental assessment* process, which advances theory -- likewise the conceptualisation of *social intelligence* based on the literature review. These basic and introspective research findings contribute substantially towards addressing the study's ***instrumental case problem***.

Future research (to address limitations)

Exploratory/empirical research to provide a clearer understanding of the interrelationship of the concepts *reflective strategist* role, *social intelligence* and *environmental assessment*.

Further research on *environmental assessment* can address the 'how' it is to be done, i.e. develop a formalised system (and not only the 'what').

Limited literature on *social intelligence* necessitates further research of the concept.

Based on recent roles research, statements (activities) to broaden the *reflective strategist* role can be developed and measured.

Keywords: *Corporate communication strategist, PR strategist role, reflective strategist, environmental assessment, social intelligence.*



Dear COVID-19, Message from Employee Diaries: Reformulating Employee Communication with the Pandemic

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Introduction and purpose of the study

The aim of the study is to understand the challenges of the employees who are working remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. What are their (non)challenges they went through with the shift of working remotely? What type of future are they forecasting in employee relations? What are the lessons to be taken from this experience for restructuring the employee relations in the future? There are not many studies which look at the impact of working from home on employee relations/communication. With COVID-19 pandemic, working from home has been widespread all over the world, in many industries, and in different type of organizations. Employee working can also employ a hybrid approach in future. This research can create awareness and may help to reshape employee and management communication/relations.

Literature Review

Communicating effectively is always difficult, and when people are under stress, anxious and sad, this becomes even more difficult (DuFrene and Lehman, 2014, p. 444). Effective communication positively affects employees to engage in their jobs and achieve their goals in difficult times (Chanana, 2020). ‘No communication ever falls

into a vacuum in people’s heads” (Davenport and Barrow, 2009, p. 21). Organizations need to work to develop and nurture commitment to employees that requires two-way relationships (Robinson et al., 2004). “Employees are seeking to be informed, reassured, and encouraged” (DuFrene and Lehman, 2014, p. 444). COVID-19 global pandemic had created a global impact in the lifetime of many people in many ways. A study conducted by Institute for Public Relations and Peppercomm on how businesses are handling the crisis have found out that communicating the employees on COVID-19 was a priority for the communication function. (2020)

Methodology

The research is qualitative. Diary method will be used. “A diary can be defined as a document created by an individual who has maintained a regular, personal and contemporaneous record.” (Alaszewski, 2006, p.1). It is an innovative way of gaining rich insights about the daily processes, relationships, products and consumers (Patterson, 2005, p. 142). “Diaries, self-report instruments used repeatedly to examine ongoing experiences, offer the opportunity to investigate social, psychological, and physiological processes, within everyday situations.” (Bolger et al., 2003, p. 580). The sample of the study consists of 10

randomly chosen employees who are working either from home or hybrid. They will be asked to write their diary for a work period of five days. The employees will be asked to write on “how they spend their workday at home,” “how they dream spending their next workday,” and “what could be done to make their next day a better day.” Diary method is usually used with another method and the same group of people will also be interviewed. Diary method is not often used in communication studies so a research paper on employee relations during the COVID-19 pandemic can provide valuable insights.

Results and Conclusion

The study is work-in-progress.

Limitations of the study

It is exploratory research and the number of participants to the study are limited.

Suggestions for future research

The diary method can be used with a larger number of employees working remotely, and industry specific employee experiences and perceptions could be studied as well.

Practical and social implications

The public relations/communication and human resources functions of organizations have now actually an issue (COVID-19) where they can equally partner in managing employee relations. The research will inform us on communication challenges of working from home, expectancies of employees, and how to integrate human factor in this “isolated” environment. Suggestions will be made on how to communicate with employees and how employees want to communicate with the management and with their colleagues. Working from home may have benefits such as not commuting to work, (losing time) and has also other negative impacts such as affecting the

socialization and being accessible all times. The research will uncover the specific issues of employees who are working from home and suggest a guide for psychologically healthy employee who would be more productive and happier at the same time.

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Keywords: *employee communication, COVID-19, diary method, employee*



Global Capability Framework in Turkey: Findings of the Delphi Study on Public Relations and Communication Profession Capabilities

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Introduction and purpose of the study

The researchers extended the project of Global Alliance Global Capability Framework (GCF). GCF is a global study which has been carried by many countries' researchers to explore the capabilities required for the public relations and communication profession. This is a replication of the study which has three phases, Delphi, survey and focus groups. The aim of the paper is to share the results of the Delphi round carried out with a panel of public relations/communications experts to explore the capabilities.

Literature Review

Knowledge has been discussed in public relations education, both in undergraduate and graduate curriculums, but there is not much information on the knowledge areas of European practitioners (Tench and Moreno, 2013). Of the many contributions of Global Alliance is a global standard (GBOK project) for the practice by studying the research, educational frameworks and credentials. From the GBOK project, another project developed- the Global Capability Framework. The rationale behind it is that public relations is not practiced in every country in the same way, therefore there is a need to approach it from the "capability" perspective. Capabilities

are linked to competencies, but they are more dynamic. Gregory (2008) defines competencies as "behavioral repertoires or sets of behaviors that support the attainment of organizational objectives (p. 216).

Methodology

The research aims to look for the most important capabilities in public relations and communication management in Turkey. The initial stage comprised of a Delphi study in which a panel of experts were asked to identify the core capabilities of the field. The objective was to come up with agreed core capabilities. In the first round, the panel members were asked to list and define these capabilities. In the second round, they were asked to rate them in terms of importance. In the final round, they were asked to indicate the top most important ones by ranking them. The Delphi study carried out had 14 experts of which 6 of them are academics, 5 practitioners and 3 employers.

Results and Conclusion

The paper will share the results from the Delphi panel. From the first round 30 capabilities came out. The contribution to the communication strategy, managing corporate reputation,



integration of the organization to updated national and international developments, effective use of digital and conventional communication channels, management of issues, risks and crisis, following the trends in the business world and integrating them to business models in the organization and following the technological advances are some of the highlighted capabilities by the Delphi analysis.

Limitations of the study

This is the first stage of a comprehensive study.

Suggestions for future research

The study will be carried out with a survey which will reach to a broader base of public relations professionals, and academic in Turkey. Then there will be also three focus groups conducted.

Practical and social implications

The findings of the study after being endorsed by the public relations professional associations in Turkey and communicated widely in the academia as well can be used by practitioners and employers. The academia also has an action plan to incorporate these in the public relations programs.

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Keywords: public relations capabilities, Turkey, Global Capability Framework, Global Alliance

The emotional toll of the Covid 19 pandemic on health communicators and its leadership effects

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The Covid 19 pandemic is an extended crisis. Its nature and longevity have challenged national health communication professionals on multiple fronts, requiring them to engage with broader, and often new, audiences, new ways and in a complex and rapidly changing environment. Significant emotional resilience has been demanded of them by their organisations and society in general. Drawing on qualitative interviews, this paper examines four dimensions of emotional impact on the crisis on health communicators: the specific triggers that generated an emotional reaction, the emotions these evoked, the support mechanisms communicators used and the differential effects it had on those communicators as leaders in their organisations.

In their extensive review of the public relations crisis literature Manias-Munoz, Jin & Reber, (2019) conclude that field is organisation-centric and focuses on reputation and image repair. Crises affecting whole populations are rarely covered. Outside the public relations field there is significantly more literature on pandemic communication with a number of reviews (Loud & Simpson, 2017; Infanti et al., 2013) and models and recommendations for effectiveness (Staupe-Delgado & Kruke, 2018; Amirkhani et al., 2016). Much of this literature mirrors principles outlined in the public relations crisis literature such as the importance and nature of

dialogue. The main purpose of pandemic outbreak communication is to influence behaviours at scale in order to affect health outcomes positively. However, there is a gap in both literatures about the lived experience of health communicators going through a pandemic and in particular, their emotional response to it.

This research addresses this gap by examining the individual emotional experiences of senior communications professionals in the UK National Health Service: the world's largest publicly funded health care system. Seventeen health communicators from across the NHS system, including hospitals, ambulance, mental health, commissioning and regulatory organisations, participated in a two stage qualitative data collection process. First each respondent independently made audio recordings which asked them to focus on three 'critical incidents' of their choice and which captured the strongest positive or negative emotional reactions the pandemic had caused. They were asked to reflect on those emotional reactions and articulate what they felt and why, what actions they took and why, how they would have liked things to be different, and what support they did/would have liked to have. They were also asked to reflect on what changes they would like for the future. Thematic analysis of these incidents revealed clear emotional 'triggers' as well as the types of



emotions experienced. However, there were two clear tracks on the other topics covered in the recordings around reactions, actions taken and support recommendations. In the second stage of data collection, respondents were interviewed individually by the research team. Each of the themes was explored in depth and participants were given the opportunity to bring other perspectives which they believed to be pertinent.

The paper presents insights into the nature of the triggers to the emotional responses of health communicators, their responses to emotional experiences and their subsequent reflections. The findings also cover the effect on the leadership of these senior communicators, both positive and negative. Distinct differences between individuals in their response patterns were observed which the authors characterise as broadly compliant or commanding. The variables that have led to this are explored and explained. The impacts on health communicators as individuals, as well as broader implications for the communication function are also examined.

The research has led to policy recommendations for the NHS which will ensure that the emotional well-being of those who form the 'second front-line' of healthcare is factored in to emergency plans for the future.

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Keywords: Covid-19, emotion, emotional toll, health communication professionals, triggers



Engaging Teachers through Effective Communication: Restarting the Government Communication in Education

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Introduction and purpose of the study

The pandemic situation has uncovered and exposed many issues in communication between the government and its citizens, not only in the health sector, but also in education. During the pandemic, schools have been under many government restrictions, and they've had to follow many unprecedented rules – such as wearing masks, social distancing or even closed schools and online teaching. The governments had to communicate new rules and restrictions to various stakeholders in the education sector: to the founders of the schools (usually municipalities, private or religious organisations), to the directors of the schools and to the teachers, as well to the “recipients” of education: pupils, students, and their parents. In many cases, this communication did not go smoothly and soon many problems arose: the stakeholders, including teachers, were confused about the government regulations, they did not want to follow them, the disinformation and various Covid-related hoaxes spread quickly and the trust towards the government fell even lower. Teachers found themselves often in a difficult position: they were often the ones who were expected to understand the new

rules to their students and pupils, they were often fighting with lack of digital literacy and use of modern communication tools, such as online video teaching, instant messaging applications, or even emails. And in some cases, they were also in a double role of parents who shall have home educate their children too. The goal of this study is to bring new knowledge about the state of (strategic?) government communication in education, identify potential communication knots (problems) and draft managerial implications for strategic communication (Holtzhausen and Zerfass, 2015). In this study, which is a part of a larger project examining the government communication of the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS), we have raised research questions:

- RQ1. How do the teachers perceive and trust the MEYS and its role in education?
- RQ2. Where do teachers gain information (concerning education or government measures) from? What information sources do the teachers use?
- RQ3. What opinions do teachers hold about specific stakeholders in education, such as governmental and non-profit organisations?

- RQ4. Are there any communication or other barriers or problems in communication between the teachers and MEYS?

Literature review

The field of government communication has emerged recently to analyse and understand the nature of communication of democratic governments with its citizens (Sanders and Canel, 2013). Public communication is represented with multifaceted and complicated interactions with various stakeholder groups. It's effectiveness is necessary for the functioning of the democratic society (Luoma-aho and Canel, 2020). The government communication in democratic societies is under media control, which is necessary to keep it under control (Liu and Horsley 2007, p. 378, Liu et al., 2010, p. 190, Gelders et al. 2007, p. 328, Fredriksson and Pallas, 2016, p.149).

Methodology

We have used both qualitative (Creswell, 2007) and quantitative research methods (Bradburn, Sudman and Wansink, 2004; Berger, 2016) in this study. Concerning qualitative research, we have conducted 3 focus groups with teachers (pre-school, primary, secondary and high school teachers, excluding universities and higher education, mixed gender and age groups) in three regions of the Czech Republic (Praha, Ostrava and Hradec Králové), N=18 (3 FGDs per 6 teachers) in October – November 2020 (online). In quantitative research, we have conducted an online opinion research among teachers (N=530) in length about 28 minutes from April 16th until August 6th, 2021. The qualitative researched helped us to get insight and draft the later quantitative questionnaire. Both quantitative and qualitative research was designed by the research team but executed with the help of the IPSOS Czech Republic research agency.

Results and conclusions

Our results show (RQ1) that the teachers have very low expectations from MEYS and their contact with this top government institution is very distant. 71 % of the respondents have never been in direct communication with MEYS, despite only about half of the teachers thinks that they are well informed about the news and important information in education. Most of the teachers don't value MEYS as the key leader in education nor as a trend-setter of innovation in communication. Teachers expect from MEYS support (22 %), precise directions (15 %) and punctual information on time (15 %). However, they don't meet these expectations – only 38 % of teachers state that the MEYS at least partially meets their expectations. Therefore, (RQ2) teachers don't even try to reach the MEYS for obtaining information – instead, they reach to their bosses (principals) (68 %) or they search internet in general (33 %). Only 14 % of teachers declare they follow social media of MEYS and this number is in reality probably even lower due to the low numbers of the MEYS's social media account followers. (RQ3) Teachers reach for different opinion leaders in education, but mostly they follow their principal. For the teachers, it's important to have not a vertical communication line, but horizontal – to have the possibility to share or discuss information with their peers or colleagues. They also cherish traditional media formats as a bulletin or fixed information board on the wall in their meeting room. There are many communication barriers between the MEYS and the teachers: only 13 % of teachers think that the government communication targeting teachers from MEYS is professional, transparent, or friendly to them. More importantly, they also think that the communication is not understandable (86 %) and even clear (83 %).

Practical and social implications

Firstly, the MEYS must acknowledge the fact that one of their key and primary stakeholders, the teachers, don't have a very favourable view of them and don't perceive their communication as understandable, clear, or timely. Therefore, we have to recommend getting back to the very basics of the public relations theory, first drafted by Scott Cutlip and known as 4 Cs in communication and then later elaborated on by many communication scholars and practitioners (Grunig 2002; Baines and Frank 2011). The MEYS should develop a strategic government communication plan and re-engage with teachers through new communication approach (Sanders and Canel, 2013; Holtzhausen and Zerfass, 2015; Falkheimer and Heide, 2018; Fredriksson and Pallas, 2016).

Secondly, the MEYS needs to establish a system for getting feedback and enabling the teachers to ask further questions, either on their website or easily searchable telephone numbers with clear competencies.

Thirdly, despite MEYS has invested large sums in social media and online communication, this form of communication does not reach the teachers. It needs to engage in teachers in a different communication mode, respecting them, creating more horizontal communication experiences, such as workshops or shared groups, where they can participate and engage more actively. The top-down communication, which resembles the army system, is paradoxically avoided and not respected by the teachers, despite the education system in the Czech Republic is still much based on the Habsburg's idea of top-down structure and "one size fits all" approach. To sum up, MEYS has to implement options for ritual communication (Carey, 2008) to regain trust and build relations with teachers, only then in can mentor them and try to be perceived as an innovation leader. This requires a strategic

communication plan, scenarios for social change and long-term implementation, with the respect to its democratic boundaries (Holtzhausen and Zerfass, 2015, Sanders and Canel, 2013; Gelders and Ihlen, 2010).

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Keywords: *government communication; strategic communication; stakeholder management; education*



Actions speak louder than words. Though we see the same world, we see it through different eyes (Woolf, 1938, p.18)

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This paper discusses transparency, trust, how we show up and whom do we serve and whether communicators are contractually obliged to behave in alignment with the messages they communicate on behalf of their employer. It accesses unpublished interview transcripts from the doctoral thesis “Communication at the Core: Exploring decision-making when communication is at the heart of an organisation’s strategy development.” In the study 34 international communication and organisations commented on how communicators are perceived in the board-room and at grassroots level. This topic has gained momentum in 2022 specifically relating to the behaviour and ethics of communication professionals in high profile government, international institutions and media outlets. It explores whether communication professionals act as a reflection of the organisations they represent, the mouth-piece of the CEO or trusted advisors offering counsel to organisations. Has the role of modern communicators shifted to intermediaries managing mistrust and the balance of power (Bourne, 2013, p. 72), sense-makers (Fiske, 1982, p. 19) or are they digitally dexterous technicians (Gartner, 2019, p. 11)?

The paper shares examples of communication best practise and questionable behaviours of actions not aligning with corporate messaging and points out that communicators are often taken for granted by internal and external stakeholders. For instance when a problem arises

leadership teams assume that “comms will fix it” (Hewson, 2021, p. 155). It explores what occurs when an organisation communicates a message and then behaves contrary to that message disengaging stakeholders. Moreover it possible to rebuild reputation, credibility and trust?

Two examples of globally recognisable organisations, and three country based organisations whose corporate behaviours do not match their mission, vision and values are examined.

Organisation leaders are on public record demonstrating this. The examples cited go on to explain and how social media platforms and activist communicators escalated the issue enabling public discourse and a commitment from the organisations concerned for independent analysis, transparency and to take on board any recommendations from formal enquiries. The examples cited also demonstrate that “the most impactful stakeholders, are employees who can communicate in their own right and act a reflection of the organisations they represent building trust through personal and professional networks” (Hewson, 2021, p. 149).

Can communicators act as intermediaries managing mistrust and the balance of power (Bourne, 2013, p. 72). Although communicators are well placed to address this issue, a number of high profile communicators have compromised public trust in the sector. The paper asks whether the



profession needs to (i) galvanise holding those who compromise the profession to account, (ii) regulate the sector to enable consistency of practise, standards, transparency and ethics or (iii) keep the status quo.

The paper concludes with a call to action to calibrate and standardise communication definitions, professional qualifications, ethical & professional standards and work flows; and to facilitate research to advance the profession and quantify the impact and value of communication in terms of transparency, process gains and levels of trustworthiness.

Transparency implies openness, communication, accountability and trustworthiness. Is that enough?

Keywords: *transparency, trust, mistrust, communication, public relations, power dynamics*



Leading corporate communication practices for non-profit organisations in South Africa to reboot themselves and ensure purposeful communication with all stakeholders


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Introduction and purpose of the study

South African Non-profit organisations have reached a crossroads and they need to reboot themselves. They are facing a tremendous funding crisis: many of these organisations have been forced to close their doors and most have had to cut back dramatically on welfare services they provide in their communities. This has worsened since the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic. These organisations can no longer rely on the South-African developing nation status which has assisted in securing support from international partners. They need to rediscover communication with their internal and external stakeholders to secure support from donors and they need to become competitive, because their current funding crisis is already threatening critical services to poor and vulnerable communities. This situation can threaten and affect the capacity of poor communities to access critical survival services. This presentation aims to address the following research question: *What are the leading corporate communication best practices that should be applied in an attempt to address the NPO reboot phenomenon in South Africa to ensure purposeful communication with all internal and external stakeholders?*

Literature review

From a corporate communication perspective, the turning point is all about creating trusting relationships, generating positive associations, maneuvering the organisations' operational needs, open and honest dialogue, stakeholder engagement, reaching out and accepting that when people understand the societal need as well as the benefit NPOs offer, making the leap to generating support is met with less pushback. As the NPO creates a culture of data collection, the process of collection, review and refining becomes second nature and aligns with organizational planning, providing valuable guidance as to the direction and activities that benefit the organization. Creating a strong reputation, built on trust, is essential to a communication plan. A trusted reputation generates a positive association with the organization. Earning trust through reputation management is important for managing day-to-day challenges, gaining buy-in of unpopular decisions and maneuvering the organization's operational needs. Brand management can be achieved through various activities, chief among them being open, honest and approachable in discussing the activities of the organization. Similar to brand and reputation



management, the nonprofit's communications strategy should include stakeholder engagement. Stakeholder engagement includes reaching out to diverse audiences, including staff, volunteers, the board, donors, competitors and the government and may require several different activities to successfully work with the interests and needs of these groups. NPOs should convene themselves to determine their agenda in the context of national development challenges and priorities and reclaim their role and space.

