



Public Relations and Human Well-being

**Proceedings of the 31st International
Public Relations Research Symposium BledCom**

EDITORS: Dejan Verčič, Ana Tkalac Verčič and Krishnamurthy Sriramesh

BledCom 2024

31st International Public Relations Research Symposium
July 5 - July 6, 2024

Organized by:





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EDITORS:

Dejan Verčič
Ana Tkalac Verčič
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PUBLISHED BY:

University of Ljubljana
Faculty of Social Sciences
Kardeljeva ploščad 5
1000 Ljubljana
Slovenia

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University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences

AVAILABLE AT:

<https://www.bledcom.com/>

Ljubljana, 2024

Katalogni zapis o publikaciji (CIP) pripravili v
Narodni in univerzitetni knjižnici v Ljubljani
COBISS.SI-ID 219942147
ISBN 978-961-295-105-4 (PDF)

1. Editors	13
2. Authors	14
3. Paper Abstracts	34
4. Papers	148

PAPER ABSTRACTS

- 34** In a crisis situation, which public communication message strategies are best deployed using short-form social media?
Alotaibi, Mutaz, *Cardiff University and King Abdulaziz University (UK and Saudi Arabia)*
Kinnear, Susan, *Cardiff University (UK)*
- 37** Double tap to heart: Portuguese National Health Service (SNS) message on Instagram about cardiovascular health and its perception
Baptista, Raphaël, *CAPP/ISCSP-Ulisboa (Portugal)*
Belim, Célia, *CAPP/ISCSP-Ulisboa (Portugal)*
- 40** Feeling good, living well, and making nice. Aspiring PR people on well-being and work-life balance
Barlik, Jacek, *University of Warsaw (Poland)*

- 42 Communicating health and well-being policies: The Portuguese Prime Minister's message on the X platform between 2016 and 2023 and its reception**
 Belim, Célia, *CAPP/ISCSP-Ulisboa (Portugal)*
 Baptista, Raphaël, *CAPP/ISCSP-Ulisboa (Portugal)*
 Cunha, Maria João, *CIEG/ISCSP-Ulisboa (Portugal)*
 Cruz, Carla, *CIEG/ISCSP-Ulisboa (Portugal)*
 Firmino, Sandra, *CIEG/ISCSP-Ulisboa (Portugal)*
 Ruel, Teresa, *CIEG/ISCSP-Ulisboa (Portugal)*
 Woss, Joana, *CIEG/ISCSP-Ulisboa (Portugal)*
 Vaz de Almeida, Cristina, *CIEG/ISCSP-Ulisboa (Portugal)*
- 45 The Utilisation of Engaged Research Towards the Well-Being of Internal Stakeholders: A Case Study**
 Bezuidenhout, Louise, *North-West University (South Africa)*
 Sutton, Lucinda, *North-West University (South Africa)*
- 47 Employee Well-being, Internal Communication and Listening: Insights from an Explorative Study Among Italian Companies**
 Butera, Alfonsa, *Università IULM (Italy)*
 Mazzei, Alessandra, *Università IULM (Italy)*
 Ravazzani, Silvia, *Università IULM (Italy)*
 Quaratino, Luca, *Università IULM (Italy)*
 Leonzio, Marco, *Università IULM (Italy)*
 Castelli, Nicola, *Università IULM (Italy)*
- 50 Grounded optimism as an approach to organisational change**
 Charlton, Dan, *SPFT (UK)*
- 52 Gen Zs Seeking Companionship. Loneliness, Individual and Collective Narcissism as Predictors of Sharing Fake News**
 Chmiel, Michal, *Royal Holloway, University of London (UK)*
 Thompson, Gareth, *London College of Communication, UAL (UK)*

- 54** **Positive Communication and resilience: Explicating how positive communication can enhance crisis response effectiveness in moral outrage inducing crises**
 Coombs, W. Timothy, *Centre for Crisis and Risk Communications (USA)*
 Tachkova, Elina R., *Hong Kong Baptist University (Hong Kong)*
- 56** **Empowering voices, enabling change: exploring the relationship between wellbeing and gender equality for public relations Portuguese practitioners**
 Cunha, Maria João, *CIEG/ISCSP-Ulisboa (Portugal)*
 Cruz, Carla, *CIEG/ISCSP-Ulisboa (Portugal)*
 Belim, Célia, *CAPP/ISCSP-Ulisboa (Portugal)*
- 58** **Harnessing the Power of Online Support Communities in Times of Crisis: Implications for Public Relations**
 Doherty, Maggie, *St Mary's University (UK)*
- 60** **Profound Changes Mobile Devices. Potential Consequences. And the Lives of Today's Public Relations Professionals**
 Downes, Edward J., *Boston University (USA)*
- 62** **Community Engagement and CSR in Times of Crisis: Corporate Efforts for Enhancing Local Well-being after the 6th February, 2023 Earthquake in Turkiye**
 Engin, Elif, *Bahçeşehir University (Turkey)*
 Eker Akgöz, Burcu, *Bahçeşehir University (Turkey)*
- 65** **Authentic Inside-Out CSR: Employees as Partners in Advancing Social Goals**
 Fitzpatrick, Kathy R., *University of South Florida (USA)*
- 67** **Whose Wellbeing Matters Most for Gen Z? A Comparative Analysis of the Effects of Climate Messages**
 Geysi, Nilüfer, *Bahçeşehir University (Turkey)*

- 70 Understanding Reputation-Building and its Importance to Young Entrepreneurs in Singapore**
 Goh, Jonathan, *Singapore Management University (Singapore)*
 Zhang, Evonne, *Singapore Management University (Singapore)*
 Ong, William, *Singapore Management University (Singapore)*
 Yeo, Su Lin, *Singapore Management University (Singapore)*
- 73 „Share the nicotine with your friends“: Ethical flaws of promoting tobacco and nicotine products using digital nanoinfluencers“**
 Hejlová, Denisa, *Charles University (Czech Republic)*
 Ortová, Nina, *Charles University (Czech Republic)*
- 75 Leading the way: The impact of leadership communication on employees' AI anxiety, well-being, and relationships with their organizations**
 Huang, Vincent, *Hong Kong Baptist University (Hong Kong)*
- 77 Organisational shared-purpose, Communication, Good Health and Wellbeing: A Case Study from Australia and New Zealand**
 Hung-Baesecke, Chun-Ju Flora, *University of Technology Sydney (Australia)*
 Chen, Yi-Ru Regina, *Hong Kong Baptist University (Hong Kong)*
 Taylor, Maureen, *University of Technology Sydney (Australia)*
- 79 Empowering Trust and Well-Being: An Analysis of Nonprofit Communication. Strategies on X**
 Kushniryk, Alla, *Mount Saint Vincent University (Canada)*
 Orlov, Stanislav, *Mount Saint Vincent University (Canada)*
- 82 Ordinary workplace digital violence. The process of banalization and the role of communication**
 Laborde, Aurélie, *Bordeaux Montaigne University (France)*
- 84 How CEOs' Conversational Communication on Social Media Enhances Internal Relationships and Employees' Social Media Engagement**
 Lee, Yeunjae, *Colorado State University (USA)*
 Yoon, Dalee, *University of Hawaii (USA)*
 Yue, Cen April, *Boston University (USA)*

- 86** Well-being at digitalized workplaces: An interdisciplinary perspective on technology design and the role of internal communication management
 Malczok, Melanie, *University of Applied Sciences Osnabrück (Germany)*
 Altendorf, Antonia, *Sociological Research Institute Göttingen (Germany)*
 Illing, Jannike, *OFFIS Oldenburg (Germany)*
- 88** Well-being. A regenerative and structured approach to corporate welfare: engagement, inclusion, sustainability and communication
 Milan, Gloria, *ICDLAB Sostenibilità e Comunicazione (Italy)*
 Martello, Stefano, *Comm to Action (Italy)*
 Bonometto, Caterina, *ICDLAB Sostenibilità e Comunicazione (Italy)*
- 90** Individual-level Antecedents in Care-Based Relationship Management: Assessing Factors to Ethical Public Relations in the Government Sector
 Morehouse, Jordan, *University of Colorado Boulder (USA)*
 Dong, Chuqing, *Michigan State University (USA)*
 Zheng, Qi, *Michigan State University (USA)*
- 93** Exploring organizational commitment to human well-being: A management logic perspective driven by the sacred-profane dichotomy.
 Oliveira, Evandro, *Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa (Portugal)*
- 95** How Supervisors' Use of Motivating Language Influences Employee Attitudes and Supportive Behaviors: Exploring the Moderating Effects of Remote Work
 Qin, Yufan Sunny, *James Madison University (USA)*
 Men, Linjuan Rita, *University of Florida (USA)*
 Akanbi, Francis, *University of Florida (USA)*
 He, Hanzi, *University of Florida (USA)*
- 97** Public Healthcare Delivery Eco-system in India: Role for Public Relations
 Qureshi, Noumaan, *University of Mumbai (India)*

- 99 Between BurnOut and BoreOut. Stress perceptions in the professional environment of corporate communications**
 Rademacher, Lars, *Hochschule Darmstadt - University of Applied Sciences (Germany)*
 Stork, Werner, *Hochschule Darmstadt - University of Applied Sciences (Germany)*
 Seidenglanz, René, *Quadriga University of Applied Sciences, Berlin (Germany)*
- 101 An exploratory study among Generation Z UK PR professionals and their employers examining their subjective attitudes toward work-placed well-being**
 Read, Kevin, *University of Greenwich (UK)*
 Ambarchian, Nyree, *Jack & Grace (UK)*
 Chmiel, Michal, *Royal Holloway, University of London (UK)*
- 103 Contributions to Societal Well-Being by the Higher Educational Institutions in Türkiye: The Analysis of Student-initiated Social Responsibility Projects in Public Relations Programs**
 Saran, Mine, *Ege University (Turkey)*
 Görpe, T. Serra, *University of Sharjah (U.A.E.)*
- 106 Ukraine's Use of Nation Branding Amidst Russia's Full-Scale Invasion**
 Savchuk, Viktoriia, *University of Maryland (USA)*
- 108 Let's Tango with the Wind. Disinformation and Onshore Wind Turbines**
 Scott, Anthony, *Hanze UAS (The Netherlands)*
 Adema, Niels, *Hanze UAS (The Netherlands)*
 Elving, W.J.L., *Hanze UAS (The Netherlands)*
 Schepers, Gerard, *Hanze UAS (The Netherlands)*
- 110 External Communications of Employee Well-being and Care: Contexts and Discrepancies**
 Selakovic, Marko, *S P Jain School of Global Management (U.A.E.)*
 Ljepava, Nikolina, *American University in the Emirates (U.A.E.)*
 Krkic, Marijana, *University of Belgrade (Serbia)*

112 News Agencies as a Blind Sport in PR Research. Results of Qualitative Interviews in the New Media Landscape of the Early 21st Century

Sievert, Holger, *Macromedia University of Applied Sciences Cologne (Germany)*

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

Inderhees, Marco, *Macromedia University of Applied Sciences Cologne (Germany)*

114 Crisis Communication Scholarship: The Dire Need for a Socio-cultural Perspective

Sriramesh, Krishnamurthy, *University of Colorado (USA)*

117 Navigating Informed Health Choices: Sociocultural Factors and Information Channels in the Context of Chiropractic Services in Croatia

Takahashi, Marta, *Catholic University of Croatia (Croatia)*

119 Communication Competence and Challenges of Family Caregivers in Navigating End-of-Life Conversations

Tan, Rachel, *Singapore Management University (Singapore)*

Ho, Kelvin, *Singapore Management University (Singapore)*

Deng, Olivia, *Singapore Management University (Singapore)*

Chia, Glen, *Singapore Management University (Singapore)*

Yeo, Su Lin, *Singapore Management University (Singapore)*

122 Impact of CSR and Corporate Sustainability Communication on the Rising Green Generation in Singapore

Teo, Justin, *Singapore Management University (Singapore)*

Gan, Jane, *Singapore Management University (Singapore)*

Foo, Kai Yen, *Singapore Management University (Singapore)*

Sim, Lincoln, *Singapore Management University (Singapore)*

Yeo, Su Lin, *Singapore Management University (Singapore)*

125 “Buying mercy” Effective altruism, philanthropy and social purpose as public relations

Thompson, Gareth, *University of the Arts London (UK)*

- 127** How digitalization of internal communication affects internal communication satisfaction, employee engagement and consequently perceived life satisfaction

Tkalac Verčič, Ana, *University of Zagreb (Croatia)*

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

Anja Špoljarić, *University of Zagreb (Croatia)*

- 130** Navigating Purpose-Oriented Communication: Insights from Dutch Public Relations Professionals

van der Zeeuw, Jeroen, *Ede Christian University (The Netherlands)*

- 132** CBO (community-based organisation) communication strategies to facilitate long-term relationships towards sustainability: A case study of iDUC

van Zyl, Marné, *North-West University (South Africa)*

Kloppers, Elbé, *North-West University (South Africa)*

Bezuidenhout, Louise, *North-West University (South Africa)*

- 134** Communication and War: Hate Speech, Propaganda War and Denial of Facts in the Tigray Ethiopia War of 2020-2023

Veen, Ton, *Mekelle University (Ethiopia)*

Weleslase, Brhane, *Mekelle University (Ethiopia)*

- 136** A smile is worth a thousand words: The role of internal communications in nurturing an emotional culture of joy at work

Willemse, Michelle, *Erasmus University (The Netherlands)*

Men, Linjuan Rita, *University of Florida (USA)*

- 138** Get Closer: How Personality Tests Enhance Brand Awareness, Attitudes, and Engagement?

Wu, Shih Chia, *The Chinese University of Hong Kong (Hong Kong)*

Zheng, Nanxiao, *The Chinese University of Hong Kong (Hong Kong)*

141 The Effects of Digital Activism on Social Wellness of Digital Natives in Singapore

Xu, Zhiying Daphne, *Singapore Management University (Singapore)*

Loi, Hui Ling Fiona, *Singapore Management University (Singapore)*

Loi, Ai Ling Stephanie, *Singapore Management University (Singapore)*

Yeow, Zheng Hoe Vernon, *Singapore Management University (Singapore)*

Yeo, Su Lin, *Singapore Management University (Singapore)*

144 Fostering Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Organizations: Perspectives from Public Relations Leaders

Yue, Cen April, *Boston University (USA)*

Bradshaw, Amanda S., *University of Mississippi (USA)*

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

Moon, Britt, *University of Mississippi (USA)*

146 Public Relations Meets Artificial Intelligence: Assessing Utilization and Outcomes

Yue, Cen April, *Boston University (USA)*

Men, Linjuan Rita, *University of Florida (USA)*

Davis, Donna Z., *University of Oregon (USA)*

Mitson, Renee, *University of Florida (USA)*

Zhou, Alvin, *University of Minnesota (USA)*

Al Rawi, Ahmed Ibraheem, *University of Virginia (USA)*

PAPERS

- 148** In a crisis situation, which public communication message strategies are best deployed using short-form social media?

Alotaibi, Mutaz, *Cardiff University and King Abdulaziz University (UK and Saudi Arabia)*

Kinnear, Susan, *Cardiff University (UK)*

- 152** Well-being. A regenerative and structured approach to corporate welfare: engagement, inclusion, sustainability and communication

Milan, Gloria, *ICDLAB Sostenibilità e Comunicazione (Italy)*

Martello, Stefano, *Comm to Action (Italy)*

Bonometto, Caterina, *ICDLAB Sostenibilità e Comunicazione (Italy)*

- 158** News Agencies as a Blind Spot in PR Research. Results of Qualitative Interviews in the New Media Landscape of the Early 21st Century

Sievert, Holger, *Macromedia University of Applied Sciences Cologne (Germany)*

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

Inderhees, Marco, *Macromedia University of Applied Sciences Cologne (Germany)*

- 170** Navigating Informed Health Choices: Sociocultural Factors and Information Channels in the Context of Chiropractic Services in Croatia

Takahashi, Marta, *Catholic University of Croatia (Croatia)*



Dejan Verčič University of Ljubljana and Herman & partnerji (Slovenia) • Dejan Verčič is Professor, 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 (EUPRERA). 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 currently the 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. His rich teaching profile includes teaching a range of courses in 10 universities in the North America, Asia, Australasia, and Europe while also delivering seminars/talks in over 40 countries. He is recognized for his scholarship on global public relations, culture and public relations, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and public relations for development. His program of research has resulted in 8 edited or co-edited books (one currently in print and another in preparation on crisis communication cases), over 120 articles and book chapters, and over 150 conference papers and other presentations around the world. A recent bibliometric analysis published in Public Relations Review placed him among the top five cited global public relations scholars. In 2004, the Institute of Public Relations (USA) recognized his scholarship by honoring him with the prestigious Pathfinder Award for “original scholarly research contributing to the public relations body of knowledge.”

Adema, Niels, Hanze UAS (The Netherlands)

AI Rawi, Ahmed Ibraheem, University of Virginia (USA) • Ahmed Al Rawi is an incoming postdoctoral fellow at the Karsh Institute for Democracy at the University of Virginia. He is a social scientist and media and communication policy researcher who utilizes both quantitative and qualitative research methods to study critical issues related to information communication technologies (ICTs) and platform infrastructures, which influence individuals' communication activities, data exchange, and digital innovation on a global scale, including the United States. Alrawi's research are twofold: (1) Surveillance, Privacy, & the Implications of ICTs and (2) Broadband Platform Policy and Deployment.



Akanbi, Francis, University of Florida (USA) • Francis Akanbi is a third-year doctoral student in the Department of Public Relations at the University of Florida. His research interests include Public Relations Ethics, Corporate Purpose, and Corporate Social Responsibility. He also studies the intersection between language use and strategic communication.



Alotaibi, Mutaz, Cardiff University and King Abdulaziz University (UK & Saudi Arabia) • Mutaz Alotaibi is a lecturer at the Faculty of Media and Communication College, King Abdulaziz University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. He is a PhD candidate researcher at Cardiff University, United Kingdom. He has a Bachelor's degree in Public Relations and Media from King Saud University and a Master's degree in Public Relations and Communication from Seton Hall University, New Jersey, United States. Moreover, he is a PhD researcher at Cardiff University in the field of Public Relations and Strategic Communication. Mutaz has had great working experiences since 2009. During his Bachelor's and master's studies, he trained at the Saudi Ministry of Interior, United Nations Organization in New York City, Light of Gold PR Consultation LTD in New Jersey and Saudi Energy Efficiency Centre in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. In 2019, he became an academic lecturer.



Altendorf, Antonia, Sociological Research Institute Göttingen (Germany) • Antonia Altendorf is a researcher at the Sociological Research Institute Göttingen (SOFI), Germany. She is currently researching issues relating to the design of digitalization in the world of work as part of the interdisciplinary Future Lab Society and Work at the Centre for Digital Innovation in Lower Saxony (ZDIN). Her focus is on the opportunities, challenges, potentials and necessities of digitalization processes in public administration.



Ambarchian, Nyree, Jack & Grace (UK) • Nyree Ambarchian is a Co-Founder of Jack & Grace, a purpose-driven communications agency. On a mission to use comms as a force for good, Jack & Grace is a B Corp and only works with organisations that value people, planet, and profit equally. Nyree has twenty years' experience in communications, specialising in behaviour change campaigns. Her career began in the marketing team of a sustainability charity, before working on community engagement programmes to support the development of large-scale renewables. For the last ten years she's worked in PR & communications agencies, leading campaigns for a wide range of clients. She is a strategic communicator skilled at helping organisations communicate in the most compelling way to reach key audiences. She works on award-winning campaigns for government, not-for-profits, and brands that engage consumers and create positive change. Over the years, that's included campaigns for the likes of Riverford, Karma Drinks, and Defra.



Baptista, Raphaël, CAPP/ISCSP-Ulisboa (Portugal) • Raphaël Marques Baptista is a Visiting Assistant Professor at the Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Políticas (ISCSP) and the University of Beira Interior (UBI). In 2022, he completed his PhD in Communication Sciences, with the classification Unanimously Approved with Distinction and Praise, presenting a research that deals with health online communication. He is also a collaborating researcher at CAPP and LabCom. In 2018, he received the ISCSP award for scientific merit and advanced research. He is currently working on two scientific projects: HealMe: What health managers in Portugal think about digital health and Communication of Public Health Policies in Portugal – ComHealthPPP.



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).



Belim, Célia, CAPP/ISCSP-Ulisboa (Portugal) • Célia Belim is an Assistant Professor in Communication Sciences (CC) at the Institute of Social and Political Sciences, University of Lisbon (ISCSP, ULisboa), teaching since 2000. She has a PhD in Communication Sciences, a master's degree in Political Science, and a postgraduate degree in Islamic Studies. Currently, she is executive coordinator of the CC first study cycle and teaches in the three CC study cycles. She coordinates the funded project Communication of Health Public Policies in Portugal – ComHealthPPP, associated with the Center for Public Administration and Public Policies (CAPP, ISCSP), in which she is an integrated researcher. She is director and scientific coordinator of the Revista Portuguesa de Literacia em Saúde and vice-president of the Scientific Council of the Portuguese Society of Health Literacy.



Bezuidenhout, Louise, North-West University (South Africa) • Louise Bezuidenhout is a senior lecturer at the School of Communication at the North-West University (NWU), South Africa. She holds a master's degree in communication management from the University of Pretoria (UP) and obtained her PhD in Communication on Corporate Social Responsibility (CRS) communication, from the NWU. She lectures at undergraduate and postgraduate levels and supervises master's and PhD students. Her research and publications include sustainability communication, strategic communication, development communication and stakeholder management. She is also involved in community engagement projects that focus on service learning and engaged research.



Bonometto, Caterina, ICDLAB Sostenibilità e Comunicazione (Italy) • A psychologist, specialized in Work and Organizational Psychology, she has worked for over fifteen years in the field of human resources, in recruitment and organisational development projects in Italy and France. Since 2016, she has been working with ICDLAB Sostenibilità e Comunicazione, extending her expertise to the field of sustainability and communication. She currently supports the analysis and definition of sustainability strategies, with particular reference to the social sphere, the drafting of sustainability reports and the design of training interventions.



Bradshaw, Amanda S., University of Mississippi (USA) • Amanda S. Bradshaw, Ph.D., is an assistant professor of integrated marketing communications in the School of Journalism and New Media at the University of Mississippi. She primarily teaches in the public relations specialization. Her research interests are threefold: the nexus of health communication and social networking interactions, Inclusivity and identity formation, and strategic communications pedagogy. Dr. Bradshaw earned her Ph.D. in mass communication from the University of Florida, her M.S. in integrated marketing communications from West Virginia University, and her B.A. in journalism from the University of Alabama.



Butera, Alfonsa, Università IULM (Italy) • Alfonsa Butera is Adjunct Professor of Corporate 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. She is

Head of Coordination and Researcher of the Centre for Employee Relations and Communication at Università IULM.



Castelli, Nicola, Università IULM (Italy) • Nicola Castelli is a lecturer for the course of Organization Theory & HR Management at Università IULM, Italy. He is a senior trainer in organizational field, author and co-author of articles published in journals such as Harvard Business Review Italia and books dedicated to the evolution of the healthcare system published by Il Sole 24 Ore. He is co-founder of MensCorpore, a consultancy and training company focused on personal and organizational well-being and development. He collaborates as a researcher with the Centre for Employee Relations and Communication at Università IULM.



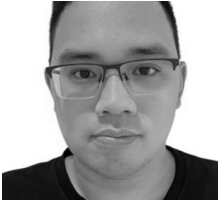
Charlton, Dan, SPFT (UK) • Dan Charlton a Board level Chief Communications Officer in the National Health Service (NHS) in England and Deputy Director at the Centre for Health Communications Research, Buckinghamshire New University, U.K. He is currently undertaking at PhD at Bournemouth University, U.K on leadership, communication and organisational change in the NHS. This research involves the first study of its kind to explore the phenomenon of organisational change from the perspective of NHS Chief

Executive Officers.



Chen, Yi-Ru Regina, Hong Kong Baptist University (Hong Kong) • Yi-Ru Regina Chen, Ph.D., is a Professor and Department Chair of the Department of Communication Studies at Hong Kong Baptist University. Dr Chen's research focuses on how public relations can bring mutual values to various organizations and stakeholders via strategic communication, especially in the context of greater China. Her research areas include strategic communication, social media behaviors and gamification, CSR, creating shared value and

purpose-driven organizations. She has published in leading communication and new media journals, such as Public Relations Review, Journal of Public Relations Research, Telematics and Informatics, Computers in Human Behavior, American Behavioral Scientist, and Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly. Dr. Chen's research was funded by several institutes, including the Hong Kong Research Grants Council and the Arthur W. Page Center of Penn State University.



Chia, Glen, Singapore Management University (Singapore) • Glen Chia is a skilled communicator and currently heads the Category Management team at Swee Lee Holdings, a music company based in Singapore that specialises in both retail and distribution of musical products across South East Asia. Glen has a decade of experience with managing brand communications and have worked with more than 100 global musical brands, to expand and grow their presence in the region. Glen holds a Bachelor of Arts in Communications from the University at Buffalo, and a Master of Science in Communication Management from the Singapore Management University.



Chmiel, Michal, Royal Holloway, University of London (UK) • Michal Chmiel (PhD) is a Senior Lecturer (Associate Professor) in Psychology. He is a former Public Relations practitioner, and now researcher and educator. Currently he is the Director of External Engagement and Partnerships of the School of Life Sciences & Environment (Royal Holloway, University of London). Michal's research interests revolve around the role of the impact of Brand PR on attitudes and well-being of audiences. He has also researched into the mechanism of sharing fake news and PR education in the UK. Michal is a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, and a member of the European Public Relations Education and Research Association and the Chartered Institute of Public Relations.



Coombs, W. Timothy, Centre for Crisis and Risk Communications (USA) • W. Timothy Coombs (PhD Purdue University, USA) is an advisor for the Centre for Crisis and Risk Communications. His primary area of research and consulting is crisis communication. His works include the award-winning book *Ongoing Crisis Communication*, coediting the *Handbook of Crisis Communication*, and co-writing *Strategic Sport Communication: Traditional and Transmedia Strategies for a Global Sport Market*. His crisis communication research has won multiple awards from professional organizations including the Jackson, Jackson & Wagner Behavioral Science Prize. He is a Fellow in the International Communication Association.



Cruz, Carla, CIEG/ISCSP-Ulissboa (Portugal) • Carla Cruz has a PhD in Communication Sciences (specialization in Sociology of Communication), a Master's degree in Sociology and a degree in Social Communication. She is an Assistant Professor at the Institute of Social and Political Sciences, at the Universidade de Lisboa, teaching within the scientific fields of Communication Sciences (1st, 2nd and 3rd Cycles) and Sociology (1st and 2nd Cycles). She is an integrated researcher at the Centre for Public Administration and Public Policies (CAPP) and a collaborating researcher at the Interdisciplinary Centre for Gender Studies (CIEG). Internationally she is also a member of the Portuguese team of a EUPRERA project. She is Vice-President of the Observatório da Criança – Associação '100 Violência' and member of the advisory board of the Observatório do Mundo Islâmico. She also researches on digital media and social change, whether in personal, educational, family or organizational contexts.



Cunha, Maria João, CIEG/ISCSP-Ulissboa (Portugal) • Maria João Cunha is Associate professor in Communication Sciences at Institute of Social and Political Sciences (ISCSP), University of Lisbon. Co-founding member and integrated researcher of Interdisciplinary Centre for Gender Studies (CIEG), in matters related to gender and communication. PhD in Communication Sciences, specialized in Sociology of Communication with a thesis about media representations and impacts on young women. Master in Sociology and graduated in Social Communication in ISCSP, University of Lisbon. She is CIEG's subdirector. She is reviewer for scientific journals in gender studies and communication, and apart from scientific papers, is the author of several books on communication, sociology and image (*A Imagem Corporal [Body Image]* (2004), *Sociologia*

da Comunicação [Sociology of Communication] (2011), Corpo e Imagem na Sociedade de Consumo [Body and Image in consumption societies] (2014) e Estudos de Imagem [Visual Studies] (2021). Main research areas focus on gender and communication/media, and the body.



Davis, Donna Z., University of Oregon (USA) • Donna Davis is an expert in virtual reality (VR), digital embodiment, and tech equity. She is director of the Oregon Reality Lab and the Immersive Media Communication master's program at the University of Oregon. Her research focuses on the potential uses of social virtual worlds, and other emerging immersive media, with a special interest in marginalized and vulnerable communities. Her research on embodied experience and identity among people with disabilities was funded by the National Science Foundation. She has also extensively studied people with Parkinson's disease who find and build support in the virtual world.



Deng, Olivia, Singapore Management University (Singapore) • Olivia Deng is a dynamic marketing and communications strategist with a rich background in Real Estate and Hospitality and an entrepreneurial stint catering to clients across Europe, China, and the US. Her career has flourished in diverse cultural settings, having worked and studied in France, the US, China, and Singapore. Olivia holds a Bachelor of Science from the University of Southern California and a Master's from Singapore Management University. She is fluent in English, Chinese, and French, enabling her to adeptly navigate multinational marketing strategies. Beyond her corporate endeavours, Olivia explores her passions as a researcher, yoga instructor, street photographer, and painter.