Methodology

The research approach is qualitative in nature, drawing on corporate communication literature as applied in both the for-profit and not-for-profit sectors as well as semi-structured interviews with 30 non-profit organizations spread across various sectors of the South African society. The chosen non-profit organizations range from large non-profit organizations with strategic communication departments responsible for the communication and marketing function of the organizations to small non-profit organizations who do not have any communication infrastructure to support their communication and marketing functions. The sampling methods was random sampling and various non-profits organizations were requested to take part in this exploratory study.

Results and conclusions

NPOs can in an attempt to free themselves from these times of turmoil advance themselves through the integration of functions such as marketing, brand and reputation management, public relations, external relations, governance and fundraising so that they can work together to attract and maintain support for their strategies. From a corporate communication perspective, the turning point for NPOs is about creating trusting relationships, generating positive associations with the organizations, maneuver-

ing the organizations' operational needs, open and honest dialogue, stakeholder engagement, reaching out and generating support that affirms their ability to take on the future.

Limitations and future research

The limitation of this study was the exploratory nature and including non-profit organizations who indicated their willingness to partake. Recommendations are made as they pertain to the NPO sector in general and not to a particular sector within the NPO context of SA. Future research would assist in purposefully including a specified number of NPOs in a particular context as well as ensuring that NPOs from different sizes reflect the context more accurately.

Practical and social implications

As the NPOs create a culture of sustainability, it allows them to align stakeholders with the organization's planning and provides guidance as to the activities that benefit the organization, its stakeholders and the developing South African society. NPOs who succeed in this mission might ensure multiple and unrestricted funding year after year.

Keywords: *Non-profit organizations, developing country, stakeholders, communication, integration and re-alignment, South-Africa*



Renewed interest in internal communication following the pandemic: How to consolidate its strategic role and meet the new demands of employees?

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While it sometimes seemed to suffer from a lack of visibility or recognition, the COVID-19 crisis has put internal communication in the spotlight. By transmitting operational information, reassuring employees, maintaining the social link and employee commitment, internal communication has demonstrated the importance of its role since the beginning of the pandemic and has consolidated its legitimacy within organizations. With the introduction of new work dynamics and the accelerated deployment of digital collaborative tools, internal communication has also undergone profound changes in its practices. At the same time, employees are making increasingly high demands for good internal communication.

Since the beginning of the crisis, we have successively conducted three quantitative and qualitative surveys to analyze the internal communication experience of employees working in organizations in Belgium. Each quantitative survey was built around a common structure measuring different dimensions of internal communication (access to information, team communication, channels and formats, managerial communication, etc.), employees' needs and relationship with their organization. The first survey was conducted in April 2020, at the time of the first lockdown in Belgium, among 515 em-

ployees. The second survey, carried out in February 2021, was administered to 550 respondents and also examined employee engagement and well-being. As a follow-up to these two studies, a third survey will be launched in February 2022 to analyze employees' current perceptions and expectations of internal communication. The data collected through these different surveys are particularly rich and offer us a transversal vision of the evolution of internal communication throughout the crisis.

The results of our surveys have highlighted the good practices of internal communication implemented at different stages of the crisis and invite us to reflect on the evolution of internal communication in a post-pandemic world. For example, in the first phase of the crisis, employees have appreciated a certain return to the "basics" of internal communication with regular and transparent communication, especially regarding the situation of the organization, the use of effective channels and relevant content adapted to their needs. Some factors, such as managerial communication, have been critical throughout the crisis.

Another key finding of our research is that employees no longer appreciate being treated as a homogeneous entity to which communication is addressed in a generalized way but expect communication that takes their reality into ac-

count. Our results have led to the identification of groups of employees with a distinctive level of satisfaction, specific needs and expectations regarding internal communication. This confirms the importance for communication professionals to develop a deep understanding of internal stakeholders in order to align internal communication with their needs. It should be noted, however, that the publics and the way of identifying them have changed at the different stages of the crisis. At the same time, we have observed a fluctuation in communication needs and expectations during the crisis.

These findings echo recent works and raise certain challenges for internal communication professionals. The workforce today appears to be increasingly diverse within organizations. For Welch (2012), employees should be considered as “a multi-dimensional set of diverse internal stakeholders”. Several authors have highlighted the importance for communication professionals to understand and manage the diversity of internal publics that exist within the organization (Men & Bowen, 2016 ; Suh & Lee, 2016 ; Welch, 2012) and to move into a more strategic role of managing internal relationships (Cardwell et al., 2017). And future research has been encouraged to explore how to segment internal stakeholders, understand their specific needs and the most effective way to reach them (Men & Bowen, 2016).

While this renewed interest in internal communication is intended to be positive, it also puts a strain on communication teams in terms of the efforts they have to make to maintain a high quality internal communication and to respond to fluctuating employee demands. Indeed, our results showed that not only the publics themselves, but also their needs and expectations, can change rapidly according to the changing context. This demonstrates the need to measure internal publics more regularly, to strengthen listening and dialogue with them, in order to

redeploy communication strategies. Moving to a more strategic role entails financial costs and human investments that teams must be able to support.

In this communication, we propose to review the main results of our surveys and to discuss their implications for the evolution of internal communication.

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Keywords: *internal communication, internal publics, internal communication needs*



It's good for our reputation (?!) The impact of socio-political CEO communication on corporate reputation

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CEOs and top-tier executives are increasingly taking a public stance on controversial socio-political issues. That is also because in polarizing societies with polarizing public discourses, stakeholders are more and more expecting corporations to fulfill a societal and even moral responsibility that goes beyond the economic scope of profit-oriented organizations or classical CSR concepts (van der Meer & Jonkman, 2021). Even though recent publications from the field of communication science acknowledge this trend, it remains largely underexplored. Especially regarding the impact on corporate reputation, there is a lack of empirical findings. Therefore, the presented study aims to address this research gap by posing the question how socio-political CEO communication impacts the stakeholder's reputation assessment.


Literature review

Dodd and Supa's approach of Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA) can be applied to describe company representative's positioning towards socio-political issues that are being discussed controversially in the public sphere (e.g. mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations). Within the conceptualization of CSA, the authors acknowledge that due to the controversial nature, it remains questionable whether positive reputation effects can outweigh negative effects (Dodd & Supa, 2014). Looking at the state of research on

CSA, existing literature focuses on the impact on stakeholder behavior and attitudes. So far, reputation has barely been used as an operationalization of attitudes. However, several empirical findings indicate that CSA can positively affect stakeholder's perceptions of a company when they share the position and vice versa. Following a stakeholder-centric approach, Heider's Balance Theory adds further value to these findings in terms of providing a theoretical framework: It conceptualizes the relationship between CEO, stakeholder, and issue. Following the theory's assumptions, the direction of reputational effects depends on whether stakeholders share the CEO's socio-political position (Heider, 1946). Unlike previous studies with comparable scope, reputation is conceived as a multidimensional construct with an economic-functional, emotional-expressive as well as social dimension (Eisenegger, 2015).

Methodology

To answer the research question raised, a fully standardized online survey with an experimental between-subject design and three groups was conducted (N=330). The participants were randomly assigned to read a fictional CEO Twitter statement that either (1) supports, (2) opposes or (3) remains neutral towards two different controversial socio-political issues (gender-neutral language, special rights for persons with



COVID-19 vaccination). Afterwards, the participants were asked to evaluate the reputation of the company and their own position towards the issue. Furthermore, various contextual factors were measured (cognitive/affective involvement, perceived credibility of the statement).

Results and conclusions

Even though theoretical assumptions suggest that negative as well as positive effects can be expected, the results of this study indicate that socio-political CEO communication has solely negative effects on stakeholder's assessment of corporate reputation. Thus, the results are consistent with other studies that pinpoint a negativity bias when it comes to the impact of CSA on stakeholders' attitudes and behavior. For corporate communication practitioners this implies that socio-political CEO communication must be understood as a risky strategy (Jungblut & Johnen, 2021). While negative effects apply to the emotional-expressive and social dimension of reputation, they do not become evident regarding economic-functional reputation. It could therefore be assumed, that the reputational impact of taking a public stance on socio-political issues is limited to the stakeholder's evaluation of the social and emotional realm but does not extend to the economic perception of a company. In other words, you might deeply reject the values that a company and its CEO represent, but nonetheless you still acknowledge the quality of their products and services or their performance within the economic system.

From a practitioner's perspective, the empirical findings provoke a paradox: On the one hand, stakeholders increasingly expect companies to take part in the socio-political discourse. This underlines the politicization of corporations in polarized, modern societies (van der Meer & Jonkman, 2021). On the other hand, reputation effects seem to be predominantly negative. Regarding corporate communication practitioners this begs the question, whether or not to implement socio-political positioning as part of their communication strategy.

Limitations

There are limitations on a theoretical as well as a methodical level: Within the concept of CSA it is not clearly defined whether or not socio-political positioning is limited to strategic dimension or also includes spontaneous communication. Furthermore, the presented setting refers to a dual communication process between company (representative) and stakeholder. Therefore, it neglects the role of other societal institutions (e.g. media). Apart from common methodological limitations (e.g. representativity of sample) it should be critically mentioned that a fictional company and CEO were used. The extent to which this represents a reliable basis for measuring corporate reputation should be viewed with caution.

Keywords: *Corporate Reputation, Corporate Social Advocacy, Corporate Social Responsibility, Balance Theory, Experimental Research*



The Myth of Emotion-Focused Employee Crisis Communication: How Information-Focused Employee Crisis Communication Drives Post-Crisis Organization Commitment, Intent-to-Perform, and Organizational Trust in Hospitality Employees


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Introduction

Nearly two years of the ongoing Covid pandemic have shifted the dynamics of the labor market. The US Labor Department reported the highest job turnover in the survey's history in November 2021. As possible reasons behind this unprecedented turnover rate in the US labor market, labor market experts have attributed to employees wanting to pursue better job opportunities with competitive pay, flexibility, job burnout, etc. Hospitality and service sectors have been particularly hit hard by this massive employee exit (aka, The Great Resignation), which spurred many employers to raise wages and offer generous cash bonuses to entice workers. Despite these efforts, the worker shortage continues to cripple these sectors, and fewer people seem to be willing to go back to their previous job despite higher wages and better perks in the hospitality and service sectors. Economically, The Great Resignation defies common sense and labor market logic.

Literature

One of the plausible explanations for the unprecedented employee exit and labor shortage in hospitality and service sectors may be found in how employers were treated before and at the onset of the pandemic, which induced furloughs and layoffs. Change communication and employee crisis communication literature also suggests the crucial impact that internal communication during organizational change/crisis has on positive post-change/crisis organizational outcomes (Mazzei et al., 2012). Organizational communication scholars have been arguing for the seminal importance of internal communication in bringing out positive employee outcomes such as positive communication, loyalty intentions, job engagement, etc. (e.g., Kang & Sung, 2017), as well as preserving organizational reputation post-change/crisis via supportive employee communication (Kim & Rhee, 2011). Mainly, how organizations treat and communicate with their employees during organizational change/crisis can determine employees' attitude and willing-



ness to support their organizations and stay loyal during and after a significant organizational crisis/change such as the shutdown induced by the covid-19 pandemic.

Scope

The scope of the current research is descriptive in that it aims to explore and describe how during-shutdown employee crisis communication has affected hospitality workers' commitment to their organizations, intention to return to work post-shutdown, and their intent to perform. Additionally, the current study examined how organizational justice (distributive, procedural, and interactive) was associated with during-shutdown crisis communication with employees.

Methods

Survey with North American 412 employees (full-time and part-time) in the hospitality sector was conducted on Prolific in August 2020, when the pandemic shutdown was at its peak with many hospitality workers out of their job either furloughed or laid off.

Employee crisis communication was measured with 11 items from change communication literature. The 11-item scale of employee crisis communication was reliable, and the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) indicated the scale measured the concept in two distinctive dimensions, which dubbed as "Emotion-Focused (EF)" and "Information-focused (IF)" Seven items measured EF employee crisis communication (e.g., gave you individualized attention; helped you understand the crisis; helped to reduce your feelings of fear and uncertainty) and four items measured IF employee crisis communication (e.g., made sure to correct any false information; were effective in sharing messages about important issues; provided timely and continuous updates)

Results

Partial correlations analysis (controlling for employees' need for employment and rehire competency) revealed that EF employee crisis communication was significantly associated with pre-shutdown leadership perception and pre-shutdown relationship quality. Meanwhile, IF employee crisis communication was significantly associated with post-shutdown intent-to-perform, trust in the organization, and organizational commitment (affective, normative, and continuance).


When the pre-shutdown leadership and LMX relationship quality were additionally controlled for in the partial correlation analysis, only IF employee crisis communication was significant across post-shutdown loyal intentions by employees in terms of intent-to-perform, intention to return to work post-shutdown, and organizational commitment.

Conclusions

These findings suggest that IF employee crisis communication is more effective in maintaining organizational commitment, intent-to-perform, intent to return, and organizational trust post organizational change/crisis, compared to EF employee crisis communication, which may be limitedly influential. Limitations of the study included the limited scope of the industry represented in the study sample.

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Keywords: *Employee crisis communication; organizational commitment, intention to return, intent-to-perform.*

Typifying Personal Reputations

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Introduction, Purpose, and Rationale

There is little research in the communication field to discern the concept of *personal reputations* - or the reputations of individuals, which is the reason for little conceptual understanding of personal reputations. Literature that exists in personal reputations exists in the case study analyses that add little to this concept's conceptual and methodological advancement.

The motivation to expand this line of research comes from a realization that reputations are imperative to individuals' well-being, whether they are in the public eye or private citizens. Therefore, this research is carried out with a fundamental assumption that reputations are valuable assets of all individuals regardless of their social influence or public clout. Researchers must step away from emphasizing the reputations of public figures and pay attention to reputations as a concept critical to all individuals.

Thus, the purpose of advancing this research is to recognize that because reputations are a valuable asset of all people (Veh et al., 2018), their concerns and how these reputations are created are different from each other. Further, the study aims to fill some existing gaps by typifying personal reputations and how personal reputations are created.

Literature Review

There is scant research on personal reputations in the public relations (PR) field; However, corporate reputation (CR) has captivated the attention of scholars in research areas, such as

PR, marketing, economics, business. Inevitably, multiple ways of theorizing and conceptualizing CR have emerged because the literature is embedded in different fields (Ali et al., 2015; Chun, 2005; Gerring 1999; Lange et al. 2011; Walker, 2010), lending little to advance personal reputations literature.

This research is one of several studies to advance the research topic of personal reputation management (PRM) in the communication field. This paper identifies the types of personal reputation; however, to achieve this, the author first looks at other important questions such as where threats to reputations emerge from and the threats to reputations.

Methodology

The purpose of the research is to explore an unfamiliar concept through the participant's perspectives, experiences, and views. Thus, elite interviews are well-suited for exploratory research (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001; Hertz & Imber, 1995). The participants included in the elite group possessed a combination of three criteria: (1) they are professionals or academics who have experience with personal reputation management and reputation attacks; (2) they are prominent in their respective fields of study or profession or public figures; and (3) they are highly educated.

Results and Conclusions

The analysis revealed that personal reputation threats could be examined based on three characteristics that fall on a continuum: (1) self-ini-



tiated (SI) or other-initiated (OI); (2) orchestrated threats or Unorchestrated threats, and; (3) threats based on factual or fictitious events. Concerning the threats, the analysis discovered that there are four significant threats to personal reputations; these are: (1) bad behavior; (2) vilification; (3) character assassination (CA), and; (4) scandals. Furthermore, personal reputations are of four types: (1) intrinsic reputations; (2) concurrent reputations; (3) legitimate reputations; (4) fabricated reputations.

Limitations

This research takes one step toward conceptualizing personal reputations; however, many questions remain unanswered. For example, future researchers should focus on deeper inquiries, such as what motivates individuals to earn and maintain favorable reputations? How are reputations established in the public eye, and what role do the public perceptions play in perpetuating reputations? Also, little is known about what constitutes a bad reputation and what conditions define when a reputation crisis may have started and ended. Additionally, the majority of research focuses on Western perspectives, with little attention paid to diverse cultural norms that may dictate the construction and destruction of reputations.

Practical and Social Implications

This study is significant as it closes several critical gaps in the PRM literature by conceptualizing the term personal reputations. Moreover, the study will help generate greater interest among communication scholars in personal reputations, contributing to public relations and crisis communication fields.

This research will help future public relations researchers advance theory-driven approaches to reputations management. Also, practitioners can benefit from these typologies by narrowing the segmenting audiences based on each type of reputational crisis.

Keywords: *Personal reputations, reputations management, typologies of reputations, reputation threats.*



From a VUCA to a BANI world: Has the view and practice of internal communication changed through the pandemic?

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Previously researchers argued that a volatile, uncertain, complicated, and ambiguous (VUCA) environment, together with the development of new technologies, were considered the great determinants of trends in the internal communication field.

However, the Covid-19 pandemic delivered even greater challenges to organisations, as it created a suddenly volatile situation. This new reality that was created can be explained by using Cascio's BANI acronym that describes the situation as brittle, anxious, nonlinear, and incomprehensible (MJV Team 2021). Interestingly, and in line with the strategic focus of internal communication, a BANI world requires a focus on soft skills and relational elements.

This makes it clear why internal communication suddenly became the lifeline for organisations during the pandemic, where employees were dispersedly working from home. Aspects like creating meaning, constructing emotion, and displaying leadership guidance – sometimes even more than sharing information – become crucially important in a consistently uncertain world. Internal communication rapidly became the representative of empathy, reassurance, and

sense giving to showcase organisation competence and resilience.

This study will aim to understand how the view and practice of internal communication has changed as we moved from a VUCA to a BANI world during the pandemic, by using South African internal communication information in a qualitative longitudinal study.

Literature review

The study is conducted from a systems and reflective approach and will use a multi-dimensional theoretical framework to accommodate the complex research context. Elements from the following theories will be incorporated in the theoretical framework: stakeholder relationship management theory, strategic communication management theory, technological acceptance model, uses and gratification theory, and the gamification phenomenon. In particular, attention will be paid to the description of the BANI world.

The baseline study that would provide information to the research is Sutton's (2020) PhD in which she explored views on internal communication in South African organisations. Her main findings included:



- That although great efforts are made, South African organisations only meet some of the internal communication and relationship building requirements as set out in literature.
- That it is believed that the volatile and diverse South African environment is the major driver in impacting on how internal communication is executed and constantly developing.
- That the definition of internal stakeholders can vary depending on the VUCA circumstances and industry.
- That the internal communication channels used in this VUCA context, mostly reflect traditional routes and not stakeholder needs.

Methodology

A qualitative, longitudinal view will be used by comparing the pre-pandemic data (gathered by Sutton in 2019) and comparing it to data gathered towards the end of the pandemic (in 2022). A qualitative longitudinal method was seen as appropriate to investigate the research question, as it provides rich information that explores the dynamic nature of respondents' views over time (Neale, 2021). Furthermore, it provides an opportunity to identify trends that might impact the internal communication field.

This qualitative study will follow on the data gathering technique of the Sutton's (2020) study and make use of in-depth semi-structured interviews with ten internal communication practitioners at the Top 500 companies in South Africa, as well as with eight internal communication consultants in South Africa that were purposively selected for their achievements and experience in corporate internal communication. These participants are responsible for internal communication management at large South African organisations in various sectors. The current study will target the same individuals to participate in the study.

The study started in January 2022 and aims to conclude by May 2022.

Results and conclusions

The expectation is to uncover a view of the renewed focus on internal communication answering to the BANI needs explained above. It is expected that the importance of internal communication as more than information sharing, will be highlighted by the South African example. It is also expected that the conflict between the strategic intent and operational realities will be emphasised. Although the information will focus on the South African context, it is expected that trends that are relevant globally, will be reflected in the findings.

Practical and social implications

Lessons learnt from this research could include recommendations for internal communication practitioners on a practical and strategic level. On an academic level, future studies could build on this study's BANI context and combine global information to build the post-pandemic internal communication discipline.



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Keywords: Internal Communication; Covid-19; VUCA; BANI



Internal Communication for Positive Organisational Culture Change: A Case Study

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Introduction

Effective internal communication is agreed as imperative for positive organisational culture. Both internal communication and organisational culture influence the antecedents of workforce productivity, which are broadly encapsulated by employee engagement and wellbeing. The widespread and costly need for improvement across these dimensions is consistently agreed; yet, definitive solutions are lacking.