Doherty, Margaret, St. Mary's University (UK) • Margaret Doherty MCIPR, FRSA is the Director of the Centre for the Art of Dying Well at St Mary's University, London. A communications and engagement specialist with extensive experience at home and internationally. She is highly skilled in stakeholder relations, public affairs, and reputational management – and has led on major change and development programmes. Her focus at St Mary's is on living and dying well and the role that digital health can play in end of life and bereavement care. She is a trustee of St Joseph's Hospice in London and also has experience in the governance of primary schools.



Dong, Chuqing, Michigan State University (USA) • Chuqing Dong (Ph.D.) is an Assistant Professor of Advertising and Public Relations. Her research focuses on public relations, corporate social responsibility, strategic communication in the nonprofit/government sectors, and digital media.



Downes, Edward J., Boston University (USA) • Edward J. Downes, Ph.D., M.P.A., is an associate professor of public relations at Boston University's College of Communication. Prior to joining academic full-time he worked, for 10 years, throughout metropolitan Washington, D.C., as a communications professional. He was employed by public, private, and nonprofit organizations, among them the U.S. Congress. His research has been published in six academic journals and he has presented at numerous at academic conferences.



Eker Akgöz, Burcu, Bahcesehir University (Turkey) • Burcu Eker Akgöz is professor in Public Relations and Publicity at Bahçeşehir University, İstanbul. She earned her Ph.D. in Public Relations from Marmara University. She started working as a research assistant at the Faculty of Communication in Bahçeşehir University in 2005. She is currently teaching several classes on Public Relations and Publicity. Her areas of interest include event management, corporate culture, organizational commitment, crisis communication and corporate responsibility.



Elving, W. J. L., Hanze University of Applied Sciences (The Netherlands) • Wim Elving is professor Sustainable Communication at the Hanze University of Applied Sciences, Groningen, the Netherlands. He is part of EnTranCe, Centre of Expertise Energy, that focuses on the energy transition and the Sustainable Society. Elving received the distinguished scholar award in September 2022 from Euprera. His current research is involved with communicative and behavioural interventions to create this sustainable future. He has contributed to more than 150 articles, book chapters, books, editorials, blogs. His research expertise is besides sustainable communications, corporate communication, internal and change communication, CSR communication and branding. He is a member of the A.W. Page Society, and member of the board of directors of Euprera.



Engin, Elif, Bahçeşehir University (Turkey) • Elif Engin is professor in Public Relations at Bahçeşehir University, İstanbul. She earned her Ph.D. in Public Relations from Marmara University. She started working as a research assistant at the Faculty of Communication in Bahçeşehir University in 2001. She is currently teaching several classes on Public Relations. Her areas of interest include corporate storytelling and narrative, social responsibility, corporate culture, and strategic public relations management.



Firmino, Sandra, CIEG/ISCSP-Ulisboa (Portugal) • Sandra Firmino has a PhD in Administration Sciences from the School of Economics and Management of the University of Minho (EEG-UMinho) and a degree and master's degree in Management and Public Administration from the Institute of Social and Political Sciences of the University of Lisbon (ISCSP, ULisboa). Assistant Professor at ISCSP, ULisboa, teaching subjects related to Research Methods, Strategic Management and the theory of Public Administration and Public Policies at undergraduate, master's and doctoral levels of the Public Administration Coordination Unit courses. Executive Coordinator of the PhD in Public Administration. Integrated researcher at the Center for Public Administration and Public Policies (CAPP), ISCSP, where she was responsible for the research project "Assessment of the Public Policy for Restorative Justice in Portugal" (CAPP). She currently coordinates the research project "GOVAPP – Governance, Innovation and Institutional Arrangements in Portuguese Public Administration", and collaborates in the projects "Widegama – Worldwide Government Accountability Map" and "ComHealthPPP – Communication of Health Public Policies in Portugal".



Fitzpatrick, Kathy R., University of South Florida (USA) • Kathy R. Fitzpatrick is professor and director of the Zimmerman School of Advertising & Mass Communications at the University of South Florida (USF). She is an internationally recognized scholar in public relations and public diplomacy, an attorney and a senior public relations advisor. She is also a faculty fellow and former research fellow in the Center on Public Diplomacy in the Annenberg School at the University of Southern California. Fitzpatrick moved to USF from American University (AU), where she served as professor and senior associate dean for academic affairs in the School of Communication. Prior to joining AU, Fitzpatrick was associate dean of graduate programs and research in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Florida International University. She previously directed graduate programs in public relations at Quinnipiac University and DePaul University and the

undergraduate program in public relations at Southern Methodist University. Fitzpatrick's research has been published in leading communication and diplomacy journals and she is the author of *The Future of U.S. Public Diplomacy: An Uncertain Fate* and co-editor of *Ethics in Public Relations: Responsible Advocacy*.



Foo, Kai Yen, Singapore Management University (Singapore) • Results-driven leader in Product and Project Management, offering wealth of experience in driving strategic growth and fostering cross-functional collaborations between external and internal stakeholders. Proven track record in delivering and achieving multi-million dollar business goals. She is a Senior Manager (Product & Project Management) of EXCELITAS TECHNOLOGIES PTE LTD from Apr 2023 – Present. She worked as Product Manager III from Apr 2021 –

Mar 2023. Education: Executive Education in Advance Negotiations (INSEAD, Apr 2022 – Jun 2023), Master of Science in Communication Management (Singapore Management University, Jan 2019 – May 2020), Bachelor of Engineering in Electrical & Electronics (Nanyang Technological University, Aug 1997 – Feb 2003).

Gan, Jane, Singapore Management University (Singapore)



Geysi, Nilüfer, Bahçeşehir University (Turkey) • Nilüfer Geysi is an Assistant Professor who received a Ph.D. in Advertising and Public Relations from Bahçeşehir University and has been actively involved in research and academia for over 7 years. Geysi's doctoral thesis, which focused on climate change communication, specifically on communicative action, activism, and pro-environmental behavior, was awarded the Best Doctoral Thesis Award at Bahçeşehir University. Her research interests include sustainability, culture, digital media,

and crisis communication. She has lectured on climate change communication and strategic communication for sustainability, among other relevant courses. Geysi is a member of EUNES and is committed to advancing research and education in the field of public relations.



Goh, Jonathan, Singapore Management University (Singapore) • Jonathan Goh Kok Chye is the Director for External Relations at the Energy Market Authority of Singapore (EMA), a statutory board under the Ministry of Trade and Industry. He is the Singapore Senior Official on Energy at ASEAN, APEC and G20 meetings and is a member of the ASEAN Centre for Energy Governing Council. Jonathan oversees the organisation of the annual Singapore International Energy Week (SIEW), a premier global energy event. Prior to

joining the EMA, Jonathan took on various roles at the Public Service Division of the Prime Minister's Office, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Civil Service College. He also served as First Secretary (Political) in Tokyo, Consul (Political) in Hong Kong and Macao Special Administrative Regions (SAR) and Assistant Director in Jakarta. Jonathan read economics at Hitotsubashi University in Tokyo, and has a Master of Science in Communication Management at Singapore Management University. He was conferred the Public Administration Medal (Bronze) (2016) and the Long Service Medal (2023).



Görpe, T. Serra, University of Sharjah (U. A. E.) • T. Serra Gorpe is a professor of communication at the University of Sharjah (UAE). She received her Ph.D. in Public Relations and Advertising from Istanbul University. She holds a master's degree in Public Relations from Boston University, USA, and a master's degree in Social Psychology from Bosphorus University, Turkey. She was a professor in the Faculty of Communications at Istanbul University from 2000 to 2016. Before joining the University of Sharjah, she was a professor at

Zayed University College of Communication and Media Sciences (UAE). She has extensive industry experience working both for corporations and a public relations agency. Her current research interests are CSR/sustainability, international public relations, and crisis management.



He, Hanzi, University of Florida (USA) • PhD student of Mass Communication at College of Journalism and Communications at University of Florida. In 2023, she finished the Master in Mass Communication at University of Florida (Graduation with Honor). She uses quantitative method (survey), qualitative method (interview) and computational methods (i.e., automated text analysis, sentiment analysis) to study audience comments of media products (i.e., movies, TV shows) and health messages on social media. Her study aims to

explore 1) how online comments affect media consumers' behaviours and 2) how health messages can affect media agenda and public health policies.



Hejlová, Denisa, Charles University (Czech Republic) • Assoc. Prof. Denisa Hejlova, Ph.D. is a leading Czech scholar and communication consultant. She focuses on research, teaching and practice in strategic communication, public relations, public affairs or political communication. From 2011-23, Denisa Hejlova headed the Department of Marketing Communication and PR at Charles University in Prague, one of the most sought-after study programmes in the Czech Republic. Prior to that, she worked as a vice-dean for PR

and PR manager at the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Denisa was a Fulbright Visiting Scholar at Columbia University in New York in 2014 and studied intercultural communication at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies in 2005-06. Denisa has published comprehensive books on public relations (Grada, 2015) and strategic communication (Karolinum, 2024) for the Czech audience. She regularly publishes in academic journals and has been a guest lecturer at universities in Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, Japan, etc. In 2020 she started the first Czech MA programme in Strategic Communication at Charles University in Prague. Since 2023 she's the director of the Research Centre for Strategic Communication and the Charles University in Prague.



Ho, Kelvin, Singapore Management University (Singapore) • Kelvin Ho is an experienced leader currently serving as the General Manager of Mechanical Services at Inchcape Singapore. With 18 years of professional experience, Kelvin spent 14 years in the aerospace industry before transitioning to the automotive sector, driven by his passion for people management. He is committed to self-improvement and knowledge sharing, holding a Master in Business Administration from the University of Nottingham (2014) and a Master of Science in Communication Management from Singapore Management University. Recently, Kelvin has

begun an Executive Masters Business Administration course at the National University of Singapore, furthering his commitment to continuous learning.



Huang, Vincent, Hong Kong Baptist University (Hong Kong) • Dr. Vincent Huang is a research assistant professor of communication and the Director of the MA in Communication program at Hong Kong Baptist University. His research lies at the intersection of information and communication technology (ICT) and organizing. He is particularly interested in studying how social technology platforms structure, alter, and extend organizational communication processes. He is also interested in studying the user experience of ICTs in organizational and social contexts. In exploring these topics, he also examines the broader impact of ICT-driven organizing on emerging labor processes, public relations, and social culture.

of ICTs in organizational and social contexts. In exploring these topics, he also examines the broader impact of ICT-driven organizing on emerging labor processes, public relations, and social culture.



Hung-Baesecke, Chun-Ju Flora, University of Technology Sydney (Australia) • Flora Hung-Baesecke, Ph.D., teaches at University of Technology Sydney in Australia. Her research interests include CSR, stakeholder engagement, sustainability, creating shared value, purpose-driven organizations, social media, and internal communication. She publishes her research in Public Relations Review, Journal of Public Relations Research, Computers in Human Behavior, American Behavioral Scientist, International Journal of Strategic Communication, Journal of Public Relations Research, Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly, etc.

Communication, Journal of Public Relations Research, Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly, etc.

She is on the editorial boards of Journal of Public Relations Research, International Journal of Strategic Communication, and Communication Research Reports. She is the Chair of the Applied/Public Policy Research Award in the International Communication Association, a member of the Arthur W. Page Society, Secretary General for International Affairs in Public Relations Society of China, and a member of the advisory board of International Public Relations Research Conference.



Illing, Jannike, OFFIS Oldenburg (Germany) • Jannike Illing is a researcher at the OFFIS Institute for Information Technology and deals with the support of the constellation of time-critical, parallel and spatially distributed work tasks in different work scenarios by Augmented Reality. She investigates how this technology can be used to reduce the complexity of this task constellation for people in real work scenarios. In doing so, she follows the Human-Centered Design (HCD) approach, in which the potential users become the starting point and benchmark for the design in both development and evaluation.



Inderhees, Marco, Macromedia University of Applied Sciences Cologne (Germany) • Prof. Dr. Marco Inderhees teaches media management at Macromedia University in Frankfurt. He initially completed his B.A. in Brand Communication and Advertising at Macromedia University in Cologne. He then decided to do an M.A. in Media & Communication Management, also at Macromedia in Cologne, and was one of the first Master's graduates at this location. He then moved to the University of Leipzig, where he completed his doctorate in the Department of Communication and Social Sciences. His dissertation deals with the topic of co-creation in social networks. During his studies, he and a business partner founded the student consultancy Roots-Campus in 2016, which is still active in the field of management consulting today and also offers agency services.

Kinnear, Susan, Cardiff University (UK)



Kloppers, Elbé, North-West University (South Africa) • Elbé Kloppers is a senior lecturer at the School of Communication at the North-West University (NWU), South Africa. She obtained both her MA (in corporate communication), as well as her PhD on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication from the NWU. Her research focuses on development communication, sustainability communication, CSR communication and relationship management. She lectures modules in development communication and research methodology at undergraduate and Honours level. She supervises Master's and Doctoral candidates in all her research focus areas.



Krkić, Marijana, University of Belgrade (Serbia) • Mrs. Marijana Krkić is a skilled communication professional who is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Belgrade Faculty of Political Sciences. Krkić worked in the public and private sectors in a variety of roles for nearly 20 years, specializing in marketing communications, strategic communications, and media relations. In addition to the academic research commitments, he is currently working as a Special Media Advisor for the Republic of Serbia's Ministry of

Environmental Protection and is serving as a communication consultant for non-governmental organizations and businesses.



Kushniryk, Alla, Mount Saint Vincent University (Canada) • Kushniryk, Alla, Mount Saint Vincent University, Canada. Alla Kushniryk, PhD, is an associate professor in the Department of Communication Studies at Mount Saint Vincent University in Atlantic Canada. The department, which recently celebrated its 40th anniversary, is renowned for its Public Relations undergraduate and graduate programs at MSVU, recognized as the flagship PR programs in Canada. Alla was one of the investigators in a research partnership with the Canadian Public Relations Society titled the GAP (Generally Accepted Practices) VIII Canadian study. Her research focuses on social media, organizational trust, and quantitative research methods.



Laborde, Aurélie, Bordeaux Montaigne University (France) • Aurélie Laborde is senior lecturer in information and communication sciences in France. She is a specialist in organisational communication. She is editorial director of the French-language journal *Communication & organisation* and coordinator of the COS (Communication, organisation, and society) section of the MICA research laboratory (UR Médiation, information, communication et arts). She runs the Master's degree in Organisational Communication at the University of Bordeaux Montaigne. She is interested in hidden, invisible and forgotten communication phenomena in organisations. Her most recent research programme, CIVILINUM (2018-2022), dealt with digital incivilities at work, and her latest book is entitled "Violences numériques et résistances au travail" (De Boeck, 2023).

Lee, Yeunjae, Colorado State University (USA)



Leonzio, Marco, Università IULM (Italy) • Marco Leonzio is Adjunct Professor of Organization Theory & HR Management at Università IULM, Italy. He has been working as trainer, coach, facilitator and organizational development consultant for over 20 years. He has designed and led projects about organizational change, HR processes and leadership development. In 2015 he became Gestalt counselor at the CSTG - Gestalt school in Milan. He is co-founder of MensCorpore, a consultancy and training company focused on personal and organizational well-being and development. He collaborates as a researcher with the Centre for Employee Relations and Communication at Università IULM.

Lincoln, Sim, Singapore Management University (Singapore)



Ljepava, Nikolina, American University in the Emirates (U.A.E.) • Dr Nikolina Ljepava is Department Chair of Marketing and Management at American University in the Emirates College of Business Administration. She is a practice-oriented academic with extensive industry experience in areas of marketing research, marketing communications, e-business, and evaluation and assessment from America, Europe and Asia. She holds a PhD with specialization in Marketing Research from University of Belgrade, and two master's degrees in data analysis and e-business following a degree in Psychology from University of Windsor, Canada. Her research interests include online consumer behavior, psychology of social media, application of artificial intelligence, digital marketing, neuromarketing, survey methodology and online panel research. She is an author of numerous conference papers and articles and had successful media appearances on the above-mentioned topics. In 2024, she was awarded as the most influential women in education in the Middle East and recognized by Higher Education Digest as one of the leaders of the future in higher education. In addition to teaching, research and business experience, Dr. Nikolina is also dedicated to community development and engagement especially in the area of youth Internet safety education.



Loi, Hui Ling Fiona, Singapore Management University (Singapore) • Hui Ling Fiona Loi is an assistant director in the information plans branch in the Singapore Armed Forces where she leads a team to develop, drive and oversee information policies, strategies, and campaign plans for the Digital Intelligence Service. Having spent 14 years in the government sector working on various portfolios, she was responsible for communication and information policy, media relations, and new media strategy and planning.



Malczok, Melanie, University of Applied Sciences Osnabrück (Germany) • Dr. Melanie Malczok is a research assistant in the Future Lab Society and Work at the Centre for Digital Innovation Lower Saxony (ZDIN, Osnabrück University of Applied Sciences). She completed her doctorate at the Otto-Friedrich-University Bamberg on the constitution of relevance in organizations. Her current research focuses on internal organizational communication, human-technology interaction in organizations and strategic communication of social movements.



Martello, Stefano, Comm to Action (Italy) • Journalist, communicator and author, is involved in integrated communication, with a focus on communication issues for the third sector and crisis management. Member of PA Social working group on environmental communication, he is senior mentor of the Comm To Action communication lab in Bologna, coordinator of Eco Media Academy and co-director of Pacini Editore's New Fabric Series.



Mazzei, Alessandra, Università IULM (Italy) • Alessandra Mazzei is Associate Professor in Management at the Department of Business LECB "Carlo A. Ricciardi", Università IULM, Italy. Her main research interests are: corporate communication; employee communication and engagement; organizational voice, silence and dissent; whistleblowing; diversity & inclusion, internal crisis communication. Her work has been published in journals such as Business Ethics Quarterly and Journal of Business Research. She is Coordinator of the bachelor programme in Corporate Communication and Public Relations and Director of the Centre for Employee Relations and Communication at Università IULM.



Meißner, Florian, Macromedia University of Applied Sciences Cologne (Germany) • Florian Meissner is Professor for Media Management and Journalism at Macromedia University of Applied Sciences. He serves as Chair of the Crisis Communication Section of ECREA and is Principal Investigator at the research project DigiFit, which focuses on risk communication in the context of cybersecurity and is funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research. Further interests in research and teaching include corporate communication, international journalism and political communication. He has also worked as a journalist for public broadcasters in Germany.



Men, Linjuan Rita, University of Florida (USA) • Linjuan Rita Men, Ph.D, APR, is a Professor of Public Relations and Director of Internal Communication Research in the College of Journalism and Communications at the University of Florida. She founded and directs the Internal Communication Research Hub, a virtual space dedicated to fostering innovative research, education, and best practices in internal communication. With a background in corporate communication research and consulting, Men's research interests include internal communication, leadership communication, emerging technologies, and entrepreneurial communications.



Milan, Gloria, ICDLAB Sostenibilità e Comunicazione (Italy) • A professional communicator with 25 years of national and international experience in various fields of communication, she has worked with various companies and organisations over the years. She was a lecturer in Social Communication at the University of Padua. In 2013 she founded ICDLAB Sostenibilità e Comunicazione, with which she now advises and trains companies and institutions on sustainability strategies and their communication. She is a member of FERPI (Italian Federation of Public Relations), a GRI (Global Reporting Initiative) professional for sustainability reporting and a sustainability specialist at Fòrema, a training and consultancy company of Confindustria Veneto Est. She is the author of several articles on sustainability and SMEs.



Mitson, Renee, University of Florida (USA) • Renee Mitson is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Florida College of Journalism and Communications. Her work explores internal public relations with an emphasis on leadership communication. She is particularly interested in female leadership communication, differing perceptions of diverse leaders among followers, and psychological outcomes as a result of leaders' communication. Mitson has over a decade of professional experience as public relations counsel and corporate strategy at brands such as Virgin, Burger King, Schneider Electric, and Electrolux.



Moon, Britt, University of Mississippi (USA) • Britt (Britt) Moon, Ph.D., is a visiting professor of integrated marketing communications at the School of Journalism and New Media, University of Mississippi. She obtained her Ph.D. in Media Arts and Sciences from the Media School at Indiana University. Dr. Moon's research investigates different stakeholders' information behavior, particularly in areas such as issue/crisis management, reputation management, and relationship management. Currently, her research explores the associations between internal communication strategies and employee silence. Additionally, she teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in public relations, corporate reputation, and integrated marketing communications.



Morehouse, Jordan, University of Colorado Boulder (USA) • Jordan Morehouse (Ph.D.) is an Assistant Professor of Public Relations at the University of Colorado Boulder. Her research examines the impact of identity as well as moral and ethical orientations on public relations strategies and outcomes. Jordan is a mixed-method scholar and has recently published research in *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *Public Relations Review*, and *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*.

Ng, Ai Ling Stephanie, Singapore Management University (Singapore)

Oliveira, Evandro, Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa (Portugal)

Ong, William, Singapore Management University (Singapore)

Orlov, Stanislav, Mount Saint Vincent University (Canada)

Ortová, Nina, Charles University (Czech Republic)



Pavlović Bujas, Nataša, IPRA, President • Nataša Pavlović Bujas is curious explorer and inexhaustible performer, passionate about behavioral sciences and behavioral economics. She graduated chemistry at University of Belgrade in 1990, but soon after she founded Blumen group, an agency for integrated communications and business development. She stands for female touch in business - so she became the first elected women in Serbian Association of Employers Presidency, and still holds this position. With her team - and as an communication expert and business coach - she was awarded with 25+ national and international awards – among them are IPRA Golden World Awards and IPRA GWA Grand Prix, as well as Public Relations Society of Serbia Special Award for personal achievements in public relations, UEPS – Gold Prize (Serbian Advertising Practitioners Association) for representing Serbian marketing and PR practice worldwide, and many others. She has more than 25 years of experience in strategic communications, brand development and market positioning. In the last ten years Nataša has worked as a business coach, and gives guest courses and lectures in Europe and the US. Nataša is International Public Relations Association President 2024 and proud alumna of the Fortune Most Powerful Women - U.S. Department of State Global Women's Mentoring Partnership Program. She describes herself as: Creative thinker. Problem solver. Business coach. Mentor. Entrepreneur. Communication Expert. Internet fun. Mom non-stop. Gallup says about her: Futurist. Strategist. Learner. Individualist. Connected.



Qin, Yufan "Sunny", James Madison University (USA) • Yufan "Sunny" Qin, Ph.D. (University of Florida) is an Assistant Professor of Public Relations in the School of Communication Studies at James Madison University. Her background is primarily in internal communication, leadership communication, employee engagement, corporate social advocacy, and relationship management. She has published articles in prestigious peer-reviewed journals, such as the Journal of Public Relations Research, Public Relations Review, Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly, and International Journal of Business Communications. She received the Cision Insights Fellowship from the Institute of Public Relations in 2022. She also won multiple research paper awards from major communication and public relations conferences, such as PRSA Educators Academy Summit, International Public Relations Research Conference (IPRRC), Annual Conference of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC). She primarily teaches courses in the public relations concentration, including public relations campaigns and advanced research methods, as well as general communication course.



Quarantino, Luca, Università IULM (Italy) • Luca Quarantino is Assistant Professor in Organization Theory & HR Management at the Department of Business LECB "Carlo A. Ricciardi", Università IULM, Italy. His main research interests are: organisational culture; employee engagement and service culture; alignment and cooperation between education and labour market; generation mix; psychological contract between organizations and individuals. He is a member of the Editorial Board of the scientific journal Industrial and Commercial Training and is Senior Project Leader of the Centre for Employee Relations and Communication at Università IULM.



Qureshi, Noumaan, University of Mumbai (India) • Balancing practice & philosophy, Noumaan is currently pursuing his PhD from the University of Mumbai (India), under the Department of Communication & Journalism. The topic of his research is oriented towards crisis preparedness for private businesses in India. He is passionate about healthcare: a sector that impacts every citizen. His earlier research in healthcare has focused on 1) 'Reputation risks for private hospitals in Mumbai' – 2011; 2) 'Treating a fracture with bandage' (focusing on violence against Doctors) – 2019; 3) Media coverage on Covid-19 – 2021. For over 25 years, he has been associated with the healthcare sector, focusing on healthcare communications. A significant

part of his career has been in public relations consulting.



Rademacher, Lars, Hochschule Darmstadt - University of Applied Sciences (Germany) • Lars Rademacher, MA, PhD, is a professor for Corporate and Sustainability Communication at Darmstadt University of Applied Sciences, Germany. He serves as director at the Institute of Communication and Media and heads the universities PhD School on Sustainability Sciences. Before joining academia, Lars spent more than 15 years as communication consultant, account executive, media relations manager and executive coach working for a number of national and multinational companies including BASF and Volkswagen. His research interests cover public legitimacy, PR ethics, Mindfulness in the Communication Industry, executive communication, CSR and compliance communication.



Ravazzani, Silvia, Università IULM (Italy) • Silvia Ravazzani (PhD) is Associate Professor in Management at the Department of Business LECB “Carlo A. Ricciardi”, Università IULM, Italy, since 2019. Previously she held the same position at the Department of Management at Aarhus University, Denmark. Her research interests include risk and crisis communication, employee communication, diversity and inclusion, and social media. Her work has been published in journals such as Group & Organization Management and Business Ethics Quarterly. She serves in the editorial boards of Journal of International Crisis and Risk Communication Research and European Journal of Cross-Cultural Competence and Management and is Senior Project Leader of the Centre for Employee Relations and Communication at Università IULM.



Read, Kevin, University of Greenwich (UK) • Kevin is CEO, and founding director, of strategic PR consultancy, Pembroke and Rye. Based in London, he has worked with global market leaders and challengers in financial and professional services, technology, aviation, retail, and energy for the last three decades. He specialises in strategic planning, thought leadership and board level coaching. He is a visiting fellow in the business school at the University of Greenwich, a fellow of the CIPR and the RSA, and a MA supervisor for Cardiff University’s International PR and Global Communications programme. Academic interests include AI, creativity, business pitching, leadership, and workplace wellbeing.



Ruel, Teresa, CIEG/ISCSP-Ulisboa (Portugal) • Teresa Ruel is a Political Scientist. Since September 2020, she is Assistant Professor (non-tenure) and Researcher at the University of Lisbon (ISCSP-ULisboa). She coordinates undergraduate and graduate subjects within the Political Science degrees and teaches at the different academic degrees (undergraduate, M.A. and PhD). She received a PhD in Political Science (2015) from ICS-ULisbon, a MA (2009) and BA (2005) degrees in Political Science from the Technical University of Lisbon (ISCSP-UTL). She also had an Advanced Diploma on Communication and Political Marketing (2006) from the same institution. Currently, she is member of DECIDE project-Decentralized Territorial Governance: coordination, capacity and accountability in local governance arrangements in complex regional settings (University of Aveiro). She took part of international projects (PARTIREP, Regional Manifesto Project); she did some additional training (funded) in Portugal and abroad, focused essentially on methods and techniques for social sciences. She was visiting scholar in University of Salamanca (Spain) and La Laguna (Canary Islands, Spain). In the recognition of her work as a national reference on regional politics, she’s frequently invited to the programmes on national TV and radio. She had coordinated the Portuguese Municipal Transparency Index (2016).



Saran, Mine, Ege University (Turkey) • Mine Saran is a professor of communication at the Ege University, Izmir/Turkiye. She received her Ph.D. in Public Relations and Publicity from Ege University. She has five years of experience in the private sector (perfume manufacturing and insurance industry) from 1989 to 1994 in Izmir. She has been an academic staff in Ege University, Faculty of Communications at Izmir since 1994. Her current research interests are social marketing, intercultural communication, international public relations, service learning.



Savchuk, Viktoriia, University of Maryland (USA) • Viktoriia is a Ph.D. candidate and instructor in the Department of Communication at the University of Maryland, College Park. Her research interests include public relations, strategic communication, public diplomacy, and nation branding. She is currently working on her dissertation, with a focus on Ukraine's nation branding efforts during wartime. She holds a master's degree in Media Arts and Studies from Ohio University, where she was awarded a Fulbright grant. In addition to her academic pursuits, Viktoriia boasts over 8 years of experience collaborating with non-profit organizations and the Ukrainian government.

Schepers, Gerard, Hanze UAS (The Netherlands)

Scott, Anthony, Hanze UAS (The Netherlands)



Seidenglanz, René, Quadriga University of Applied Sciences, Berlin (Germany) • René Seidenglanz is Professor of Communication Science, in particular Communication Management, at Quadriga University Berlin and is currently President of the university. The graduate and doctor of communication science taught and researched in the field of PR/communication management at the University of Leipzig between 2003 and 2008 and then moved to Berlin. His research focuses on trust and credibility in the context of communication management as well as the professional field of communication with its structures and organisation, developments, history and ethics. He has also been advising companies and institutions on communication strategy and the organisation and management of PR units for over 20 years.



Selakovic, Marko, S P Jain School of Global Management (U.A.E.) • Dr Marko Selaković is manager, researcher and scholarly academic who is occupying various senior roles at SP Jain School of Global Management (currently Deputy Director and Assistant Professor). He is a strategic management and communications professional with more than 20 years of high-level experience in Europe and the Gulf countries. Selaković is specialized in strategic and international communications and development, stakeholder relations and crisis management. In addition to the academic positions, he is currently Chairman of Serbian Business Council in Dubai. Previously he was Head of Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia Office to the UAE, Business Director of Expo 2020 Serbia, and Vice-president of the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) Gulf Chapter. His research interests include strategic, crisis, investor, and internal communications.



Sievert, Holger, Macromedia University of Applied Sciences Cologne (Germany) • Prof. Dr. Holger Sievert is full professor for Communication Management at Macromedia University of Applied Sciences. He also heads the Cologne Media Faculty as well as the national Research Committee of his institution. In addition to teaching, he has always been active in communication management functions including Roland Berger Strategy Consultants, the Bertelsmann Foundation and the large German communication agency komm.pas-sion. In research, he focuses on interactive, international and internal communication. His recent studies at

the Macromedia University were conducted for partners such as the German Foreign Office, The Federal Press Office, the Council of Europe, Payback, TUI or Vodafone.



Sriramesh, Krishnamurthy, University of Colorado (USA) • Krishnamurthy Sriramesh, is Professor of Public Relations at the University of Colorado. His rich teaching profile includes teaching a range of courses in 10 universities in the North America, Asia, Australasia, and Europe while also delivering seminars/talks in over 40 countries. He is recognized for his scholarship on global public relations, culture and public relations, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and public relations for development. His program of research has resulted in 8 edited or co-edited books (one currently in print and another in preparation on crisis communication cases), over 120 articles and book chapters, and over 150 conference papers and other presentations around the world. A recent bibliometric analysis published in *Public Relations Review* placed him among the top five cited global public relations scholars. In 2004, the Institute of Public Relations (USA) recognized his scholarship by honoring him with the prestigious Pathfinder Award for “original scholarly research contributing to the public relations body of knowledge.”

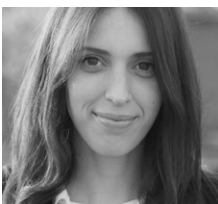
Stork, Werner, Hochschule Darmstadt - University of Applied Sciences (Germany)



Sutton, Lucinda, North-West University (South Africa) • Lucinda Sutton is a senior lecturer and teaches various corporate communication and public relations modules at undergraduate and postgraduate level at the North-West University, South Africa. She obtained her PhD in Communication on the topic of Internal Communication Trends in South Africa. Furthermore, she holds a MA degree in Communication Studies and a BA Hons degree in Corporate Communication Management which she both received cum laude. Her research interests and publications stem from her experience in practice as a communication professional, which involves strategic communication with a specific focus on managing relationships with internal and external stakeholders.



Tackhova, Elina R., Hong Kong Baptist University (Hong Kong, S.A.R. China) • Elina R. Tackhova (PhD Texas A&M University) is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Communication Studies at Hong Kong Baptist University. Her research examines the intersection between organizational crises and scandals as well as incorporating emotion into crisis communication research. Elina has co-authored *Communicating in Extreme Crises Lessons from the Edge*, a book examining extreme crises and the practical implications these pose for crisis managers. Her work has also been published in peer-reviewed journals such as *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *Public Relations Review* and *Management Communication Quarterly*.



Takahashi, Marta, Catholic University of Croatia (Croatia) • Marta Takahashi has a master's degree in public relations, and is a doctoral candidate in communication science at the Josip Juraj Strossmayer University in Osijek. She is employed at the public relations agency Narativ komunikacije and has lectured at the Edward Bernays University of Applied Science in Zagreb, and the Catholic University of Croatia. Her scientific work includes public relations, in particular media credibility and approach to health issues. She has participated in numerous congresses and symposia, is the author of multiple scientific papers, co-author of an international atlas and editor of two monographs. She has been a Caritas volunteer for many years in the Home for the children without proper parental care, and the Caritas Archdiocese of Zagreb named her volunteer of the year in 2012.



Tan, Rachel, Singapore Management University (Singapore) • Rachel Tan is a dynamic communications leader, currently heading Branding and Communications at IPOS International, the technical expertise arm of the Intellectual Property Office of Singapore. Leveraging her strategic communications expertise, she champions its mission to drive enterprise growth through effectively using intangible assets and intellectual property. Rachel's diverse career includes serving as Regional Director for Marketing in Southeast Asia at The Ascott Limited, focusing on hospitality marketing communications. She has also led impactful initiatives in separate roles across healthcare, media, market research, and retail. Rachel holds a Master of Science in Communication Management (Dean's List) from Singapore Management University.



Tao, Weiting, University of Miami (USA) • Dr. Weiting Tao is an associate professor in strategic communication. Her primary research area is corporate public relations, which includes corporate social responsibility, corporate ability, crisis communication and management, cross cultural strategic communication, corporate reputation and relationship management, and social media strategies. Dr. Tao has published in scholarly journals such as Communication Research, Public Relations Review, Journal of Communication Management, and International Journal of Strategic Communication. She also has won numerous top paper and research awards at international and national communication conferences such as the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication and International Public Relations Research Conference.

Taylor, Maureen, University of Technology Sydney (Australia)



Teo, Justin, Singapore Management University (Singapore) • Justin brings a decade of expertise in strategic and operational planning, complemented by eight years of experience in strategic communications and public relations. His adeptness at collaborating with leadership stakeholders ensures the delivery of exceptional results and the facilitation of impactful communication both internally and externally. Driven by a fervent passion for strategic communications and public relations, Justin is distinguished by his robust work ethic, sharp analytical abilities, and proficient project management skills. His capacity to swiftly adapt, innovate with creativity, and perform with equal vigor whether independently or as part of a team, makes him an invaluable asset to any organisation. Justin is Head, Digital and Intelligence Information Centre, The Digital and Intelligence Service, Singapore. From Jan 2023 - Jan 2024 he was Head Digital and Intelligence Service Media Operations Branch, Singapore Armed Forces, Singapore. He has a Master of Science in Communications Management from Management University, Singapore (2020) Capstone Project on Corporate Social Responsibility.



Thompson, Gareth, University of the Arts London (UK) • Gareth Thompson is a Senior Lecturer at London College of Communication, University of the Arts London. He worked in public relations in the corporate, finance and technology sectors for over 20 years in Europe and the USA. He founded the PR firm, Hunt Thompson, which was acquired by Citigate Dewe Rogerson, with whom he then worked in London. He later served as director of marketing at the pan-European fund services and software business, JPMorgan FundsHub.

He has taught public relations and communications in London and at the French Grand Ecole business school, ESCM, in Poitiers. He has degrees from University College London and University of Cambridge (Trinity Hall). He researches historical aspects of media and public relations, including government communications, war time propaganda and terrorism. Other research interests include the application of economic theory to public relations. His research has been published in Public Relations Review, Journal of Communications Management, Journal of Public Relations Research and Corporate Communications: An International Journal. His first book, Post-Truth Public Relations: Communication in an Era of Disinformation, was published by Routledge in 2020.



Tkalac Verčič, Ana, 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 currently the president of the Croatian Public Relations Association.

van der Zeeuw, Jeroen, Ede Christian University (The Netherlands)



van Zyl, Marné, North-West University (South Africa) • Marné van Zyl is a Marketing Coordinator at Hinterland Holdings - the retail department of the Senwes Group in South Africa. She holds an honours degree in Development Communication and obtained her master's degree in Corporate Communication from North-West University (NWU) in South Africa. Her research focuses on strategic communication and stakeholder relationship management. She started as a Liaison Official for two non-profit organisations. Later, she worked as an Account Manager at a media and communication agency that involved graphic design and copywriting for six companies, laying the basis for her current coordinating job.



Vaz de Almeida, Cristina, CIEG/ISCSP-Ulisboa (Portugal) • Cristina Vaz de Almeida has a PhD in Communication Sciences - Health Literacy from the Higher Institute of Social and Political Sciences, University of Lisbon. She is President of the Portuguese Society for Health Literacy (SPLS), Director of the Postgraduate Program in Health Literacy (Institute of Applied Psychology – ISPA), Founding Member of the Portuguese Laboratory for Healthy Work Environments (LABPATS). She is also Chief-Editor of the Medical Research Journal (JIM), Peer Reviewer of the Portuguese Journal of Public Health, Researcher at the Centre for Public Administration and Public Policies (CAPP, ISCSP), Member of the Advisory Board of the BUMPER project, Member of the National Cancer Hub (NCH) – Portugal, Member of the Portuguese Council for Health and Environment, Member of the Scientific Council of the Journal of Psychology and Neuroscience, Member of the Academic Network of Health Sciences of Lusophone (RACS). She is the coordinator and author of the Manual de Literacia em Saúde – Princípios e Práticas [Health Literacy Handbook – Principles and Practices] (PACTOR).

Veen, Ton, Mekelle University (Ethiopia)



Verčič, Dejan, University of Ljubljana and Herman & partners (Slovenia) • Dejan Verčič is Professor, 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 (EUPRERA). In 1991 he was the founding director of Slovenian national news agency (STA). Organizing the annual International Public Relations Research Symposium – BledCom since 1994.

Weleslase, Brhane, Mekelle University (Ethiopia)



Willemse, Michelle, Erasmus University (Netherlands) • Michelle Willemse is a communications professional located in Munich, Germany. Originally from Australia, Willemse started her career in Australia's largest local government, where she gained almost a decade's worth of experience in multi-disciplinary stakeholder engagement, community consultation, and strategic advice to facilitate optimal land-use outcomes for the city of Brisbane. Since 2017, following her relocation to Europe, Willemse has been a communications manager active in the areas of employee engagement, leadership communication, strategy communication, change communication, and social media. She is particularly interested in internal communication and organisational culture.



Woss, Joana, CIEG/ISCSP-Ulisboa (Portugal) • Joana Woss completed her degree in Audiovisual and Multimedia at the School of Communication and Media Studies of the Lisbon Polytechnic Institute in 2013. At the same institution, she completed her master's degree in Multimedia in 2015, with the project: Proposal for standardizing claims management in the relationship between hospitals and health insurance providers. In 2021 she completed a postgraduate degree in Information Management and Business Intelligence applied to the health sector, at the Information Management School of Nova University Lisbon. In the same year, she began her path towards obtaining a doctorate at the Institute of Social and Political Sciences, in Communication Sciences, in the area of Health Communication, which is still in progress. Since 2014, she has been working as Administrative Services Manager at Hospital da Luz Lisboa and, since 2023, she has been involved in training hospital sector professionals in the area of communication excellence and conflict management at Hospital da Luz Learning Health.



Wu, Shih Chia, The Chinese University of Hong Kong (Hong Kong, S.A.R. China) • Prof. Wu Shih-Chia is the Deputy Program Director of M.S.Sc. in Corporate Communication from the School of Journalism and Communication, the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK). Her recent research on social media usage behavior, sustainability & CSR Communication in Greater China has received attention from academia, industry, and media. She also accelerates the learning of sustainability communication studies in Hong Kong and Taiwan's universities via organizing forums, producing case studies and serving as USR consultant. Her book, "Style Marketing" in Chinese, has been adopted by many education institutions. She is the columnist for several media platforms. Prior to CUHK, as an accredited professional with rich industry experience and cross-culture practice, Prof. Wu specializes in global brand management, corporate & crisis communication, and strategic planning. She used to work at Chanel, P&G, and DaimlerChrysler as executive management team member and served as the corporate spokesperson.



Xu, Zhiying Daphne, Singapore Management University (Singapore) • She is the deputy director of the information policy and plans department in the Information Policy and Strategy Office at Singapore's Ministry of Defence Communications Organization. She leads a communication team that provides centralized guidance and oversight of the strategic communications policies, in addition to strategizing plans across a spectrum of issues. She has been in the government service for 15 years and her work experience spanned from managing strategic communications, national education and policy communication, and leadership development.



Yeo, Su Lin, Singapore Management University (Singapore) • Dr Su Lin YEO is Associate Professor of Communication Management (Practice) at the Lee Kong Chian School of Business in Singapore Management University (SMU). She serves on the SMU Faculty Senate Committee and is an appointed Board Trustee at the Institute of Public Relations (USA) and Director for the SMU-IPR USA Alliance (Southeast Asia). She teaches a range of full credit communication modules from undergraduate to MBA, EMBA and executive seminar programmes in the business school. Her primary research interests include Corporate Reputation, Crisis Communication, and Public Policy Communication. She publishes in top communication journals which include Communication Research and Public Relations Review; and sits on national boards that drive stakeholder engagement on health communication and public policy campaigns in Singapore. Prior to pursuing an academic career, Su Lin spent 12 years managing corporate communication and investor relations for several conglomerates in the banking and financial services sectors in Asia.

Yeow, Zheng Hoe Vernon, Singapore Management University (Singapore)

Yoon, Dalee, University of Hawaii (USA)



Yue, Cen April, Boston University (USA) • Her research interests focus on internal public relations, leadership communication, organizational change management, and relationship management. She has published in scholarly journals such as Public Relations Review, Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, International Journal of Communication, and International Journal of Business Communication, among others. She has received over 10 top paper and research awards and recognitions from national and international communication associations and conferences. She is also a Research Editor at the Institute for Public Relations' Organizational Communication Research Center.

Zhang, Evonne, Singapore Management University (Singapore)



Zheng, Nanxiao, The Chinese University of Hong Kong (Hong Kong, S.A.R. China) • Nanxiao Zheng (MSc, The Chinese University of Hong Kong) is currently a M.Phil. student at the School of Journalism and Communication, the Chinese University of Hong Kong. His research interests lie in the intersection of visual communication, computer-mediated communication, and political communication, with a special focus on the visual role of technologies, online multimodalities, and nationalism.



Zheng, Qi, Michigan State University (USA) • Qi Zheng is a doctoral student in the Department of Advertising and Public Relations at Michigan State University. Her research interests rely on persuasion and public relations. Currently, her research concentrates on governmental communication by utilizing quantitative and computational methods.



Zhou, Alvin, University of Minnesota (USA) • Alvin Zhou is an Assistant Professor at the Hubbard School of Journalism and Mass Communication. His research centers around computational social science and strategic communication. Specifically, he studies advertising, public relations, audience analytics, and the various ways digital technologies (e.g., artificial intelligence, platform design, mobile access, behavioral trace) are changing their industry practices and social implications.

In a crisis situation, which public communication message strategies are best deployed using short-form social media?

Alotaibi, Mutaz, *Cardiff University and King Abdulaziz University (UK and Saudi Arabia)*
Kinnear, Susan, *Cardiff University (UK)*

Introduction

This paper investigates the role and effectiveness of short form social media as a tool for public communication during a crisis. It will present an analysis of public communication strategies employed by Saudi governmental organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically focusing on X/Twitter utilization. The study is grounded in the context of a transformational period in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia where significant change can be observed in the Public Relations and communication strategies deployed. It contributes to a larger study which considers the effectiveness of social media as a platform for different types of public communication message in a crisis scenario.

Purpose of the Study

The research seeks to answer a central question: How effective is social media as a strategic communication tool for creating public engagement? It addresses this question by carefully analyzing Twitter data, offering a comprehensive evaluation of Public Relations roles and communication strategies during a global health crisis. Literature Review and a Theoretical Framework: In order to build a theoretical framework to interrogate the data, key approaches and frame-

works such as Stakeholder Engagement (Nie et al., 2019), Strategic Communication (Soffer, 2019), Gatekeeping (Kyprianos et al., 2020), Persuasion (Geers et al., 2018), Key Opinion (Wang et al., 2020), and Grunig's Public Information Model (Hung-Baesecke et al., 2021) are all explored. The literature review highlights the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on crisis communication, emphasizing the use of social media for engaging stakeholders and disseminating information.

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative approach, comprising content analysis of Twitter posts in order to identify message types which attract effective public engagement. Content analysis focuses on the Saudi Ministry of Health's official Twitter account. It examines a dataset of 1,469 tweets posted from 5 March to 5 October 2020. The analysis categorizes the tweets into five thematic dimensions: Awareness, Warning, Risk Information, Efficiency Messages, and Providing Reassurance.

Results of Social Media Data

The Saudi Ministry of Health's messages are extensively analyzed based on engagement metrics

such as likes, retweets, replies, and quotes. Analysis of this data utilizes thematic categorization to better understand the communication efforts of the Saudi government as follows:

- Awareness: This theme captures the Saudi Ministry of Health's activities to educate the public about COVID-19, including disease information and preventive recommendations. The theme reflects the importance of public education and awareness in crisis communication.
- Warning: The Warning theme provides immediate public alerts and responses by conveying symptoms and case reports.
- Risk: Risk Information provides credible messages by offering details on responsibilities and prevention measures.
- Efficiency: Public responses and information sources are highlighted in the Efficiency Messages theme, showcasing the role social media plays in providing timely and accurate information.
- Reassurance: Finally, the Providing Reassurance theme, through government roles, appreciations, and calming measures, aims to mitigate public anxiety and foster a sense of security during the crisis.

The study examines the types of tweets (original tweets, retweets, replies) and media types (photos, videos, animated GIFs) used in the communication strategy. It finds that through enhancing message dissemination and engagement, original tweets and visual content (photos and videos) predominate.

Analyzing tweet distribution over the study period provides further insights into communication strategy changes. The results demonstrate how social media can foster two-way communication between governments and the public through its interactive nature.

The paper also indicates the need for further investigation into the outcomes of this engage-

ment, which the researcher is now progressing as a series of semi-structured interviews with Public Relations and communication professionals from the Saudi Ministry of Health. This further analysis supports and extends the content analysis, offering deeper insights into the strategic use of social media communication during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

Conclusion:

This study contributes to Public Relations knowledge and practice by examining the role that short form social media plays as an effective and interactive tool for public communication during a crisis. The findings provide insight into how governmental organizations can effectively use social media platforms during a public crisis, emphasizing the importance of varied content and engagement strategies to effectively respond to different public needs and concerns. The insights developed from this study are not limited to the specific context of the COVID-19 pandemic but offer broader implications for the use of social media in various crisis communication scenarios.

In conclusion, this research study not only presents a comprehensive analysis of public engagement with Saudi governmental use of X/Twitter during a pivotal time, but also provides a foundation for future research and practice in crisis communication. It illustrates the importance of a multifaceted communication approach, incorporating various themes, media types, and engagement strategies to effectively reach a range of audiences in times of crisis.

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Double tap to heart: Portuguese National Health Service (SNS) message on Instagram about cardiovascular health and its perception

Baptista, Raphaël, *CAPP/ISCSP-Ulisboa (Portugal)*
Belim, Célia, *CAPP/ISCSP-Ulisboa (Portugal)*

Introduction and purpose of the study

In Portugal, cardiovascular diseases kill around 80 people a day (Mendes, 2023), accounting for a third of all deaths each year. The average amount of time spent on the internet each day by the Portuguese is over seven hours, higher than the world average of six hours and 40 minutes (We are Social, 2024). Instagram is the preferred online social network, on which the Portuguese spend around 17 hours a month, also above the world average of less than 16 hours (We are Social, 2024). This data can be exploited by the Portuguese government to reach audiences in the online environment. Therefore, this research aims to understand the publications of the National Health Service (SNS) on cardiovascular issues (e.g. diseases, health, ephemeris) shared on its official Instagram page and their perception.

Literature review

With the continuous growth and adoption of online social networks, several scientific contributions highlight their importance and success in promoting cardiovascular health and well-being, as well as in preventing cardiovascular dis-

eases (e.g. Eshah, 2018). Thus, professionals in this scientific field, that includes public relations professionals, have identified an opportunity in online social networks for health promotion, such as social mobilization and advancing research (Chen & Wang, 2021), anchored in the commitment to ehealth communication, in which health information operates on new dissemination channels, specifically online ones. For example, Cardoso and others (2021) carried out a content analysis of 12 manuals of conduct from Portuguese and international organizations for the management of online social networks, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. The aim of the research was to identify and systematize the main strategies included in these manuals and then assess their convergence with scientific theories on online social media management. The authors concluded that the potential of online social networks should be recognized, as they are successful in promoting health. In addition, the researchers highlight the work that needs to be done together between online social networks and health professionals as promising. In this way, it will be possible to disseminate scientifically correct information on a mass scale from these online media (Cardoso

et al., 2021).

Methodology

The research has three specific objectives: (1) to understand the strategy and specificities (textual, iconic, plastic and symbolic elements) of the government message on SNS Instagram for cardiovascular health during 2020 and 2024; (2) to understand the rhetorical potential of online communication on Instagram for cardiovascular health in the SNS during 2020 and 2024; and (3) to ascertain the perception of Instagram users regarding the effectiveness of SNS Instagram communication for cardiovascular health. To this end, we chose to carry out a semiological analysis to achieve the first specific objective, a rhetorical analysis for the second objective, and a focus group to achieve the third objective. The corpus for the first two objectives will be 81 publications related to cardiovascular health, shared between 2020 and the end of the current government's mandate, in March 2024. The focus group, in turn, will be made up of individuals between the ages of 18 and 34, since these are the adult ages that are most present on Instagram and given that the prevention of cardiovascular diseases and the adoption of behaviors that contribute to well-being should be started as early as possible. Future studies could focus on other online social networks used by governments to communicate health and well-being.

Results and conclusions

The results indicate which coding options for SNS publications generate the most interactivity and the most perceived effectiveness. Strategically formulated government communication can increase perceived effectiveness.

Practical and social implications

In the light of strategic and rhetorical communication studies, the theory of uses and gratifications and the encoding-decoding approach, it is understood that the results of this research will be useful in different parameters: (1) professional-practical, given that the results will provide recommendations on how to communicate public policies and cardiovascular health messages online, with specific indications that facilitate the process, the coding and the expected decoding; and (2) social, given that they may provide knowledge on how to construct a competent governmental (and also organizational) message with persuasive potential on a widely used online social network, in order to promote cardiovascular health and the well-being of target audiences.

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Keywords

Online communication; Public policies; Cardiovascular health; Health policy; Portuguese government

Feeling good, living well, and making nice. Aspiring PR people on well-being and work-life balance

Barlik, Jacek, *University of Warsaw (Poland)*

Introduction and purpose of the study

Both the public relations industry and academics have stressed the growing role of well-being and work-life balance among major challenges perceived by PR professionals globally. Not surprisingly, the biggest challenge facing British PR practitioners (and not just them) was mental health, ahead of such factors as fake news and disinformation, fear of job losses, lack of influence on management, or long working hours (CIPR, 2022). At the same time, PR experts have increasingly become responsible for handling – on top of the communication management function and maintaining relationships with various publics – the CSR and ESG issues, including social accord, individual fulfillment, and the well-being of many organizational stakeholders. Such ambiguity PR practitioners may feel (i.e., taking care of the external publics and neglecting themselves) can lead to even greater frustration and failure to address the most daunting challenge to the entire PR profession. Aspiring PR practitioners (including PR students) are also exposed to these problems and – in most cases – are not ready to handle them properly due to insufficient education and training on subjects such as well-being, mental health, or work-life balance.

Literature review

The literature on the relationship between public relations and the well-being, mental health, and

happiness of employees and stakeholders has been growing fast recently (Rando-Queto et al., 2022). As it was found out, overall well-being and happiness at work and in personal life consist of three areas: subjective satisfaction with the job, the possibility to grow one's potential and develop as a human being (also called psychological well-being), and positive and enriching relationships that a job brings (that may be described as social well-being) (Muñiz-Velázquez et al., 2022). Simultaneously, four out of ten communication professionals feel stressed out or tense during their working hours (with females being more affected than men), and a quarter of all communicators do not know how to manage the daily stress caused by the need to be constantly available, enormous workload, lack of prospects, and blurring work and personal life boundaries, which have become even more important due to remote or hybrid work models launched during the pandemic (Zerfass et al., 2023, 38).

Research questions

Thus, it might be worthwhile to pose several questions concerning well-being and work-life balance among aspiring PR practitioners and full-time PR students.

- **RQ1** – Are future PR practitioners aware of emotional costs, extreme workload, distress, and mental health issues associated with their trade?
- **RQ2** – Have PR students and young pro-

professionals been taught and trained about well-being, work-life balance, and mental health during their studies, internships, and at the early stages of their careers?

- **RQ3** – How do PR students and young practitioners assess the PR academia's and industry's efforts to address well-being, mental health, and work-life balance issues troubling PR people (regardless of their tenure)?

Methodology

The planned research will employ quantitative methods, namely online surveys among young professionals and PR students in a European country. Respondents will be recruited via professional organizations, PR forums and discussion groups, and at several universities that run full-time PR sequences in the country. The aspiring practitioners' and PR students' opinions will be measured using Likert-type scales, when applicable, making it possible to find a general mood about well-being among aspiring PR people.

Results and conclusions

The research will show the level of preparedness of young practitioners and PR students to cope with the stress at work, balance duties, and personal life, handle responsibilities toward stakeholders' well-being, and take care of their mental and emotional challenges. The conclusions from this study could help PR academics, associations, and industry leaders to come up with necessary adjustments about mental health and well-being in PR curricula, onboarding, training and development programs for students, interns, and junior staff.

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Keywords

mental health, public relations education, well-being, work-life balance

Communicating health and well-being policies: The Portuguese Prime Minister's message on the X platform between 2016 and 2023 and its reception

Belim, Célia, *CAPP/ISCSP-Ulisboa (Portugal)*

Baptista, Raphaël, *CAPP/ISCSP-Ulisboa (Portugal)*

Cunha, Maria João, *CIEG/ISCSP-Ulisboa (Portugal)*

Cruz, Carla, *CIEG/ISCSP-Ulisboa (Portugal)*

Firmino, Sandra, *CIEG/ISCSP-Ulisboa (Portugal)*

Ruel, Teresa, *CIEG/ISCSP-Ulisboa (Portugal)*

Woss, Joana, *CIEG/ISCSP-Ulisboa (Portugal)*

Vaz de Almeida, Cristina, *CIEG/ISCSP-Ulisboa (Portugal)*

Introduction and purpose of the study

Social media have increasingly been used by political bodies and experts to disseminate health information to the public. Several authors recommend that the governments should assume a more active role in the meaning making of the policy. Knowing how to communicate policies is essential because citizens need to understand decision-making – the pillar of democracy – and to access, understand, and use health content for their benefit. Portugal was selected as a case study as: a) the World Health Organization's 2019 World Health Report placed Portugal's health system 12th in its ranking; b) it held the rotating European Union Council presidency from January to June 2021, while c) in January of the same year, the country was dealing with the world's highest Covid-19 rate. The option for X (ex-Twitter) is based on two considerations: a) the opportunities provided for effective communication, fast and efficient dissemination of

vital messages, and appropriate tailoring of messages for different audiences (Hyland-Wood et al., 2021), and b) it is one of the main platforms used by political parties and candidates (Alonso-Muñoz et al., 2016, p. 72). The proposed study aims to: 1. characterize the health-related message published on the X platform account of the Portuguese Prime Minister, António Costa, during his administration; 2. explore the persuasive potential of the health message published by the Portuguese Prime Minister António Costa on his X platform account during his administration; 3. perceive the discursive enunciation present in the health message published by the Portuguese Prime Minister António Costa on his X platform account during his administration; 4. ascertain the reception of these messages by António Costa's followers.

Literature review

There are few studies on the communication of public health and well-being policies, either in Portugal or in other countries. However, it is noted that the Covid-19 pandemic has also had an echo in research, finding a vast literature on governmental health communication, especially in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. As an example, Belim's study focuses on Covid-19 communication on Twitter by the Portuguese prime minister, during significant synchronous periods, managing to extract some recommendations at the level of government communication, such as striving for transparency, truth, and proximity to citizens, seeking to inform, clarify and convince them. The studies found on Portuguese government communication during the pandemic focused on media communication, highlighting for example official sources, in particular the Portuguese prime minister (Lopes et al., 2021), and communication strategies in prime time television news (Cunha et al., 2021).

Methodology

The method to be used is mixed, consisting of content analysis (to fulfill the 1st and 4th objectives), rhetorical analysis (2nd objective), discourse analysis (to fulfill the 1st and 4th objectives). The mixed method is used because it compensates for the disadvantages of the qualitative and quantitative methods, offering a more complete and plural version of the results. The corpus consists of all the publications made by the Portuguese Prime Minister on his X account in the period from April 2016 to November 7, 2023, which is almost eight years.

Results and conclusions

The results show that, during the Covid-19 pandemic, there was an intense focus on the subject, noting the Prime Minister's concern for the well-being of the Portuguese and the focus on responsibility. Pathos was used to inspire main-

ly positive emotional responses-such as the impulse to action, feelings of support, desire for unity, and confidence, optimism, or calm-but also negative emotional responses, such as anxiety, apprehension, or concern and disappointment. Outside the pandemic period, the focus on health and well-being is less. As future studies, we suggest focusing on other forms of communication about health and well-being from the Portuguese government and even a comparative study between countries.