Literature Review

Despite wide and promising multi-disciplinary existent literature, there is a lack of clarity regarding their exact nature, interrelation and processes for improvement. To exacerbate disagreement, existent work evaluates the relevant constructs in relative isolation or employs relatively narrow foci and methods. Disparity is documented between leadership and workforce perceptions of culture (Hofstetter and Harpaz, 2015), further hindering organisationally driven effective change.

This research addresses these gaps through a holistic approach that considers and investigates the relevant phenomena as interrelated. Practical utility of the research outcomes was tangible, and successful change is expected to benefit both

the organisation and workforce.

Methodology

A workforce-centric lens necessitated a collaborative, qualitatively led case study inquiry aimed at identifying informed actions for positive change. One participant SME was purposefully recruited as “an exemplar of the phenomena of interest” (Vissak et al., 2020) for a naturalistic, in-depth inquiry. A single punctuated longitudinal case study design (Soulsby and Clarke, 2011) provided a detailed, processual and longitudinal view of the role of internal communication in organisational culture change.

Data consisted of thirty-four activities characterised by knowledge-exchanges with key informants, a fifteen-day non-participant observation study and seven semi-structured interviews. The latter data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2021) that was complemented with a critical realist (Bhaskar, 2008) view of reality. The themes were mapped with a processual framework pertaining to the generation of workforce perceptual outcomes.

Results

The phenomena were demonstrated as inter-dependent, complex and varied; yet, internal com-

munication provided the common explanatory factor.

Inadequate organisational knowledge regarding the role of internal communication in shaping and therefore changing organisational culture accounted for the lack of internal communication strategy and resource. This fostered a multitude of negative outcomes: positively intended organisational statements and actions caused negative consequences because of misaligned content and poor implementation. The lack of effective two-way communication exacerbated deleterious facets of climate, compromised employee voice and contributed to dissonant perceptions of culture between leadership and the workforce. The perceived dissonance between organisational value-laden statements and actions fostered mistrust within the workforce.

The advent of the pandemic (Covid-19) yielded opportunity for a quasi-experimental confirmation of the formative role of all internal communication for organisational culture. The pandemic accelerated the resolution of simple communication issues already underway. However, implementing new processes was hindered and dissonance increased between leadership and workforce views regarding the effectiveness of organisational communication. Technology for digital communication was considered as paradoxical.

Conclusions

Communication was ubiquitous in generating organisational culture via climate, which shaped workforce outcomes related to productivity. Communication from leaders exerted the most salient effect on these phenomena. Therefore, all internal communication is proposed as the manifestation of culture.

Although generalisability is limited, a novel analytical framework demonstrated that increased solution-focussed insight can be gained from a


holistic approach to changing organisational culture through communication. The multi-faceted change process is theoretically modelled, including the role of expertise. Future work should evaluate the generalisability and utility of this theoretical model and research approach.

Practical Implications

Internal communication should form the target of and vehicle for culture change, and the organisational and workforce constructs should be approached as interdependent. Further, implementation of change should be comprehensively considered and applied to prevent dissonance between leadership intentions and workforce perceptions. HRM and communication expertise appear integral for successful change.

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Keywords: *Organisational communication; organisational culture change; organisational climate; relational communication; workforce productivity.*

Collecting Communicative Premium for Innovation: How Employees Re-compensate Innovative Organization for Legitimation, Innovation, and Reputation

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Employees and their communicative behaviors have been re-recognized as a most important organization's key public and for its impacts on organizational effectiveness. They are causes and consequences of management success (Kim & Rhee, 2011; Mishra et al., 2014). Today, the employees' thoughts about the organization are more crucial than in the past because of digital media. Employees are empowered to deliver opinionated information to the mass without any obstacles. Their voices could be accepted as reliable information for the other publics. Although the academic interest in employees' voicing outside of the workplace is growing (e.g., Lee, 2021), sufficient research is still not being conducted much compared to its importance (Cassinger & Thelander, 2020). This study will extend the previous studies' efforts on the employees' voicing behavior by examining the antecedents to affect the level of positive Employee Communication Behaviors (ECBs hereafter).

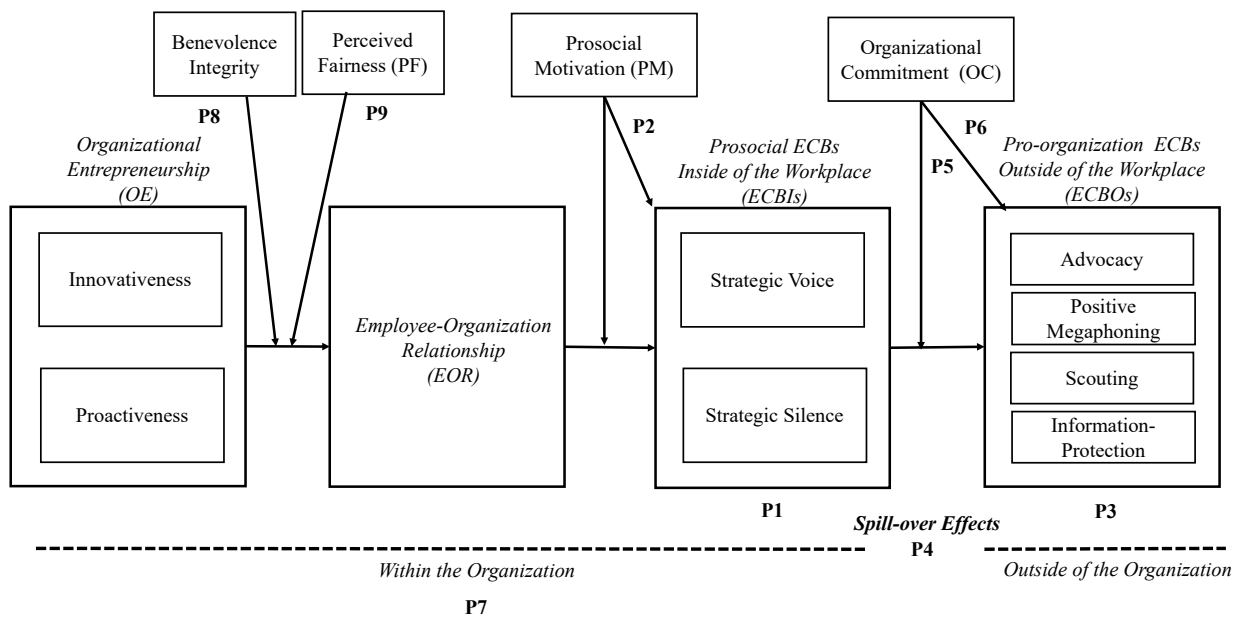
The current study extends the research idea about ECBs to find the antecedents of ECBs. It will try to configure the organizational antecedents and their relationship with ECBs. There could be many various organization-level factors

such as organization culture and perceived organization support (POS), but this paper adopts organizational entrepreneurship (OE) as a focal antecedent as it entails organizational culture and support together. To posit the concrete mechanism between organization entrepreneurship and ECBs, the paper also considers a mediator as well, which is an employee-organization relationship (EOR).

ECBs have been newly defined based on two types of behaviors (voice and silence) and location (inside and outside of the workplace), so that the paper will suggest its bidirectional interaction between inside ECBs (ECBIs) and outside ECBs (ECBOs). Lastly, the paper will propose two moderators to affect the linear relationship between OE, EOR, ECBIs, and ECBOs: prosocial motivation (PM), and organizational commitment (OC). Figure 1 depicts the detailed relationship among the concepts. Specifically, the model proposes that the higher perceived OE by employees will predict the more prosocial ECBIs via the more positive evaluation about EOR of employees and the more prosocial ECBIs will predict the more pro-organization ECBOs. The employees' prosocial motivation will increase

the positive relationship between EOR and EC-BIs and organization commitment will increase the positive relationship between ECBI and ECBOs.

FIGURE 1: The Conceptual Model



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Networked and engaged? Toward a critical framework for internal communication in the public sector

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on organizations, transforming working routines and communication practices across the world. The national lockdowns and the need to reduce social distancing pushed organizations to switch or increase remote working or working from home. After the first phase, this working model was continuously adopted at different stages following the pandemic waves. Public sector organizations were fully immersed in these processes, and they were among the few organizations to be resilient and active to deliver public services. They use communication as a strategic leverage to coordinate and empower their collaborators, and to timely inform citizens.

In this context, the paper aims to describe the main dimensions of a new theoretical framework to investigate the evolution of internal and employee communication in the public sector, in an era characterized by a remotization of working activities and by a growing role of digital platforms. Within a public relations perspective, it proposes a critical analysis hybridizing three specific groups of theories: public sector communication (Canel & Luoma-aho 2019; Lovari et al. 2020); internal communication and employee engagement (Men & Bowen 2017; Mazzei 2010); social media logics and platformization (van dijck et al., 2018). The study will draw

a map of practices to analyze the evolving role of internal communication and employee engagement in the public sector.

Literature review

Nowadays internal communication is recognized as one of the crucial leverages for the engagement of employees in companies, and in general in organizations. This role, if strategically conceived, managed, and planned, is not only useful for transferring information and instructions within the corporate context, with a functional aim. It has also a symbolic purpose, strengthening the sense of belonging, creating a shared culture of transparency between management and collaborators (Men & Bowen 2017), as well as encouraging identification of the values and the alignment of the objectives of the collaborators with those of the organizations (Mazzei et al., 2019). Internal communication impacts also on organizational cultures and influences the organizational climate. An organizational culture is thus strictly connected to the collaborators working for the organization, and it is shaped by employees' behaviors and attitudes (Grunig et al., 2002). Moreover, the quality of employees' relations is today considered strategic to increase the efficacy of the internal communication flows, but also to nurture organizational reputation with prosocial activities (Dalton, 2010), or enhancing positive megaphoning behaviors (Kim

& Rhee, 2011), also to improve the quality of product/service offered, as well as to mitigate possible crisis or emergencies (Mazzei et al., 2021). Digital platforms have broadened the spectrum of channels for internal communication's purposes. Indeed, they can strengthen the sense of belonging and enhance the exchange of information, thus making a concrete contribution to the development of good relationships and impacting on external relations with other stakeholders.

All these dynamics had an impact on the public sector during the pandemic, an emergency considered the world's 'largest work-from-home experiment' (Banjo et al., 2020). Before 2020, only a limited number of institutions have experienced flexible remote working practices. With the pandemic, administrations have been obliged to adopt such routines, experimenting new internal communication practices to inform, motivate and empower collaborators, thus redefining meanings and goals of their internal relationships. Digital platforms, with their logics and affordances (van dijck et al. 2018) represent today a new environment for managing relations with collaborators, opening new challenges for the public sector.

Methodology

A review of the scientific literature related to the three groups of theories (public sector organizations; internal communication; platformization) will be carried out, to be framed into the specificities of public institutions.

Results and conclusions

This is a conceptual, study in progress paper. At the conference the model will be presented, discussed, and operationalized. The map of practices will help researchers to identify the main dimensions for internal communication investigation and strategic planning.

Practical and social implications

The ongoing Covid-19 emergency requires a deep understanding of those work-related factors that contribute to the redefinition of internal communication activities in the public sector. These critical insights could represent a useful framework for future empirical studies, highlighting communication behaviors, practices, and relational models that, arose during the pandemic, could be integrated into the "new normality".

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Keywords: *internal communication, public sector communication, remote working, platforms*



Managing Diverse Stakeholder Expectations through Strategic Ambiguity: A Case Study of Public Sector Communication in Finland

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Purpose

The increasing stakeholder expectation toward organizations societal role are leveraging a higher degree of required transparency in their communication. This implicates that disclosing exclusively financial information is no longer enough as companies need to be held accountable also for their impact on society in terms of environmental and societal activities (Moreno & Capriotti, 2009). To comply with this surging demand, companies have therefore begun to publish sustainability reports to communicate their activities and impacts.

Despite the fact that several standards are available, the reporting scenario remains still fragmented and unregulated regarding how companies should present their data (Lock & Arujo, 2020). Due to the volatile attention scarcity of the audience, companies need to implement engaging and timely data communication tactics. The emergence of the “visual turn” in CSR communication (Lock & Arujo, 2020) is exemplified by the increasing predominance of infographics and data visualization elements in sustainability reporting. The available visualization techniques have now transformed sustainability reports into

a powerful form of promotional content companies can embrace to fulfil multiple purposes and convey information to several publics. This has also implied an increase adoption of impression management techniques with the goal of delivering as much as possible positive information, to the point of distorting the graphs in the context of corporate reporting. Indeed, several studies analyzing the impression management techniques in annual report highlights how reports easily adapt to deliberately alter perception of the company’s performance (Beattie & Jhones, 2002). However, while extensive literature has been dedicated to the graphical distortion present in company’s reports, the focus has predominantly fallen on annual reports or financial reports. Sustainability reporting is an increasingly studied area of inquiry for communication scholarship. To contribute to the discussion by expanding the existing gaps, the present study fits in with the goal of studying under the lens of impression management techniques are deliberately conceived to alter the public perception of companies’ sustainability performance.

Design/Methodology

In particular, in order to assess whether and to what extent companies use impression management techniques. We analyzed a sample of 65 companies listed in the Italian stock exchange, systematically collecting their reports and categorizing them by their market capitalization. This method of selection seems to be favorable for what concerns the industrial sectors of analysis. Indeed, selecting companies based on their market capitalization and not on industry specifics allows to gain an overview also on different aspects of different sectors. Hence, even though this sampling cannot be defined as purely randomized, at the same time it offers a good approximation of what the market is like.

Findings

By using an analytical framework informed in the impression management theory, we found undeniable evidence of the adoption graphical distortion techniques by companies, supporting the idea that sustainability reports are employed not only to convey important and truthful information about the firms' sustainability performance, but also a favorable image of the company. Consistently with the studies on impression management (Cho et al., 2018), the results of the analysis confirmed that graphs are not only largely adopted forms of communication but also largely altered ones where selectivity, presentational enhancement, and measurement distortions convergently appear.

Theoretical and practical contributions

Theoretically, the research problematizes and extends studies on the impression management techniques deployed in CSR reporting. Practically the research informs the sustainable reporting sector by providing evidence on the actual stage of CSR impression management and possible avenues to increment and regulated

unified standard for a more transparent communication. On the other side, the research raises awareness on the issue of graph literacy among corporate report publics as an antecedent of correct data consumption and misuse identification.

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Keywords: *CSR reporting, impression management, data visualization, transparency*



The Full-Stack Public Relations: Future-proofing communication management for stakeholder experience delivery and the digital transformation era

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Communication management has long claimed responsibility for stakeholder relationships and enshrined the function as part of the definitional identity for practitioners and academics. During an era of unprecedented digital transformation and shrinking stakeholder proximity, the author interviewed c-suite executives at ten publicly traded companies operating in Canada to explore the role for strategic communication/public relations in the growing field of experience delivery.


These conversations were augmented by ten interviews with experience management (XM) experts and practitioners – those who monitor employee, customer, product and brand perceptions using predictive behavior data – to give the organization a robust understanding of all relationships impacting business performance.

Underscored by an integrative literature review, the applicability of communication management is examined through communication, organization-public relationships (OPR) and brand/image reputation activities. However, communication management continues to struggle with delivering measurement and evaluation (M&E) for their programs and responsibilities. Meanwhile, organizations have increased their appetite for actionable insights that will cause behavior change in important relationships. Meeting

this expectation, Experience management (XM) applies agile design processes and mines digital connectivity to deliver robust business intelligence tools and an intimate understanding of the stakeholder journey.

Literature Review

Broadly examining the landscape of organizational transformation in the 21st century, Holtz (2002), Castells (2000) and Hax (2010) highlight how social and digital ecosystems are altering how stakeholders interact with brands and are shifting business strategies from product differentiation to service experience. In order to explore shifting priorities of senior leaders, communication management as a strategic function is explored in literature. Mcnamara (2015) evidenced a long history of difficulty measuring and evaluating (M&E) programs and responsibilities for communication practitioners and academics. Supporting this finding Huang and Zhang (2013) thoroughly critique organization-public relationship measurement scales to similarly find outcomes are elusive. The major communication activities such as the tactic of communicating (Hutton, 1999; Macnamara, 2018; van Ruler, 2018), organization-public relationships (OPR) (Bruning & Ledingham, 2000; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Finne and Grönroos, 2009; Macnamara, 2015) and image/



reputation monitoring through crisis and issues management (Bunting & Lipski, 2000; Coombs & Holladay, 2005; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001; Macnamara, 2020; murray & White, 2005) are given as context for the role of communication practitioners in organizations. In contrast, the new field of experience delivery (Macik, 2017) is explored through computer sciences literature including the Internet of Things (IoT) (Amodu et al., 2019) and human to computer connectivity (Fletcher, 2015) showing that senior leaders are looking for analytics to identify gaps in the perception that stakeholders have of a brand/organization (Grannan & Geoffroy, 2016) and that indicate behavioral intention as well (Qualtrics, 2021; Palmer, 2010).

Methodology

This is an exploratory, qualitative research study to introduce experience (XM) management into communication management literature. The sample size consisted of twenty in-depth interviews: ten senior leaders who had authority in operational and strategic decisions and ten experts and practitioners in the experience delivery ecosystem at publicly traded companies operating in Canada and undergoing digital transformation. Three broad interview questions discussed experience delivery, stakeholder relationship management and strategic communication activities. The qualitative synthesis focused on words, descriptions, concepts, perceptions and sentiments expressed by participants. Narrative analysis revealed mindsets and perspectives of interview participants while thematic analysis revealed similarities and differences that could be grouped together for deeper interpretations.

Results and conclusions

The results of this study are expected to be completed by March 2022 as part of a master's thesis defence. Early analysis shows the activity of communication, as message sending and

message clarifying for strategic priorities, is the tactical function most needed at a program level and senior executive level in organizations. Other insights found: strategic communicators could play a role in determining the mission of analytics and data collection as ethical advisors; letting go of managerial ownership with stakeholder relationships; find influence with chief technology and strategy officers; overwrite traditional communication plans to incorporate design-thinking principles of empathy and feedback loops; and finally, improving data and analytics fluency as it relates to experience delivery.

The author submits that communication management is poised for an upgrade. The modern practitioner should be “full-stack” much like that of a software developer who can solve customer-facing aspects of design and diagnose internal system-related issues as well.

Practical and Social Implications

To ensure relevance after digital transformation, communication management must find a place for communication, crisis and issues management as well as reputation activities within the agile, cross-functional ecosystem of today's modern, data-informed organizations who are using experience delivery models.

The findings are instructive for professionals performing communication activities and researchers studying them, as well as institutions offering academic study in strategic communication and public relations.

Keywords: *public relations theory, communication theory, experience management, relationship management, organization-public relationships*



The voice behavior of employees: How can their voice be the supervisors' favorite sound

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study

According to Berkovich (2014) leaders assume the behavior of promoting dialogue more in flexible structures than in rigid structures. It is known that there is a specific performance appraisal named “360-degree evaluation” that is more applied in organizational contexts of greater power sharing. In this sense, this study seeks to understand if there is a relationship between this type of evaluation and the communication that supervisors have with their subordinates. In this way, we have the hypothesis:

The application of 360° performance evaluation is positively related to the voice behavior of employees, when mediated by the communication climate.

Literature Review


The voice behaviors have been a topic of interest in the past decade (Mowbray, Wilkinson & Herman, 2015). The notion of voice behavior emerged with Hirschman (1970), who found that when employees were not satisfied with their working conditions, they tended to leave the organization or remain, but revealing their concerns.

The author Morrisson (2014), in turn, divided voice behaviors into two types: promotional voice behaviors and prohibitive voice behaviors.

The promotional voice conceptualized by Van Dyne and LePine (1998) is related to the expression of new ideas or suggestions to improve the functioning of the work or the organization. Is promotive in the sense that it focuses on an ideal future state. It is challenging because it suggests change. The prohibitive voice describes expressions of concerns regarding employee work practices, incidents, or behavior. Furthermore, this serves an important function for the health of the organization, mainly because these alarming messages put problems previously not detected in the collective agenda, to be solved, avoiding some problems in the organization. In some cases, this type of voice can even be beneficial, since it involves less time than the promotional voice and, currently, organizations operate at great speed.