Practical and social implications

At a practical level, this study provides plural knowledge (e.g., rhetorical potential, specificities of the message in a pandemic crisis context and outside of that context, discursive specificities, reactions of recipients according to the type of message and social context) about the government message in an online context, bringing together recommendations for political actors and communication professionals, such as public relations. On a social level, this study provides insight into the link between the communication on the X platform of a government actor with public responsibility and the reception of individuals, and which messages get the most positive reactions and comments, and even feelings of well-being (or not) on the part of the recipients. In a public relations context, some lessons can be learned about how to build a positive government image in the online environment in different social contexts linked to health (with and without a pandemic).

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Keywords

health communication, well-being, health policy, Portuguese prime-minister, X

The Utilisation of Engaged Research Towards the Well-Being of Internal Stakeholders: A Case Study

Bezuidenhout, Louise, *North-West University (South Africa)*
Sutton, Lucinda, *North-West University (South Africa)*

Introduction and purpose of the study

The well-being of internal stakeholders lately received increased attention. It is argued that organisations should prioritise well-being by creating an environment of cooperation and collaboration through participation in bottom-up communication, rather than the top-down management of communication. Such an environment of participation and dialogue is important for the well-being of internal stakeholders because it creates a sense of community.

As part of the strategic role of corporate communication, research should take place to identify issues within specific stakeholder groups to inform strategies and policies to be able to address them strategically. Within internal communication, such research should take place to establish the issues that might influence the well-being of the internal stakeholders.

We argue that engaged research could be utilised to identify internal communication issues regarding the well-being of the internal stakeholders. Engaged research contributes to creating an environment of participation and dialogue where collaboratively, issues can be identified to inform strategies to address those issues. However, engaged research is usually applied in a community context to address mostly health, social and environmental issues. No prior re-

search could be found where engaged research was used to address internal communication issues in an organisational context. Therefore, we ask the question: How could engaged research be used to identify and address internal communication issues in an organisational case study to promote the well-being of internal stakeholders?

Literature review

Engaged research is an ongoing and reflective process of collaboration, inclusivity, and a shared sense of purpose between researchers and community stakeholders. Within engaged research, real-life issues are addressed through the co-creation of knowledge to bring about meaningful change. This is done within cooperative partnerships to empower partners towards the sustainability and well-being of all.

The case study

The researchers were approached by members of a communication advisory committee of a retirement village in South Africa with the request for assistance with their internal communication. These committee members argued that internal communication issues are influencing the well-being of the residents, but they were unclear on the extent of these issues and how to address them. The researchers and these advisory committee members formed a partnership where

there was active participation by all partners in the research process. This included the research design, measuring instruments, data collection, data analysis, writing the research report and the implementation of the findings.

Methodology

As part of phase 1, the partners decided on a qualitative research approach that included six semi-structured interviews with management and six focus groups with residents, to ensure that participants had the opportunity to address themes they deemed necessary. This was done by creating an environment where conversation and reflection took place on internal communication issues. The data was collected in January 2023 and analysed through qualitative data analysis. Discussions took place between the partners on the findings and possible recommendations before the research report was finalised.

To evaluate the utilisation of engaged research to address internal communication issues toward the well-being of the internal stakeholders, critical reflection will be done in phase 2 of the research. First, we will reflect through self-inspection on how our worldviews, prior experiences, assumptions, and beliefs influence the research and results. Secondly, a reflective group session will be held with all the members of the partnership. A discussion guide will be developed, with input from the partners, to guide the reflection. The partners will reflect on the partnership, the research process, and the outcomes of the research.

Results and conclusion

Through the interviews and focus groups, various internal communication challenges were identified and their influence on the well-being of the residents was deliberated. Within these discussions, the participants themselves came up with possible solutions to address these chal-

lenges. These conversations also resulted in the identification of communication principles that the participants felt were necessary to be put in place to further contribute to the well-being of the residents. Strategy and policy changes were suggested to address the challenges and principles.

To evaluate the use of engaged research in identifying and addressing these challenges and principles, the process of critical reflection (phase 2) will take place in March 2024 to determine how this engaged research project addressed the well-being of the retirement village's internal stakeholders.

Practical and social implications

After the critical reflection, a framework will be developed that could extend to other internal communication contexts and environments facing similar well-being issues. Furthermore, engaged research could prove to be a valuable strategic method for communication managers to use toward the well-being of internal stakeholders. Future studies could investigate this research method and the framework within the wider well-being discussion in the internal communication discipline.

Keywords

Engaged research, internal communication, internal stakeholders, well-being

Employee Well-being, Internal Communication and Listening: Insights from an Explorative Study Among Italian Companies

Butera, Alfonsa, *Università IULM (Italy)*
Mazzei, Alessandra, *Università IULM (Italy)*
Ravazzani, Silvia, *Università IULM (Italy)*
Quaratino, Luca, *Università IULM (Italy)*
Leonzio, Marco, *Università IULM (Italy)*
Castelli, Nicola, *Università IULM (Italy)*

Introduction and purpose

Public relations and corporate communication, conceived as two-way communication and relationship management between organizations and their publics, are best performed through listening in order to align the organizational purpose and behaviour with the interests of stakeholders. This paper specifically addresses the topic of listening as a component of internal communication that is critical to sustain employee well-being, considering employees as a key group of stakeholders.

Literature review

Employee well-being cannot simply be viewed as job satisfaction or the overall quality of an employee's experience and functioning in the workplace. Rather, it is a broader concept that encompasses three dimensions: psychological, physical and social (Grant et al., 2007). Looking specifically at how to sustain employee psychological well-being, internal listening is crucial in its two components: organizational and supervisory listening (Qin & Men, 2022).

Organizational listening should be grounded in a culture that is open to employee voice and rely on dedicated policies, systems, technologies, and resources, including staff (Macnamara, 2016). This applies to the listening of both internal and external stakeholders. Supervisory listening is a form of dyadic listening, since it involves a manager and her subordinates, and is associated with several organizational outcomes, such as job performance, leadership, quality of relationships, job knowledge, job attitudes, and employee well-being (Kluger & Itzhakov, 2022).

When employees and managers are geographically distant, managers need to demonstrate a range of skills to ensure employee well-being and organizational performance, namely the ability to listen, create and show trust, and give authority to employees (Poulsen & Ipsen, 2017).

Methodology

The empirical study is based on the accounts of managers from 10 Italian companies. Qualitative data were collected from 10 interviews carried out between July and October 2023. The

sample of interviewees included board members and managers responsible for internal communication, employee well-being, sustainability, and HR management.

Results and conclusions

Findings show that companies understand the relevance of structured forms of organizational listening to better understand the needs of their employees in terms of well-being, also with the aim of implementing effective programs in this area. In addition to climate and engagement surveys, companies also use other methods to listen. For instance, one company put together a listening team of around 40 employees who extensively interviewed the organizational population in several forms to create a 4-year employee well-being plan based on their specific and assessed needs. Companies have also cited the monitoring of internal communities as a powerful listening tool as they act as excellent collectors of employee needs in specific areas. For example, after listening to the community of pet-owning employees, one company decided to implement a policy regulating the possibility of employees to bring their pets into the office.

In recent years, companies' focus on internal listening has also been reinforced by the increase in remote working, which has made supervisory listening a necessary measure to monitor employee well-being, recognizing that the increased distance between a supervisor and their employees could worsen their relationship. In this sense, some companies strived to introduce forms of structured supervisory listening through technologies that complement supervisory listening in face-to-face interactions, which are thinned out in hybrid work contexts. Specifically, managers were provided with specific monitoring tools to collect frequent employee feedback, typically on a weekly basis. These tools have been used by supervisors to learn more about how their employees feel and to gather

information that they can use to guide their dialogue with subordinates.

Practical implications

This study offers reflections and insights into tools and methods that organizations can use to sustain internal listening as a lever for employee well-being. While the literature underlines the value of listening at both the organizational and supervisory level to promote employee psychological well-being, listening to them to specifically identify their needs for a more sustainable work environment is also crucial to developing effective employee well-being initiatives.

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Keywords

employee well-being, organizational listening, supervisory listening, internal communication

Grounded optimism as an approach to organisational change

Charlton, Dan, *SPFT (UK)*

Introduction and purpose

This doctoral study utilises psychoanalytic scholarship to explore the deep currents which drive the tides of human behaviour during organisational change - the 'emotional undertow' described by Krantz and Trainor (2019, p.205). The basis for this thesis is that contemplating the unconscious, emotional dynamics which are psychoanalytically conceptualised as sitting beneath the surface of organisational behaviour provides a means to understand, anticipate and potentially mitigate the risk of change being impeded by leadership disconnect from the wider workforce.

Literature review

The literature review lays the foundation for the development of 'grounded optimism' as a way of navigating the turbulent waters of change. Grounded optimism builds on existing theory in conceptualising the value of a positive, plausible leadership vision for the future which is rooted in reality through democratic dialogue, and enriched by a sophisticated appreciation of the emotional impact of change. This requires leaders to reframe resistance to change as an opportunity to identify potential problems and explore solutions, rather than simply characterising it as irrational and oppositional.

The concept of grounded optimism is proposed in mitigation to the risk of excess leadership positivity. The downside of too much positivity is examined within organisational literature

with regards to both leadership communication and behaviour. Whilst recognising the transformative attributes of an uplifting vision for the future which inspires, empowers and reassures, Collinson (2012) highlights how employees can become sceptical and mistrustful when they receive overly optimistic messages from leaders which feel divorced from their own economic and social reality.

Exploring excess positivity in relation to leadership behaviour, Collinson (2012) defines 'Prozac leadership' as the way in which senior organisational members can become seduced by an unrealistic, personal narrative that everything is well within the workforce environment they are responsible for managing. Consequentially, such leaders become unwilling to hear difficult news, address problems or give due consideration to organisational risks (Collinson 2012). The "fallacies of optimism and invulnerability" (Ford and Ford 2009, p.5) are identified as causal factors in leaders neglecting to seek input, feedback and challenge from staff about their plans, thereby potentially missing opportunities to identify problems. In this vein, the dark side of optimism is defined by Gibbons (2019) as a form of hubris and self-delusion which renders organisational leaders "confident without competence" (Gibbons 2019, p.174) by impairing their ability to analyse risk, assess probability and proceed with prudent caution when contemplating a new strategy or change programme.

Methodology

This study explores organisational change leadership within the United Kingdom's National Health Service (NHS). The NHS is the world's largest publicly-funded health system and fifth largest employer, with 1.5 million staff.

The study is the first of its kind to explore organisational change and leadership in the NHS from the perspective of Chief Executive Officers (CEOs). NHS CEOs are simultaneously responsible for focusing on immediate operational pressures whilst having a long-term vision for their organisation; able to delegate whilst maintaining a detailed knowledge of what is going on within the walls of the institution they are responsible for leading; accountable for maintaining stability whilst acting as agents for change (Chambers and Exworthy 2021).

This study is interested in a deep exploration of the unconscious, emotional dynamics which are psychoanalytically conceptualised as influencing leadership behaviour during organisational change (Krantz and Trainor 2019; Jarrett and Vince 2023). Phenomenology is utilised as the methodological means of immersion in study participants' experience of leading change. It involves one-to-one interviews with 20 individuals who hold the position of NHS CEO.

Practical and social implications

The basis for the research is threefold. Firstly, the NHS is an instructive environment in which to study organisational change because of the sheer amount that takes place within it. Secondly, there is an imperative to explore and understand how NHS leaders motivate, engage and enable their workforce to deliver the continuous change needed to meet the multifactorial healthcare needs of the U.K population. This imperative is particularly pertinent in light of evidence which suggests the NHS is historically and systemically poor at changing (Tingle 2022). Thirdly, the re-

search responds to the purported gap in knowledge regarding leadership of large, complex public sector organisations (Janke et al. 2021).

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Gen Zs Seeking Companionship. Loneliness, Individual and Collective Narcissism as Predictors of Sharing Fake News

Chmiel, Michal, *Royal Holloway, University of London (UK)*

Thompson, Gareth, *London College of Communication, UAL (UK)*

Introduction and purpose of the study

Although wellbeing of external audiences has not been the primary focus of Public Relations scholarship, the recent COVID-19 pandemic has partly contributed to reenergising the interest in publics and their characteristics (Botan, 2023). It seems that especially Gen Z audiences are better informed, more motivated and active than previous generations but – worryingly – they also appear to be more vulnerable.

This transdisciplinary project seeks to identify factors negatively affecting the wellbeing of Gen Z audiences that also create conditions for sharing fake news online.

Literature review

Gen Zs can be characterised as the loneliest and most narcissistic of all generations (e.g. Cacioppo & Patrick, 2016; Twenge, 2023). At the same time, they have been also identified as being more prone to engage in sharing fake information (van den Linden, 2023). Public Relations professionals have indirectly contributed to the problem by supporting and communicating various isolation measures introduced during the pandemic. It would now appear timely to investigate the consequences of the two major char-

acterisations of Gen Zs for organisations and professional communicators.

Although several scholars have made significant effort to understand the impact of Public Relations on audiences (e.g. Rudock, 2001), and suggested the need to recognize PR's role on the marketplace of ideas (Fitzpatrick & Bronstein, 2006), a necessity to develop more responsible practices of online communication seems even more pronounced in today's communication environment (Hallahan, 2006). Additional rationale for investigating vulnerable audiences and their role in shaping communication-based relationships with organizations and society comes with the limitation found in the traditional model of stakeholder identification (Freeman, 1984), which suggested power as one of the main characteristics of stakeholders that organisations should engage with.

In the present project, it was hypothesized that although audiences experience feelings of loneliness and powerlessness, they would be inclined to share information low in facticity. Individual narcissism will be a moderator of this relationship. Additionally, it was hypothesized that collective narcissism would positively moderate the relationship between political attitudes

and sharing fake content online, but only if fake news stimuli is aligned with their political stance and is assessed as political and newsworthy.

Methodology

An online study was carried out using the university experiment management system and Qualtrics platform. Gen Z participants were recruited, and course credit was offered as compensation for their participation. As sample size of 279 participants was determined by calculating the expected power of the study (effect size = .25).

Independent variables included political attitudes, loneliness (Russel et al, 1980) individual narcissism (Ames et al., 2006) and collective narcissism (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009).

In the next step, participants were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions (political vs. not political fake news).

Next, participants were asked to rate their willingness to share the news online, assess its newsworthiness, credibility, and the extent to which the post appeared as political (manipulation control).

In the last step, participants were debriefed and thorough information about the purpose of the study was provided along with links to governmental websites offering credible information about the topics of the news used in the manipulation stage.

Results and conclusions

It is expected that this transdisciplinary project, which looks into PR, media and psychological factors explaining behaviour of audiences will more comprehensively explain why vulnerable and young audiences share fake content in the online environment. Authors hope to discuss

their findings against the assumptions of the Situational Theory of Publics (as reviewed in Grunig, 1997) and concentrate on the dimension of public's involvement and its antecedents.

Limitations

The sample consisting of Gen Z members living in the UK appears as the main drawback of the study, which partly limits the interpretation of the findings to the western European communication environment.

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Keywords

fake news, loneliness, narcissism, political attitudes, newsworthiness

Positive Communication and resilience: Explicating how positive communication can enhance crisis response effectiveness in moral outrage inducing crises

Coombs, W. Timothy, *Centre for Crisis and Risk Communications (USA)*
Tachkova, Elina R., *Hong Kong Baptist University (Hong Kong)*

Introduction

Crisis communication is one context where communication and human-wellbeing intersect. Organizational crises damage relationships and place people at risk physically, emotionally, and/or financially. By properly managing a crisis, the organization can facilitate stakeholder resilience and wellbeing. The focus on trying to lessen the damage a crisis inflicts upon others is the starting point for linking the crisis communication context with human wellbeing. The emphasis on “organizational outcomes” in PR and crisis communication has overshadowed its attention to human wellbeing. This is a theoretical piece which incorporates, positive communication, resilience, crisis communication and rhetoric theories to help improve communicative efforts and encourage human wellbeing.

Literature Review

Positive communication scholarship seeks to promote human flourishing across a variety of contexts. Within the organization context, crisis communication is one area where concern for human flourishing is salient.

Crisis is a very broad term, we focus on crisis context characterized by organizational behavior that violates stakeholder expectations and places stakeholders and the organization at risk. The harm inflicted by a crisis can be physical, psychological, environmental, and/or financial. Crisis victims at risk for physical and psychological harm include employees, community members, and customers (Coombs, 2023).

We first identify how crisis communication’s link to resilience illustrates its positive communication aspect. Resilience is an adaptive-transformative process evoked by disruption or loss (Buzzanell, 2010) and promotes wellbeing. Hence, many aspects of crisis communication seek to facilitate resilience, promote wellbeing, and improve social interactions. There are multiple levels of resilience during an organizational crisis including individual, relational, and organizational. The manuscript examines individual and relational levels because the organizational level is widely viewed as built upon employee (individual) resilience and the resilience of relationships with various stakeholders (relational). The explication of resilience provides a foundation for examining how crisis communication

acts as a form of positive communication.

Secondly, we draw upon positive communication to help understand how communication can be used to promote human flourishing during moral outrage inducing crises. Moreover, we explore crisis communication more broadly by establishing how existing elements of crisis communication are related to individual and relational resilience. We explicate the ethical base response in crisis communication (instructing and adjusting information) and reputation management. The ethical base response is a form of psychological first aid (PFA). PFA is composed of creating a safe environment (free from harm) coupled with communicating concern and compassion to reduce stress.

Finally, emotion-driven research in crisis communication is still in its infancy. Moral outrage creates a boundary condition for crisis communication theory (Coombs & Tachkova, 2023). In other words, it hinders promoting relational resilience because it negates the effects of the crisis response, including apologies. Since resilience is crucial for the wellbeing of stakeholders and an essential part of crisis recovery, there is a need to articulate a crisis response strategy specifically for extreme moral crises which promotes resilience and human wellbeing. We propose incorporating elements of positive communication into the crisis response is the key to communicating effectively. The suggested curative action response has several unique characteristics which make it an effective response for extreme moral outrage crises: (1) provides steps to facilitate recovery from the crisis, (2) seeks forgiveness through accountability, and (3) demonstrates the organization is accepting the negative consequences of its own actions. Moreover, curative action is a form of positive communication because it enables the organization-stakeholder relationship to flourish by facilitating individual and relational resilience.

Implications

We articulate the need for a new crisis response which more accurately captures the communicative demands of moral outrage inducing crises and addresses the needs of stakeholders. Rooted in the rhetoric of atonement, we propose that organizations should communicate clearly about what curative actions have been taken to help both victims and non-victims manage the negative consequences of the crisis and encourage wellbeing. The manuscript has both theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical standpoint, this is the first paper to propose a crisis response strategy aiming to improve stakeholder wellbeing following moral outrage inducing crises. From a practical standpoint, this will enhance the repertoire of strategies available to crisis managers by putting the victims at the center of the crisis communication effort.

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Keywords

crisis communication, resilience, positive communication, curative action

Empowering voices, enabling change: exploring the relationship between wellbeing and gender equality for public relations Portuguese practitioners

Cunha, Maria João, *CIEG/ISCSP-Ulisboa (Portugal)*

Cruz, Carla, *CIEG/ISCSP-Ulisboa (Portugal)*

Belim, Célia, *CAPP/ISCSP-Ulisboa (Portugal)*

Introduction and purpose of the study

This communication aims to explore the relationship between wellbeing and gender equality for Portuguese PR practitioners. It derives from the project *Well-being in comms industries* from EUPRERA Project network *Women in PR*. Though studies have shown that wellbeing is a gendered construct, little work has focused on the relationship between SWB and gender equality policies and experiences, especially in PR in Portugal. Therefore, the research question for this study is: RQ1. How does the SWB of Portuguese PR practitioners relate to gender equality policies and experiences in the workplace?

Literature review

We refer to the concept of subjective well-being (SWB) in the assertion of measuring happiness or satisfaction with life, combining the dimensions mentioned by Diener (2009) of thinking - the evaluative/cognitive dimension and feeling - the emotional/affective dimension. In this study we specifically focus on the relationship between wellbeing, considering job satisfaction and work-life balance, and gender equality

perceptions. As noted by Connerly and Wu (2016), despite over 50 years of research on the quality of working life and diversity, there has been a notable gap in the examination of women's wellbeing in the workplace. This oversight is becoming increasingly concerning as women's participation in the workforce continues to grow, accompanied by distinct challenges they encounter both professionally and domestically, which differ from those experienced by men. And PR is a predominantly feminized profession around the world since the 1970's (Tench et al 2017; Topić et al 2020), which is also the case for Portugal. With the increasing influx of women into the field of public relations, notable advancements have been achieved, with women now occupying prominent leadership roles within communication agencies. However, despite these strides, systemic gender disparities persist, as evidenced by significant gender pay gaps (Moreno et al 2021), the prevalence of glass ceilings, and the overburdening of women with work and family tasks. Although gender equality is one of the millennium goals and it is in organizations' agendas, monitoring mechanisms are rare and it is important to understand how

it impacts SWB.

Methodology

The study used a qualitative method with semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted with the aim of exploring the experiences and practices of Portuguese PR practitioners. This study comprised two distinct groups of participants: the first group with contracted workers in the comms industries (n=11) and the second one with active freelancers (n=6). In terms of sociodemographic characterization, the first group was composed of six women and five men, aged between 24 and 53, and the second had four women and two men, aged between 22 and 51.

Given that this study derives from the project Well-being in comms industries within EUPRE-RA's Project network Women in PR, the interview guidelines were previously approved, fulfilling ethical requirements. A platform was used to allocate all interviews, and data was processed using MAXQDA software. Framework analysis was chosen as the basis for data analysis, going through stages of familiarization, coding, framework development, and interpretation.

Results and conclusions

Data shows that male practitioners reveal higher levels of SWB, especially related to job satisfaction and work-life balance but are more unaware of gender equality issues. In general, gender equality policies were hardly reported. Though gender inequalities are not directly mentioned, they are reported for other cases, using a third person. Some differences were found between contracted and freelance workers from the industry. We also found evidence to concur with the idea of a gender subtext that reinforces the relationship between wellbeing and gender equality, indirectly revealed in work-life unbalances and in gendered perceptions.

Limitations of the study

Main limitation of the study is the panel of interviewees that is limited to 17 participants, though they are all PR practitioners.

Practical and social implications

This study contributes to shed light on the relationship between subjective wellbeing in PR and gender equality experiences and perceptions, contributing to the development of more effective policies in a rather feminized industry.

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Keywords

Wellbeing, Gender equality, Work-life balance; Job satisfaction; Portuguese PR practitioners

Harnessing the Power of Online Support Communities in Times of Crisis: Implications for Public Relations

Doherty, Maggie, *St Mary's University (UK)*

Introduction and Purpose

This mixed-methods study by Demos and the St Mary's Centre for the Art of Dying Well analysed 110,000 online peer support conversations around terminal illness and bereavement from 2003-2020, using natural language processing and qualitative analysis of data from specialised forums and social media with expert workshops. It explores how rapidly expanding digital support networks provide emotional support during crises, with implications for public relations crisis management and collective well-being.

Literature Review

Prior research establishes the rising role of online communities in easing isolation, enabling advocacy amid unfamiliar systems, allowing authentic expressions unsuitable offline, and providing an immediate response as in-person services halt during disasters, epidemics, conflicts, and cause-specific crises.

Methodology

Natural language processing systematically identified prevalent forum conversations around grief, caregiving burdens, existential beliefs, and pets during loss. Researchers have collaboratively developed ethical classification frameworks to explore discussions involving personal expe-

riences, analysing usage patterns, and perceived benefits versus systemic barriers raised by experts.

The data collection spanned from May 2003 to September 2020, and before the data was analysed, it was anonymised as much as possible by removing metadata that could potentially identify the authors, including social and site usernames, images, and originating IP addresses. The volume of posts increased over time, with a general upward trend, likely due to the increasing use of online platforms. Additionally, the volume of posts increased significantly in 2020, which may be attributed to the Covid-19 pandemic, which has led to a greater number of people experiencing serious illness and loss, as well as disrupted access to support and information, which has moved online.

Results and Conclusions

Findings strongly indicate online networks' roles as real-time barometers of social strains, as well as resources which can supplement traditional crisis infrastructure. Users describe forums as providing essential emotional support by validating otherwise dismissed common experiences, aggregating insider knowledge for navigating complex care systems, and sustaining empathetic communities that offer support all year

round. Together, these findings demonstrate the means of maintaining collective continuity and resilience when disasters threaten individual and societal well-being.

Practical and Social Implications

The practical and social implications of public relations strategies must be considered in light of the growing influence of online support networks on collective well-being during times of crisis. Practitioners have an ethical responsibility to actively engage with and respond to online discourse, rather than relying solely on traditional methods of monitoring. By closely monitoring online communities, valuable insights can be gained into the social strain experienced by individuals. The strategic incorporation of digital self-advocacy circles as resources for validation, navigation, and resilience can enhance an organisation's communication infrastructure, particularly when individuals seek transparency, advocacy, and care in times of instability.

Limitations and Future Research

Digital inequality barriers around income, literacy levels, inconsistent device/broadband access, cultural preferences, and language fluency must be continually addressed to fulfil support potential. Private forums and non-English content should also be explored for completeness as online well-being dependencies widen.

Keywords

Online networks, peer support, natural language processing, bereavement, death

Profound Changes Mobile Devices. Potential Consequences. And the Lives of Today's Public Relations Professionals

Downes, Edward J., *Boston University (USA)*

Introduction and Purpose of the Study

This study addresses how dependency on the use of mobile devices by today's public relations professionals globally has deeply, decisively, definitively--profoundly--influenced their "work-life balance." In turn, it asks whether these communication managers control these devices--or if the devices control them?

Literature and Methodology

The analysis draws its conclusions from 35 carefully selected studies. Collectively these offered a wide, kaleidoscopic, long-term view of the *metamorphosis* of social media's influence on public relations/communication management, rather than a stagnant discovery at a certain point in the evolution of social media's influence on the field. They were chosen from literature dating back a quarter century to 1997--i.e., about the time when the rapid adoption and diffusion of social media began to redefine the opportunities--and challenges--offered to PR professionals. Roughly fifty percent of the analyses were from the social sciences (primarily from the mass communication/public relations literature); a quarter from the natural sciences (primarily from the medical literature); and a quarter from the humanities (primarily from the humanities literature).

Results and Conclusions

The common theme through all of the literature is not surprising, but worth reflecting on--carefully: that is, that the changes social media and mobile devices offered to public relations professionals have been dramatic, unprecedented, sometimes misguided, and occasionally unexpected. They have significant consequences--socially, politically, economically, culturally--and historically. As one illustration from an historical perspective notes: the term "social media" never appeared in any of the historical records, chronicles, biographies, or documentations that speak to the deeper history that has informed what today we call "public relations." Roughly 30 years ago, for PR managers, there was no blogging, no Tweeting, no Google, no Internet, no tablets--or mobile phones.

Redefining "Time," "Space" and "Availability"

Over roughly the last three decades, social media generally (and eventually mobile devices) have redefined the PR professionals' concepts of "time," "space" and "availability." Re. "time"--because of social media, the eight, ten, 12 (or longer) hour workday is fading as PR practitioners are increasingly "on call" all day (and night?). Thus, the concept of "time"--specifically "work/office time"--has changed. Re. "space"--because

of social media, distance is increasingly an irrelevant consideration when working with clients/publics in different time zones--since today's PR professionals can connect within seconds--across the world. Thus, the concept of geographic distance's limitations has been refined. Re. "availability"--because mobile devices allow some PR practitioners to be available 24/7, increasing numbers are "never unavailable."

Never Before

Never in human history, prior to now, have PR practitioners dealt with the demands on their lives, personal and professional, directed at them through their mobile devices' callings. A summary of much of the literature's assertions, and data to back them up, is illustrated through this rich quote: "Increasingly PR professionals choose first to look at their mobile devices' screens prior to getting out of bed in the morning; they keep their devices on their person all day; they place them on a table, an arm's length away, as they go to bed; and they grab them again as soon as they are awake...."

A perplexing question arises, still without a definitive answer (such as those provide by long-term, longitudinal inquiries). That is, "What are mobile devices "doing" to PR practitioners--particularly when it comes to 'workplace demands' conflicting with 'free time'?"

Mobile Device Addiction

The paper shares two simultaneous addictions, largely unrealized as PR practitioners are using their mobile devices--which allow them to "feel good" as they use the device. Namely: (1) "dopamine rushes" (encouraging their physical addiction) and (2) "intermittent reinforcement" (encouraging psychological their addiction). The paper provides a series of citations from peer-reviewed analyses, primarily from the medical and behavioral psychology fields, supporting this "addiction assertion" suggesting why users are often physically and emotionally addicted to

their phones. This is followed by a summary of supportive also supporting this assertion--while incorporating more public relations foci--from a presentation at the 2021 International Conference on Communication & Media Studies titled, "What's Going on with that Device Attached to Your Hip? -- The Downfalls of Mobile Device Dependency."

Practical and Social Implications

The paper recognizes the unprecedented advantages--and unquestionable need for--PR professionals to use mobile devices. It cites, for example, how these devices have dramatically enhanced, and are now integral to, the field's seminal research-planning-implementation-evaluation processes. It also, however, asks PR practitioners to consider carefully how the devices' requests brought to them from clients, bosses, publics who want their immediate attention stifle positive, empirically supported correlations between wellness and uninterrupted "quality," "family," "personal," times.

Keywords

Mobile Devices/Mobile Phones, Psychological/Social Effects, Wellness

Community Engagement and CSR in Times of Crisis: Corporate Efforts for Enhancing Local Well-being after the 6th February, 2023 Earthquake in Türkiye

Engin, Elif, *Bahçeşehir University (Turkey)*

Eker Akgöz, Burcu, *Bahçeşehir University (Turkey)*

Introduction and purpose of the study

On the 6th February, 2023, a major earthquake hit southern side of the Türkiye. The first earthquake with a magnitude of 7.8 which seriously shook 11 cities hundreds of kilometers away for approximately 86 seconds, caused the death of tens of thousands of people and the collapse of tens of thousands of buildings. Following this earthquake, approximately 9 hours later on the same day, a second large earthquake of 7.6 magnitude occurred in Kahramanmaraş. The greatest humanitarian crisis to ever affect Turkey resulted as thousands of homes and businesses collapsed, crumbling historic citadels and leveling bustling cities. It killed more than fifty thousand people. Millions more people are homeless, and over hundreds of thousands people have been injured. It caused emotional and psychological devastation and more than 100 billion dollars in material damage. In the wake of natural disasters, communities must work together to overcome a variety of obstacles in order to recover and become more resilient. Following both the emotional and material devastation caused by the earthquake, the Turkish nation showed a positive reflex in a very short time and started to collect aid from all over the

country. While search and rescue efforts continued, non-governmental organizations as well as volunteers began working day and night to meet the urgent needs of the local people.

Turkey is very familiar to the social, economic, and environmental changes that can result from earthquakes. Because our country has a long history of seismic activities. However, the wounds left by this earthquake on the Turkish nation are deeper than all of them. During post-disaster recovery periods, companies' social responsibilities and efforts become more prominent. Interactions and communication with local people affected by disasters and the effectiveness of corporate strategies within this framework gain importance. Therefore, the aim of this study is to examine the social responsibility and community engagement efforts of companies after this major earthquake disaster in Turkey and to investigate their effects on the well-being of society. In order to analyze the efforts, these are the research questions of this study.

- **RQ1:** What community engagement strategies did corporations employ to address the well-being of local people after the earthquake?

- **RQ2:** What role did Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives play in contributing to the well-being of the affected communities after the earthquake?

Literature Review

The concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) pertains to a management approach that is characterized by the company's ethical conduct, openness, and communication with all stakeholders. It also involves establishing corporate objectives that align with the principles of sustainable development, conservation of natural and cultural resources for future generations, diversity appreciation, and the mitigation of social issues (Filho et al., 2010). CSR contributes to the ethical and responsible protection of stakeholders in order to accomplish two objectives: to maintain the advantages of bettering stakeholders' lives both inside and outside of the government. A well-implemented CSR is expected to create a positive impact on community well-being (Kotler and Lee, 2005). And also CSR affects community development and engagement. CSR initiatives have an impact on community development, which in turn influences community empowerment and fosters positive community transformation and social change. This also focuses on community engagement and enhancing well-being of local people.

Methodology

This study will utilize qualitative research methods to collect additional data and characterize the circumstances surrounding the procedure. Because it provides a comprehensive understanding for this study, the case study will be used as the research technique. Furthermore, rather of measuring the phenomena, this study attempts to explain them. In order to investigate the social responsibility and community engagement efforts of companies and their effects on the well-being of society, first, we need to gain

in-depth insights. The major data collection approach will be the researcher interviewing each participant in a semi-structured in-depth interview. In-depth interview is a data collection technique that covers all dimensions of the subject being researched, asks mostly open-ended questions and allows detailed answers to be obtained, and allows information to be collected through face-to-face, one-on-one interviews. The other person's feelings, knowledge, experience and observations are reached through conversation (Tekin, 2006). While interviewing, which is the data collection technique widely used in qualitative research, gives the interviewees the ability to express themselves first-hand, the research also provides the meaning of the interviewees in their worlds, their lives, their lives, and their lives. It offers the opportunity to understand in depth the feelings, thoughts and experiences of the special situations they are in, with the help of their expressions (McCracken, 1988).

In this study, interviews with corporate representatives, community leaders, local government officials and NGO's will be conducted. In order to analyze the interviews, the thematic analysis will be used. It is a method for studying qualitative data involves looking for, interpreting, and reporting recurring patterns throughout a data collection (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It is a technique for characterizing data, but in the process of choosing codes and creating themes, interpretation is also involved.

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Keywords

CSR, community engagement, community well-being

Authentic Inside-Out CSR: Employees as Partners in Advancing Social Goals

Fitzpatrick, Kathy R., *University of South Florida (USA)*

Introduction and purpose

Anita Roddick took on the titans of business in 1976 with the launch of The Body Shop in the seaside town of Brighton, England. Her “quaint” idea that a business could make money and also be a force for good in the world was the guiding principle behind the growth of the company into a billion-dollar enterprise. A big part of that growth can be attributed to Roddick’s view that employees were the heart and soul of a company and, therefore, should be viewed and treated as partners in the company’s corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts. This paper presents a historical case study focused on Roddick’s “inside out” approach to CSR in practice. The work provides theoretical insights for scholars studying the business philosophies and practices of socially responsible companies and practical insights for entrepreneurial business leaders and communication professionals leading and communicating about CSR initiatives.

Literature review

The research distinguishes existing “internal CSR” and “inside-out CSR” approaches that view employees as publics or targets of CSR communication aimed at garnering employee support for CSR initiatives from an “authentic inside-out CSR” approach that views employees as partners in CSR efforts. The study identifies key elements of an authentic inside-out CSR model, illustrating the role and impact of employees as partners in defining and advancing mission-driven CSR goals, as well as the influence of a socially active

CEO on CSR practices. As such, the research extends and refines understanding of how “inside-out” approaches to CSR can be used to accomplish dual purposes in business and society. The work also illuminates distinctions between reactive CSR activities and CSR communication with strategic stakeholders (including employees) that are motivated by internal and external pressures and proactive CSR activities and CSR communication that are intrinsic to a company’s purpose, mission and values.

Research questions

- RQ1: What philosophies, principles and practices define an authentic inside-out CSR model?
- RQ2: How can an authentic inside-out CSR model be operationalized in practice?
- RQ3 What is the role and impact of a socially activist CEO in advancing authentic inside-out CSR?

Method

The paper presents a historical case study documenting CSR philosophies, principles and practices implemented by Anita Roddick in launching and leading The Body Shop, an exemplar among socially responsible businesses that is widely recognized for both its commitment to social causes and its charismatic, social activist founder. A case study method is appropriate for research designed to test theories and concepts and to answer “how” questions – in this case,

how an authentic inside-out approach to CSR can be successfully operationalized in practice to accomplish mission-driven CSR goals. The case study is historical in the sense that the focus is on Roddick and the decisions she made and how they were implemented to what effect. The study is based on a comprehensive review of available works both by and about Roddick and her leadership of The Body Shop. Although her premature death in 2007 does not allow for a personal interview, Roddick was a prolific writer who shared her views in multiples books and interviews, providing a rich trove of materials for review, along with the works of other scholars who have written about Roddick's contributions to the CSR movement.

Results and conclusions

The study shows that for companies authentically pursuing social goals that are built into a company's DNA, employees are key partners in a company's ability to successfully balance the pursuit of profits with the advancement of social goals. The research offers a new CSR practice model for entrepreneurial business leaders and communication professionals in companies committed to both maximizing profits and making the world better.

Limitations and future research

In documenting key elements of authentic inside-out CSR, and the influence of a socially minded, activist business leader on CSR practices, the work provides scholars a range of topics to explore in future research on CSR. Although the results of the study help to advance theoretical aspects of CSR, case studies are not generalizable to other populations. Future research should test the elements of an authentic inside-out model of CSR in empirical studies involving different types of companies operating in various contexts and cultures.

Keywords

Corporate social responsibility (CSR), employee relations, CEO activism, leadership

Whose Wellbeing Matters Most for Gen Z? A Comparative Analysis of the Effects of Climate Messages

Geysi, Nilüfer, *Bahçeşehir University (Turkey)*

Introduction and purpose of the study

Climate change stands as one of the most imminent challenges confronting the global community. In addressing the extensive impacts of global climate change, governmental bodies, intergovernmental organizations, and businesses have strategically approached various aspects on diverse scales. This engagement requires disseminating climate messages that are crafted for various stakeholder groups.

Generation Z has multiple connections to climate change, serving as the prospective future leaders, investors, and decision-makers. Another pivotal aspect of this generation is their crucial role in driving social change and transformation, with assigned characteristics such as being socially conscious and self-oriented influencing their dynamic impact on shaping a sustainable future.

This study aims to investigate the impact of various message frames that highlight the wellbeing of distinct elements (nature, community, and self) in predicting the intention to engage in low-risk activist behaviors, attitudes toward the organization, and the intention to support the organization. Additionally, it aims to compare the diverse responses generated by for-profit and non-profit organizations.

This study aims to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1. How, if at all, does participants' activist behavior intention differ as a function of message framing (nature-related vs. self-related vs. community-related)?
- RQ2. How, if at all, does participants' attitudes toward the organization differ as a function of message framing?
- RQ3. How, if at all, does participants' intention to support the organization differ as a function of message framing?
- RQ4. How, if at all, do participants' activist behavior intentions differ according to the source of the organization (company vs. NPO)?
- RQ5. How, if at all, do participants' intention to support the organization differ according to the source of the organization?
- RQ6. How, if at all, do participants' attitude toward the organization differ according to the source of the organization?

Literature review

Contemporary organizations address environmental issues for the wellbeing of society, nature, the sector, or the organizations themselves. "The concept of wellbeing can be applied to any living system, namely, Earth as a whole, the global economy, social communities, individual biological creatures (plants, animals, etc.) and natural ecosystems" (Shrivastava and Zsolnai, 2021,

p. 386).

When framing climate change, adherence to the underlying scientific facts is crucial. This ensures that messages are tailored to align with diverse audiences. The presentation of climate change messages as either gain or loss, and the focus on who or what is at the center of these positive or negative contents, are crucial considerations. The demographic group born in 1997 or later, namely Gen Z, is closely interested in the topic of climate change, showing more concern for the future compared to other generations and being more optimistic (Deloitte, 2023). Examining the literature reveals a focus on more effective education regarding sustainability issues, along with an emphasis on consumption and behaviors within this group. However, studies on messages that would motivate this generation to take action on transformative societal issues are limited.

Methodology

In this study, a 3 (message framing: nature-related vs. self-related vs. community-related) x 2 (message source: company vs. NPO) between-subjects experimental design will be employed. Data will be collected through an online

survey method. The research aims to include 450 participants, with an inclusion criterion of being born between 1997 and 2006. The survey form will be distributed to individuals studying or graduated at various levels (high school, undergraduate, and graduate) in Turkey through the researcher’s networks using the convenience sampling method. Participants will be randomly assigned to six groups.

The stimulus materials will include two fictitious organizations, one company and one NPO, will be used to minimize possible effects of the pre-existing company perceptions. The six fictitious posts will invite the readers to stand against the climate change problem for wellbeing of the three different elements.

Dependent variables include low-risk activist behavior intention (three-item Likert scale), attitudes toward the organization (three seven-point semantic differential items adopted from MacKenzie and Lutz, 1989), and intention to support the organization (three seven-point semantic differential items adopted from Kim and Lee, 2015). In addition, the study will include control variables, specifically gauging issue involvement through a two-item Likert scale

Table 1: Experimental design

Nature-oriented		Message framing		
		Self-oriented	Community-oriented	
Type of organization	Company	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
	NPO	Group 4	Group 5	Group 6

and assessing beliefs about climate change using a five-item Likert scale adopted from McCright et al. (2015).

Before commencing the data collection process, ethical approval will be sought from the university's ethics committee to proceed with the study. Additionally, a manipulation check will be conducted to ensure the successful manipulation of the message. The findings will be analyzed using SPSS.

Results and conclusions

The results are anticipated to make contributions to the literature on corporate activism, youth activism, environmental communication, and NPO communication. This research is novel in its exploration of the impact of message focus on mobilizing Gen Z. The study further enriches the literature by specifically analyzing a developing country. Despite the considerable momentum gained by climate activism and youth movements in recent years in Turkey, the number of studies in the field of strategic communication on this matter is almost negligible.

This research aims to present novel practical insights, shedding light on companies engaging in activism. Currently, no company in Turkey can be distinctly identified as an activist. Attitudes toward the company and the intention to support it may serve as guiding factors for companies interested in activism. The study's results will furnish valuable information for NPOs about message frames capable of mobilizing Generation Z as activists.

This study has several limitations. It relies on a convenience sample of students limiting the generalizability of the findings. The second limitation is associated with the nature of the message and exposure to it. Different topics and longitudinal experiments may yield diverse results. The final limitation pertains to the number of

control variables, such as values and political identity, which may influence the prediction of dependent variables.

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Keywords

social media, youth activism, climate change communication, NPO communication, corporate activism

Understanding Reputation-Building and its Importance to Young Entrepreneurs in Singapore

Goh, Jonathan, *Singapore Management University (Singapore)*

Zhang, Evonne, *Singapore Management University (Singapore)*

Ong, William, *Singapore Management University (Singapore)*

Yeo, Su Lin, *Singapore Management University (Singapore)*

Corporate reputation is becoming increasingly important to companies hoping to survive in the globalized digital economy characterized by an ongoing and omnipresent environment for social advocacy. Considering that reputation is positively associated with business performance (Yeo, 2020), damage to reputation is the number one business risk particularly for companies operating in the Asia Pacific region (AON, 2019). Since the Covid-19 pandemic, building reputation from inside out and internal communication have also been shown to critically drive organizational identity and trust among employees. Further, in an age of digitalization where members of society are actively engaged in some forms of advocacy, having high reputation capital is necessary as companies are 24/7 scrutinized by an integrated media ecosystem and a highly polarized global audience that do not hesitate to throw unfair accuses and attacks to ruin reputation (Winters, 2022). While many established companies may be cognizant that a corporate reputation that takes 20 years to build can be destroyed in 5 minutes, can this be said of the same for young entrepreneurs and their start-up companies or are they too focused on making profits?

A business-friendly city-state, Singapore has consistently been ranked among the top three

nations for doing business by the World Bank. Following its rapid growth as a regional hub, Singapore ranks at the top in Asia, and seventh globally (Crunchbase, 2021). According to KPMG, Singapore is the top destination in Southeast Asia for startup investment, and Singapore-based enterprises are attracting more funding than ever. In 2021 alone, startups in Singapore raised over S\$11.2 billion (US\$8.02 billion) which doubled the amount obtained in 2020 (KPMG, 2022).

Considering that top business priorities for young entrepreneurs and the young companies are to ensure adequate funding, profitability, and revenue growth, this study seeks to gain insights into the extent start-ups in Singapore value and allocate resources to building their corporate reputation. It is guided by the RepTrak™ Reputation Model (Fombrun et al., 2000) which is an established standard measurement used to measure the views of multi-stakeholders on the reputation of corporate reputation. Comprising seven attributes or dimensions, i.e., 1) financial performance, 2) products and services, 3) innovation, 4) workplace, 5) governance, 6) citizenship, and 7) leadership, the model captures the perceptions of different stakeholder groups and their collective judgements of the company based on the evaluation of each of the attribute

over time (Chan et. al., 2018). Through the theoretical lens of this model, we asked two research questions: 1) Do young entrepreneurs in Singapore value and prioritize reputation building in their business operations and strategies? Among the seven reputational attributes suggested by RepTrak, which of the attributes are prioritized and how are these attributes built into their corporate business strategies to enhance reputation? (RQ1); and 2) Do they view the efforts and resources in corporate reputation building and profitability of their business as a zero-sum game? Who drives the reputation efforts in these young startups, and how do they go about doing that? (RQ2).

The study employed semi-structured in-depth interviews as the primary method and data was collected from inputs shared by 22 young entrepreneurs of business startups in Singapore whose ages ranged from 18 to 40 years old. Interviews were carried out either via face-to-face or online (zoom). Additionally, we ensured participants hail from different industries and included representations from audit, automobile, biotech, e-commerce, education, energy, entertainment, fashion, food and beverage, media, public relations, real estate, training and development, and health.

Our finding revealed that despite 77 percent of the interviewees indicating that reputation was very important to their growing business, all of them appeared to have a lack of conceptual understanding of reputation building. Furthermore, they did not appear to spend much time thinking about the drivers of reputation and what matters most to their companies to build a strong reputation (RQ1). Further, when asked to rank the importance of the seven attributes, Products and Services (30%) was the most important, followed by Leadership (26%), Innovation (20%), Financial Performance (8%), Citizenship (6%), Governance (6%) and Workplace (4%). All the startup founders additionally re-

ported that they lead reputation building themselves (RQ2).

Our study essentially found that reputation is only as important as business needs and profitability is sole motivation for young entrepreneurs in Singapore. We further uncovered that two of the attributes, specifically citizenship and workplace, which are key in driving reputation today ranked lowly, suggesting that despite the global push for companies to embrace sustainability practices and diversity, equity and inclusion in workplace, profitability matters more for startups whose corporate purpose is to survive and grow their businesses.

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Keywords

Corporate reputation; starts-ups; reputation attributes; Singapore

„Share the nicotine with your friends“: Ethical flaws of promoting tobacco and nicotine products using digital nanoinfluencers“

Hejlová, Denisa, *Charles University (Czech Republic)*
Ortová, Nina, *Charles University (Czech Republic)*

While public relations (PR) and strategic communication is often portrayed as a champion of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) initiatives, promoting human well-being and sustainable practices, its actual contribution to these areas remains a subject of critical scrutiny. The effectiveness and sincerity of PR efforts in genuinely advancing ESG values, rather than merely enhancing corporate images, are essential for fostering true societal progress and the well-being of both groups: PR professionals themselves and their publics. Among industries often labeled as vices—such as tobacco, alcohol, and gambling—communication professionals face a unique ethical dichotomy.

On one hand, they must reconcile their promotional activities, which are increasingly targeted and data-driven due to digital advancements, as noted by Hagelstein et al. (2024), with their personal moral compass and the societal impact of their work. On the other hand, the target audience's well-being is at stake, as they are subjected to sophisticated marketing campaigns that may influence their lifestyle choices. For example, new tobacco devices are promoted as technological devices and trendy gadgets, undermining their negative health effects and addiction (Hejlová et al., 2019).

This creates a complex dynamic where the communication professional's role in advocating for potentially harmful products is at odds with the foundational goal of enhancing human well-being. The balance between these opposing forces is delicate and necessitates a nuanced understanding of ethical practice in digital communication. We will thus delve into the content of briefings provided by PR professionals to individual influencers, aiming to promote tobacco and nicotine products through their own social media channels.

Our research design employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as proposed by van Dijk (1993) to scrutinize the promotional strategies utilized in digital marketing of tobacco and nicotine products through nanoinfluencers. CDA allows us to deeply analyze the language and communication tactics employed, revealing the underlying power dynamics, ideologies, and ethical implications. This methodology is particularly suited for examining how digital marketing narratives may influence consumer behavior and societal norms around tobacco use.

This research aims to bridge the knowledge gap of tobacco influencers and their threat to the well-being of other stakeholders (especial-

ly non-smokers) and PR or communication professionals, who balance on the edge of ethics and/or legislative norms (Nguyen & Zarndt, 2023). It helps to understand the tobacco control and its ethical challenges, especially with regard to underage online publics, which report an increase in intake of novel tobacco products, such as vapes, nicotine pouches, or e-cigarettes, even without smoking cigarettes before (so-called initiation theory) (Venrick et al., 2023).

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Keywords

public relations; strategic communication; ethics; influencer marketing; tobacco control

Leading the way: The impact of leadership communication on employees' AI anxiety, well-being, and relationships with their organizations

Huang, Vincent, *Hong Kong Baptist University (Hong Kong)*

The advent of artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming the workplace, automating tasks, optimizing workflows, and providing data-driven insights that were previously unattainable. As AI systems become more capable and accessible, they are reshaping the job landscape. However, many leaders find themselves on the back foot, grappling with the pace of change. They are often unprepared for the intricate challenges that AI integration poses, from ethical considerations and potential biases in AI decision-making to the need for significant investment in upskilling employees. This study explores the role of leadership communication in AI uses in the workplace and its impact on employees' well-being and their perception of employee-organization relationships.

This study draws on the motivating language theory (MLT; J. Mayfield & M. Mayfield, 2018) to explore the impact of three types of leadership communication in mitigating employees' AI anxiety and enhancing employee well-being and their perception of relationships with their organizations. Informed by the MLT (J. Mayfield & M. Mayfield, 2018), leader-to-follower communication is conceptualized into three types: direction-giving language, meaning-making language, and empathetic language. Direction-giving language provides clear instructions

and expectations. Meaning-making language acknowledges followers' contributions and provides cultural guidance. Empathetic language creates emotional bonds and shows care and compassion. Research has indicated that leaders' motivating language has a positive impact on employee outcomes, such as job satisfaction, performance, and organizational identification (Madlock & Sexton, 2015; Mayfield & Mayfield, 2007; Wang et al., 2009).

A survey of 505 employees across various internet companies in China revealed that a leader's ability to provide clear direction, demonstrate empathy, and imbue meaningful workplace changes is inversely correlated with AI anxiety among employees. These linguistic strategies appear to reduce fears related to AI, such as job displacement and skill redundancy, thereby enhancing overall well-being. Moreover, the study finds that when leaders employ motivating language effectively, it fosters a more positive perception of the employee-organization relationship.

Theoretically, this study extends the concept of leaders' motivating language by applying it to the context of AI-infused workplace. It underscores the significance of leadership communication as a tool for socialization and resocializa-

tion in environments undergoing technological disruption. By interpreting and framing the AI integration process, leaders can shape employee attitudes and ease the transition into new working paradigms.

The research highlights the importance of leaders as both navigators and translators of AI-driven change. Effective communication by leaders helps employees understand and align with the evolving technological landscape, ensuring that the human workforce is not only retained but is also prepared to collaborate with AI tools and systems.

Furthermore, the study accentuates the necessity for targeted leader training programs focusing on enhancing communication skills in the context of the AI-infused workplace. It suggests that leaders must be educated not only in the functional aspects of AI but also in the psychological and social dimensions of its workplace integration. Such training should aim to equip leaders with the skills needed to articulate a compelling vision of the future, address employee concerns with empathy, and foster a shared understanding of the evolving role of AI in enhancing job performance and organizational outcomes.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the body of knowledge on leadership communication by demonstrating the potential of leaders' motivating language to act as a buffer against AI anxiety. It provides empirical evidence for the critical role leaders play in resocializing the workforce during periods of technological upheaval. As AI continues to reshape the workplace, the ability of leaders to effectively communicate becomes pivotal in ensuring a smooth transition, maintaining employee satisfaction, and strengthening the bond between the employee and the organization.

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Keywords

leadership communication, AI anxiety, employee well-being, employee-organization relationships

Organisational shared-purpose, Communication, Good Health and Wellbeing: A Case Study from Australia and New Zealand

Hung-Baesecke, Chun-Ju Flora, *University of Technology Sydney (Australia)*
Chen, Yi-Ru Regina, *Hong Kong Baptist University (Hong Kong)*
Taylor, Maureen, *University of Technology Sydney (Australia)*

Introduction

The development of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) started at the Earth Summit in Brazil in 1992, where the participating countries agreed to adopt Agenda 21. This global partnership aimed to improve human living quality and protect the environment (United Nations, n.d.). In September 2015, at the UN Sustainable Development Summit, the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with 17 SDGs, was agreed upon (United Nations, n.d.). Nowadays, it is very common to see organisations in different industries, government departments, educational institutes, and NGOs adopt some of these SDGs in their pursuit of sustainability. Meanwhile, the research agenda in public relations has expanded beyond organizational boundaries, focusing on how organisations can make a positive impact on society (Hurst & Johnston, 2020). Such trend also challenges organisations to reflect on their own purpose in the society (Carroll, 2021). A clear purpose provides *a reason for being* of an organisation (Gartenberg, et al., 2019) and allows the organisation to make informed decisions about what actions to take and what to avoid, such as its sustainability initiatives (Jindal, 2022). To achieve this, organisations need to develop a purpose that can

be shared with the stakeholders who also agree with the organisation's vision, and who's expectations on organisations' social role are aligned with organisational purpose. In addition, we believe that it should be joint effort for organisations and the society to work together in achieving the 2030 Agenda. Therefore, the focus of this research is on how an organisation incorporates SDGs as its purpose foundation and collaborates and communicates with the stakeholders that share the same visions and values in the sustainable issues.

Literature Review

When an organisation shares its purpose with stakeholders (i.e., shared purpose) by co-creation or buy-in, it can unify them (Jindal, 2022), and achieve both economic and social objectives, leading to more effectiveness than an organisation without purpose (Hung-Baesecke, Chen, & Taylor, 2023). On the other hand, an evolving message is becoming clearer to all kinds of organisations: stakeholders have high expectations for business to contribute to resolving societal and environmental issues (Braig & Edinger-Schons, 2020). For an organisation's purpose to have its maximum effectiveness and impact on society, it must be shared with the organi-

sation's key stakeholders (Lleo et al., 2021). We believe that the construct of "shared purpose" explains the importance of alliance building goals for achieving the 2030 agenda. Through communication, engaging in dialogues, and listening to stakeholders, organisations are able to establish and maintain relationships with stakeholders sharing the same purpose and the goals for improving the society and resolving social and economic issues.

Methodology

In this research, we are studying Ryman Healthcare (Ryman hereinafter), a New Zealand based retirement village and rest home operator, and how the SDGs the company adopted serve as the foundation for their purpose development and business operations. In this paper, we focus on how the SDG of good health and wellbeing serves as the purpose foundation for guiding Ryman's operation and communication with the internal and external stakeholders. We have conducted in-depth interviews with Ryman, including the organisation's senior executives, the public relations and communication staff, the employees, and the government sector for this research.

Findings

The initial findings show that: 1) Having the SDGs as an organisation's purpose foundation provides the directions on an organisation's strategic planning and affect how an organisation develops its purpose; 2) A shared purpose can be developed by involving and consulting different stakeholders on their visions and expectations towards the society and the organisation; 3) Having wellbeing incorporated into an organisation's purpose allows organisations to have a broader scope in caring not only for the customers, but also other stakeholders, such as employees, the marginalised publics, the minorities in the society, etc.; and 4) for Ryman as an retire-

ment home operator, having the SDG of good health and wellbeing as one of the organisational purposes help empower the senior citizens in re-defining the meaning of retirement.

Practical and Social Implications

This research echoes Hurst and Johnston's (2021) view on the role of public relations in bringing impact to the society. In the specific context of this study, we identified how public relations could utilise communication and listening in understanding stakeholders' expectations on an organisation's social role and incorporate these expectations in the shared-purpose development. In addition, when an organisation follows one of the SDGs, good health and wellbeing, it not only addresses the wellbeing issue of the customers (in this research, the senior citizens), but also employees' welfare and wellbeing, which in turn, motivates the employees to care more on the senior citizens in the retirement villages.

Keywords

Organisational shared purpose, wellbeing, sustainable development goals, dialogic communication, listening

Empowering Trust and Well-Being: An Analysis of Nonprofit Communication Strategies on X

Kushniryk, Alla, *Mount Saint Vincent University (Canada)*

Orlov, Stanislav, *Mount Saint Vincent University (Canada)*

Introduction

High levels of trust are fundamental for strong and united communities, fostering a sense of belonging and support among members, ultimately contributing to enhanced overall community well-being. Nonprofit organizations play a significant role in contributing to the well-being of individuals and communities, and trust forms the solid foundation that fosters relationships between nonprofits and their publics. This study examines how nonprofit organizations use X (formerly known as Twitter) to foster and sustain trust-based organization-public relationships.

Literature review

Effective communication practices within nonprofit organizations play a pivotal role in both establishing and sustaining organization-public relationships founded on trust. Trust, defined as “one party’s level of confidence in and willingness to open oneself to the other party” (Childers Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 19), is a significant outcome of successful relationships.

Nonprofit organizations build and sustain relationships with their publics using approaches that differ from corporate practices. Addressing societal challenges like poverty, crisis relief, care for animals, and health research, nonprofits often operate on limited resources, impacting their

public relations efforts. Social media emerges as an important tool for nonprofits, offering a cost-effective means of two-way communication. According to Carim and Warwick (2013), nonprofit organizations primarily use social media for general promotion, creating a dialogue or sense of community, and reaching a larger audience. Nonprofit organizations use social media to leverage public support of their causes.