According to some studies, the voice behaviors may be beneficial to the organization, with people tending to evaluate organizational actors more positively when they have more voice behaviors (Whitning, Maynes, Podsakoff & Podsakoff, 2012).

Since the 21st century the perception of leaders as the people who has the power has been changing, and this notion been replaced by the concepts of coach, mentor and facilitator (Johansson, 2018). For this reason, the more recent companies have been searching an organizational democracy in which it occurs the involvement



of all members in decision making (Cunha & Rego, 2005). This organizational democracy may be related to 360-degree evaluation and the support communication. This is a type of evaluation that promotes an active voice of employees when compared to a top-down performance appraisal. In this way, it is important to find out if the employees have more voice behaviors when there is a trust, opening and support communication.

Methodology

The main objective of this study was to understand if the application of 360-degree evaluation may be positively related to the adoption of voice behaviors by employees, when it is mediated by the climate of communication of trust, openness and support. For this, a theoretical model with three variables was created: the independent variable (application of the 360-degree evaluation); the communication climate-related mediator variable of the original Communication Measurement Scale (Smidts, Pruyn & Van Riel, 2001) and the type of voice (defensive voice and prosocial voice) – dependent variable, derived from the original Scale of EVLN Model (“Exit”; “Voice”; “Loyalty” and “Neglect”, by Dyne, Ang & Botero 2003). These scales were evaluated by applying a questionnaire to a sample (non-probabilistic) convenience and snowball sample, consisting of a total of 704 individuals (managers and / or subordinates), inserted in the Portuguese Labor Market, during the year 2019.

Results and Conclusions

The analysis of the results allowed the creation of a theoretical model of mediation in which it was found that the application of the 360-degree evaluation was positively related to the defensive and prosocial voice of employees, when mediated by climate of communication of trust, openness and support.

These results are in line with previous studies, as it is known that more and more companies have been seeking to promote an organizational democracy in which all organizational actors can be involved in decision-making (Cunha & Rego, 2005), this kind of democracy is promoted, many times, by the application of 360-degree evaluation (Mamatoglu, 2008).

This study is innovative, since the majority of the studies in this context focus only on direct relationships between variables, not considering mediations and moderations. Considering the leaders ‘and followers’ views also becomes innovative, as the most studies take into account only one view (the view of the employees). Furthermore, there are few national studies linking the 360-degree evaluation and the communication climate.

Practical and Social Implications

In practical terms, this study may be useful to the development and application of an innovative type of performance evaluation, namely, the 360° performance evaluation, enabling communication of greater dialogue between supervisors and subordinates. Furthermore, this study allows training supervisors with regard to communication and evaluation processes, contributing to a better organizational effectiveness.

Key-words: *Voice behaviors; Employees; Organizations; 360-degree Feedback*



Try before you buy: examining the relationship between communication organisations, higher education, and public relations students undertaking WIL

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Introduction

The pandemic necessitated a shift in how industry, higher education, and students collaborate via internships. Traditionally a capstone offering in undergraduate programs, many institutions had to suspend their internship programs, or strike a balance across remote, onsite, or blended modes. What lessons can be learned from this necessity?

Purpose

This study examines student experiences of work integrated learning, specifically internships, during the pandemic. It will explore how such experiences differed, whether the experience was taken onsite, remotely, or a combination of both (“blended”). The study will seek to identify implications for higher education institutions and whether such WIL experiences – and the relationships which underpin them – need recalibrating in the “new normal” post-pandemic conditions.

The following research questions (RQ) guided the study:

- RQ1: How did the pandemic impact student experiences when undertaking WIL in either onsite, remote, or blended contexts?

- RQ2: How did the pandemic impact host organisation experiences of students undertaking WIL?
- RQ3: What implications does this have for higher education institutions?

Literature review

The study is situated in the crosshairs of a few research agendas in work-integrated learning (“WIL”): the role of industry as a primary stakeholder in higher education (Naqvi 2021); the push for collaboration across higher education institutions (Cameron et al 2020) to operate sustainable models under government policy directives; and, a need for research which goes beyond the ‘outputs’ of WIL, and looks at the strategy of WIL for three stakeholders namely industry, academia, and the student (Cooper et al. 2010).

Methodology

A critical realism paradigm underpins the exploration of the study. Critical realism’s subjectivist epistemology recognises that some reality – in this study, the internship experience – cannot be objectively measured (Stolz 2020). Studies with a subjectivist epistemology are well-suited to a qualitative design, and that of phenomenology (Blundel 2007).

The purpose of phenomenology is to describe a phenomenon as the lived experience of individuals (Speziale et al. 2011). As an inductive approach to research, the lived experience gives a subjective meaning to an individual's perception of the stated phenomenon. A common form of phenomenology in education research is the descriptive approach, which is used in this study.

The study implemented the phenomenological approach through a quasi-field experiment design, with three data collection components:

- a reflective journal maintained by student participants in the study during their internship. Moon (2006) cites six key factors in how students learn from reflective journals. Of specific relevance to this study, the role of emotion in a student's learning as they experience their internship under one of three modes (dependent variables);
- a survey completed by students at the end of the internship; and,
- a survey completed by a host organisation representative.

Quantitative surveys provide a complementary data point to the qualitative reflective journals, ensuring the student has an opportunity to reflect upon their experiences in real-time, as well as to look back once it is complete. Descriptive statistics were used to bring the raw data into due form.

Sample sizes:

- Reflective journals: n = 6
- Survey 1 (student): n = 25
- Survey 2 (industry): n = 15

Results and conclusions

This study is continuing at the time of writing, however initial indications are that students undertaking WIL remotely experience similar outcomes in terms of workplace task productivity.

However, most noticeable, was a lack of social engagement and exposure to workplace culture. The findings amongst host organisations suggest that whilst students completed set tasks to a satisfactory level, supervision was problematic for internships having any remote component. Allocated tasks also differed significantly across the three internship modes. Also, there may be an emerging reduction in willingness for organisations to extend ongoing offers of employment to participating students, post-WIL. This has implications for the tripartite relationship between student, university, and industry, as one of the primary motivators for organisations participating in such programs is to access a pipeline of future talent.

Limitations

This study focuses on one higher education institution and thus is not representative of all public relations students nor all higher education institutions.

Suggestions for further research

Further study into the perspectives of communication organisations and their intake of students for internships conducted onsite, online, or a blend of both, would be suggested.

Possible areas of contribution – now and as future exploration – are in the areas of work-integrated learning pedagogical practices in higher education. In addition, there is a possible contribution in evolving the role of industry, alongside academia as well as government, in developing the next generation workforce. Further research will also explore the development of an industry engagement framework for use across higher education institutions.

Keywords: *Work-integrated learning; Industry engagement; Higher education; Public relations; Stakeholder relations*

Turnover Intentions among Millennial Public Relations Professionals in Latin America

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Introduction

The topic of the Millennial Generation in the workplace has gained momentum since the retention and turnover of younger employees have become a challenge for companies around the world (Sujansky & Ferri-Reed, 2009). Expectations of acceptable workplace behavior and performance differ across generational cohorts (Stewart, Oliver, Cravens, & Oishi, 2017). Understanding these differences could have major implications for the way organizations recruit, hire, train, reward, promote, and terminate their employees (Costanza, Badger, Fraser, Severt, & Gade, 2012). This is even more critical for the Public Relations industry, a knowledge-intensive field characterized by their focus on intellectual or human capital to produce their products and services. This paper focuses on six research questions:

- RQ1: What is the strength of the relationship between Millennial PR professionals and their employers in terms of relationship outcomes (job satisfaction, trust, job engagement, and employee retention)?
- RQ2: Do additional sociodemographic factors, particularly gender, hierarchical levels and salary, affect the relationship outcomes of Millennial PR professionals?
- RQ3. Does job satisfaction have positive im-


pact on Millennials employee retention?

- RQ4. Does trust have positive impact on Millennials employee retention?
- RQ5. Does job engagement have positive impact on Millennials employee retention?
- RQ6. Does excellent leader performance has a positive impact on Millennials employee retention?

Literature review

Empirical research on generations' work attitudes is sparse and mixed. In accordance with the past literature, seven factors encourage employee retention among employees: challenging work, opportunities to learn, positive relationships with colleagues, compensation and appreciation of the work performed, recognition of capabilities, work-life balance and good communication. Research on Millennial employees working in full-service communication firms (Gallicano, Curtin, & Matthews, 2012) depicts a generation that enjoys positive relationships with their agencies but also expresses their frustration of a lack of empowerment, significant hierarchy, and distance from managers.

Factors affecting employee turnover have received significant attention from academia and practitioners during the last decades. Through a meta-analytic review of organizational liter-



ature Cotton and Tuttle (1986) identified 24 variables impacting employee retention and classified them into three correlates: external, work-related, and personal characteristics. Meng and Berger (2019) also confirmed the strong impact that organizational culture and leader performance could have on public relations professionals' work engagement, trust, and job satisfaction.

Method

The data used for the study were gathered using an online survey designed in Qualtrics. The questionnaire was active from April to August of 2019 and was available in both Spanish and Portuguese. A total of 2,575 professionals from 19 countries started the survey and 1,229 of them completed. The final evaluation is then based on the completed responses of 1,165 public relations professionals.

Findings

Results show that Latin American Millennials present significant lower levels of job satisfaction, engagement, and trust in the organization than Gen Xers and Boomers ($p \leq .05$). When asked about their plans for the further development of their career, 45.3 percent of the respondents want to leave his or her current employer, compared with 35.4% of Gen X and 28.1% of Baby Boomers. Almost half of the participants in the survey (46.7%) show little engagement or even a complete disengagement. X-Gers and Boomers practitioners report a significantly higher work engagement ($p \leq 0.05$). Similarly, findings indicate significant differences across generational cohorts regarding trust in the organization. 12.7 percent of the Millennials respondents report a low level of trust, compared to 10.3 percent of Generation X and 3.5 percent of the Boomers. Salary was a statistically significant predictor using t- tests ($p < 0.05$) of overall job satisfaction, and turnover intentions, but did not

influence on engagement and trust. Moreover, practitioners working in excellent departments report statistically higher levels of job satisfaction (90.2 percent, $p \leq 0.05$), engagement (88.7 percent, $p \leq 0.05$), organizational trust (85.5 percent), $p \leq 0.05$, and lower turnover intentions (32.2 percent, $p \leq 0.05$).


There is a strong correlation between job satisfaction and the willingness to leave. Professionals that want to move out of communications and change employers are the less satisfied with their job (19.6 percent, $p \leq 0.05$). Strong association between perceived trust in the organization and Latin American Millennials turnover intentions was also found. In fact, one-third practitioners reporting low level of organizational trust want to change employer, comparing with 20.6 percent ($p \leq 0.05$) of those with a high level of organizational trust.

Practical Implications

This research not only informs supervisors about what they can do to motivate workers and provide for job satisfaction and retention but gives them insight into what type of leader's Millennials may become based on what is important to them. Overall, this study can be used to teach organizations to facilitate trainings, develop better leaders, create a culture that promotes job satisfaction, and increase the retention of good public relations Latin American Millennial employees.

Limitations

The study has several limitations that require consideration when interpreting the findings. First, a large sample of professionals was approached, but a much small number initiated and completed the online survey. Second, because of the possible systematic bias in the convenience sample as used here, the results of this research should be seen as a pilot study giving an indication of the distribution of the results



in the entire population. Third, as in any study using self-report measures, the results may have been influenced by participants' acquiescence and need for social desirability.

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Keywords: *Employee retention, Employee engagement, job satisfaction, Millennials, Latin America, Public relations.*



New challenges for the countries in external communications due to fake news blossoming


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The wide spreading of fake news in recent years, especially in Covid19 period, has been caused by the rise of social media worldwide as nowadays this medium have become the main source of getting information. Therefore, fake news detection has become an emerging topic, and more and more technical giant companies are seeking future solutions for recognizing online fake information. However, accurate fake news detection, is still challenging, due to the dynamic nature of the social media, and the complexity and diversity of online communication data. As well as, it is not clear if the detection of fake news may limit the sharing process made by users. As a time when research shows that 75 per cent of American adults who were familiar with a fake news headline viewed the story as accurate (Silverman and Singer-Vine, 2016), and facts are less important the emotional desire in high spreading of fake news (BBC research), consumers are more likely than ever to pass along “news” that is inaccurate and potentially even harmful.

By conveying biased and false information, fake news can destroy folk’s faith and beliefs in authorities, experts and the government. Although the unprecedented scale of fake news has brought more scholarly attention in recent years, most studies focused on the public policy and political communication perspectives (Jang et

Kim, 2018; Vargo et al., 2017). Relatively little research has investigated fake news in the context of brand management and communication and there is absolutely no research in the context of country brand or country of origin product brand. Berthon and Pitt (2018), one of the first researchers who has analyzed different situations in which brands come in touch with fake news and the potential negative outcomes of such relationships and highlighted the symbiotic relationship between fake news and brands. It was empirically examined & results showed there was indeed a chain of effect from fake news on consumers’ trust toward brands that appeared next to fake news, and such effects were mediated by the credibility of the news and sources (Visentin et al., 2019).

Some scientists have proposed Antecedents and outcomes and persuasion knowledge toward a fake news post regarding a brand (Chen & Cheng, 2019), whereas, others discusses how consumers process fake news and its relevance to marketing communications (Nyilasy, 2019, De Regt and al. 2019) have identified seven denialistic marketing tactics that contribute to the diffusion of fake news in the health and beauty industry and Weidner and al. (2019) present a framework to examine the different impact of fake news, taking consumers’ confirmation bias into account.



According to hypothesis of this study, the impact of fake news is especially notable in the case of country image since knowledge about other countries is often limited, it is reasonable to assume that the media significantly influence the thoughts on which people rely in order to judge countries or its products.

Thus, this study is going to shed the light on consequences and further challenges for country brand or country-of-origin product brand occurred after reading fake news. So, the question which is going to be answered: Does fake news influence country brand or brand of specific product category from that country what way?

The distinction between projected and perceived image is applied as useful approach for analyzing the contribution of fake news on country and product brand from a methodological point of view and country brand equity approached is used as a theory to measure brand.

In other words, if projected images by fake news are evaluated on changes in country and product perceived brand and how it is, in its turn, relates with country or product awareness, associations, quality and loyalty. Higher education was chosen as a foreign product because the impact of fake news may vary significantly.

China and Chinese Universities as a product category from that country were chosen and 290 Russian students respondents took place in the survey. The survey questionnaire incorporated four sections. In the first section, respondents were asked to provide the general characteristics and the atmosphere or mood and measurement of categories of country brand equity before reading fake news. In the second component, respondents were given created by us fake news messages which had negative connotation concerning this country and after reading fake news, participants were asked to indicate their attitude toward the truthfulness of the news on three items anchored with a 7-point scale and further section again was devoted to measure country brand equity categories.

The results of this survey were obtained in the middle of January and in the process of analyzing and more detailed results will be presented at the conference. However, already now we may see the decrease of country brand and even stronger damage to country-of-origin product brand in the category of higher education.

These results will identify the weakest points in the fight of fake news consequences that would give a ground for further proposing different response strategies for governments or organizations in the work of improving crises situation.

Keywords: *fake news, country brand, China, country-of-origin product brand, Chinese Universities.*



The Key to Improving ‘Team Virtuality’: Defining Internal and External Distractors of Virtual Meetings

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Introduction and purpose of the study

As part of a wider research on virtual communication patterns and practices in large companies, the study focuses on employees’ requirements towards their managers/employers to improve the technical aspects of using collaborative platforms for internal and external virtual meetings. It defines the most common technical and personal distractors which influence employees and thus affect the quality of virtual meetings and e-collaboration in large companies. The study will provide qualitative insight into areas of corporate virtual communication and the use of collaborative platforms that can be improved by implementing the ‘team virtuality’ concept, which, according to Kirkman & Mathieu (2005), consists of three dimensions: the degree that on-line teams use virtual tools to coordinate and communicate (the reliance on virtual tools and the extent to which teams use virtual technologies to coordinate work activities); information value (communication and data that is valuable to a team’s effectiveness, such as the technology’s capability to transmit cognizable information); and synchronicity (how well employees are able to support simultaneous communication through video conferencing).

Literature review

Numerous books and papers, including Kirkman & Mathieu (2005), Anderson et al. (2007), Kock (2008), Salmons & Wilson (2009), Mayadas & Hultin (2010), Chudoba et al. (2011), Amcoff Nyström & Asproth (2013), Kurtzberg (2014), Abrahamsson Lindeblad et al. (2016), Kolbaek (2018), Frisch & Greene (2020), Handke et al. (2020), Afflerbach (2020), Baker & Murphy (2021), Swartz et al. (2021), and Dumitru (2022), explored the communication practices developed by remote virtual teams in periods before the COVID-19 pandemic and during the pandemic, as a sudden and unexpected event that provoked a certain response. Numerous recent scientific and practical research studies, including LaBerge et al. (2020), Lifesize (2020), Twillio Inc. (2020), Buffer.com (2021), Microsoft (2021), Statista.com (2021), and Zerfass et al. (2021), are also available to identify communication procedures in order to make virtual meetings as effective as possible in the ever-evolving ‘new normal’.

Methodology

The authors of this paper conducted a survey on employees (N=188) from communication, marketing, and human resources departments in medium-sized and large companies of various



businesses in Croatia ranked in the TOP 505 companies based on the report by Bisnode Dun & Bradstreet on revenues in 2017 and 2018, with the aim of gathering quantitative data concerning employees' views on distractors in virtual meetings, which limit their effectiveness in internal and external communication during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study will be qualitatively supplemented by the semi-structured interview method conducted through 10 semi-structured interviews focusing on CCOs who are in charge of communications in Croatian medium-sized and large companies of various businesses that have introduced virtual communication and/or remote work in the last two years. Using mixed methods research, the authors of this study will conduct a comparative analysis of employees' requirements and expectations towards their employers and vice versa in order to improve the technical aspects of using collaborative platforms for internal and external virtual meetings.

Results and conclusions

A review of various global studies on virtual meetings, as well as empirical research among employees in medium and large companies in Croatia show that there are no significant differences in the way employees in Croatia approach the organization and conduct team communication in a virtual environment. Although we are witnessing a change in the communication paradigm in the last two years, numerous similarities which appear in communication patterns during virtual meetings can be noted, especially when distractors of virtual meetings are observed. In most cases, these distractors, which affect the quality of internal and external communication, are the result of lack of understanding between employees and employers in companies in terms of acceptance of communication requirements, or in other words, a discrepancy between communication practices and expectations. The research will provide valuable insights into the

most common internal and external distractors of virtual meetings and help raise the level of understanding of requirements and expectations regarding personal and technical aspects of internal virtual communication. The conclusion of the research could be a step closer to a new corporate culture model which is more adapted to the new conditions of internal communication in the virtual world.

Practical and social implications

Besides contributing to the practical and academic thought of internal virtual communication, this study will help companies to conceptualize and better understand personal and technical restrictions and interferences that affect the quality of internal virtual communication. Managers in organizations, aware of the limiting circumstances in which employees participate in the process of internal virtual communication, will be able to develop a new set of tools, communication training programmes or expertise to optimize and upgrade the personal and technical aspects of internal virtual communication.

Keywords: *team virtuality, e-collaboration, internal communication, virtual meetings, remote work*



Rethinking Internal Communication between “New Normal” and “Next Normal”: An Overview of current and emerging practices

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Introduction and purpose

Among the key conference subthemes and current challenges for organizations, there is internal communication and the profound changes it has undergone during the Covid-19 pandemic. Social distancing and remote working, fast become the routine for millions of workers worldwide, have deeply impacted employee sense of security, identification, socialization, engagement, and organizational culture at large. In the face of an ever-evolving health and work context, organizations need to constantly redesign new ways of working and communicating. The purpose of this study is to scrutinize internal communication practices, focusing on the role of internal communication for rebooting and revitalizing organizations in the “new normal” and in the “next normal” following the crisis.

Literature review

The study builds on research related to internal communication practices relevant to capture and make sense of this evolving context, such as those aimed at ensuring closeness to employees despite physical distance and work digitalization (Mazzei, Quaratino & Ravazzani, 2021), building up resilience through internal sense-


making, facilitating learning through sharing new insights out of the crisis (Heide & Simonsson, 2019). For this purpose, literature within internal communication, internal crisis communication, and employee relations in Covid-19 times is drawn upon.