Numerous nonprofit organizations utilize X to engage with their audiences. This platform facilitates the rapid dissemination of information, provides immediate feedback, and offers an interactive environment that can foster positive, long-term relationships between nonprofits and their publics. According to Guidry et al. (2014, p.278) the immediacy of X can be a “double-edge sword” for the nonprofit organizations. X has a capability to instantly engage with both established and new audiences. However, the necessity for instant feedback also presents challenges. Authors (e.g., Guidry et al., 2014; Hougaard, 2017) examined how nonprofit organizations can use X for communication to achieve their goals. Nevertheless, there is limited research on how nonprofit organizations utilize X to build and sustain organization-public relationships based on trust. The purpose of this exploratory study is to fill this gap.

Research Question

The study distinguishes two nonprofit types: ‘community well-being’ organizations, improving lives and aiding in crises, and ‘charitable health foundations,’ focusing on health research and supporting patients. The following **main research question** was proposed: *What types of trust-building communication messages do ‘community well-being’ nonprofits and ‘charitable health foundations’ employ on X to build and sustain organization-public relationships based on trust?*

Methodology

The study employed content analysis, examining tweets posted by fifteen Canadian nonprofits on their official X accounts. The dataset included 1,955 messages, analytics, and 612 public replies. ‘Community well-being’ nonprofits contributed 50.5%, and ‘charitable health foundations’ contributed 49.5% of the tweets.

Coding categories for analyzing nonprofit tweets were established based on Schoorman et al.’s (2007) organizational trust model and Tschannen-Moran and Hoy’s (2000) multi-dimensional trust approach. Six trust dimensions—benevolence, competence, integrity, openness, reliability, and confidence—were utilized, with an additional ‘other’ category reflecting organizations’ efforts to convey these positive qualities through communication.

Results and Conclusion

The findings revealed that ‘community well-being’ nonprofits excelled in sending trust-building messages, particularly showcasing benevolence, integrity, and reliability. In contrast, ‘charitable health foundations’ sent more confidence-building messages and messages with useful information.

Benevolence, defined as having the assurance that your own welfare or something important to you will be protected and not endangered by the trusted organization, is the most prominent dimension of trust (Schoorman et al., 2007; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000).

In the nonprofit sector, showcasing genuine concern for beneficiaries and the community fosters positive relationships, enhances the organization’s reputation, and advances its mission. To strengthen trust, nonprofits should communicate benevolent actions, such as aiding communities, assisting individuals in distress, educating, supporting the sick, feeding the needy, sheltering the homeless, and providing various forms of assistance, emphasizing their commitment to enhancing the well-being of communities, individuals, and animals.

It was also found that ‘confidence’ messages showcasing heartwarming stories of devoted volunteers and donors, supporting the nonprofit’s initiatives because of their unwavering trust in its ethical conduct and dedication to its mission, received the highest audience engagement.

Limitations and Practical and Social Implications.

The study’s limitations stem from its exclusive focus on fifteen Canadian nonprofit organizations on X, rendering the findings non-generalizable to all nonprofits. Future research should encompass nonprofits of all types and sizes across different locations. The findings have the potential to significantly impact both practice and society by aiding nonprofit organizations in effectively engaging with their audiences on X, fostering trust, and ultimately contributing to the improvement of overall community well-being.

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Keywords

trust, nonprofit, organization-public relationships

Ordinary workplace digital violence. The process of banalization and the role of communication

Laborde, Aurélie, *Bordeaux Montaigne University (France)*

This proposal is based on five years of field research on digital incivility and ordinary digital violence in companies, to show how the banalization in the workplace occurs, and what role the corporate communication can play in this process.

This research is in line with the field of “critical dark side studies” (Linstead et al., 2014), which looks at issues that are generally neglected or ignored in organisations and proposes to take shadow or dark practices seriously. These approaches permit a renewal of critical perspectives in the field of organisational communication and a different way of thinking about issues of vulnerability and suffering at work (Dejours, 2007; Lhuillier et al., 2013; Laborde, 2021).

The forms of professional digital violence discussed here are part of the ‘dark side’ of organisations. They are commonly seen as negative or unethical, but they are also invisible, hidden, passed over in silence or denied in organisations, by both management and employees. The aim is to highlight these practices, not to correct or adapt them, but to observe what they tell us about representations and transformations of work, about power struggles in post-disciplinary organisations, about the place of PR in this context, and about possible alternatives.

This proposal is above all a theoretical discussion of the role of PR in the process of trivialis-

ing digital violence in the workplace. However, it is based on several years of quantitative and qualitative research in and with companies. This mainly consists of: participative research conducted with occupational health and workplace well-being practitioners over 3 years from 2016 to 2018, 6 focus groups that brought together 30 researchers and practitioners in 2019, a qualitative interview survey conducted with 8 occupational doctors in 2020 and finally a quantitative survey on communication practices in teleworking situations conducted with 1087 French teleworkers in 2021. These data collection methods will be described in detail.

Ordinary digital violence reflect a range of phenomena observed in these different areas. They reflect profound changes in forms of communication and cooperation at work, against a backdrop of crisis in managerial models and the dilution of power in organisations. These are relational and symbolic forms of violence, mediated by our digital devices, that are part of the ‘ordinary’ of work, no longer ‘events’, but invisible and widely tolerated in organisations.

This ordinary violence is based both on organisational and social contexts that euphemize such practices and make them acceptable and commonplace, and on the potential of digital technologies to facilitate ambiguity, dilute intentionality and accentuate suffering.

The invisibility of such violence is based on a complex process of banalization that helps to produce a 'black box' that is no longer questioned and taken for granted. This process is underpinned by a series of social and organisational phenomena that help to move from silence to indifference and then to oblivion. Individuals and groups actively participate in this process through self-censorship and denial, but also through the production of new damaging rules of communication that act like routines and are constantly reinforced in exchange.

In this context, corporate communication practices enable, reinforce and legitimise trivialisation. They produce a symbolic context that mostly masks, euphemizes and disqualifies the words of denunciation and deflects attention by emphasising the autonomy and responsibility of those involved. However, they could also highlight, transform and change representations.

The aim of this research is to deconstruct the process of banalisation and to show the role of PR in this process. De-banalising digital violence, making the ordinary 'un-quiet', necessarily involves deconstructing the process of trivialisation, which would make it possible to restore organisational reflexivity by playing on both the agency of actors and the empowering and emancipatory dimension of communication.

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Keywords

Workplace digital violence, ordinary digital violence, banalization, critical dark side studies

How CEOs' Conversational Communication on Social Media Enhances Internal Relationships and Employees' Social Media Engagement

Lee, Yeunjae, *Colorado State University (USA)*

Yoon, Dalee, *University of Hawaii (USA)*

Yue, Cen April, *Boston University (USA)*

Introduction and Purpose

As an increasing number of CEOs embrace social media to forge a more relatable presence and engage with a tech-savvy audience, the impact of CEOs' social media engagement on public perception has garnered significant attention in research (Kim & Sung, 2020; Tsai & Men, 2017). Yet, the effect of CEOs' social media presence on internal stakeholders, particularly employees, has not been extensively explored. Employees increasingly rely on social media not just for advocating on behalf of their organizations but also for interacting with their organizations and leaders (Lee & Kim, 2021). Employees, in fact, have specific expectations from their CEOs on social media, anticipating them to be accessible, engaging, and emotionally connected (Yue et al., 2021). Despite the recognized strategic significance and practical benefits, the internal ramifications of CEOs' use of social media remain underexamined.

This study seeks to bridge this gap by investigating how the interpersonal communication style of CEOs on social media serves as an effective tool for fostering high-quality relationships with employees and boosting employees' engagement on these platforms. We specifically zero in on

the concept of Conversational Human Voice (CHV), identified by Kelleher (2009) as a crucial strategic communication approach in the digital realm. Our objective is to explore the impact of CEOs' use of a conversational human voice on social media—how it influences employees' perceptions of the CEO, the quality of their relationship with the CEO, and their level of engagement on social media.

Literature Review

CEOs are crucial in shaping the way companies communicate internally, playing a key role in developing the organization's culture and connecting with employees. Research indicates that when CEOs communicate strategically, it boosts employee engagement, strengthens the relationship between employees and the organization, and encourages actions that benefit the company (Men, 2021). Additionally, it has been highlighted that CEOs should use various communication channels, including social media, to effectively reach their employees (Lee, 2018). Social media, in particular, is valuable for helping employees feel connected, network with colleagues, take pride in their company, and feel satisfied and competent in their roles (Huang & Liu, 2017). However, the question of *how* CEOs

can best use social media to interact with employees remains open.

This study uses social presence theory to explore how a CEO's conversational style on social media can improve their relationship with employees and increase employee engagement on these platforms. To better understand how CEOs' communication on social media increases positive employee outcomes, we further explored the mediating role of perceived CEOs' attributes, namely, their *approachability* and *interactivity*.

Methodology

An online survey was administered to a sample of 404 full-time employees across various industries within the United States, utilizing Qualtrics panels for participant recruitment. The criteria for participation were specifically designed to include only those employees whose CEOs actively use social media platforms. The conceptual model was analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM) with the Mplus software program.

Results and Conclusion

The study's results indicate that a conversational tone used by CEOs on social media significantly enhanced employees' perceptions of their leaders as approachable and interactive. This shift in perception directly improved the quality of the relationship between CEOs and employees. However, while perceived CEO interactivity was positively associated with employee social media engagement, perceived CEO approachability was not significantly associated with employee social media engagement. In essence, by communicating in a more relatable and engaging manner, CEOs can foster stronger connections with their employees and encourage a more active and engaged online employee community.

Practical and Social Implications

Our study stands as one of the initial empirical analyses to explore the internal impact of CEOs' social media communication style. It contributes to leadership communication and relationship management literature by delineating how effective use of social media by senior leaders can bolster internal relationship management. Practically, it offers valuable insights for CEOs and communication practitioners on crafting an image of approachability, interactivity, and friendliness on social media. This strategy not only strengthens relationships with employees but also boosts their engagement on these platforms.

Keywords

CEO, leadership communication, conversational human voice, employee-organization relationships, employee engagement

Well-being at digitalized workplaces: An interdisciplinary perspective on technology design and the role of internal communication management

Malczok, Melanie, *University of Applied Sciences Osnabrück (Germany)*

Altendorf, Antonia, *Sociological Research Institute Göttingen (Germany)*

Illing, Jannike, *OFFIS Oldenburg (Germany)*

Introduction and purpose of the study

In this interdisciplinary article, we want to explore the extent to which strategic internal communication can enable, organize and shape the dialogues surrounding the development and design of technology in order to foster well-being at digitalized workplaces. Digitalization processes can be understood as complex socio-technical design processes (Wuersch et al. 2023). In this respect, we see a stronger role for internal communication management in the future. By using the term well-being we refer to the definition of the WHO as "complete subjective well-being and not merely as the absence of illness".

From an interdisciplinary perspective – consisting of communication management, sociology of work, and computer science – we will:

- present findings on the impact of digital technologies on work and well-being,
- present findings and conclusions from our research project on how employees perceive, experience and assess the realities of digitalized work in specific areas of public administration,
- discuss requirements that a technology development and design process must meet in order to fulfill the demands of working pro-

cesses and employees and contribute to their well-being,

- discuss the (future) role of internal communication management, seen as an enabling function, in this process.

Literature Review

Well-being at work is of great social and economic importance and subject of public and scientific debates for decades. In the management context, research to promote well-being has become even more important in the 2000s (Walden 2021). Not least since the Covid-19 pandemic, it also plays a central role in thinking about the design of (digitalized) internal communication processes (Quin & Men 2023; Walden 2021).

Since then, workplaces and related communication structures have become even more digitalized. Hopes and expectations around digital technologies are high, but facing occupational practice shows that digitalization does not always make work easier, in many cases is also associated with additional strains. What are these strains and where do they come from? While debates on digitalization often assume that strains are inherent in the technology (Ter Hoeven et al. 2016) and that there is a shift towards men-

tal stress, studies have concluded that – besides the fact that strains caused by ergonomics and the environment continue to play a major role – strains are also caused by the way the design and implementation process is carried out (Carls et al. 2021). Inadequate technology design leads to ambivalence that must be regulated by employees and causes additional stress (e. g. Demerouti, 2020). For research on internal communication, a strong focus of investigation has so far been on the use of different technologies and communication channels (Verčič & Špoljarić 2020), and less on the design and development of technologies in the workplace. We therefore want to identify the potential for strategic communication in this area.

Methodology

Our interdisciplinary discussion is based on five case studies we conducted in public administrations in Germany from 2020 until 2023 – mainly in employment agencies “job centers” but also in one local administration and business promotion service (“Wirtschaftsförderung”). Our approach included workplace observations as well as interviews with experts and employees. The limitation of this approach lies in the limited number of case studies. Future research should investigate our findings in further cases – in public administration, other sectors and different task areas.

Results and Conclusion

Some of our main conclusions are:

1. Deficits in the use of digital applications are omnipresent in our research cases. They lead to extra work, waiting times, interruptions and necessary workarounds. They are therefore associated with additional stress for employees.
2. Deficits arise in particular when digital systems are designed distant from the work process and are thus impractical. Participation

processes are important in order to meet the demands of employees when designing digital systems.

3. Inadequate technology design and a lack of opportunities for participation has negative impact on employees’ well-being at work.
4. Internal communication management should play a stronger role here and put design processes relating to new technologies in the workplace on its agenda.

Practical and social implications

Based on the impact that inappropriate technology design has on well-being, it cannot be emphasized enough how crucial participation in occupational technology design is. Internal communication management plays an important role in organizing and shaping these participation processes: the understanding of its tasks and role should not only include an information function, but rather an organizing, shaping and enabling function for participation. In this role, they are also an important partner for managers in enabling participation processes.

Keywords

Internal Communication, Digitalization, Participation, Workplace, Job Design

Well-being. A regenerative and structured approach to corporate welfare: engagement, inclusion, sustainability and communication

Milan, Gloria, *ICDLAB Sostenibilità e Comunicazione (Italy)*

Martello, Stefano, *Comm to Action (Italy)*

Bonometto, Caterina, *ICDLAB Sostenibilità e Comunicazione (Italy)*

Introduction and purpose of the study

The theme of ‘organisational well-being’, understood as the ‘capacity of an organisation to promote and maintain the highest degree of physical, psychological and social well-being of workers in all types of employment’ (Avallone, Bonaretti, 2003) is today a central topic in the general debate. Many studies highlight how promoting and maintaining the well-being of people within an organisation is fundamental not only for corporate growth and competitiveness, but also and above all for the achievement of certain Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030, Goals 3, 5, 8 and 10), for the reputation of organisations and for stakeholder engagement activities.

Methodology

Among the various tools aimed at first measuring and then improving the well-being of the people working within an organisation (institutions, companies, associations), the Family Audit certification will be analysed. Family Audit is a certification process, set up in 2010 by the Autonomous Province of Trento, focused on the issues of work-life balance, inclusion, social equity and adopted by numerous organisations, mostly

located in the North East of Italy. The work will consist of two levels of analysis. The first level will include an analysis of the variables taken into account by the certification, the proposed actions and the benefits for the organisations involved, for the employees and for the territory. The second level will analyse the activities undertaken by organisations to achieve increasing levels of well-being, both internally and externally. The aim of the study is to analyse the correlation between measures to improve employee well-being and activities related to communication, particularly in terms of brand reputation, stakeholder engagement and local and community relations.

Results and conclusions

Understand the state of the art of well-being within organisations through the use of an innovative tool and identify useful actions to foster the improvement of well-being. Furthermore, understand how and to what extent communication is a strategic lever to foster this process. Potential implications for practice and society Demonstrate how a climate of an organisation oriented towards the well-being of its employees, based on the values of equity, inclusion and social justice, can contribute to their direct involvement in the construction of a convergent

language and objectives, helping to consolidate the organisational culture.

In all of this, communication, both internal and external, becomes an effective tool for improving and building a good corporate reputation, while at the same time conveying the values of corporate culture externally, setting in motion virtuous circles of social and economic development in the territory.

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Keywords

Welfare, Social inclusion, Ethics and social equity, Audiences, Reputation

Individual-level Antecedents in Care-Based Relationship Management: Assessing Factors to Ethical Public Relations in the Government Sector

Morehouse, Jordan, *University of Colorado Boulder (USA)*

Dong, Chuqing, *Michigan State University (USA)*

Zheng, Qi, *Michigan State University (USA)*

Introduction

Public relations scholarship focuses on how strategic messages and relationships contribute to desired public relations outcomes (Yang & Saffer, 2019). While this research is important, it removes the power and influence of individual level factors—like identities, values, and morals—on public relations outcomes and organizational effectiveness. Accounting for individual-level factors is pertinent in all sectors, but is particularly necessary in sectors where the practice of public relations directly influences the lives, health, and wellbeing of stakeholders. This includes government organizations.

Some scholars have addressed this gap by studying practitioners' ability to engage in ethics of care in their strategic communication efforts, which provides more context concerning practitioners' ethical orientations; however, our understanding of why and how some practitioners adopt care ethics is still unclear. As a result, limited research exists addressing the individual-level factors that influence a practitioners' adoption of care ethics. To account for this gap, this study examined the influence of religious, political, and caregiving identities with government employees on public service motivation, and its im-

pact on two care-based relationship cultivation strategies. Specifically, this study asked:

- RQ1: To what extent does political ideology, intrinsic religiosity, and care-giver identity
- influence government employees' adoption of care-based relationship maintenance
- strategies of empathy and humanization.

Literature Review

Ethics of care is a feminist approach to normative moral theory and prioritizes relational reciprocity between one-caring and cared-for (Noddings, 2013). Care ethics recognizes the context in which relationships occur, as well as the human attachment habits as a result of those relationships. Thus, ethics of care is an ethical orientation emphasizing humanity, context, and interdependence in building relationships, making it a natural ethical fit for a relationship-centric public relations practice where care is a fundamental component of the organization-stakeholder interaction (e.g., government sector).

Method

This study conducted a survey of 316 government employees in the U.S. A survey is the most

appropriate method because it allows researchers to measure respondent's self-reported opinions, judgments, and attitudes. Study participants had to be current employees within local government entities whose jobs involve communicating with residents. The questionnaire used in this study combined previously validated scales from public relations, religion, sociology, and psychology (Appendix available). Structural equation modeling via R Studio's lavaan package was used.

Results and Conclusion

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was first performed (Table 1), which yielded acceptable model indices, $\chi^2(416) = 807.50$, $p < 0.001$, SRMR = 0.06, NNFI = 0.92, TLI = 0.92, CFI = 0.93 and RMSEA = $0.06 < 0.08$ (MacCallum et al., 1996, 90% CI [0.049, 0.060]). Construct reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were also satisfactory (Cheung et al., 2023). SEM model shows an acceptable model fit ($\chi^2(473) = 949.98$, $p < 0.001$, SRMR=0.06 < 0.08 , CFI=0.92, TLI = 0.91, NNFI = 0.91, RMSEA=0.06 < 0.08 , 90% CI= [.051, .063]).

Findings from this study suggest individual-level factors influence public relations practitioners' adoption of care-based relationship maintenance strategies, namely empathy and humanization (see Figure 1). Intrinsic religiosity ($B = -0.08$, $\beta = -0.12$, $p = 0.048$) has a significant negative relationship with public service motivation, but a positive relationship ($B = 0.12$, $\beta = 0.19$, $p = 0.001$) with humanization. Political ideology does not have any significant association. Caregiver identity is positively associated with public service motivation ($B = 0.75$, $\beta = 0.70$, $p < 0.001$). Public service motivation has significant effects on empathy ($B = 0.51$, $\beta = 0.71$, $p < 0.001$) and humanization ($B = 0.73$, $\beta = 0.77$, $p < 0.001$).

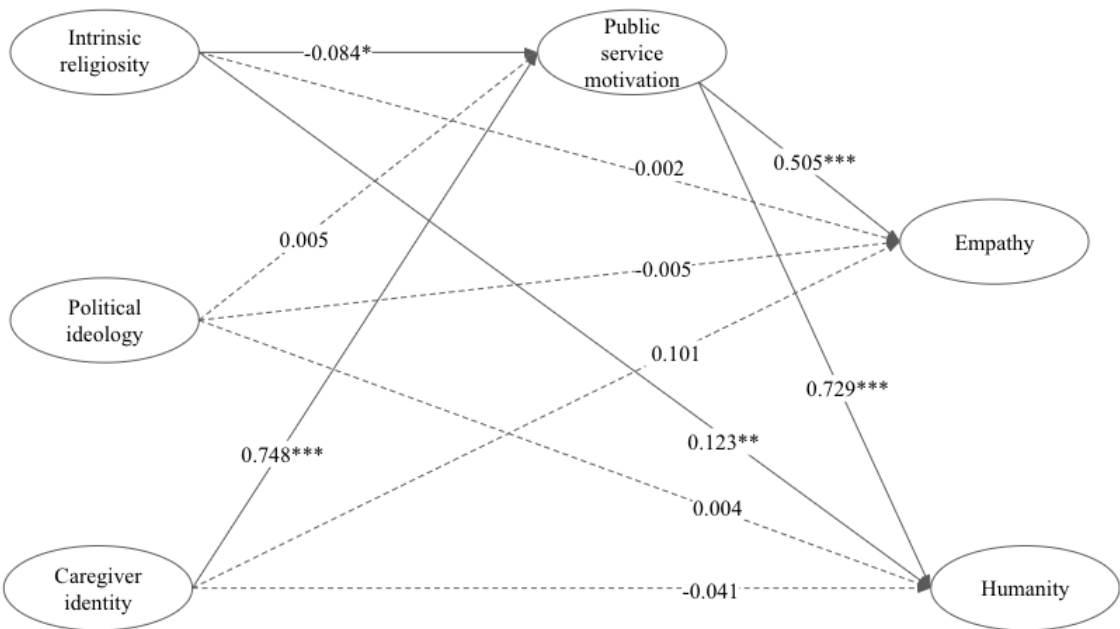
Findings from this study provide key insights for academics studying the adoption of ethical public relations approaches, as well as practitioners working in the government sector. This study confirms previous research suggesting that religious identity is an influential factor in how public relations strategies are selected by practitioners (Morehouse, 2020, 2023). Furthermore, this study advances theorizing by incorporating care-giver identity and political identity as dependent variables for relationship maintenance strategies, suggesting that more defined identities—beyond age, education, and gender—influence the ethical orientation of practitioners (Medallo & Hanusch, 2011). This study is not without limitations. Respondents were local government employees in the United States. Including respondents outside of the U.S. who are practitioners at a national level would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Practical and Social Implications

This study has several practical and social implications. Ethical norms and principles of public relations have largely been discussed in corporate and nonprofit settings, creating a vacuum of knowledge concerning how government practitioners ethically communicate, why they ethically communicate, and the implications of their ethical orientation. This study provides governments with a more robust method to recruit and train ethical government communicators, and understand the characteristics that create an ethical care-based government public relations practitioner.

Keywords

Ethics of care, government, identity



Note. Gender is controlled

Figure 1

Exploring organizational commitment to human well-being: A management logic perspective driven by the sacred-profane dichotomy.

Oliveira, Evandro, *Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa (Portugal)*

While some organizations are making a deep commitment to human well-being, or at least taking steps toward becoming a B Company, others are staying on the surface by developing strategies that address people in a partial way. Some are driven by the idea that by improving employee well-being, they will have a more productive workforce. Others try to make a statement about societal demands to justify the legitimacy of their operations by introducing societal issues such as diversity, inclusion, or corporate volunteerism. Still others rely on corporate hypocrisy, using narratives and rhetoric that may be useful but lack deep commitment. This paper explores the idea that the organization's management logic is the basis for an organization that is deeply committed to the human factor and approaches it in a holistic way, and that public relations drives this process. After looking at the concept of management logic (Oliveira, 2019), driven by Prahalad and Bettis' (1986) concept of dominant logic, within the characteristics of the definition of public relations and communication management from the European approach as managerial (1) operational (2) reflective (3) and educational (4) (Ruler & Verčič, 2012), we additionally propose to apply Émile Durkheim's *sacred-profane* dichotomy (1947 [1915]) in order to have a theoretical framework that could provide a way to understand and analyze the

phenomena in an organizational context. We then present an empirical application through a series of case studies with maximum differentiation from Portugal. The approach is hermeneutic and through document analysis on the one hand and in-depth interviews on the other, it seeks a deep understanding of the process within the organization that brought them to the stage they are and the management logic next to these decisions. We also investigate if there is the introduction of the *sacred* in organizations, motivated by a humanistic or idealistic view of management and contrasted with the *profane* of profit maximization. A case in point is the multinational Ageas Group, which, in order to promote a culture of physical and mental well-being, has created a complete health program, with activities ranging from workshops to improve mental and emotional well-being, to Pilates and Power Combat, to a program to help employees realize their entrepreneurial dreams. Ageas has also launched the "Getting well" program, which nudges content to encourage constant reflection and appeals to employees on different topics. The second is a company that decided to go down this path long before the question was raised in society. Delta Cafes is a Portuguese company whose founder was a unique person, who always cared about his employees and the city in which it was located, and who fought

many battles with giants such as Nestle in order not to sell the company, to prevent a monopoly and to impose his own vision of entrepreneurship. On the other hand, a medium-sized family company in the north of the country, called BC Security, has created a happiness department that, in addition to vacations to an international destination, allows employees to enjoy a mini-spa at the company, with the right to massages, manicures, pedicures or waxing twice a week, as well as an entertainment room, laundry, take-home meals at reduced prices, life and health insurance, time off on their birthday, monthly and annual bonuses. What these examples have in common is strong leadership that has taken risks with a management logic driven by a *sacred* management approach and the full application of the four components of a public relations definition from a European perspective.

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Keywords

public relations, management logic, organizational commitment, well-being, sacred-profane

How Supervisors' Use of Motivating Language Influences Employee Attitudes and Supportive Behaviors: Exploring the Moderating Effects of Remote Work

Qin, Yufan Sunny, *James Madison University (USA)*

Men, Linjuan Rita, *University of Florida (USA)*

Akanbi, Francis, *University of Florida (USA)*

He, Hanzi, *University of Florida (USA)*

Introduction and Purpose of This Study

The rise of remote and hybrid work, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has brought new challenges for organizations' internal communication. The increasing complexity of the modern work environment calls for effective leadership communication to keep employees engaged (Sull et al., 2020). Despite the extensive research on the effectiveness of leadership communication (e.g., Men, 2014; Qin et al., 2023), there remains a significant gap in understanding the role of leadership communication across different work modes. This study aims to address this gap by examining how supervisory leadership communication, specifically supervisors' use of motivating language, influences employee trust, engagement, and supportive behaviors toward the organization (e.g., advocacy, mentoring, defending, walking extra miles, etc.), focusing on the contrasting impacts in remote versus onsite settings. The goal is to offer insights into optimizing leadership communication for positive employee attitudes and behaviors in both work contexts, thereby contributing to the literature on leadership communication's role in modern

work environments.

Literature Review

This study uses the Motivating Language Theory (MLT) to examine the impact of supervisory leadership communication on employee trust, engagement, and supportive behaviors in different work settings. MLT is a robust leadership communication theory that underscores the significance of the type of language used by leaders, categorized into direction-giving, empathetic, and meaning-making language (Mayfield et al., 1995). Employee organizational trust is defined as employees' level of confidence in and willingness to open themselves to the organization, based on their perceptions of the organization's integrity, competence, and dependability (cf. Hon & J. Grunig, 1999). Engagement is conceptualized as employees' psychologically motivated state characterized by vigor, absorption, and dedication (Welch, 2011).

Methodology

An online survey was conducted with 2,004 full-time employees across 18 industries in the U.S. recruited via the Harris Poll. The average age of the respondents was 43 years ($SD = 12.67$). Among the respondents, 53.4% were male and 45.6% were female. As for the work modes, 30.5% ($n = 612$) of them indicated they mostly worked remotely (at home or hybrid), and 64.7% ($n = 1,296$) mostly worked onsite.

Results and Conclusions

Second-order structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis was used to test the hypothesized model in AMOS 29.0. The results showed that supervisors' use of motivating language enhanced employee trust in the organization ($\beta = .70, p < .001$), engagement at work ($\beta = .43, p < .001$), and supportive behaviors toward the organization ($\beta = .22, p < .001$). Also, both trust and engagement were positively related to employee supportive behaviors (trust: $\beta = .30, p < .001$; engagement: $\beta = .34, p < .001$). Higher trust also led to higher engagement at work ($\beta = .42, p < .001$). To test the moderating effect of work mode, multi-group SEM analysis was conducted with work mode as the grouping variable. Model comparison showed a significant difference, $c^2 \text{ diff } (30) = 47.16, p = .02$. Specifically, work mode significantly moderated the effect of supervisors' use of motivating language on trust. For employees who mainly work on-site ($\beta = .73, p < .001$), supervisors' use of motivating language showed a stronger effect on trust than employees who work remotely ($\beta = .67, p < .001$), $c^2 \text{ diff } (1) = 7.89, p = .005$. Similarly, trust showed a stronger effect on employee supportive behavior for employees who mainly work on-site ($\beta = .34, p < .001$) than employees who work remotely ($\beta = .16, p < .001$), $c^2 \text{ diff } (1) = 3.66, p = .05$. However, regarding the effect of employee engagement on supportive behaviors, this effect was stronger for employees who work remotely ($\beta = .49, p < .001$) than their counterparts who mainly work on-site ($\beta = .30,$

$p < .001$), $c^2 \text{ diff } (1) = 5.04, p = .025$.

The findings indicate that supervisors' use of motivating language showed a more pronounced effect on employee organizational trust among onsite employees than on remote workers. This difference can be attributed to the fact that on-site employees often have more direct and personal interactions with their supervisors, which enhances the effect of high-quality leadership communication. Such interactions foster a deeper sense of trust in the organization among onsite employees. In contrast, trust and engagement play different roles in influencing supportive behaviors among employees in onsite and remote settings. Onsite employees' trust, which is more tangible due to their environment, directly translates into positive organizational behaviors. Remote employees, however, rely more on self-motivation and independence due to less frequent direct interactions. As a result, their personal engagement at work becomes a key driver of their behavior.

Practical and Social Implications

This study expanded the existing body of knowledge on leadership communication by providing empirical evidence on the impact of supervisors' use of motivating language in different work modes. In addition, the results provide strategic insights for organizational leaders and internal communication practitioners regarding how to develop effective leadership communication strategies tailored to the needs of employees working onsite or remotely to bolster their trust, engagement, and supportive behaviors at work.

Keywords

leadership communication, employee supportive behaviors, trust, employee engagement, remote work

Public Healthcare Delivery Eco-system in India: Role for Public Relations

Qureshi, Noumaan, *University of Mumbai (India)*

Introduction

The healthcare industry has three major segments: healthcare delivery (hospitals and patient touch points), pharmaceuticals and vaccines, and medical technology (devices, equipment, etc.). Healthcare delivery is further divided between private and public healthcare systems. Healthcare delivery systems across nations differ; from heavily private-dominated like the USA to government-supported public healthcare systems like the NHS of the UK. India has a mix of a strong public healthcare delivery system and a growing private sector.

The Public Healthcare delivery segment in India is the true representation of the federal nature of the country. Health is a state subject (there are 28 states in India), with a Ministry of Health and Family Welfare at the central government level. Through its various arms – Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), under the Department of Health & Family Welfare, Department of AYUSH, Department of Health Research, etc, - the ministry serves the healthcare eco-system of the country. At the state level, there is a ministry of health in each of the states which primarily takes care of the healthcare delivery to citizens through a network of primary, secondary, and tertiary care. Post 2014, the newly constituted National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Ayog) is playing a catalyst role for healthcare-related improvements in the country.

In the past few years, the central government through policy interventions, aims to enhance both healthcare infrastructure and universal health coverage through insurance. To cater to a population of 1.4 billion, the country has over 1 million allopathy doctors. To meet the doctor shortfall and reach the desired 1:1000 ratio of WHO, the government has increased the number of medical seats in the past few years. As per the budget announcement of 2024-25, the number of medical colleges is set to be increased.

NMC, the governing body for medical education in the country, has introduced 'communication' as a subject at the undergraduate MBBS level. Violence against doctors is a key risk factor, and time and again, lack of communication by doctors is attributed as one of the reasons for violence. Most times this violence happens in public hospitals, and the doctors at the receiving end are medical students on duty in the hospital.

Methodology

This researcher has previously conducted two researches on healthcare in India: 1) Reputation risks for private hospitals in Mumbai (2011); 2) Treating a fracture with a bandage (2019). For the current study, to get a pan-India perspective of communications at government-run tertiary care hospitals, this researcher visited 8 cities in India – Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Pune, and Lucknow. According to reports, the first seven cities house over 80% of super specialists in the country.

Lucknow was included in the study to represent the most populous state of North India - Uttar Pradesh. East region – Kolkata (city), West Bengal (state); West region – Mumbai (city), Maharashtra (state); South region – Chennai (city), Tamil Nadu (state), represented the most populous states of the other three zones. In these eight cities, 29 public hospitals attached to a medical college were visited as part of the study between July 2022 to December 2023. Senior administration officials were met at these hospitals/ medical colleges to understand the communication approach. The research methodology was qualitative.

The study aims to find answers to three research questions, as follows:

- RQ 1) What are the current communication methods adopted by public hospitals in India?
- RQ 2) How is the communication approach at public hospitals vis-à-vis private hospitals in the country?
- RQ 3) Are there communication gaps in the communication approach of public hospitals?

Significance of the study

Deriving from the Systems Theory, considering healthcare delivery as a system, with various agencies and departments, this study will posit some communication best practices to enhance the public relations effort for public hospitals.

The public hospitals cater to half of the beds for tertiary care in the country (the other half are in private). The findings of this study will enhance the efforts of public hospitals that provide free or subsidized healthcare services to a large population, and improve the experience of beneficiaries – patients and caretakers – who access and utilise the public hospitals for their healthcare needs.

Keywords

india, public health, healthcare delivery, healthcare PR, healthcare communications

Between BurnOut and BoreOut. Stress perceptions in the professional environment of corporate communications

Rademacher, Lars, *Hochschule Darmstadt - University of Applied Sciences (Germany)*

Stork, Werner, *Hochschule Darmstadt - University of Applied Sciences (Germany)*

Seidenglanz, René, *Quadriga University of Applied Sciences, Berlin (Germany)*

Introduction

“Stress is a state of alertness of the organism, which adjusts itself to an increased willingness to perform,” said the zoologist Hans Seyle in 1936, who, together with the American physiologist Walter Cannon, is considered the father of stress research and the “inventor” of the word stress. The two authors thus gave science a term that is immediately understood in almost all languages of the world, that is written and pronounced almost everywhere in the same way and that has found its way into and meaning in people’s everyday lives like no other. Stress as an emotional reaction pattern is not a clearly undesirable behavioral trait, but rather serves as an original flight or fight response with heightened perception of self- preservation and can also lead to short-term increased performance in working life. Chronic stress, however, is considered a serious health risk and can lead to typical diseases of civilization such as cardiovascular diseases, high blood pressure or even cancer or promote the development of corresponding clinical pictures.

Literature Review

In recent years, resilience has increasingly been seen as a key ability to reduce stress. Resilient people are resistant to stress and crises; they have skills that enable them to deal better with stress triggers and high levels of stress. Thanks to an impartial attitude, they can recognize risk factors at an early stage, assess them correctly and overcome them (persistence). Resilient people accept the given situation and, despite adverse circumstances, are able to focus their attention on the tasks that are currently important in order to implement them in a focused manner. This promotes their individual competence in dealing with stressful and crisis situations as well as with changes in general (adaptability). In addition, resilient people are able to develop new ideas and behavioral approaches even in difficult situations, as well as recognize new opportunities for themselves and develop themselves accordingly or literally “reinvent” themselves (Transformality) (Heller, 2019; Stork & Grund, 2021).

Methodology

In this study, we present for the first-time data from an industry survey of almost 1,000 man-

agers at different hierarchical levels in the field of corporate communications in Germany, who were interviewed in May and June 2023. This is the first survey on stress and resilience in the field of PR and corporate communications in Germany to focus primarily on the resilience of German communications managers. The survey focused primarily on the individual stress experience and coping strategies of PR managers: What are the main stress triggers, what role do superiors and team constellations play, are there resilience-promoting offers such as mindfulness courses, yoga or meditation in their companies? The impact model was based on the assumption that existing coping strategies have a stress-reducing effect.

In the previous surveys, it was primarily the general stress level that was surveyed. The most recent European Communication Monitor (ECM 2023), for example, shows a stress level of 40 percent across all respondents, with the main stress factors being constant availability and a high workload. A lack of opportunities for advancement in their organizations or disrupted free time are also a burden for communication managers across Europe. According to an industry survey by Civey & News Aktuell (2020), unreliable colleagues and inaccurate work assignments are also among the most significant stress factors.

Findings

This is where our own survey comes in, focusing primarily on the role of team structures and superiors. Overall, German PR managers have a medium level of stress compared to other sectors: only 26% of respondents in Germany feel stressed, with women being significantly more stressed than men. Respondents over the age of 60 experience themselves as significantly less stressed than younger respondents, as do members of companies with fewer than 100 employees compared to larger companies.

However, 47% of respondents are sufficiently resilient to deal with this stress, and age also plays a role here. Men experience themselves as significantly more resilient than women and people with higher resilience have a significantly lower stress level. The fact that the resilience quotient is unexpectedly high may well be due to the frequent use of mindfulness training and meditation offers: 28% state that their employers offer mindfulness courses, a further 11% specifically mention meditation offers and a further 22% include yoga offers in their repertoire. Here, too, there are significant correlations: those who regularly take advantage of such offers are significantly less stressed, and stress levels are significantly higher where companies do not offer such resilience-promoting offers.

Keywords

Stress – Resilience – Communication Managers

An exploratory study among Generation Z UK PR professionals and their employers examining their subjective attitudes toward work-placed well-being

Read, Kevin, *University of Greenwich (UK)*

Ambarchian, Nyree, *Jack & Grace (UK)*

Chmiel, Michal, *Royal Holloway, University of London (UK)*

Introduction

Employers of PR professionals seek to understand the attitudes of Generation Z. This is driven by the need to recruit, train and motivate new industry entrants. But research focused too heavily on entrants' performance outcomes can diverge from how employees evaluate and feel about their roles. Both dimensions are critical to gain a deeper understanding of workplace well-being and overall job satisfaction.

Literature review

Many studies have considered general wellbeing. Recent studies provide a focus on subjective workplace wellbeing (De Neve and Ward, 2023), and home in on how employers and employees self-define their own wellbeing. Such studies have not had the PR industry as their focal point. Other studies suggest that PR can have a positive influence on social change (Fehrer et al., 2022) and that it can address the importance of ethics to job satisfaction (Kang, 2010). Neither consider the connections between purpose and workplace wellbeing. Wider communications research does look at the connection between

purpose and PR (Verwey et al., 2017). Yet, to date the only major study looking at the connection (in the PR world) between general wellbeing and purpose is Euprera's *Wellbeing in the Workplace* research, led by Martina Topić.

This proposed study examines the attitudes and outcomes associated with workplace wellbeing among employers and Generation Z PR professionals. It assesses dimensions associated with well-being and explores how important it is for employers and employees to be clear about the meaning and purpose of their PR and communications work.

Methodology

This multi-stage study initially uses grounded theory to establish a framework to explain the PR professions' attitudes toward wellbeing and purpose.

Then, it utilises NVivo 14 to assess 20 PR employer interviews from the commercial, not for profit and consultancy sectors. Their opinions and attitudes toward well-being drivers at work and what they feel their Generation Z employees

expect are explored.

Thereafter, a representative sample of 370 Generation Z PR professionals from the UK will be invited to complete a detailed questionnaire asking them to state what they understand it means to be part of Generation Z. The questionnaire draws upon the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (SWEMWBS), a 7-question framework for defining wellbeing. Specifically, participants will be asked about their attitudes and feelings prior to securing employment in the industry, how they feel in their current role and what they may be considering when making future applications. Finally, they will be asked to indicate how important they feel that purpose and meaning in their roles is to their individual sense of workplace well-being and how closely their personal values align with those of their employer.

The findings will be used to develop an exploratory framework for understanding the workplace wellbeing concerns of young PR professionals and their employers. Specifically, the importance of purpose and meaning to wellbeing will be assessed. Initial interviews and questionnaire sampling will take place between February and June 2024.

Results and Conclusions

Test sampling suggests that employer prioritisation of wellbeing is increasing, although there is a mismatch between employer and employees' expectations. Furthermore, young PR professionals emerge as strong advocates of transparent and comprehensive approaches to workplace wellbeing. Differences exist between those employed in consultancy environments as opposed to those working in-house. Employees are also very keen to understand both the purpose and meaning of the work that they are undertaking, but also have wider expectations for the PR industry to champion both purpose and meaning.

Practical and social assumptions

The findings from the study will aid employers, recruiters, new entrants to the profession and professional bodies to secure a contemporary understanding of expectations from employees and employers about workplace well-being, including the need to address purpose and meaning.

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Keywords

PR, Purpose, Wellbeing, Recruitment, Retention

Contributions to Societal Well-Being by the Higher Educational Institutions in Türkiye: The Analysis of Student-initiated Social Responsibility Projects in Public Relations Programs

Saran, Mine, *Ege University (Turkey)*
Görpe, T. Serra, *University of Sharjah (U.A.E.)*

Introduction and Purpose of the Study

Social responsibility is an individual and organizational-related responsibility and public relations professionals have an important role in leading, planning, and implementing it for the welfare of society. This understanding is transferred to higher educational institutions in Türkiye. Community service and social responsibility projects initiated and implemented by higher educational institutions gained more importance when the Council of Higher Education (YOK) assigned criteria to measure the university and the faculty member's contribution to the community. This initiative started in 2011 and has become an important part of research universities and each university is handling the social responsibility projects in an established structure within their context. The aim behind service to the community is to create awareness of social responsibility among students, faculty, and administrators, make them work together, and evaluate this as a university KPI.

Within this contextual background, the purpose of the study is to understand the process of student-initiated/implemented social responsibility projects in higher educational institutions which

has a public relations program. The analysis will be on several dimensions such as the topic of the project, target audience, collaborations/alliances with non-governmental organizations, time-frame, budget, and sustainability. The period of analysis will cover three years (2021-2022-2023). This analysis will include all the universities in Izmir city of Türkiye which has a Public Relations Program. Consciousness of social responsibility and community service cannot be narrowly limited to public relations students, and viewed from the implementation, and activity lens for the sake of doing, but goes beyond it and expands to being a responsible citizen and welfare of the society. Therefore, this descriptive research with public relations students is expected to guide us in the strategy and implementation of the social responsibility projects of higher educational institutions. The second purpose of the research is to understand the shortcomings and advantages of student social responsibility projects from the perspective of "public relations academics."

Literature Review

Social responsibility is becoming a philosophy for organizations. This understanding is being

transferred to individuals through education programs. In Türkiye, social responsibility and community service practices have been considered more and put into the education plans. (Saran et al, 2011) The University Monitoring and Evaluation Criteria take into consideration four dimensions which are 1)education; 2)research development, projects, and publications; 3)internalization, and 4)service to the community, and social responsibility. Research universities' performance criteria are research capacity, research quality, and interaction and collaboration. According to the recent data of Council of Higher Education, at Turkish universities, different social responsibility projects such as environment, education, disadvantaged environments, culture animals rights, sports are carried out. Of these projects, 3,431 are carried out by the public (government) and 1,237 are by foundation universities.

Methodology

The study will cover an analysis of the last three years (2021-2023). The classification of students' social responsibility projects in Public Relations programs will be made based on numerical data and will be related to content- including the focus of the social responsibility project, target audiences, partnerships, budget, and sustainability of the project. The data for analysis will consist of documents. In Izmir city, there are four universities which have public relations programs. The researchers will have access to the student social responsibility projects. In addition to document analysis, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with public relations academics from these programs to understand the contribution of this initiative by YOK, its shortcomings, and how to improve this initiative. These four public relations programs are from two foundations (private) and two public (state) universities.

Results and Conclusion

This is a work in progress, at the stage of literature review. Data gathering will start in mid-February.

Practical and Social Implications

The study will guide the future social responsibility projects of public relations programs by drawing a comprehensive picture of what has been done and what could be done. The public relations academics' perspective on the initiative of YOK will also guide the structure of community service and the social responsibility efforts of the whole university. This inventory and insights of public relations program faculty will propose solutions on how to improve the current practice. The frame of social responsibility goes beyond the projects. Through this study, the contribution of the public relations programs (faculty and students) to the welfare of society will be discussed as well.

Universities have education, research, and training activities as part of their core tasks. In addition to this, they carry out social responsibility projects with their students and on an institutional basis. The aim is to sensitize future generations to the issues of society while they are still studying and higher educational institutions have an important role in the well-being of societies. This is the integration of universities with society through thinking for the well-being and doing good.

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Keywords

Higher educational institutions, public relations programs, social responsibility projects of students, society, well-being

Ukraine's Use of Nation Branding Amidst Russia's Full-Scale Invasion

Savchuk, Viktoriia, *University of Maryland (USA)*

What does well-being entail in times of war? How do you support people when their homes face daily missile attacks, and their children have to study in bomb shelters? Public relations and strategic communication can become crucial to a country's defense, securing the safety and well-being of its citizens. For example, in 2022, Ukraine became the first country to launch a nation branding campaign during an ongoing war. Challenging times demand the use of new tools to defend your country and its citizens. Ukrainians had to tell the world about themselves to seek help to stop Russia's war, which started in 2014 and escalated in 2022.

This research project focuses on Ukraine's use of nation branding amidst Russia's full-scale invasion. It conducts a systematic content analysis of nation branding through a relationship-building paradigm of public relations to decipher their impacts on strategic communication during wartime by addressing the following questions: How does Ukraine's President's Telegram channel construct Ukraine's nation brand? In what ways are relationships manifested in nation branding?

Literature review

Sometimes strategic communication and public relations are used synonymously. Yet, I align with Yuskiv et al. (2022) and Khorishko (2022), viewing public relations as a primary component of strategic communication.

Strategic communication involves purposeful communication aligned with an entity's strategic objectives, with its origins rooted in military theory. Ironically, it is often overlooked by communication science, possibly because of the negative associations with information warfare (Zerfass et al., 2018). This highlights the necessity for further exploration of strategic communication during wartime.

Russia's war on Ukraine has fundamentally shifted the global perception of the nations involved (Chaban & Elgström, 2023) and introduced nation branding as a crucial tool in warfare (Kaneva, 2023), emphasizing the changing objectives and potential impacts of such practices and research.

Nation branding has evolved as a multidimensional effort involving a diverse range of activities, aiming to shape a nation's perceptions on the international stage and achieve specific goals. Conventionally, it is conceived as national image management (Surowiec, 2016; Szondi, 2010), denoting the organized framework designed to influence and uphold the reputation of a state or nation.

Szondi (2010) presented an alternative conceptualization of nation branding by examining the role of public relations within it. The scholar proposed relationship building as a new framework, asserting that both domestic and foreign publics should have ownership over a dynamic brand, enabling collaborative creation of identity and meanings.

Applying the relationship-building framework of public relations to nation branding in strategic communication during wartime can offer valuable implications across theoretical, practical, and policy perspectives.

Methodology

This project applies a reflexive qualitative thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2019) to examine posts from Ukraine's President's official Telegram channel posted during the first year after Russia's full-scale invasion. I gathered data by extracting content from Volodymyr Zelenskyy's official Telegram channel, totaling 546 posts, and randomly examined 10% of these posts. Since 2022, Telegram has transformed into a pivotal platform for Ukrainians seeking information about the war (Yuskiv et al., 2022), and emerged as the primary platform for the Ukrainian President to connect with his constituents. Given Zelenskyy's impact on the country's internal and external agenda, analyzing his communication platforms is crucial.

Results and conclusions

This project reveals that nation branding transcends traditional communication campaigns and is strategically harnessed in the online domain. Zelenskyy's Telegram channel prioritizes themes related to garnering international support and cultivating relationships with diverse strategic publics. Mentioning various individuals and showcasing their roles in Ukraine, along with sharing their pictures, has contributed to the co-creation of Ukraine's brand identity, aligning with Szondi's (2010) relationship-building approach to nation branding.

Ukraine's identity is portrayed as a protagonist opposing Russia and the Soviet Union, aligning itself with the European Union and the free world. Furthermore, Zelenskyy's Telegram channel defines Ukraine's resistance, identifying

unity, heroism, strength, and gratitude as the fundamental components shaping the nation's brand.

The research findings echo Yuskiv et al.'s (2022) study, indicating that Ukraine's strategic communication prioritizes themes related to garnering international support and engaging with state authorities. Additionally, the results are in line with Yuskiv et al.'s (2022) and Chaban and Elgström (2023)'s studies, emphasizing Ukraine's protagonist identity.

To further enhance this project, it would be beneficial to extend the analysis beyond Telegram to encompass a variety of platforms and offer a more nuanced comprehension of nation branding. Including timeframes before and after one year from the full-scale invasion through a longitudinal analysis can uncover shifts in strategic communication. Expanding the scope to involve other key actors in Ukraine's strategic communication, not just the President, will further enrich the examination of dynamics.

Keywords

strategic communication, nation branding, public relations, social media, warfare

Let's Tango with the Wind. Disinformation and Onshore Wind Turbines

Scott, Anthony, *Hanze UAS (The Netherlands)*

Adema, Niels, *Hanze UAS (The Netherlands)*

Elving, W.J.L., *Hanze UAS (The Netherlands)*

Schepers, Gerard, *Hanze UAS (The Netherlands)*

In the need to increase the amount of renewable energy, wind energy both on- and offshore are a necessity. Though there is not always wind (like there is not always sun) wind energy became remarkably cheap and produces no greenhouse gasses. However, onshore wind turbines are confronted with a lot of resistance from local residents because of hindrance regarding noise and disturbance of their landscape view.

The Netherlands currently boasts over 2,144 onshore wind turbines, demonstrating the country's commitment to meeting the national electricity demand through renewable sources (CBS, 2022). These targets underscore the nation's commitment to achieving a more sustainable energy environment through a mix of renewables, including wind power. However, planning barriers, inconsistent noise regulations, and increasing public resistance threaten the pace of progress (Breukers & Wolsink, 2007). This is especially impacts Dutch households as research shows 70% of Dutch municipalities will have households within a 2.5km radius of an onshore wind turbine (TNO, 2022).

At the provincial and municipal levels, noise and spatial consideration regulations introduce additional layers of complexity. A lack of national and local policy frames has led to bottlenecks in

developing and implementing standards. Fueled by misleading information, localized opposition often gains traction, posing challenges to the consistent growth of onshore wind energy.

Additionally, the regulatory landscape governing onshore wind energy projects illustrates a multifaceted environment with complicated permitting and planning processes. The complexity of navigating these processes introduces vulnerabilities that disinformation campaigns exploit. Anti-wind groups have been leveraging regulatory intricacies to propagate misleading narratives about wind turbine noise's health and environmental impacts, contributing to public skepticism. Despite claims of health risks, the organization of health care research (NIVEL, 2023) did not find any significant indications of health risks of people living close (less than 5km) to wind turbines compared to those not about wind turbines.

We applied the Issue Arena Conceptual Framework Vos (2017) to systematically analyze the public debate and disinformation around wind turbine noise annoyance in the Netherlands. The Issue Arena model consists of four key components:

1. Issue-related aspects - the substantive themes and claims being debated.
2. Actors - the stakeholders involved and their interests.
3. Places of interaction - the contexts and channels where debates emerge.
4. Courses of debate - how the debates and claims evolve.

This framework positions complex issues as co-creations of various stakeholders interacting in an ecosystem of debates across media, online spaces, and communities (Luoma-aho & Vos, 2010). It provides a structured approach to map all facets of the wind turbine noise annoyance issue arena.

We aim to investigate disinformation surrounding wind turbines and their associated noise annoyance among residents of the Netherlands using the Issue Arena Model. We seek to elucidate how disinformation fuels ongoing debate and opposition around this issue.

We interviewed 6 experts, coming from energy companies involved in developing on shore wind turbines, including two managers who are working on a local wind park. They all have experiences in dealing with disinformation and resistance.

Key findings include the identification of a dynamic landscape influenced by decentralized governance, conflicting national and local goals, and the rise of political disinformation. Stakeholder mapping reveals a complex web of actors with varying positions. The research assesses digital and traditional platforms, cultural resistance, and political skepticism. Practical recommendations are proposed, focusing on a two-way symmetric communication strategy to connect with local communities and dispel misconceptions about wind turbine noise.

Despite limitations, the study provides foundational insights for ongoing research and interventions in the field of renewable energy communication, emphasizing the importance of adaptive strategies to foster an informed public discourse.

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External Communications of Employee Well-being and Care: Contexts and Discrepancies

Selakovic, Marko, *S P Jain School of Global Management (U.A.E.)*

Ljepava, Nikolina, *American University in the Emirates (U.A.E.)*

Krkic, Marijana, *University of Belgrade (Serbia)*

Introduction and purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to examine how the corporate sector communicates employee well-being to external audiences. The study aims to identify what are the main terminologies used in communication of the employee well-being programs and activities toward external stakeholders. Additionally, the study aims to add to the understanding of whether communications of the companies related to well-being are congruent with the expectations of the employees related to their well-being.

Literature review

Employee well-being is a complex construct, consisting of three core components: subjective well-being; workplace well-being, and psychological well-being (Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009). Companies are taking a myriad of initiatives to contribute to employee well-being. At the same time, care about employee well-being is an important pillar of the communications of the corporate sector towards external stakeholders. Evidence about care for employee well-being is found in numerous literature sources analyzing organizational behavior and human resources. Despite all efforts, large corporations find it difficult to improve employee well-being and human sustainability in areas such as work-life balance, flexibility, and gender diversity (Ko-

bayashi, Eweye & Tappin, 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic introduced a set of new challenges for employee well-being: Juchnowicz and Kinowska (2021) argued that the digitalization of work that occurred during the pandemic transformed the relationship between employees and employers and impacted the perception of quality of life and well-being. Post-pandemic expectations of the employees have changed: according to an Infostud (2022) survey, companies are not fully following the needs of employees in terms of psychological support - this growing need of employees is significantly underestimated by decision-makers in companies. According to the survey, the gap between the needs of employees and what companies offer is significant: for example, while 81% of employees included in the survey reported disturbances such as increased concerns, stress, or low mood during the pandemic, only 18% of companies provided their employees with psychological counseling. Thus, the research aimed to understand how the corporate sector perceives employee well-being, how it communicates well-being to external audiences, and to compare communications of the corporate sector with the priorities and needs expressed by the employees.

Methodology

A document analysis has been deployed to identify external communications of the companies related to employee well-being. Companies' websites have been searched for the terms "employee well-being" or "care for employees" in English and Serbian language. A total of 73 examples of corporate communications that include phrases followed by more detailed descriptions of concrete measures have been identified, and consequently included in the research.

Each case has been analyzed from the semantical perspective and associated with the terminology used to describe what companies are doing within their employee well-being programs. Word clusters have been identified, and findings have been compared with the priorities of the employees described in the Infostud (2022) survey.

Results and conclusions

The document analysis of content published on corporate websites indicates that companies are emphasizing occupational health and safety as the core of their employee well-being programs (53 examples), followed by work flexibility (50 examples) and events for employees (26 examples). These elements contribute to the perception of companies as responsible corporate citizens (Koskela, 2014). However, these findings are only partly in line with the expectations of the employees expressed in the Infostud (2022) survey: although both companies and employees highlighted stress, communication, and business skills as the most relevant topics, external communications related to well-being highlight different topics.

Practical and social implications

The study provides guidelines to both communications and human resources practitioners about possible alignments of company well-being

policies with needs expressed by the employees. Moreover, the study offers a review of communications efforts to promote employee well-being and suggests the directions for future development of employee well-being communications and policies.

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Keywords

employee well-being, corporate communication, digital communication, corporate social responsibility, occupational health and safety

News Agencies as a Blind Sport in PR Research. Results of Qualitative Interviews in the New Media Landscape of the Early 21st Century

Sievert, Holger, *Macromedia University of Applied Sciences Cologne (Germany)*
Meißner, Florian, *Macromedia University of Applied Sciences Cologne (Germany)*
Inderhees, Marco, *Macromedia University of Applied Sciences Cologne (Germany)*

Introduction and purpose of the study

According to the Call for Papers, BledCom 2024 welcomes “ALL papers that are relevant to public relations and communication management and not just papers that discuss the conference theme”. This paper is one of those general papers. It deals with a central blind spot - namely an area that continues to be of great importance, especially for media work within public relations, but which has received and continues to receive very little attention in research and literature. This is the interplay between media releases as a product of public relations and the actual work of news agencies in the further use of these media releases. In particular, there are no current studies on how this area presents itself under the changing media conditions of the early 21st century. The aim of this paper is therefore to shed some light on this under-researched area by means of qualitative interviews.

Literature Review

The general relationship between public relations and journalism, as well as differences and similarities between the two fields (including training), has long been extensively studied in our academic field (e. g. Cutlip, 1961, Baerns,

1979 and 1991, Turk, 1986, Ryan & Martinson, 1988, but also more recently e. g. Macnamara, 2019, Hoffmann, 2022, Weder et al., 2023). Most of these studies have shown a very close relationship between PR professionals and journalists (or PR and journalism more general), but also, that there are significant differences in the perception of the impact of these relationships.

News agencies, however, and their significance for the field of public relations is only mentioned as a marginal aspect. As Nelissen & Hendrickx (2023) state: “News agencies are regularly mentioned in scholarly works among the principal sources of information [...]. However, little is known about how these agencies themselves source news.” While it is commonly assumed that, at least in democratic countries, news agencies follow high journalistic standards and strive to maintain neutrality (Vyslozil & Surm, 2019), it is important to take a more specific look at this type of communicator towards social order.