Methodology

The study presents an empirical research based on the perceptions and experiences of 29 internal communication managers and professionals working in 15 Italian companies. Qualitative data were collected from 3 focus groups carried out throughout 2021, when the “new normal” was gradually established in organizations and the “next normal” began to make its way into management discussions and priorities for the near future.

Results and conclusions

Focus groups results help delineate the evolution of internal communication objectives, tools, and contents. In addition, the analysis reveals three key themes: the “new way of working”, the “digital workplace”, and the “leadership for transition”.



Participants' experiences highlight, first, the experimentation of a new way of communicating, emerged from the effort to cope with the "new way of working" that became somehow established after the first phases of the pandemic (the "new normal"). Main endeavours regard effective ways to communicate in a still uncertain health and legal context, and in hybrid environments with employees working partly in presence and partly from home. These unprecedented working conditions bring with them the risks of isolation and burnout of employees, and of losing a common sense of purpose and belonging, which internal communication must prevent. Internal communication finds itself increasingly engaged also in key organizational processes such as socialization, onboarding of newcomers, and cultural change.

Linked to this is the "digital workplace" theme. Internal communication reinvents itself to continue sustaining motivation and engagement of those employees who have been working remotely for months, most of them with no prior experience of virtual work and home office. Both employees and internal communicators across the studied organizations have approached this drastic cultural and technological change from a learning-by-doing perspective. A digital workplace is also a matter of technological infrastructures: in this sense, the internal communication function has helped develop these new platforms, designing communication flows and communication areas that efficiently sustained business processes and employee interactions.

Finally, "leadership for transition" emerges as a central theme especially when envisioning the post-pandemic scenario of the "next normal". Results stress the critical role of organizational leaders in anticipating and mastering change, and enacting the emerging values of perseverance, transparency, sustainability. Internal communication must do its part in training leaders, facilitating the development of new leadership

competencies, as well as ensuring continuous alignment between leaders' sensegiving and employees' sensemaking.

Given the constantly evolving context and subsequent impact on employee needs and work routines, additional research is in the pipeline to delve further into the "next normal" and forthcoming internal communication practices. This would also allow to enlarge the number of companies and perspectives involved in the current study.

Practical implications

Insights from this study have implications for internal communication practitioners when rethinking work and communication models and experiencing the adaptive learning processes initiated by the current pandemic. While showing how internal communication has changed so far in the way it is conceived and practiced, this study also offers reflections useful for handling the "next normal". This will pose the questions of getting remote employees back to office work and reboot, once again, personal relationships and collaboration routines; and/or maintaining hybrid solutions for individual and organizational sustainability finding the balance between office time and remote work.

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Keywords: *internal communication, remote working, hybrid workplace, leadership for transition, new normal, next normal*

Mediated Scandals as Show Trials: The Case Study of the COVID-19 Controversy with Serbian tennis player Novak Djokovic

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Introduction and purpose of the study

In April 2020, Serbian professional tennis player Novak Djokovic indicated in a Facebook live stream that he would not wish to be forced to take a vaccine to attend tennis tournaments. Djokovic's views on vaccination came under increased scrutiny in late 2021, in the run-up to the 2022 Australian Open, which stipulated COVID-19 vaccinations. The issue escalated in January 2022 when Djokovic was detained at Melbourne Airport by Australian Border Force officials for failing to produce the necessary paperwork to enter the country. Later, Djokovic was deported after losing an appeal to stay and play at the Australian Open. This case study discusses a celebrity detained and labelled by the media as an anti-vaxxer amid growing hostility towards people who appear to be unvaccinated. The whole time, the media across the world capitalized on his downfall by publishing scandalous content about Djokovic and his past transgressions.

Literature review

A multitude of political scandals is coming to public attention in recent years across the world. A cause for the number of political scandals in

the last decades can be attributed to the overall transformations of media and journalism in the digital age (Haller & Michael, 2022).

The creation of scandal news and partisanship in reporting contributes to the slant in the news. The 24/7 news cycle supports a Twitter cycle that requires a constant supply of news fodder. Public interest in some personalities is constantly high and can thus be monetized by various media retailers through positive or negative coverage. Naturally, negativity is quite profitable in times of social media (Samoilenko & Miroshnichenko, 2019). Essentially, the media's focus on capitalizing on and monetizing scandals affects their ability to cover basic news, much less undertake nonpartisan investigative journalism.

Klicperová-Baker (2019) defines show trials as staged spectacles that conveniently combine public shaming and prosecution. A defamation media campaign precedes the actual trial. During a public trial, targets are often forced to discredit their characters through widely publicized public confessions before an official verdict.



Methodology

The case study of the COVID-19 Controversy with Novak Djokovic is analyzed according to the framework of character assassination typology. This framework assumes that a social event produced by character assassination is multidimensional and thus should be examined in terms of five contributing elements (Icks, et al., 2020). This interdisciplinary framework pays attention to how the attacker, target, audience, media and context intersect to determine the effectiveness and longevity of attacks. These puzzle pieces should be considered in relation to each other while assessing the probability of reputational crisis and public outrage following an attack on character.

Results and conclusions

The document analysis of media content reviewed as a part of this case study supports the notion of *mediatization* as “the growing intrusion of media logic as an institutional rule into fields where other rules of defining appropriate behaviour prevailed” (Esser & Matthes, 2013, p. 177). One critical impact of mediatization is that the production of news content has become ever more dictated by commercial imperatives and consumers’ expectations. Online platforms seek to deliver edgy click-bait content to niche audiences who are eager to demonstrate their moral and intellectual superiority in online battles. As a result, today’s mass media provide a conducive environment for character attacks amplified by the negative effects of mediatization, such as simplification of content, personalization and infotainment favouring conflict, drama and negative representation of social and political life (Esser, 2013).

Practical and social implications

The complex nature of highly mediated events often impedes crisis managers from controlling for multiple reputational risks and responding to new emergencies. This case is a *scansis* situation that involves a character assassination attempt of a celebrity figure via a mediated scandal. *Scansis* represents the intersection of a scandal and crisis, essentially when a reputational crisis becomes a scandal (Coombs & Tachkova, 2019). This case is illustrative of how mediated scandals involving celebrities can be used as show trials to ensure compliance gaining and conformity with health regulations.

Keywords: *character assassination, crisis communication, reputation management, public relations, Novak Djokovic*



Designing an investor focused communication framework based on dialogic theory: An interpretative qualitative study of publicly listed companies in South Africa

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Introduction and Purpose

In recent times, the South African capital market has been plagued by a myriad of corporate scandals, with the likes of Steinhoff, Tongaat Hulett, and EOH being amongst the latest transgressors. These corporate scandals served as a reminder that all too many organisations take a myopic view of their business, considering financial bottom lines as the be-all and the end-all. As a result, stakeholders are understandably more sceptical about the accuracy and transparency of information being communicated to them.

An integral stakeholder group which forms part in the success of an organisation is its investors (Hoffmann and Fieseler, 2018:405, Laskin, 2018:75). Since investors have increasing demands and specific information needs, it is essential that organisations communicate relevant and useful information by means of investor relations.

However, despite its importance, academic research in the field of investor relations, specifically in terms of communication, is lacking and does not correlate with the importance of the function in corporate practice (Hoffmann et al., 2018:299, Laskin, 2014).

The aim of this study was to propose an investor focused communication framework based on dialogic theory, for South Africa organisations listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. This was done by investigating investor relations theory within the broader context of dialogic theory and crystallising the most critical constructs to include in a communication strategy.

Methodology

The research design employed in this study was an interpretive multiple case study qualitative inquiry which included an investigation of current investor relations regulations that publicly listed organisations have to adhere to and engage in.

The research took place in three phases, consisting of both an empirical and non-empirical component. The three phases of the research conducted in this study were as follows; research phase one, the non-empirical component, consisted of an extensive literature review of the key concepts of this research, showcasing various conceptualisations and relationships. Ultimately the literature review crystallised the conceptual framework for this study, against which communicative products were assessed, and which assisted in the development of the initial inter-



view schedule utilised in research phase three of the research.

The empirical component consisted of two parts; research phase two, a qualitative content analysis of the Case Organisation's communicative products; including SENS announcements, annual integrated reports, and websites. The aim of this analysis was to assess the status of the communicative products against the conceptual framework put forth in research phase one, and hence assist in the refining of the interview schedule developed in research phase one.

During the second part of the empirical component of the research, research phase three, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with the IR officers of each of the Case Organisations whose communicative products were analysed. These interviews were mainly confirmatory, the results of these interviews were used to substantiate, and where necessary adapt the final framework put forth.

Proposed Framework

The proposed framework is the culmination and outcome of a synthesis of an in-depth literature review, a content analysis of communicative products- and semi-structured interviews with the investor relations officers of the case organisation. Propositions informing the proposed framework is put forth and the proposed framework serves as the original contribution of this study.

The proposed framework consists of intricate elements represented in three spheres that are influenced by, and in turn, exert influence on each other; (i) the communication process, (ii) IR, and (iii) the regulatory environment. In order for engagement with investors, as per the proposed framework, to be successful, these three spheres cannot be considered in isolation, but rather in a holistic all-encompassing manner.

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Keywords: dialogic communication management theory; investor relations; publicly listed organisations; South Africa



Rebooting for the “New Normal” while “Working from Home”? Results from a long-term interview study concerning and Internal Social Media among up to 500 German companies 2013-2022

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Introduction and purpose of the study

According to the Call for Paper for this conference, the pandemic had demonstrated the fragility of humans and the societies we inhabit. As stated there, “[a]tomized employees were asked to work from home, and the very definition of the workplace seems to have been redefined” (Call for Paper). Internal Social Media and Enterprise Social Networks play an important role during this process, because a “rapid expansion of ESN use and its significant role in the ‘new normal’ have combined to create a substantial change to the context of work” (Dickinson 2020). To analyse current changes linked to these developments, a long-term perspective might be helpful to distinguish Covid-19 related developments from other, even more fundamental effects. Therefore, this paper will use a general stakeholder approach on internal communication and apply it to analyse some data from a long-term interview study concerning the use of internal social media among up to 500 German companies 2013-2022.

Literature Review

As a general theoretical framework for this pa-

per, the stakeholder theory based “Internal communication matrix” from Welch and Jackson (2007) will be used. It differentiates between internal line management communication, internal team peer communication, internal project peer communication and internal corporate communication – four dimensions which are also crucial for the use of internal social media within companies since all these levels should be part of it. Especially the two mentioned peer levels were heavily concerned during the Covid-19 pandemic when suddenly if ‘working from home’ (WFH) became the ‘new normal’. Following Ipsen et al. 2021, most knowledge workers in Europe had a more positive rather than negative experience of WFH during lockdown, but work uncertainties (which normally can be dealt with through intensive peer dialogue) and inadequate tools had been identified among the three most negative factors. Based on this, the vast majority seems to wish to continue to work flexibly on a remote basis, at least to some extent (Kunze et al. 2020). Looking at Internal Social Media and following Huck & Sandhu (2015), social media applications open up new possibilities for collaboration, participation and – above all – dialogue communication in organisations.

Methodology

The survey studies were conducted in 2013, 2016, 2019 and 2022, in each case in January, with 579, 555, 352 and 421 respondents respectively. The online questionnaire was distributed to company representatives (mainly in the areas of communications, human resources and general management) via address lists and editorial references. While this study is, like many company studies, not really representative, it does, however, entail a good selection of companies in the country, roughly corresponding to official statistics. Above all, however, it is highly comparable in terms of developments over time since there is a very similar composition of distributors and participants for all four surveys.

First results and conclusion

Since this study was realised in January 2022, only some results have been analysed so far. What is interesting to observe in a first place, is the development of the preferred working place over the timeframe as well as its linkage to the own experiences with internal social media. In 2013 and 2016, the office workplace with flexible working hours was with 41 and 37.4 percent by far the most preferred solution among employees interviewed concerning internal social media. On the either side, a flexible workplace with flexible times was only preferred by 2 or 3.2 percent nine and six years ago, compared to 27.1 percent at the beginning of 2022. However, WFH has even been reduced as preferable solution from 5.0 percent in 2013 (with fixed working hours) to 1.9 percent in 2022 (with flexible hours). Overall mixed forms are currently most preferred (40.6 percent).

The findings show quite clearly WFH from a stakeholder perspective: since spontaneous peer communication is getting quite difficult in mainly WFH based model, this is even more rejected than 9 years ago and mixed forms are preferred.

However, also these mixed forms are only possible using an appropriate technology as well as having an adapted meeting and company culture. More results on this are part of the survey and will be analysed for the conference and the full paper.

Practical and Social Implications

The practical implication of this study should be quite evident: Only if internal social media communication do take into account the specific stakeholder dimension of international communication in general, it can be successful. And only if internal social media communication is successful, the digital side of a flexible workplace with flexible working hours can be realised appropriately – and organizations might be able to rediscover communication with internal stakeholders.

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Keywords: *Stakeholder Approach, Internal Communication, Internal Social Media, Enterprise Social Networks*

Mind the gap: Reconnecting employees and organizations after remote work during a crisis

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Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic necessitated organizations to adopt various short- and medium-term operating models that had a direct impact on interpersonal interactions. This included implementing remote work to reduce the physical proximity between employees (Lund *et al.*, 2021). While these measures had to be taken during the onset and height of the pandemic, survey data from the United Kingdom suggest that organizations plan to adopt hybrid work models that allow employees to work from home at least some of the time after the pandemic (YouGov, 2021). Another study highlighted the consequences of pivoting from in-person work to hybrid/online interactions during the pandemic. For example, employees' hours worked increased, including outside normal business hours; communication and task coordination costs increased while at the same time employees communicated with fewer individuals and departments both internally and externally; and employees received less coaching and fewer one-on-one meetings with supervisors (Gibbs *et al.*, 2021).

It is in this context that employees and organizations had to navigate employee-organization relationships (EOR). Although EOR have been theorized robustly within public relations scholarship, little research has explored the antecedents, states, and outcomes of EOR, particular-

ly when employees work remotely and have to re-engage with the organization on returning to the workplace.


This study, therefore, aims to examine changes in relationships between employers and their employees over the course of remote work.

The pandemic has also amplified various tensions and paradoxes in the workplace. In the context of EOR, employees were confronted with notions such as being connected/disconnected, dealing with flexibility/inflexibility, standing together while being apart; and navigating the blurred boundaries between work-life and private life. A dialectical approach (Mumby, 2005; Tracy, 2004) provides a useful lens through which these tensions in organizational life and the renegotiation of the boundaries spanning relationships can be studied.

Literature review

Employee-organization relationships (EOR)

The relational outcomes of EOR are trust, satisfaction, commitment, and control mutuality, while effective relationship maintenance strategies include access, openness, positivity, networking, and sharing of tasks (Hon & Grunig, 1999). However, existing models of EOR, including antecedents, states, and consequences



call for a re-examination especially when the employee-organization relationship moves on-line and back, such as in the case of remote and in-person work during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Relational dialectics theory

Relationships are maintained through communication, but these relationships are often characterized by contradictions and tensions as relationships grow and develop (Baxter & Montgomery, 1998). Communication scholars have called for a nuanced, multilayered approach to investigate the dualities and contradictions that underlie organizational interactions as well (Mumby, 2005; Tracy, 2004). Following Mumby's (2005) assertion that organizational behavior can be understood through discourses, a dialectical approach is used to examine the communicative utterances used by employers to construct new understandings of their relationship with employees during remote work. The research questions posed to guide the study are:

- **RQ1:** Did employee-organization relationships (EOR) change over the course of remote work during the pandemic? If yes, then how did they change?
- **RQ2:** What were some of the factors that led to the changes, if any? Were there differences due to antecedents of EOR such as openness, access, networking, and positivity?
- **RQ3:** What are the short term and long-term outcomes of the changed relationships?

Methodology

The methodological approach is qualitative and will employ in-depth interviews with senior managerial employees (representing employers/organizations) who worked remotely during the Covid-19 pandemic in the United Arab Emirates. This is regarded as a suitable approach for exploring employers' perceptions of their relationships with employees during remote work conditions. The researchers will employ pur-

posive sampling to recruit participants with some experience of remote working. The population will be employees working in organizations listed in the Fortune 500 100 *best companies to work for* and/or *Great place to work in the UAE* indexes. Interview data will be analyzed by means of qualitative thematic analysis.

Implications

Theoretically, the findings of this study will add to emergent empirical insights into relationship management in the context of remote work in turbulent contexts. The study aims to demonstrate the impact of remote work on EOR and provide future research directions for the successful management of EOR in times of crises.

Keywords: *employee engagement, remote work, employee-organization relationships, relational dialectics, public relations, UAE*

Role perceptions and challenges of internal communication practitioners in facilitating the shift toward a more flexible work environment

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Introduction and purpose


As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations are experiencing fundamental changes in their daily operations. Above all, the unprecedented shift to homeworking or mobile working is driving virtualization which requires the implementation of new digital tools and ways of how work is organized. It also initiated a change towards more flexibility, which causes challenges for most organizations, particularly for those who had a pronounced culture of presence prior to the pandemic. Internal communication assumes a key role in addressing these challenges in that it is to strategically guide this change process and fulfill its function as facilitator of the organization-employee relationship. This raises the question how internal communication practitioners experience the change and evaluate their roles in this process:

- RQ1: How do internal communication professionals perceive their role in the pandemic-driven shift toward a more flexible work environment?
- RQ2: Which challenges do internal communication professionals perceive in the pandemic-driven shift toward a more flexible work environment?

Literature review

Various scholars examined the roles and functions of internal communication in different organizational contexts, which Men (2021) categorized as follows: Internal communication professionals must keep employees informed, listen to their perspectives, concerns and ideas, and help build relationships within the organization. In addition, internal communication is responsible for inspiring and acculturating employees as well as helping them to make sense of the situation. Finally, they play an important role in motivating and engaging employees. “Overall, the role and function of internal communication can be summarized as informational (to inform), relational (to listen, connect), motivational (to acculturate, inspire, motivate), and behavioral (to engage)” (Men, 2021, p. 6).

Especially during crisis-induced changes, employees benefit from internal communication that reduces situational uncertainties, misunderstandings, rumors, and negative communication behaviors. A lack of employee-centered, two-way symmetrical communication would enhance negative outcomes during these times. As emphasized by Heide and Simonsson (2021), we investigate whether communication professionals use a process approach to internal crisis



communication as it helps to reduce negative outcomes and motivate employees to actively support the organization.

Methodology

Since gaining insights into the reflections of internal communication professionals is required to answer the research questions, a qualitative research approach was chosen. Between March and May 2021, 16 qualitative, semi-structured, problem-centered interviews were conducted with internal communication professionals from large, globally operating organizations in German-speaking countries. The selection of suitable interview partners was based on a convenience sampling strategy. In order to test the quality of the interview guide, two pretest interviews were conducted. All interviews were conducted via MS Teams or Zoom. The analysis of the material is based on a deductive and inductive structural content analysis and supported by the software program MaxQDA18.

Results and implications

The results show that the shift toward a “culture of flexibility” requires that communication professionals deepen their knowledge of employee needs, concerns, and habits in order to develop targeted communication strategies and promote participatory employee behaviors. Fostering employees’ commitment to the organization is one of the biggest challenges named by practitioners. The situation has strengthened the role of communication professionals as enablers who actively support leaders and employees to adapt and enhance their own communication behavior. Furthermore, communication that addresses the relationship with employees is key to engender employees’ support during the change. This requires listening and being transparent, appreciative and supportive. Organizations with a high proportion of employees working in production on-site face a particular challenge of reaching

everyone equally and preventing on-site workers to feel left out. With regard to home workers, the challenge is to intensify the exchange between managers, supervisors and employees and find appropriate communicative strategies to motivate and engage employees.

Research results imply that virtualization of work enlarges professionals’ functions by enabling, and broadens their radius of action. At the same time, they have more responsibility and a higher risk of losing employees – increasing, for example, their frustration or disengagement. In order to overcome the challenges, professionals must adapt their existing workflows, and need to learn and experiment with novel formats and messages.

Future studies could use case studies to further examine different perspectives during the transitioning from a culture of presence to a culture of flexibility. In addition, it would be valuable to capture employees’ perspectives on their perceptions of internal communication during the change to deepen findings on communication challenges.

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Keywords: internal communication, change, flexibility, qualitative research

Organizational purpose and public relations in hybrid organizations

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Organizational purpose is the reason for an organization to exist and the essence of its identity. Most organizations strive to define and communicate their unique purpose as a particular way of satisfying stakeholders' expectations and contributing to society.

This study seeks to explore how hybrid organizations reconcile and communicate multiple organizational purposes, more specifically in private universities as hybrid institutions with elements from the logics of education and business. The following research question is raised:

- RQ1: How do hybrid organizations communicate multiple purposes?

Hybrid organizations emerge out of public-private partnerships or a combination of non-profit/for-profit components, comprising elements from at least two different sectors with their institutional logics, values or rationalities, hence paving the way to multiple organizational purposes (Schmitz and Glänzel, 2016). Due to the hybrid nature, such organizations may not be entirely and exclusively assigned to either sector, which may raise tensions and pose the challenge to handle the communication of multiple logics and purposes and balancing claims from different sectors.

And since hybrids are typically more complex to govern, hybridization calls for new management paradigms and new ways of accountability to-

ward multiple stakeholders (Jongbloed, 2015). It can be also claimed that, in turn, the particular communication concerns of hybrids partly institutionalize these emerging forms so as to position them in one or another sector (Birkholz, C., 2015); (Buhmann and Schoeneborn, 2021).

Methodology: in order to answer the research question, qualitative data were collected through mini-Delphi with public relations and communication experts (N=15) and in-depth interviews (N=40) personally held on campus with university executives, communication specialists and academics from three countries.

Results and conclusions: findings show that private universities tend to declare a single organizational purpose as a mission statement blending their particular commitment with specific groups of stakeholders. In some cases, the organizational purpose has already changed since foundation (which may entail a different essence or identity), while in others it has remained unwavering, strategically blended, disseminated and integrated as the backbone and centre of all decisions. Contrastingly, double narratives and mismatches between internal and external messaging reveal mission drift leaning towards one dominant logic at the expense of another, also leading to legitimacy deficit.

This study further develops the incipient conceptualization of hybrid organizations as actors combining different logics and provides a typol-



ogy enriched with private universities as hybrid institutional forms in the Higher Education sector.

Purpose emerges as an essential governance mechanism of hybrid organizations to avoid mission drifts and maintain hybridity (Mair, Mayer and Lutz, 2015). Hence, the vital role of public relations in aligning multiple institutional pressures (Wolf and Mair, 2019), activating favourable behaviours and generating identification and adherence to the organizational values declared in the organizational purpose. To achieve this, the conceptualization of purpose-driven public relations is suggested, whereby the purpose and values are defined *with* the stakeholders and not just *for* the stakeholders (Fontán, Alloza and Rey, 2019, p. 110). The upheld values should then be reflected in the communication practices, contents and decisions (Siwale, Kimmitt and Amankwah-Amoah, 2021). Organizational purpose then becomes the departure and destination point in the strategic loop to evaluate communication performance.

An acknowledged limitation of this research is that the phenomenon of hybridization has been empirically explored only in private universities as explicitly *de iure* hybrid institutions in the Higher Education sector, where state-owned institutions are gradually becoming *de facto* hybrid forms (Jongbloed, 2015).

Keywords: *organizational purpose, public relations, hybrid organization, university, mission drift, Higher Education Institutions.*



Graphical distortion and Impression Management techniques in Corporate sustainable reporting: An investigation of the sustainability reports in the top 100 companies in Italy

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Purpose

The increasing stakeholder expectation toward organizations societal role are leveraging a higher degree of required transparency in their communication. This implicates that disclosing exclusively financial information is no longer enough as companies need to be held accountable also for their impact on society in terms of environmental and societal activities (Moreno & Capriotti, 2009). To comply with this surging demand, companies have therefore begun to publish sustainability reports to communicate their activities and impacts.

Despite the fact that several standards are available, the reporting scenario remains still fragmented and unregulated regarding how companies should present their data (Lock & Arujo, 2020). Due to the volatile attention scarcity of the audience, companies need to implement engaging and timely data communication tactics. The emergence of the “visual turn” in CSR communication (Lock & Arujo, 2020) is exemplified by the increasing predominance of infographics

and data visualization elements in sustainability reporting. The available visualization techniques have now transformed sustainability reports into a powerful form of promotional content companies can embrace to fulfil multiple purposes and convey information to several publics. This has also implied an increase adoption of impression management techniques with the goal of delivering as much as possible positive information, to the point of distorting the graphs in the context of corporate reporting. Indeed, several studies analyzing the impression management techniques in annual report highlights how reports easily adapt to deliberately alter perception of the company’s performance (Beattie & Jhones, 2002). However, while extensive literature has been dedicated to the graphical distortion present in company’s reports, the focus has predominantly fallen on annual reports or financial reports. Sustainability reporting is an increasingly studied area of inquiry for communication scholarship. To contribute to the discussion by expanding the existing gaps, the present study fits in with the goal of studying under the lens of

impression management techniques are deliberately conceived to alter the public perception of companies' sustainability performance.

Design/Methodology

In particular, in order to assess whether and to what extent companies use impression management techniques. We analyzed a sample of 65 companies listed in the Italian stock exchange, systematically collecting their reports and categorizing them by their market capitalization. This method of selection seems to be favorable for what concerns the industrial sectors of analysis. Indeed, selecting companies based on their market capitalization and not on industry specifics allows to gain an overview also on different aspects of different sectors. Hence, even though this sampling cannot be defined as purely randomized, at the same time it offers a good approximation of what the market is like.

Findings

By using an analytical framework informed in the impression management theory, we found undeniable evidence of the adoption graphical distortion techniques by companies, supporting the idea that sustainability reports are employed not only to convey important and truthful information about the firms' sustainability performance, but also a favorable image of the company. Consistently with the studies on impression management (Cho et al., 2018), the results of the analysis confirmed that graphs are not only largely adopted forms of communication but also largely altered ones where selectivity, presentational enhancement, and measurement distortions convergently appear.

Theoretical and practical contributions

Theoretically, the research problematizes and extends studies on the impression management techniques deployed in CSR reporting. Practically the research informs the sustainable report-

ing sector by providing evidence on the actual stage of CSR impression management and possible avenues to increment and regulated unified standard for a more transparent communication. On the other side, the research raises awareness on the issue of graph literacy among corporate report publics as an antecedent of correct data consumption and misuse identification.

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Keywords: *CSR reporting, impression management, data visualization, transparency*



How internal communication contributes to organizational success conditions

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Internal communication was previously recognized for its considerable contribution to organizations (Špoljarić & Tkalac Verčić, 2021). Its significance within organizations has recently grown even further. Due to the current global crisis, which caused most employees working from home, internal communication suddenly became critical for everyone. In our study we test the extent of internal communication's influence on job attitudes and its contribution to perception of the organization among both internal and external publics. Within our research we turned to employee engagement, perceived organizational support and psychological contract fulfillment in order to portray employees' job attitudes. Internal perception of the organization is displayed by internal employer attractiveness, while reputation and external employer attractiveness demonstrate external perception of the organization. Additionally, we explore the potential effect internal communication has on overall organizational success caused by indirect effects through reputation.

Literature review

Internal communication and level of satisfaction with it have a great impact on employees' attitudes and perception of their employers (Tkalac Verčić et al., 2021). Research has shown that employees that are satisfied with the communi-

cation within their organizations feel motivated and display higher levels of engagement at work. At the same time, clear communication helps organizations manage perceptions and expectations. This reflects in higher perception of organizational support, psychological contract fulfillment (Špoljarić & Verčić, 2022; Tkalac Verčić et al., 2021) and internal employer attractiveness (Tkalac Verčić et al., 2021). These positive practices within organizations lead to positive recognition among external publics, which is made up of corporate reputation and external employer brand perception. However, the relationship between these internal and external contributors to organizational success has never been fully established (Tkalac Verčić & Sinčić Ćorić, 2018).

Methodology

In order to analyze internal communication's contribution to organizational behavior and perception of organizations among employees, we applied predesigned measurement instruments. This part of the research was done as a large communication survey among 1805 employees from 12 companies. The communication survey was a part of a four-year national scientific project to map out internal communication. The choice of organizations that were approached within the project was based on the typical unit criteria. In selecting the organizations for the sample, the project team reached a consensus

on what is considered typical and which criteria should be typical. Number of employees range from 60 up to 10 000. Within each company, significant effort was made to include representative samples of employees. Additionally, among organizations' external publics, an analysis of reputation and external employer attractiveness was conducted.

Results and conclusion

We are still in the process of data collection among organizations' external publics. We will complete our research and conduct appropriate analysis before July 2022.

Practical and social implications

The global crisis that occurred after the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic further established the importance of internal communication for organizational success. With this research we aim to show just how important internal communication is to organizations. We expect to show its influence on several organizational outcomes, which include employee engagement, perceived organizational support, psychological contract fulfillment, internal employer attractiveness, organizational reputation, external employer attractiveness, and ultimately, profit.

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Keywords: *Internal communication, employer brand, organizational reputation, employee engagement, job attitudes.*

From Situational Appraisals to Collective Action: An examination on Asian Americans' Engagement in Collective Action during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study

The COVID-19 pandemic is not only a global health crisis but has also uncovered many underlying societal issues of disparity, inequity, and injustice. In the United States, along with the vast spread of COVID-19 is the uptick of hate incidents, discrimination, and racist attacks against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI). According to Stop AAPI Hate, a total of 10,370 hate incidents were reported from March 19, 2020 to September 30, 2021 in the United States. These hate incidents took place in various forms that ranged from individual acts of verbal harassment, shunning, physical assaults, to civil rights violations such as workplace discrimination and refusal of service. This study, in this regard, sets out to examine the factors and mechanisms that drive Asian Americans' engagement in collective action in combating anti-Asian discrimination and racism during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Literature review

Scholars from various fields have conducted studies that examined the anti-Asian rhetoric

during political campaigns, the use of social media on Asian Americans' well-being, mental health issues among Asian Americans, and so on (e.g., Lee & Waters, 2021; Yang et al., 2020). Apart from addressing the immediate impact during the pandemic, scholars have also noted that the uptick of hate incidents against Asian Americans has its historical roots. The portrayal of Asians as the "Yellow Peril" and "perpetual foreigners," along with the pervasive "model minority" myth, has resulted in Asian Americans' voices on their experiences of discrimination being delegitimized and silenced. This has further led to limited empirical research evidence on the impact of racial discrimination among Asian Americans, especially when it comes to activism and collective action (Lee & Waters, 2021). The knowledge on collective action—the action that aims at changing the status of a disadvantaged group—could be especially instrumental as community members, activists, and scholars continue exploring viable measures to combat anti-Asian discrimination and racism at individual, institutional, and societal levels.

Drawing on insights from the Situational Theory of Problem Solving (STOPS) (Kim & Grunig,

2011), societal risk reduction motivation model (SRRM) (Cho & Kuang, 2014), and collective action (Van Zomeren et al., 2008), this study proposes a model that comprises perceptual, cognitive, emotive, and motivational factors that could drive Asian Americans' online and offline collective action in combating anti-Asian discrimination and racism.

Methodology

An online survey was conducted in August 2021 among 505 Asian Americans residing in the U.S. at the time of the study. Participants were recruited via Dynata survey panel, representing diverse ethnic backgrounds among the Asian American communities spanning across 41 states in the U.S.

Results and Conclusions

Results revealed the perceptual, cognitive, emotive, and motivational factors that drove Asian Americans' online and offline collective action. Perceptual factors including Asian Americans' involvement recognition, their perceptions of self-efficacy, group efficacy, and governmental efficacy fostered situational motivation to combat anti-Asian discrimination and racism. The emotive factor of discrimination-inflicted arousal also generated Asian Americans' situational motivation. Asian Americans' motivational state, in turn, facilitated their online and offline collective action in combating discrimination and racism. Given that this study particularly pertains to the context of anti-Asian discrimination and racism during COVID-19, future research could further test our model among other marginalized communities and in different sociocultural contexts to enhance its theoretical and practical utility.

Practical and Social Implications

For public relations professionals, activists, policy makers, and the society at large, findings from

this study suggested a multi-facet approach that encompasses consideration at perceptual, cognitive, and emotive levels in gauging Asian Americans' online and offline collective action. By providing an integrated framework that delineates the process from situational appraisals to collective action, this study helps shed insights on the role public relations could play in advocating for social change and creating a more humane and just world.

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Keywords: *Racial Discrimination, Collective Action, Asian Americans, Situational Theory of Problem Solving (STOPS), COVID-19*

Increasing employee advocacy through supervisor motivating language: The mediating role of psychological conditions

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Introduction and purpose of the study


Research on leadership has attracted the attention of scholars and practitioners for decades. The positive impact that leaders can exert on a wide range of individual and organizational outcomes, such as commitment, trust, and performance, have contributed to this widespread interest. However, leadership and leadership communication are broad terms that apply to an extensive range of communication behaviors. As noted by Mayfield and Mayfield (2017), studies examining leader communication behaviors need to focus on specific aspects. Therefore, the current study analyzed leadership communication through the lens of motivating language (ML), a framework of leader-to-follower speech (Sullivan, 1988). More specifically, we examined ML's relationship with employee advocacy, a type of organizational citizenship behavior in which employees voluntarily support, recommend, or defend an organization to internal or external publics (Thelen, 2020).

In addition to examining the relationship between ML and employee advocacy, insights on the mechanisms through which ML impacts advocacy behaviors are needed. In his seminal study, Kahn (1990) identified three specific psychological conditions that help determine whether and how people engage in their roles:

psychological safety, job meaningfulness, and psychological availability. To fill the research gap and expand the body of knowledge on leadership communication and internal communication, this study focuses on the psychological conditions of employees and looks at how supervisor ML influences employee advocacy behaviors through the mediating mechanisms of safety, meaningfulness, and availability.

Literature review

When employees feel psychological safety, find work worthwhile, and can channel their physical, emotional, and psychological resources for focused tasks, they are inclined to do more for their organizations (Kahn, 1990). The mediating role of work meaningfulness, psychological safety, and psychological availability have been studied in various settings, including work relationships, career adaptability, and performance (Jannesari & Sullivan, 2019). Overall, when employees perceive a supportive environment, inclusive leadership, and communication that addresses their physical, cognitive, and emotional needs, they are more likely to advocate for the organization. When leader communication includes motivating language, it builds confidence, reduces stress, and encourages staff to experiment in a safe environment. When motivating language is an ongoing priority for leaders, it



helps staff view work as meaningful and increases their likelihood to speak up (Sullivan, 1988) and potentially advocate for their organization.

Methodology

We administered an online survey on Qualtrics and used quota sampling to obtain samples from the U.S. and India. These samples provide an opportunity to compare the proposed model across varied settings that differ vastly in cultural and economic environments. Data collection was conducted on Amazon's Mechanical Turk in August 2021. Our sample consisted of 354 participants from India and 441 participants from the U.S.

Results and conclusions

The results from the current investigation confirmed that leader motivating language was positively correlated with psychological safety, work meaningfulness, and psychological availability in India and the U.S. The study also provided empirical evidence for the effectiveness of supervisor motivating language in nurturing employee advocacy behaviors.

Additionally, the study looked at the relationship that psychological safety, work meaningfulness, and psychological availability have with employee advocacy. Among these three variables, only work meaningfulness had a positive relationship with advocacy behaviors in both countries. The positive relationship between psychological safety and advocacy was only significant among U.S. workers. The Indian system is profoundly hierarchical, and employees are highly status-conscious. Therefore, a plausible explanation for the nonsignificant relationship could result from the higher levels of power distance that exist in India. The current study also found a positive relationship between psychological availability and employee advocacy in India. Surprisingly, psychological availability did not have a significant relationship with employee advocacy among em-

ployees in the United States. This result suggests that feeling confident about their work abilities is not enough for employees in the United States to feel an intrinsic desire to advocate for their organization. Finally, our study indicated that work meaningfulness mediated the relationship between motivating language and employee advocacy in India and the U.S.

Practical and social implications

This study impacts the profession and society in several ways. First, internal communicators and leaders need to understand the impact of cultural differences while investing in employee advocacy programs. There is no one-size-fits-all model. Second, a supervisor's role in, for example, emphasizing a program's goals and focusing on employees' collective and individual aspirations is crucial in shaping employees' actions. Third, infusing meaningfulness at work by helping employees understand how their work is important, worthwhile, and significant can generate the conditions that will encourage employees to advocate on behalf of their organization.

Keywords: *supervisor motivating language, employee advocacy, psychological safety, work meaningfulness, psychological availability*

Organizational culture and remote working in public relations agencies in Greece

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Introduction and purpose of the study

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought significant changes in the workplace environment with remote working being one of the major challenges for organizations. The pandemic also transformed existing organizational cultures by shifting and replacing deep-rooted values, rituals, and shared practices among employees. The aim of the present study is to explore the post-covid organizational culture of public relations agencies in Greece. Towards this end the following research questions will be addressed: What are the main types of organizational culture that emerged in public relations agencies in Greece as a response to the Covid-19? How did public relations agencies try to communicate their organizational cultures to their employees and other stakeholders during the pandemic? What engagement practices were utilized by agencies (e.g., employees, customers) during the lockdowns? What are the perceived benefits or disadvantages of remote working for public relations executives? How leadership was exercised in virtual teams? and whether remote work is here to stay, replacing face-to-face meetings with employees or customers?

Literature review

While teleworking was not a new practice for public relations professionals, Covid-19 caused agencies to urgently switch almost all their ac-

tivities to a work-from-home style. Teleworking has been associated with several benefits such as greater employee autonomy, better work-life balance, reduced stress, and greater job satisfaction. On the other hand, work-from-home can cause social isolation, work overload, family-work conflict, employees' alienation, and weak relationships between employees (Contreras et al., 2020). Under these new working conditions, organizational culture can be weakened (Chatman and Gino, 2020) or transformed as new digital norms arise. Organizational culture has been defined as the shared values, beliefs, assumptions, rituals, symbols, and practices of organizations (Schein, 2004). Thus, in a remote working situation, the shared aspect of culture can be jeopardized (Ranghuram, 2021) if not communicated effectively.

Methodology

To answer the research questions an online survey will be conducted directed to executives working in public relations agencies in Greece. Open-ended as well as close-ended questions will be used regarding the types of culture that exist or the new forms that arose; the practices and channels for communicating organizational culture; the stakeholder engagement tactics; the leadership style in virtual teams; as well as the benefits and challenges associated with remote working.



Results and conclusions

Due to the characteristics of the public relations industry in Greece that is comprised of small-sized agencies, it is suggested a clan culture will be favored after the occurrence of Covid-19 due to its flexibility and internal focus. Moreover, it is expected that hybrid modes of communication practices and channels (online as well as offline) will be utilized by agencies given that the public relations industry in Greece is still dominated by a clientelist approach that focuses on the cultivation of personal relationships with customers, media, politicians, etc (Garcia, 2015). However, it is also expected that in a feminized public relations industry the “work-from-home” will be preferred along with a team leadership.

Practical and social implications

This present study will be among the first to map the changes in organizational culture, working, virtual leadership, and communication practices that the public relations industry in Greece has undergone due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, important managerial implications will be suggested for effective communication of organizational culture.

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Keywords: *organizational culture, public relations agencies, virtual leadership, remote working, communication practices, employee engagement.*



The Four Realms of Digital Visual Experience: A Theoretical Framework

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Communication management has long claimed responsibility for stakeholder relationships and enshrined the function as part of the definitional identity for practitioners and academics. During an era of unprecedented digital transformation and shrinking stakeholder proximity, the author interviewed c-suite executives at ten publicly traded companies operating in Canada to explore the role for strategic communication/public relations in the growing field of experience delivery.


These conversations were augmented by ten interviews with experience management (XM) experts and practitioners – those who monitor employee, customer, product and brand perceptions using predictive behavior data – to give the organization a robust understanding of all relationships impacting business performance.

Underscored by an integrative literature review, the applicability of communication management is examined through communication, organization-public relationships (OPR) and brand/image reputation activities. However, communication management continues to struggle with delivering measurement and evaluation (M&E) for their programs and responsibilities. Meanwhile, organizations have increased their appetite for actionable insights that will cause behavior change in important relationships. Meeting this expectation, Experience management (XM)

applies agile design processes and mines digital connectivity to deliver robust business intelligence tools and an intimate understanding of the stakeholder journey.

Literature Review

Broadly examining the landscape of organizational transformation in the 21st century, Holtz (2002), Castells (2000) and Hax (2010) highlight how social and digital ecosystems are altering how stakeholders interact with brands and are shifting business strategies from product differentiation to service experience. In order to explore shifting priorities of senior leaders, communication management as a strategic function is explored in literature. Mcnamara (2015) evidenced a long history of difficulty measuring and evaluating (M&E) programs and responsibilities for communication practitioners and academics. Supporting this finding Huang and Zhang (2013) thoroughly critique organization-public relationship measurement scales to similarly find outcomes are elusive. The major communication activities such as the tactic of communicating (Hutton, 1999; Macnamara, 2018; van Ruler, 2018), organization-public relationships (OPR) (Bruning & Ledingham, 2000; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Finne and Grönroos, 2009; Macnamara, 2015) and image/reputation monitoring through crisis and issues management (Bunting & Lipski, 2000; Coombs & Holladay, 2005; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001; Mac-



namara, 2020; murray & White, 2005) are given as context for the role of communication practitioners in organizations. In contrast, the new field of experience delivery (Macik, 2017) is explored through computer sciences literature including the Internet of Things (IoT) (Amodu et al., 2019) and human to computer connectivity (Fletcher, 2015) showing that senior leaders are looking for analytics to identify gaps in the perception that stakeholders have of a brand/organization (Grannan & Geoffroy, 2016) and that indicate behavioral intention as well (Qualtrics, 2021; Palmer, 2010).

Methodology

This is an exploratory, qualitative research study to introduce experience (XM) management into communication management literature. The sample size consisted of twenty in-depth interviews: ten senior leaders who had authority in operational and strategic decisions and ten experts and practitioners in the experience delivery ecosystem at publicly traded companies operating in Canada and undergoing digital transformation. Three broad interview questions discussed experience delivery, stakeholder relationship management and strategic communication activities. The qualitative synthesis focused on words, descriptions, concepts, perceptions and sentiments expressed by participants. Narrative analysis revealed mindsets and perspectives of interview participants while thematic analysis revealed similarities and differences that could be grouped together for deeper interpretations.

Results and conclusions

The results of this study are expected to be completed by March 2022 as part of a master's thesis defence. Early analysis shows the activity of communication, as message sending and message clarifying for strategic priorities, is the tactical function most needed at a program level and senior executive level in organizations. Oth-

er insights found: strategic communicators could play a role in determining the mission of analytics and data collection as ethical advisors; letting go of managerial ownership with stakeholder relationships; find influence with chief technology and strategy officers; overwrite traditional communication plans to incorporate design-thinking principles of empathy and feedback loops; and finally, improving data and analytics fluency as it relates to experience delivery.

The author submits that communication management is poised for an upgrade. The modern practitioner should be “full-stack” much like that of a software developer who can solve customer-facing aspects of design and diagnose internal system-related issues as well.

Practical and Social Implications

To ensure relevance after digital transformation, communication management must find a place for communication, crisis and issues management as well as reputation activities within the agile, cross-functional ecosystem of today's modern, data-informed organizations who are using experience delivery models.

The findings are instructive for professionals performing communication activities and researchers studying them, as well as institutions offering academic study in strategic communication and public relations.

Keywords: *public relations theory, communication theory, experience management, relationship management, organization-public relationships*



Employee satisfaction with internal communication in private companies during the first lockdown

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Internal public relations, ie internal communication, includes communication within the organization that can flow from superiors to employees, from employees to superiors and between employees. Quality internal communication in times of crisis is the key to the company's survival in the future, so in March, April and May 2020 many Croatian companies found themselves in an uncertain situation where they had to adapt internal communication and organizational culture to new circumstances. The COVID-19 crisis hit the whole world in 2020, and it is still inconceivable what and how many consequences it will leave behind. Its effects are clearly visible in the day-to-day operations of most companies. In the most challenging period during March, April and May 2020, companies had to show how they cope with the crisis and how much they are ready for it in all aspects of their business and management. Why is employee satisfaction with internal communication important? The reason is very simple, satisfied and motivated employees and successful communication with internal stakeholders will create satisfied customers, users and successful communication with all external stakeholders.

The subject of this paper is the internal communication of Croatian companies during the COVID-19 crisis and the first lockdown with

special emphasis on organizational culture and relations with employees and employee satisfaction with internal communication during the first lockdown. The period of the first lockdown in the Republic of Croatia includes March, April and May 2020. For the purposes of this paper, an anonymous questionnaire was conducted on a sample of 84 respondents. The questionnaire sought to examine the satisfaction of respondents with internal communication and communication channels in their companies with an emphasis on organizational culture and relationships with employees during the first lockdown in the Republic of Croatia. The results of the survey indicated that respondents were satisfied with the communication processes in their organizations during the first lockdown, and that the COVID-19 crisis did not significantly change the attitude of employees towards employers, but the results showed that there is room for improvement in internal communication management culture.

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- Keywords:** *internal communication, lockdown, COVID-19 crisis, employees, organizational culture*



To Trust or Not to Trust: Consumer Perceptions of Brand Activism in Times of the Black Lives Matter Movement

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Introduction and purpose of the study

The salience of socio-political issues on social media has led to increasing pressure on companies to engage in corporate social advocacy (CSA), referring to them taking a stance on these issues (Austin et al., 2019; Edrington and Lee, 2018; Gaither et al., 2018). CSA may include taking actions such as contributing to a certain cause financially, creating advertising campaigns related to the issue, lobbying local and state governments, making donations and engaging in philanthropic efforts known to the public, or using the company's large platform to raise awareness, for instance through social media (Waymer and Logan, 2021). Despite this new phenomenon, the research on CSA is limited in literature, and CSA has often been classified as a subset of corporate social responsibility rather than its own category of corporate action. This paper aims to understand to what extent perceived corporate motives of engaging in CSA affect consumer skepticism and brand equity. We also examine whether a consumer's social issue involvement moderates the proposed relationship.

Methodology

An online survey was conducted ($N=375$). Participants were recruited using a convenience sampling method through Amazon Mechanical Turk.

Results and conclusions


The results revealed that values-driven motives and egoistic-driven motives were significant predictors of consumer skepticism. However, no significant impact of strategic-driven motives and stakeholder-driven motives was discovered on consumer skepticism. In addition, consumer skepticism was found to be a significant mediator of the relationship between egoistic-driven motives and brand equity. The results however did not reveal any significant moderation effect of social issue involvement.

Practical and social implications

The findings imply that companies need to develop a good understanding of the consumers' attributions when engaging in CSA as the latter can result in consumer skepticism and negative impact on brand equity.

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Keywords: *Corporate Social Advocacy, Black Lives Matter, Rebranding, Corporate Motives, Consumer Skepticism, Brand Equity*



Re-Framing Sustainability in a Pandemic. Understanding Sustainability Attitudes, Behaviors, Visions and Responsibilities for a Post-Covid Future

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There is no doubt that the Covid-19 pandemic means much more than a health challenge and more than a potential economic catastrophe. It is the beginning of a social change process and a test for our civilization on how we deal with transformation. It is also time for asking for the moral principles that will guide transformation. Our response as society as a whole, as collectives and communities, as institutions and individuals will highlight our capability to deal with and manage cultural and social change in the future. Staying at home and away from travelling, consumption, and playgrounds have changed our behavior and lifestyle, with positive and negative effects. It also changed our attitudes from preferences to moral imperatives, from being driven by conventions and habits to moral convictions and new perceptions of our very individual responsibility in these societal transformation processes (Weder et al., 2021). During the first year of the pandemic, people did not only return to their local structures and developed a solidary “we-culture” (Zukunftsinstitut, 2020) and a new consumer sentiment (Kittel et al., 2020). Much more, organizations sketching the future picture the future as the opportunity for a new

kind of globalization and climate change-related transformation (reduction of fossil fuels, less air and car travel, shift to a meatless diet, some form of basic income (Moriarty & Honnery, 2020; Goffman, 2020)).

With the study at hand, we aimed at understanding people’s visions for a “new normal” and what role sustainability as a moral principle might play in this process of change and redefinition of “normal”.

Theoretically, we first conceptualize how sustainability is defined and a sustainable future possibly envisioned by organizations and individuals. Second, we introduce the concept of moral agency to better understand how individuals perceive their responsibility when it comes to sustainable development and social transformation processes – or how much they allocate the responsibility to “others,” mainly political institutions, “the government,” but also corporates.

With empirical data from a quantitative survey with complementary qualitative elements (n = 264; 2020, Austria), we can not only show



that people increasingly use sustainability as a principle to evaluate their behavior (“during the Corona-restrictions, but I was also much more sustainable because I didn’t travel”). Much more, we can see that this is not necessarily related to the willingness or readiness to change and the commitment to keep the changed and more sustainable practices in the future (taking agency for the future, feeling responsible).

The insights gained from the survey show that people tend to use three narratives for the future, which are related to a certain degree of morality, the perception of being a change agent, and, therefore, the willingness to take responsibility as an individual: they range from rather fear- or concern-driven resignation (Type A), to guilt-driven resilience (Type B) and to an anger-driven, courageous responsibility (Type C). Limitations of the study and future research potential will be also presented and discussed at the conference.

Development of an optimal reputation quantifier for the reboot of communication after Covid-19

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Introduction and purpose of the study

To reorganize communication with internal and external stakeholders after a drastic event such as a pandemic, and to check whether changes are necessary, a sound orientation is required. In this context, reputation measurement is becoming increasingly important for companies, because eruptive shifts in stakeholder perception may have occurred. This measurement of reputation as an important control variable for the communication management of companies is made more difficult by the digitalisation of communication on the internet – with significantly increased speed and frequency of interaction as well as with a greatly increased number of senders. At the same time, this digitalised communication makes it technically easier to be recorded and analysed, for example with the help of artificial intelligence. So far, there is no known instrument with which the overall reputation of a company can be precisely quantified when the reputation of partial aspects is known. The aim of this study, therefore, is to find a quantification mechanism with which the reputation of a company can be precisely calculated. The basic approach is to apply a dimensional reduction procedure to a set of known reputation dimensions to obtain a single value representing the overall


reputation of a company. The formula resulting from this reduction can then be used as an ‘optimal reputation quantifier’.

Literature review

The authors reviewed existing literature and empirical research concerning different concepts of reputation, then consider especially the model developed by Charles J. Fombrun et al. (2000) and the functional dimensions (sustainability, economic performance, employer performance, products & services, management performance) defined in this model, focusing primarily on research dealing with the question of how far the different dimensions interact and influence each other. Furthermore, the literature review identified and discussed existing research analysing in what way external events which are beyond the control of the organisation, such as the coronavirus pandemic, can influence a reputation.

Methodology

The authors combined two data sources for their research: market research data was used for the long-term adjustment of the optimal reputation quantifier. This was combined with social listening data for the short-term adjustment of the reputation measurement. Social listening collects



data via the analysis of internet sources with respect to statements concerning the different reputation dimensions. These statements are then analysed with the help of artificial intelligence, i.e. with specially trained algorithms which can identify and categorise the linguistic content of written statements.

Results and conclusions

The data show that due to the high correlation of the different reputation dimensions in relation to one another, the basic idea of using a process of dimensional reduction to achieve a quantification for an overall reputation works basically well. The results of the dimensional reduction further imply that although each reputation dimension does have a significant influence on a total reputation, the strengths of the individual influences differ. The interaction of the reputation dimensions is likely to vary from industry to industry and possibly from company to company; this study explores the general approach.

Practical and social implications

Nevertheless, the study is suitable for providing cross-sectoral orientation as to which reputation dimensions deserve greater attention in order to improve corporate reputation in a targeted manner. Two levers are relevant here: In which reputation dimension is the company strong or should it strengthen itself? In which reputation dimension should communication be intensified to influence the public's perception?

With this approach, it is possible to put external communication to the test and – in terms of corporate reputation – to optimise it. Changes in the reputation quantifier, for example because of a pandemic, can also be recorded in a structured manner and transferred into modified communication accordingly.

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Keywords: *reputation management, interaction of reputation dimensions, social listening, big data*

Corporate Philanthropic Behavior and The Construction of Public Affective Trust. Shopping Spree After Hongxing ERKE Group's Donation for the 2021 Henan Floods in China

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Introduction and purpose

The 2021 Henan Floods in China have triggered a wave of public donations among Chinese enterprises. In July 2021, Hongxing ERKE Group (ERKE), a Chinese domestic trendy sports brand, donated CNY 50 million in materials for disaster relief, even facing its poor business performance. Then, topics related to ERKE rushed to the trending topic and became the hot search. Securities Times reported that relevant public opinions reached 39,684 posts one week after the ERKE donation, with 75% positive and 24% negative emotions. Also, ERKE's donation has set off 'crazy consumption' that consumers spontaneously rushed into the online and offline stores to buy products crazily.

As a typical case of earning public affective trust with corporate social responsibility (CSR), this study will explore the public opinions about the ERKE's donation and how ERKE gained public trust, solidarity, and support with its philanthropic behavior from the perspective of emotions.

Literature review

Trust contains two major forms in social sciences: cognition-based trust and affect-based trust (McAllister, 1995). Affective trust is the confidence one places in another and the willingness to open up to another, including the dimensions of integrity and dependability (Hon & Grunig, 1999). ERKE's philanthropy awakens public affective trust and support. However, researchers have found that crowd-sourced CSR does not always produce positive results. The CSR will create positive outcomes when the company has established positive feelings or trust and the public infers that the behaviors are consistent with motives (Rim, Park & Song, 2018).

Methodology

We collected data from the official Weibo account of ERKE and conducted a content analysis with the comments left on ERKE's posts.



Results and conclusions

According to the content analysis of their comments on ERKE's posts, the study revealed Weibo users' strong solidarity and support for ERKE, mainly including affective support and behavioral support. Affective support takes the domain and involves three types of performance: public expression of positive feelings and attitudes such as recognition, love, support, and trust; affective empathy and sympathy for ERKE's philanthropy; and defense and support for ERKE through a crusade against its 'opponents.' Behavioral support in this case contains three types of behaviors: expressing purchase intentions; providing consultation and suggestions on the products; and call for rational consumption to support ERKE.

ERKE still donated even with a business dilemma. The charity behavior is also in line with the Chinese traditional cultural values of "help those in distress," "help people for happiness," and "uphold virtues and kindness," gaining widespread public affective recognition and empathy. The public affective and behavioral support to ERKE reflected that the public migrates their affective identification to the company and brand. Also, the public satisfies their own patriotic and social feelings through supporting ERKE. The common affective connection is further diffused and sublimated through the communication between social media users and the enterprise, presenting new features of constructing public trust with corporate philanthropic behavior on social media.

Limitations

There is a certain limitation of this study that evaluating public opinion only from social media users' comments but still provides a perspective for public affective trust research.

Keywords: CSR; corporate philanthropic behavior; public affective trust; social media users



How does the motivation of watching live streaming commerce affect online purchase intention?

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study

Live streaming from various social media networks offers users news, production information, entertainment, and shopping functions. Live streaming commerce has become an uprising trend with the utilization of live streaming for commercial purposes (Wongkitrungrueng et al., 2021; Cai & Wohn, 2019; Hamilton et al., 2014), commonly seen selling apparel, fashion, beauty, food, consumer electronics, furnishing, home décor, and automobiles (Mckinsey Digital, 2021). Originated from China, live streaming commerce has been expanding rapidly and adopted by dominant e-commerce platforms such as Amazon and Taobao, to enhance customer engagement and boost revenue. Live streaming commerce provides product demonstration, product information, and excitement to consumers (Wongkitrungrueng et al., 2021).

This study adopted both the consumption value theory that has not been widely discussed in the context of live streaming commerce, and the uses and gratifications theory, to investigate the motivations of people watching live streaming commerce and the motivations' relationship with online grocery purchase intention. HKTVmall, a leading e-commerce platform with a huge pro-


portion selling groceries (53.8%) in Hong Kong, is the targeted platform for this study.

Literature Review

Live streaming commerce is defined as a subset of e-commerce embedded with real-time social interaction, including real-time video and text-based chat (Wongkitrungrueng et al., 2021; Cai & Wohn, 2019; Hamilton et al., 2014). It is predicted that people are motivated to watch live streaming commerce by the perceived functional value (capacity for functional, utilitarian, or physical performance), epistemic value (capacity to arouse curiosity, provide novelty, and satisfy a desire for knowledge), and conditional value (specific situation facing the choice maker), and the values are positively related to online purchase intention. In addition, under the theory of uses and gratifications, the gratifications of social interaction, enjoyment, and pass time, are also expected to be the motivations for people to watch live streaming commerce, and positively affect people's purchase intention online.

Methodology

Online quantitative survey using the snowball-sampling technique was adopted for the study and conducted from Nov 5 to Nov 19,



2021. HKTVMall users were the targets. Only the respondents who had watched live streaming in HKTVMall before were appropriate. 149 questionnaires out of the total of 257 questionnaires collected were valid for analysis. The qualitative data were analysed using IBM SPSS.

Results & Conclusion

All the consumption values: function value (Mean= 3.54, SD= 0.68), epistemic value (Mean= 3.65, SD= 0.68), conditional value (Mean= 3.66, SD= 0.96), are regarded to be the motivations to watch live streaming. In regards to the gratifications, only enjoyment (Mean= 3.35, SD= 0.83) is the motivation for people to watch live streaming commerce, while social interaction (Mean=2.37, SD= 1.08), and passing time (Mean=2.71, SD= 0.11) are not. At the bivariate level, all the factors are correlated with respondents' purchase intention online. However, from the regression model, only the gratifications of social interaction (coefficient = .209, $p \leq .05$) and enjoyment (coefficient = .457, $p \leq .001$), are proven to have a significant effect on online purchase intention.

From the result, despite the consumption values are proven to be the motivation for people to watch live streaming commerce, still, it is unable to predict consumers' online grocery purchase intention in the context of live streaming commerce. In terms of the effect on purchase intention online, social interaction and enjoyment are proven to have a significant effect on online groceries purchase intention.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The results imply that people still regard live streaming commerce as media products, that they are searching for enjoyment and social interaction from consuming live streaming commerce, treating and selecting live streaming commerce more as a media when coming to consumption choice-making, hence making the gratifications

significant reasons affecting purchase intention online.

As the enjoyment perceived by live streaming has the most strong and positive influence on purchase intention online. While even the consumption values did not directly affect consumers' online purchase intention, they are proven motivations for people to watch live streaming on groceries or household goods. These imply the feasibility of taking a content-based approach when performing live streaming commerce, which includes product-related and non-product-related content, to arouse consumers' interest and possibly increase their purchase intention online (Wongkitrungrueng et al., 2020).

Future studies can be expanded to other categories of online products for more understanding.

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Keywords: *live streaming commerce, uses and gratifications theory, consumption value theory, online purchase intention*

A study of Memes, Conformity and Watching Intention: Squid Game as an example

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Introduction and purpose of the study

According to Shifman (2014), meme has become an important element in internet culture and has been defined as a form of digital content, such as “me and the boys...,” “HACKERMAN,” etc., that is generated by different users in the digital world. In 2021, the Korean thriller series “Squid Game” had quickly become the most-watched TV series on Netflix, with more than 142 million viewers during its first 28 days of launch (Nolan, 2021). Upon its launch on the streaming platform, the buzz around the plot continued non-stop and therefore, a lot of memes were created, echoing the series’ phenomenal spread around the globe through social media which have drawn our attention to examine the relationship between meme and watching intention of Squid Game. Furthermore, conformity, the bandwagon effect, and the Uses & Gratifications Theory (U&G), would be relevant factors in attracting more people to watch Squid Game.

The aim of this study is to find out the relationship among meme, conformity, U&G and watching intention.

Literature review

Meme includes 4 key viral elements, i.e., positiv-

ity/humor (people tend to share positive content online), whimsical Content/participation (people reproduce the content and share), evoking emotions (stories that evokes more positive emotions would be shared more) and simplicity/language (content with simple meaning is easier to be shared) (Shifman, 2014).

Conformity refers to consumers’ feedback, rating, purchase intention and behaviour will be affected by the group’s feedback, and they would use others’ suggestions as reference to change themselves to fit the group expectation or get accepted by the group (Lascu & Zinkhan, 1999). The framework of Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) developed by Ajzen (1991) is adopted in the study which includes three constructs: Attitude, Perceived Control of Behaviour and Subjective Norms which can be linked to Conformity.

U&G is a well-utilized framework in defining motives behind the use of any given medium (Gan, 2017). With reference to the prior research, six U&G factors are selected in order to create a relationship study on watching intention of Squid Game, which includes: Exposure, Social Sharing, Entertainment, Information Seeking, Escape and Affection (Gan, 2017).

Methodology

Two runs of data collection were carried out with the general public in Hong Kong, during the period of 24th to 27th November 2021 and 1st to 3rd December 2021 respectively. A total of 226 adults have participated, with 71 adults joining in the second run of study. Participants had watched *Squid Game* the TV series and seen memes on their social media. Data collection was carried out by snowball sampling through internet. A five-point Likert

Scale was adopted for respondents to evaluate the different measures of our research models where Extremely Disagree = one and Extremely Agree = five. Data analysis with Pearson Correlation was computed in SPSS to assess the relationship between the variables of this study.

Results and conclusion

The results of statistical analysis indicate that there is a weak correlation between Meme and Watching intention. Specifically, among four meme virality factors, Evoking Emotions has the most powerful impacts ($R = .314$, $p = .001$), followed by Participation ($R = .259$, $p = .007$) and Positivity ($R = .208$, $p = .032$). Simplicity, as one of meme virality factors, is not found having significant relationship with Watching intention ($R = .087$, $p = .372$). In testing the relationship between Conformity and Watching intention, both two variables, Attributions about group behavior ($\beta = .624$, $p < .001$) and Informational influence ($\beta = .581$, $p < .001$), have positive impact on Watching intention. Furthermore, U&G, which is measured by six factors in this study, is tested as positively related with Watching intention at a moderate level. In details, Entertainment is most predictive ($r = .525$, $p < .001$), followed by Exposure ($r = .507$, $p < .001$), Social Sharing ($r = .505$, $p < .001$), Escape ($r = .459$, $p < .001$), Information Seeking ($r = .410$, $p = .002$) and Affection ($r = .290$, $p = .03$).

Practical and theoretical implications

As shown in the findings, conformity and U&G are both positively related to consumers' watching intention, which implies that both collective and individual factors would stimulate the audience's intention to consume cultural products. Furthermore, the predictive power of conformity is stronger than factors of U&G, which suggests that streaming platforms and production companies could concentrate on manufacturing the trend at the collective level and not forget to create chances for the audience to feel entertained, to be exposed to the cultural product, to share with family and friends, to be escaped from reality, to get access to much more information and to fulfill the affective demands.

The findings also show that meme does not explain the change in consumers' watching intention. One of the possible explanations is that most memes are created after the release of the TV series, with content that is closely related to TV series' plots. This characteristic makes it difficult for consumers to understand and be attracted by memes if they haven't watched the TV series. Consumers tend to participate in spreading memes only after they have watched the TV series, rather than watching this cultural product with the aim to understand memes. This finding suggests that it is necessary for streaming platforms and production companies to create memes that are understandable to consumers.

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Keywords: meme(s), conformity, Uses & Gratifications theory, watching intention

The state of internal communication in Latin America: An international Delphi

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Introduction and purpose of the study:

Internal communication is a fast-growing specialization in public relations and communication management that has emerged as a critical function for organizations (Tkalac Verčič et al., 2012). Not surprisingly, the amount of internal communication research has flourished during the past decade, and scholars have examined the role that internal communication plays in employee behaviors, leadership, organizational culture, organizational crises, reputation, and employee social media communication. Despite the increasing literature, researchers have recognized the need to increase the documentation and the perspectives of public relations and internal communication in underrepresented regions (Molleda et al., 2017). Latin America is the least researched region globally, and there is a strong need to further explore how internal communication is practiced and understood in this region (Thelen, 2021).

To fill in the research gap and diversify the body of knowledge in internal communication, the current study aimed to explore internal communication in Latin America, specifically how seasoned internal communication practitioners understand and practice internal communication in Latin America. We provided answers that tap into different aspects of Latin American internal communication practice, including how internal communication is defined and understood, the skills and knowledge needed in internal communication practice, the value of internal communi-

cation, and the state of internal communication practice.

Literature review

Latin America, comprising 20 countries and one territory, accounts for 64% of the population of the Western Hemisphere and 8% of the global population (Statista, 2021). Despite its cultural diversity and growing political and economic force, public relations scholars have not extensively explored this region (Molleda et al., 2017; Thelen, 2021). A quantitative content analysis examining 223 internal communication articles published in public relations and communication journals between 1970 and 2019 found that none of the articles focused on Latin American countries (Lee & Yue, 2020). This reality prompted us to explore internal communication within this region.

Given the lack of research on internal communication in Latin America and the importance of enriching and diversifying our existing body of knowledge that is U.S. and European centered, the current study explored four overarching research questions: (1) How is internal communication defined and understood by practitioners in Latin America? (2) What are the skills and knowledge needed in internal communication practice in Latin America? (3) What is the value of internal communication? (4) What is the state of internal communication practice in Latin America?



Methodology

Although there are several means to examine the uncharted territory in internal communication, the current study used the Delphi technique. This method gathers data from selected individuals within their domain of expertise via an iterative process that continues until there is some degree of consensus among participants or until researchers believe that no extra rounds of questions will provide new insights (Wakefield & Watson, 2014). Twenty internal communication experts from Latin America with at least ten years of experience completed the first and the second round of the data collection from September to November 2021. The participants were from Argentina (n = 4), Chile (n = 4), Colombia (n = 3), Guatemala (n = 2), Mexico (n = 1), Panama (n = 1), Peru (n = 3), Uruguay (n = 1), and Venezuela (n = 1).

Results and conclusions

Participants agreed that formal internal communication encompasses (1) top-down, bottom-up, and diagonal information, (2) communication between team members, (3) communication between members of a specific project, and (4) communication of messages between an organization and all of its members. Regarding the primary role of internal communication, the findings suggested that the function should manage information, facilitate relationships within an organization, and ensure that employees are connected to their organization's mission, vision, and values.

In addition to understanding internal communication and its role within an organization, all participants agreed that practitioners should be knowledgeable about organizational culture and crisis communication. It is noteworthy that skills like listening, empathy, and interpersonal communication were underscored by the participants.

Latin American practitioners have a mature understanding of the strategic value of internal

communication. They also suggested that the influence of internal communication has substantially increased within the past decade. Nevertheless, one of their main challenges is to position themselves as strategic partners and to be seen as a critical area for organizational growth, employee retention, and innovation.

Practical and social implications

This study impacts the profession in several ways. First, it analyzes the specific knowledge and skills that practitioners need to be successful in their careers. Second, it highlights how internal communication practitioners currently measure the impact of their efforts and addresses the major challenges they encounter in measurement and evaluation. Third, the study provides insights regarding the future direction of the practice in Latin America.

Keywords: internal communication, public relations, Latin America, Delphi study

Should we follow this advice? Introducing and testing a framework for assessing quality in communication consulting

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Communication leaders in organizations of any kind have to tackle several challenges at the same time. Right now, they need to find new ways of engaging with stakeholders in a rapidly changing economic and political landscape with a wide range of innovate media channels and instruments. They also need to future-proof their functions and departments: Objectives, services, operations, and resources must be regularly reviewed and optimized to ensure efficiency and effectiveness.

This increases the need for external help from consultants. *Communication consulting* can be defined as the process by which consultants help or enable organizations to solve challenges related to their communication activities and/or their structures and processes for communication. A look into practice shows that the need for external consulting and the range of available consulting services is increasing. The communication consulting industry is becoming more and more diversified and complex. Many consultants claim to be competent and trustworthy advisers for multiple challenges ranging from designing creative campaigns to introducing digital tools or agile ways of working. However, these claims are hard to substantiate or evaluate. Existing certification procedures in the profession (e.g.,

the CMS III Communications Management Standard used by communication consultancies associations like ICCO, PRCA, GPRA, etc.) are limited to managing agency business and campaigns, but do not cover consulting processes (ICCO, 2022).

It is therefore quite important to develop a comprehensive understanding of the *quality of consulting*. This will help clients assess the relevance of advice and whether to follow it, consultants focus their services on the most important aspects, and both parties develop measures to enhance their interaction.

The aim of the study is to close this gap by developing a comprehensive *conceptual quality model for communication consulting* on a conceptual level and by using this model to *empirically research how consultants and clients evaluate key quality dimensions* in practice with three research questions:

- RQ1: How can quality be defined and systematized in the communication consulting process?
- RQ2: At what stage of the consulting process do conflicts most often occur?
- RQ3: What is important to secure the quality of communication consulting?

Literature review

An interdisciplinary literature review was conducted to develop a comprehensive quality model for communication consulting. Interestingly, consulting is hardly the subject of scientific studies in communication management research. This also applies to quality of communication consulting. The few studies and articles identified either deal with individual aspects of the consulting process (e.g., the requirements for a high-quality briefing) or take a one-sided view of the topic (e.g., from the client's point of view, without including the consultant's perspective). A comprehensive model does not yet exist.

However, a number of quality models from management, health care, or education research (e.g., Donabedian, 1980; Schiersmann & Weber, 2017) were identified and combined with existing knowledge from the field of communication management to construct a novel, comprehensive model for communication consulting quality (see figure). The model maps the consulting process from input to output and outcome, taking into account the interaction between consultants and clients at each stage of the process. The overall quality can be assessed and secured on two different and intertwined levels: A functional level and a relationship level. The individual components can be further broken down into quality attributes such as the consultant's industry knowledge in the domain of 'structures, processes and people' or a sound briefing at the beginning of the 'realization' phase of consulting activities.

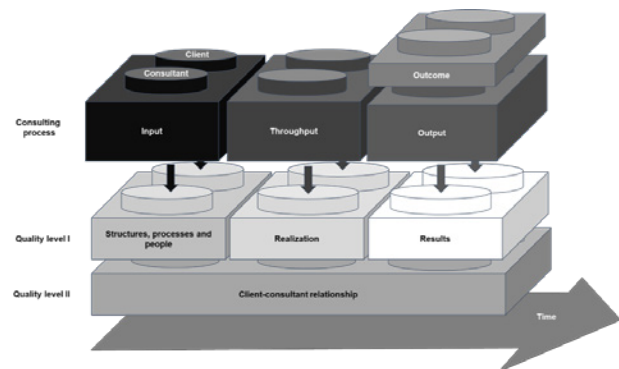


Figure 1. A comprehensive model for communication consulting quality.

Empirical study

The newly developed framework will be tested in a quantitative survey of practitioners working in communication departments of for-profit, non-profit, and governmental organizations (clients) and in agencies, consulting firms, or as freelance consultants (consultants) across Europe. To answer the research questions, the model was operationalized based on the findings of the literature review. For example, in order to identify quality conflicts and measures to leverage quality, the input–throughput–output–outcome dimensions and the relationship level were operationalized on the basis of two items each. Respondents are asked to assess the importance on a 5-point Likert scale. The study has been pre-tested. Data collection takes place in February and March 2022. A sample size of $n > 1,000$ is expected. Results cannot be reported yet, but will be shown at the conference.

Practical and social implications

The comprehensive model of communication consulting quality developed in this study offers a variety of starting points for further research. The model can be used to examine the quality of consulting from the perspective of clients and consultants in order to find out what is particularly important for each actor involved. Approaches to ensure this quality can be explored



in detail. A practical added value is that clients and consultants will be enabled to review their processes. The model and its findings could also serve as a blueprint for the development of quality standards for communication consulting that could be integrated into existing certification procedures in the industry.

Keywords: *Communication consulting – quality model – client-consultant relationship – consulting process*



Virtual stakeholder dialogues: Challenges and opportunities of moving face-to-face formats to online environments

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Introduction and purpose of the study

The global pandemic has affected the relationships between companies and their stakeholders in many ways. Most communications professionals have found it comparatively easy to shift interactions with employees, consumers, investors or journalists to online formats – although the learning curve has often been hard and steep for all involved.


At the same time, it has been much more difficult than in the past to build or maintain relationships with stakeholders who are neither bound by self-interest nor formally connected to organizations. Many companies, especially in much-criticized industries (energy, fashion, food, infrastructure, etc.), have long conducted stakeholder dialogues as closed and in-person platforms to engage with activists, local communities, policymakers, researchers, and other critical stakeholders or opinion leaders. Typical goals are to understand different perspectives, build personal relationships and trust, and identify common ground without having to play by the rules of the mass media. Most stakeholder dialogues were canceled or postponed during the pandemic. Conducting them virtually was seen as difficult at first glance because of the importance of personal exchanges, confidentiality, authenticity, and informality.

Nevertheless, it is important to continue interacting with all types of stakeholders, especially in times of social division in many societies. This raises the questions of whether and how stakeholder dialogs can be virtualized, what experiences of pioneers can be identified in corporate practice, and what factors should be considered when introducing virtual stakeholder dialogues as a new format of corporate communication. The research questions of the study are therefore:

- RQ1: What are the advantages and disadvantages of virtual stakeholder dialogues compared to face-to-face settings?
- RQ2: What factors must be taken into account for the successful implementation of virtual stakeholder dialogues?

Literature review

Through an interdisciplinary literature review on *stakeholder dialogues*, four research directions could be identified. They can be conceptualized a) as a specific form of events, b) as instruments in the field of corporate social responsibility (CSR), c) from a strategic perspective, and d) from a consensus-oriented perspective. However, it is not appropriate to speak of clearly defined perspectives, as the levels of abstraction in the literature vary. There is little explanatory potential for multi-layered topics and settings.



This is also true for *virtualization* as a trend in corporate communications. The conceptual understanding of what virtual means varies widely. In this study, “virtual” is used in the sense of a) geographically separated, b) technology mediated, c) structurally dynamic, or d) nationally diverse.

By combining both strands of literature, the following *conceptual definition* was developed:

Virtual stakeholder dialogues are symmetrically designed, dialogue-oriented communication instruments for face-to-face, confidential, and issue-centered exchange between an organization and critical stakeholders on problems of various origins, supported by digital technologies so that all or some of the participants are not located in the same place. They take place primarily synchronously, although asynchronous elements are conceivable. The goal of the participants is mutual understanding, whereby in each case strategic considerations as well as collaborative problem solving and participation can form the foundation.

Empirical study

Since it was not possible to build on existing evidence, a qualitative design with expert interviews was chosen to explore the field. An interview guide was developed from the literature review. It maps the key steps and drivers in planning and conducting stakeholder dialogues and addresses the opportunities, prerequisites and barriers to virtualization in individual cases. Communication professionals in Germany with proven experience in planning or conducting stakeholder dialogues were interviewed. The final sample (n = 39) consisted of 27 communications directors from large international and national companies and 12 managing directors from consulting firms specializing in this topic. All interviews were transcribed and analyzed using a grounded theory approach.

Results and conclusions

The study identified and systematized the small body of practical knowledge about virtual stakeholder dialogues. Advantages and disadvantages of the format can be illustrated in a SWOT matrix. The strengths (e.g., low participation requirements) point to clear advantages of virtual over face-to-face settings, while the weaknesses list clear disadvantages (e.g., less interaction). However, a majority of the identified features are both opportunities *and* threats (e.g., technology can make dialogues more engaging, efficient, and effective *or* lead to frustration due to technical problems) – these features unfold their potential depending on the situation and require sound decisions and preparations by communication professionals in charge of the formats.

To realize the full potential of virtual stakeholder dialogues, several success factors were derived from the interviews: Alignment of the chosen format with strategy and goals, targeted use of technology and optimal timing, knowledge of participants’ needs and requirements, rigorous facilitation and moderation activation of all stakeholders, demonstration of appreciation and respect as hosts, and respect for privacy and confidentiality.

Practical and social implications

The study shows that virtual stakeholder dialogues are an instrument that can offer numerous advantages for rediscovering the potential of corporate communications with external stakeholders. The illustration of strengths and weaknesses as well as success factors provides guidance for practitioners who canceled face-to-face meetings with these stakeholders during the pandemic. Engaging in dialogues on socially relevant topics such as sustainability of products and critical infrastructure is always important – whether in person or virtually.



Keywords: *Virtuality; Stakeholder dialogue; Corporate communications; Corporate social responsibility; Business ethics*



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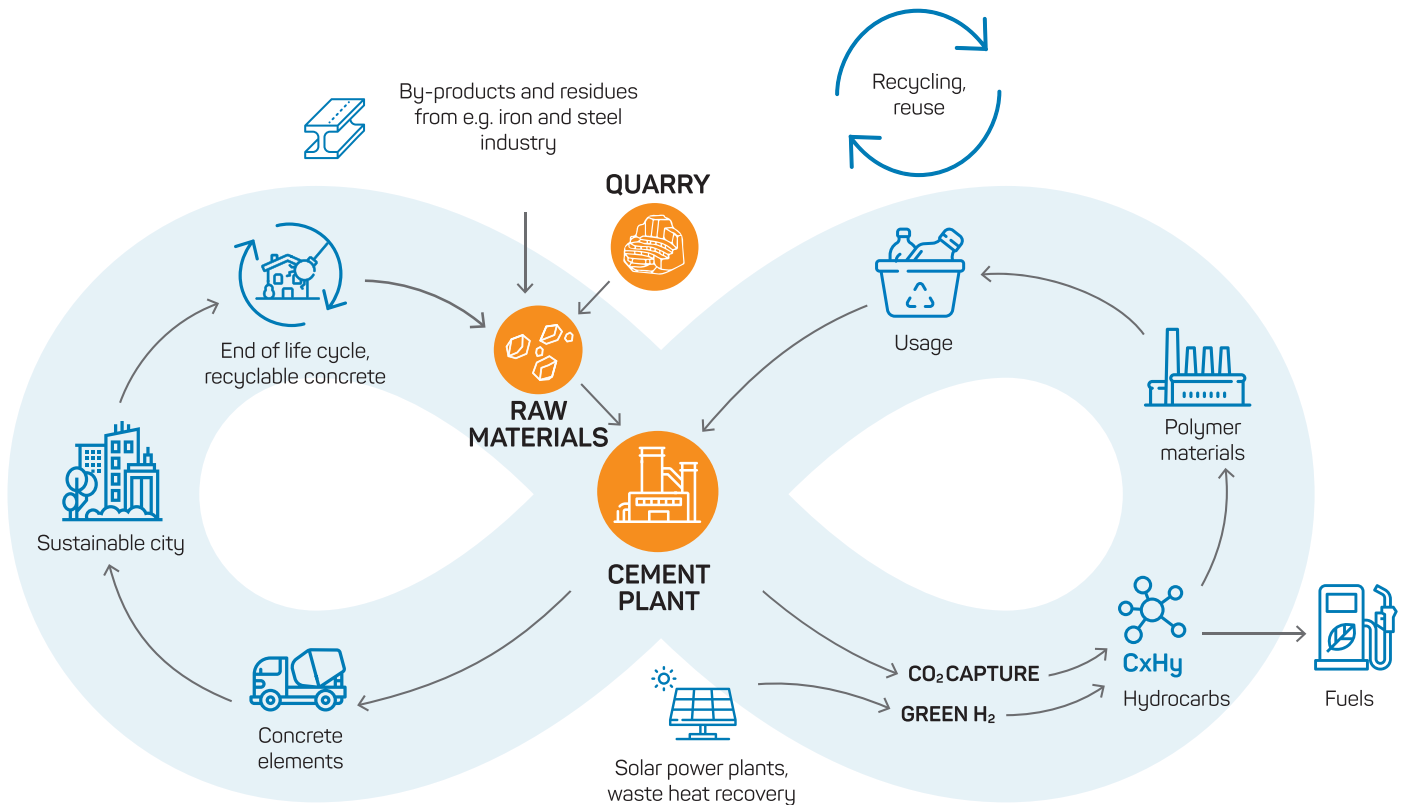


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