Methodology

This research paper aims to make a small exploratory contribution in this strand of research, which has received far too little attention. It is based on so far 11 semi-structured interviews.

Nine of them were conducted with representatives of different functional areas at agencies (managing level as well editor-in-chief and “normal” journalismt) as well as newsrooms of various media outlets (newspaper, tv, radio and pure online channels. In addition, three academic experts in the field of media economics and media law were interviewed. The interviews were conducted in the federal state of a large EU member country and intensively analysed using MAXQDA.

Selected Results and conclusions

The qualitative interviews analysed for this research paper show very clearly the difficult relationship between public relations organisations and news agencies. In summary, it can be said that agencies offer a very differentiated picture in their handling of press releases:

They are important to all interviewees, although to varying degrees. The smaller the agency and the more relevant the information is to a certain topical field, the greater the chance of triggering coverage with a press release as the person responsible for PR.

Press releases in direct use (without using a news agencies as intermediary) also continue to be of great importance for media representatives, but that they are also overwhelmed by an abundance of press releases and other communication. In the end, the actual use depends strongly on the type of media and the specific department.

Additionally, it remains to be noted that it is very likely that media will generally take over press releases that are disseminated within agency reports unchecked due to the so-called “agency principle”. For PR professionals that might make the job easier at a first glance, but, however, sometimes a higher level of reflection would also give the opportunity to communicate the own position deeper.

Practical and social implications

For the field of Public Relations and Corporate Communications, these results show that news agencies should be considered more as important and highly trusted intermediaries in external communication. Overall, however, this interplay, and especially its critical aspect, has not yet been sufficiently explored in the academic and applied literature. Much more research would be interesting – to help PR professionals in their daily work, but also to critically discuss the implications of these findings for democratic societies as a whole.

Keywords

Public Relations, Press Releases, News Agencies, Newsrooms, Media Transformation

Crisis Communication Scholarship: The Dire Need for a Socio-cultural Perspective

Sriramesh, Krishnamurthy, *University of Colorado (USA)*

Introduction and Purpose of the Study

Crises are ubiquitous in modern times and their consequences are becoming ever more serious, and global. Among the many reasons for this is the emergence of digital and social media that have circumvented traditional “gatekeeping” functions by traditional print and broadcast media. Despite its global nature, crisis communication scholarship has almost entirely neglected the role of socio-cultural variables in crisis communication. To reduce this ethnocentricity, this study proposes an approach where the term *culture* is defined broadly to include political systems, level of economic development, media culture, societal culture, and activist culture - a framework presented by Sriramesh & Verčič, (2020). The proposed study addresses the overall research question: *What role do socio-cultural variables play in the crisis communication?*

Literature Review

The Covid-19 pandemic is a crisis case that helps illustrate the rationale for studying the role of culture in crisis communication. By all accounts, the SARS-Cov2 that caused the Covid-19 pandemic, originated in China (Ye, Z, et. Al. 2020) in late 2019. Yet, the world only heard about it months later in early March 2020 because Chinese authorities chose to not disclose it to the public for several months. One can only wonder how the course of the global pandemic might have been altered had the virus originated

in a more pluralistic political system with a more liberal media environment. On the other hand, a more liberal and federal political system such as the US saw acrimony and division among various actors from the very outset. More conservative state administrations such as Florida resisted even the CDC’s directions with regard to risk mitigation measures such as masking, shut-downs, etc. Ironically, the Chief Executive of the country himself led the charge against a Federal agency – the CDC – by refusing to wear a mask in public and offering many confusing public statements on the potency of the virus or ways of preventing it from spreading. He was aided in such ‘activism’ by his many Republican supporters in Congress. Inter-Governmental Organizations (IGOs) such as NATO and WHO were also affected by stark differences in the political ideologies of member-states. Activist groups – civil society – played a key role also on both sides of the socio-cultural divide. The Covid-19 pandemic thus helps illustrate that the pandemic was perceived, and responded to, differently by nations based on their socio-political factors.

Yet, crisis communication scholarship has largely been silent on the critical role of socio-cultural variables in crisis communication. As a result, E. T. Hall’s (1959) insightful comment: “culture is communication and communication is culture” (p. 186) has mostly been ignored by most crisis communication literature. Two theories have dominated research in crisis communication

over the past thirty years: Image Restoration Theory (Image Repair Theory) proposed by William Benoit (1995, 1997) and Situational Crisis Communication Theory offered by Timothy Coombs (2004, 2007) and in six different editions of his book starting in 2007 (Coombs, 2022). Neither scholar recognizes even in passing, the role of culture in crisis communication. Further, there is also a paucity of crisis case studies, which is evident when one reviews scholarly books on crisis communication going as far back as 1997. Of the 15 scholarly books on crisis communication (see enclosed bibliography) only two offer crisis case studies and only three address culture as a variable influencing crisis communication. Of the other books, only a few make occasional references to culture or may even devote one chapter to the topic (eg. Frandsen and Johansen, 2017) but they do not accord culture the primacy it deserves in crisis communication. Of the three books that do address culture/international perspectives, one was published 11 years ago and did not use the same conceptual framework to analyze crisis cases (George and Pratt, 2012). The world and its cultures have changed a lot since then. The second book (Bernhardsdottir, 2015) used Grid Group Cultural Theory (GGCT) to analyze crisis communication. GGCT focuses on four dimensions of societal culture: hierarchy, egalitarianism, individualism, and fatalism. Although any analysis that gives credence to culture is a step forward, there are many more dimensions to societal culture than the ones used by Bernhardsdottir. The third book (George and Kwansah-Aidoo, 2017) offers case studies from several non-Western countries. As heartening George and Kwansah-Aidoo's approach is, once again the focus is only on societal culture and in a "transboundary context" and other socio-political variables are not at all addressed. Thus, one can reasonably contend that a cultural perspective of crisis communication is long overdue. Further, one can also contend that there is a dire need for cases that address the impact of culture on crisis communication with a more ex-

pansive definition of the term *culture* as being proposed in this study.

Methodology

Given the relative novelty of this socio-cultural approach to crisis communication, the case study method seems quite appropriate. This project proposes to primarily use the case study method, which has multiple benefits. Cutler (2004) concluded that "if thoughtfully conceived and well executed, [case studies] are a research tool well suited to study [communication]" (p. 365). Harvard Business School pioneered the case study method to study organizational communication 102 years ago. Former Harvard Business School Dean Nitin Nohria articulated the benefit of the case study method: "Cases expose students to real business dilemmas and decisions. Cases teach students to size up business problems quickly while considering the broader organizational, industry, and societal context... Cases teach students how to apply theory in practice and how to induce theory from practice. The case method cultivates the capacity for critical analysis, judgment, decision-making, and action" (Nohria, 2021). Gillham (2010) provides an extensive discussion of the case study method as do Tsang (2013) and Welch, et. al. (2011).

Crisis communication being an applied science, the case study method seems most appropriate wherein a specific crisis faced by an organization (eg. for-profit corporation, government agency, or not-for-profit organization) is chosen for analysis. The analysis will have two broad aspects. First, a thorough description of the crisis: the origin/source of a crisis, its expansion, and ultimately resolution and damage caused especially to organizational stability and reputation. Second, an analysis of crisis communication vis-a-vis the role that the five socio-cultural variables mentioned above played in the development and resolution of the crisis.

Results and Conclusions

This approach has already been used under the leadership of the author to analyze a sample of crises in Asia. The primary findings of those will be discussed as part of this presentation. The presentation will also discuss how the experience from these Asian cases can be extended to other socio-cultural environments such as Europe.

Practical and Social Implications

Crisis communication is at its core, a professional activity/practice. Theorizing should help improve practice at its most applied level. So, this proposal has a dual purpose of helping expand the horizons of crisis communication scholarship expanding its theoretical parameters. Such theoretical expansion will help crisis communication practice, which is practiced by every type of organization. Therefore, a study that assesses the impact of socio-cultural factors on crisis communication is going to help all organization types to better manage their communication and relationship building. By providing empirical data on the impact of socio-cultural variables on crisis communication, this project fills a huge chasm in existing scholarship first but also aids professionals. Finally, in addition to its theoretical and practical ramifications, the proposed study will help the process of teaching crisis communication – especially in institutions of higher education – by providing current case studies. There are very few crisis case study books available to university teachers even though there is a steep rise in universities offering courses in crisis communication.

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Keywords

Crisis Communication, Culture and Crisis Communication, Socio-cultural variables, Culture and Communication

Navigating Informed Health Choices: Sociocultural Factors and Information Channels in the Context of Chiropractic Services in Croatia

Takahashi, Marta, *Catholic University of Croatia (Croatia)*

Introduction and purpose of the study

Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) are a wide range of healthcare practices that fall outside of conventional medical practices, and are not fully incorporated into the predominant healthcare system (WHO, 2019). Given that the providers of complementary treatment methods, such as chiropractic, are not subject to legal regulations covering conventional medical services in Croatia, they are not well recognized by the general public.

The goal of this research is to determine the types of information channels and media content, attitudes, and characteristics of individuals using chiropractic treatments. The choice to use CAM aligns with post-materialistic values, emphasizing personal development, self-expression, and health investment (Coulter, Willis 2007). Socioeconomic shifts diminish traditional values, empowering individualization, self-confidence, and responsibility (Inglehart, Baker, 2000). Chiropractic, requiring active patient involvement, underscores the importance of informed choices. Awareness of chiropractic is crucial in its selection.

Literature review

Improved health and longer life spans, increased productivity, increased material well-being, the expansion of education and communications, and the complexity of social organization are part of the socioeconomic development, where post-materialistic values are strengthened (Maldini, 2008). An additional aspect of post-materialistic values is emphasizing the importance of personal development, self-realization and quality of life, and promoting self-care and investing in one's own health as a priority, especially with an emphasis on prevention and health maintenance (Axén, Hestbaek, Leboeuf-Yde, 2019). From that perspective, the so-called conventional (orthodox) methods of treatment belong more to modernist or materialistic values, mostly because they are oriented towards a curative effect and a symptomatic perception of the problem. On the other hand, complementary or alternative methods are linked to postmodernist values.

Methodology

Based on the operationalization of research variables, a survey questionnaire will be constructed as the main instrument of empirical verification. The survey will be conducted online, with a sample of 200 respondents from Croatia, 100 of which have experience with chiropractic.

ic treatments and 100 which do not. It will be conducted in March 2024. The questionnaire will examine the sociocultural characteristics of the respondents, and information channels they use while researching CAM versus conventional medicine, and making informed decisions.

H: The research subjects who display an acceptance of predominantly post-materialistic values have a tendency towards the use of information channels that are supportive of complementary treatment methods, including chiropractic, while the opposite is true for the subjects who predominantly accept traditional social values.

Results and conclusions

It is expected that the preliminary results of the research will confirm the hypothesis. The results of the proposed research examining the connection between sociocultural factors and use of certain information channels on the research subject's tendency to use complementary methods of treatment on the example of chiropractic will have a multi-layered application of the results in practice, given the lack of research on the topic.

Practical and social implications

The research results will be able to be used in health education, market research and potentially in the legal regulation of complementary (alternative) medical services.

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Keywords

CAM, Chiropractic, Complementary and alternative medicine, Health, Post-materialism, Sociocultural factors

Communication Competence and Challenges of Family Caregivers in Navigating End-of-Life Conversations

Tan, Rachel, *Singapore Management University (Singapore)*
Ho, Kelvin, *Singapore Management University (Singapore)*
Deng, Olivia, *Singapore Management University (Singapore)*
Chia, Glen, *Singapore Management University (Singapore)*
Yeo, Su Lin, *Singapore Management University (Singapore)*

Singapore, with a rapidly aging population of 5.92 million, faces significant challenges in its healthcare system, exacerbated by escalating costs and increasing pressures on family caregivers (National Population and Talent Division, 2023). In a society driven by strong familial values, these caregivers are pivotal in end-of-life care and ultimately make important decisions for their care recipients (Ministry of Health Singapore, 2023, Gu et al, 2015). Yet, they struggle to communicate to their dying loved ones as they navigate a complex landscape marked by societal taboos about death and ingrained negative perceptions of palliative care and nursing homes (Singapore Hospice Council, 2023). This study seeks to understand the communication competence and challenges of primary family caregivers in navigating end-of-life conversations. The study is guided by three key research questions: RQ1 investigates underlying factors such as perceptions, knowledge, and attitudes towards palliative care and their impact on caregiver-patient communication during end-of-life discussions and decision-making. RQ2 explores the media consumption patterns of caregivers seeking information on palliative care and how these patterns influence their engagement with patients and competence in accessing useful knowledge for desired health outcomes. RQ3

delves into how factors like family relationships, finances, resources, cultural norms, and Asian values contribute to the comfort or discomfort in communication, ultimately affecting the end-of-life experience of patients.

Previous research has highlighted the difficulties in discussing end-of-life care within families, especially in cultures where death is a taboo subject. Studies have shown that caregivers often lack adequate information and support, which can negatively impact the quality of end-of-life care (Chua et al, 2020). End-of-life care is vital for addressing diverse needs in the final stage of life, positively influencing the fulfillment of care recipients' wishes and overall patient health outcomes. This study builds upon this existing body of knowledge and contributes to literature by examining the unique cultural, social, and emotional factors that influence caregiver communication and decision-making at the end of life in Singapore.

To delve into these intricate dynamics, the study carried out 22 semi-structured in-depth interviews with a representative sample of family caregivers in Singapore in the last quarter of 2023. Caregivers were carefully selected to meet specific criteria, including demographics

that reflect the multicultural ethnic population of Singapore, and that they must have provided care within the last five years. These parameters ensured a variety of recent experiences and perspectives in caregiving and challenges in end-of-life communication that reflect the society's cultural norms. Each interview lasted between one and two hours, and the data collected through audio recordings was subsequently transcribed and analysed.

The study revealed a substantial lack of awareness of family caregivers around palliative care (86%) and knowledge gaps (91%). Notably, more than half did not even discuss final wishes for a “good death” with their care recipients, while the remainder discussed primarily medical topics (RQ1). The caregivers’ media consumption patterns on palliative care or treatment subsequently influenced their engagement with care recipients, and competence in accessing useful knowledge. During their decision-making process, the majority (64%) had relied solely on individuals such as doctors and healthcare professionals for information not always forthcoming (RQ2). Almost all caregivers (95%) did not partake in conversations about end-of-life plans prior to the diagnosis, indicative of prevailing cultural stigmas associated with death. After diagnosis, more caregivers (50%) engaged in end-of-life conversations, but their discussions were largely superficial and did not address crucial aspects. Only half of caregivers (55%) believed that their care recipient’s wishes were heard, communicated, understood, and followed. This suggests a mixed level of satisfaction with their communication and decision-making processes, pointing to a critical need for improved communication between caregivers and recipients. The study concludes by emphasising the need to enhance caregiver-patient communication and integrate palliative care education and end-of-life conversations into public health policies in the larger societal context. This leads to a more compassionate, informed, and holistic public health

communication approach regarding end-of-life care, fostering better patient outcomes aligned with their wishes.

The findings of this study bear significant implications for both practical application and societal impact. Singaporeans play a pivotal role in delivering active caregiving, be it on an individual or collective societal level. Family caregivers require increased awareness and knowledge concerning the significance of end-of-life care and effective communication (Ministry of Health Singapore, 2023). For policy makers, these insights underscore the importance of seamlessly integrating end-of-life and palliative care conversations into public health communication, initiatives, and the broader environment. By doing so, family caregivers can enhance their communication competence and effectively navigate the daunting challenges involved in providing care for loved ones at the end of life.

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Keywords

End-of-Life Care, Family Caregivers, Palliative Care, Communication, Singapore

Impact of CSR and Corporate Sustainability Communication on the Rising Green Generation in Singapore

Teo, Justin, *Singapore Management University (Singapore)*

Gan, Jane, *Singapore Management University (Singapore)*

Foo, Kai Yen, *Singapore Management University (Singapore)*

Sim, Lincoln, *Singapore Management University (Singapore)*

Yeo, Su Lin, *Singapore Management University (Singapore)*

Given the growing prominence of corporate sustainability in nearly every region of the world, sustainable consumption has become a core endeavor in an era of global push for sustainable development, particularly among the younger consumers (Seyfang, 2005). With the rise of the environmentally and socially conscious Millennials and Gen Z labeled as the “Green Generation” (Deloitte; 2019), companies are placing more emphasis on responsible business practices and sustainability objectives at the heart of their business strategy. As a result, carrying out corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities and communicating the intent and efforts of these initiatives have never been more critical for organizations today (Ioannou & Serafeim, 2017).

However, despite organizations’ attempts to integrate CSR through their core businesses to help tackle the world’s pressing problems, publics are also becoming more skeptical of such corporate sustainability efforts. Defined as the tendency to distrust organizations’ CSR claims and actions, CSR skepticism relates to doubts and suspicion as to whether organizations can truly be altruistic when it comes to doing business (Vanhamme & Grobbsen, 2009). Unfortunately, many organizations’ use of communication campaigns to make them appear to be more environmentally

friendly than they really are. Their utilization of persuasive marketing messages for short-term financial gains, and their efforts to increase CSR visibility to recover tarnished reputations after crises, have only fueled publics’ scrutiny and cynicism of business morals and ethics (Webb & Mohr, 1998).

This study hence purposes to examine the impact of corporate CSR communication on the younger and green population segments in Singapore. Drawing literature from multidisciplinary research, a hypothesized model was developed to test the relationships between a) CSR communication (independent variable) and 1) corporate reputation, 2) trustworthiness, 3) employer attractiveness and 4) purchase intention (dependent variables). Two other factors – social responsible consumption and CSR scepticism – were investigated for their roles as moderators. While there has been no lack of research investigating the impact of CSR on various aspects of corporate performance and consumers’ perception, there is a lack of empirical evidence concerning the examined factors on the rising “green generation” who will eventually form a formidable segment of the workforce in Singapore. Hence, we find a pressing need to fill this knowledge gap in the CSR and sustainability

communication scholarship, given the growing power of youth and young graduates in driving companies to be more engaged in responsible sustainability activities (Landrum, 2017).

To examine the proposed hypotheses, an online survey was sent to Singaporean tertiary students and young working adults in the first quarter of 2020. A total of 403 Singapore citizens and residents between the ages of 21 and 35 years old voluntarily participated in the online survey. The approval from the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) was received before the data collection. A statistical model using multiple regression was subsequently carried out to test and explain the relationships among the examined variables.

Our findings suggested that while corporate reputation, employer attractiveness, and purchase intention are significantly associated with CSR communication, such a relationship was not found in trustworthiness. Our results also suggested that social responsible consumption positively moderates the direct relationship between CSR communication and the corporate outcomes; and CSR skepticism negatively moderates the same direct relationship. The fact that no positive association was found between CSR communication and trustworthiness was not surprising since the concept of trustworthiness is multi-dimensional and may not be determined through a single construct of effective CSR communication. Additionally, trust literature identifies the propensity to trust as an important predictor of the judgment of the trustworthiness of the trustee (Mayer et al., 1995), which presents another set of complexity in examining how stakeholders evaluate the trustworthiness of a company through its CSR communication.

Given that positive public perceptions of CSR bring with it both social and financial benefits for organizations, it is not difficult to understand why many companies today are allocating more

resources to back CSR initiatives with an aim to boost corporate reputation. Amidst the growing corporate emphasis on CSR, there is also an increasing number of studies that questioned if "doing good" will always lead to positive outcomes (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). Indeed, such sustainability narratives have become a top shopping and job seeking priority for the rising and influential green generation in Singapore, and any missteps or perceived attempts at greenwashing will almost immediately trigger a backlash. Companies should consistently re-examine the impact of their CSR communication on this target group if they wish to establish a reputation for environmental stewardship among the Gen Zs and millennials in Singapore.

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Keywords

CSR communication, sustainability, green generation, corporate reputation, Singapore

“Buying mercy” Effective altruism, philanthropy and social purpose as public relations

Thompson, Gareth, *University of the Arts London (UK)*

Introduction and Purpose

This paper is concerned with the interplay between public relations and individual philanthropy, with a particular focus on the movement for effective altruism and social purpose giving. The aim of the project is to investigate the way high profile contemporary billionaires such as Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, Sam Bankman-Fried and others are combining philanthropy with communications in a mode of personal public relations that not only makes them feel good about their legacy but also functions as an exercise of power that can subvert the normal processes of public policy making.

Literature review

A *Public Relations Review* article in 1985 claimed that “Corporate philanthropy comes of age” (Tilson and Vance, 1985). This study was followed by papers that variously investigated the returns that corporate giving could deliver to community relations programmes and evaluated how cause marketing could be interpreted as “philanthropy as public relations” (Stole, 2008). Recent book length contributions to the literature have claimed that the modern form of “big philanthropy” as practised by high profile donors such as Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg and others “can be a plutocratic exercise of power” that deploys “vast private assets toward a public purpose, frequently with the goal of changing public policy” (Reich, 2019).

Methodology

Reflecting the recent emergence of the field and the lack of existing literature relating to effective altruism and social purpose giving, the project took the form of an exploratory study. The primary methodology was a case study approach, based on a set of examples reported in business and general media of philanthropy by wealthy individuals and families that also included an element of publicity and evidence of planned public relations work. The case studies were selected based on a search of the ProQuest news database over the last ten years along with the cascading of cases that were uncovered in the literature review.

Results and conclusions

Individuals and families are using high profile publicised philanthropic giving in their name as a public relations strategy to offset historic reputation issues arising as a result of business activities that have been the source of the wealth they are giving away. For example, the Sackler family, owners of Purdue Pharma which manufactured the OxyContin drug that has contributed to an opioid epidemic in the US, has been accused of trying to donate their way out of trouble in a “whitewash” through philanthropic donations in a lawsuit filed by the New York attorney general. Similarly, despite working for his father Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation for most of his working life, including as CEO

of 21st Century Fox when Fox News was at the forefront of publicising divisive conspiracy theories and giving a voice to climate sceptics, in 2019 after leaving Fox, James Murdoch and his wife, Kathryn made donations of \$4.25 million to the US-based Environmental Defense Fund that fights climate denial as well as gifts to Unite America and the Anti-Defamation League.

Implications

The main implication of this study is the realisation that philanthropy is being used as a tool of public relations beyond traditional legacy motives as a calculated offset to correct damage done in creating the wealth that is being given away. Niche PR firms that combine reputation management and social impact consulting are emerging to serve this field and author Anand Girighardas (2020) urges transparent communications on the nature of the transaction when donations are made by their billionaire clients: “The Murdochs are trying to buy mercy on the cheap and it is being willingly sold to them by people who should know better”, (Mass, 2019).

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Keywords

Effective altruism; philanthropy; social purpose; public relations

How digitalization of internal communication affects internal communication satisfaction, employee engagement and consequently perceived life satisfaction

Tkalac Verčič, Ana, *University of Zagreb (Croatia)*

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

Anja Špoljarić, *University of Zagreb (Croatia)*

Introduction and purpose of the study

To understand new patterns of communication affected by the introduction of digital communication technology (ComTech) and how it affects employees' lives, this project aims to develop a theory of internal communication preference and explore how it connects perceived digital channel value, culture, personality, social exchange quality indicators, engagement, and life satisfaction.

Main questions driving the project are:

- How does digitalization of communication channels affect internal communication, engagement, and life satisfaction of employees in a post-pandemic world?
- How do culture orientation and personality traits determine internal communication preferences?
- What are the solutions to designing optimal internal communication systems in a new digital society?

Literature review

We believe it is relevant to explore the relationship between internal communication satisfaction and life satisfaction, from both a theoretical and practical perspective. A central point of this project is to look at the relationship between all described concepts, and through that explore the influence internal communication has on overall life satisfaction.

This project contributes to several different strands of literature which all centre around internal communication, which is being recognized as an increasingly important specialization in communication management (Tkalac Verčič et al., 2012; Men & Bowen, 2016). Satisfaction is an important construct and it can be described as a summation of an individual's satisfaction with information flow and relationship variables (Downs & Hazen, 1977), or as employee's satisfaction with different aspects of communication in group, interpersonal and organizational contexts (Tsai et al., 2009). Even though

there is a huge shift towards using digital technologies in daily communication, studies show that adoption of new technologies is neither easy nor straightforward (Tkalac Verčič & Špoljarić, 2020). Personality does not only have an influence on selection and use of media (Kraaykamp & van Eijck, 2005; Rosengren, 1974), but also on the motivation for media preference (Weaver, 2003). National cultural values relate to attitudes in the workplace and other organizational outcomes (Kirkman et al., 2006). Although internal communication is essential in promoting employee engagement (Bakker et al., 2011), this relationship is underexplored (Men et al., 2020; Tkalac Verčič et al., 2012; Tkalac Verčič & Pološki Vokić, 2017). Subjective well-being is an umbrella phrase which describes the way people evaluate their lives (Diener et al., 1999). It is a wide set of concepts that includes emotional responses, domain satisfactions, and global judgement of life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1999; Luhmann & Hennecke, 2017).

Figure 1 gives an overview of described relationships between main concepts of the project. The general goal of the project is creating principles for successful internal communication which ultimately affect life satisfaction.

Methodology

The project relies on theoretically defined constructs used for empirical research. We will conduct three experiments to empirically establish what shapes perceived (digital) channel value and employ a diary method which will help shed light on how perceived (digital) channel value affects internal communication satisfaction among employees. Then we will develop a scale to measure perceived channel value to be used in a multiwave survey on purposeful stratified samples of employees in four countries, to explore the proposed model. This will help us determine the effect of culture and personality on internal communication, engagement, and life satisfaction, as well as the potential mediating effect of social exchange quality indicators. By understanding different responses of employees in various settings, the model can be assessed and redefined.

Results and conclusions

The project started in 2022 and it will run until 2025. By the 2024 BledCom symposium the first two phases of the project will be concluded and results of initial theoretical work, experiments and the diary will be presented, as well as a scale to measure perceived channel value.

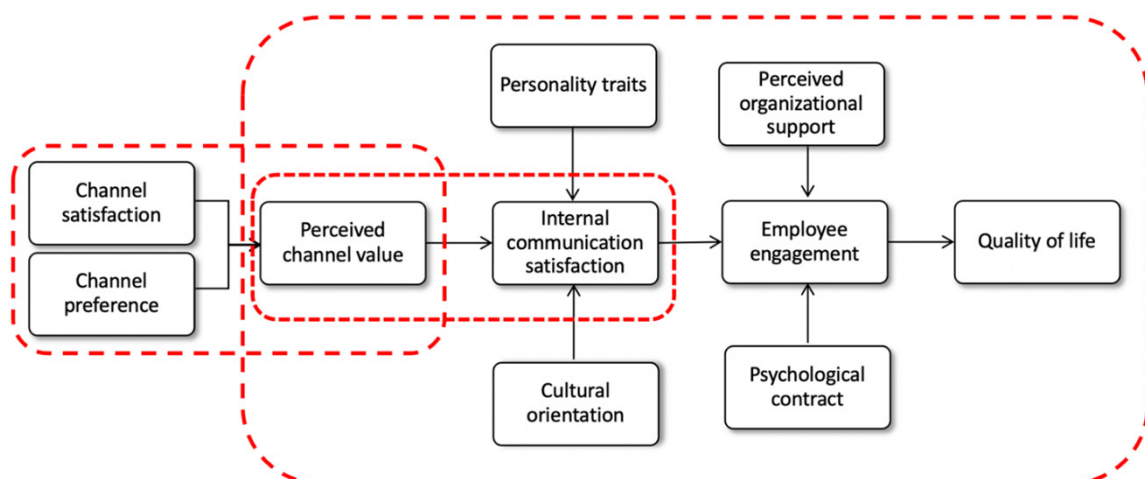


Figure 1

Practical and social implications

The project will conclude with the development of guidelines about best practices in internal communication and indicate pitfalls to avoid. Providing research-based guidelines and assessment tools will provide practice-based innovations for this field. This will help the scientific community and practitioners to improve the elements of internal communication for the benefit of organizations and their employees.

The social importance of this project is in clarifying how this aspect of our lives can be a positive influence on our life satisfaction.

This 2022-2025 reserach project is suppppported by Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency grant J5-4584 and by Croatian Science Fooundation grant IPS-2022-02-4542.

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Keywords

internal communication, digital communication technology, ComTech, communication channels, organizational culture, engagement, life satisfaction

Navigating Purpose-Oriented Communication: Insights from Dutch Public Relations Professionals

van der Zeeuw, Jeroen, *Ede Christian University (The Netherlands)*

Introduction and purpose of the study

Many organizations nowadays have purpose statements and inspiring purpose narratives, claiming that they are not merely committed to enhancing shareholder value, but also contribute to the greater good and broader well-being of stakeholders. A pressing question arises: are these purpose statements genuine expressions of intent or merely rhetorical? By way of a case study of a recent incident in the Netherlands we will look into how Dutch public relations professionals think about fair purpose-oriented communication and into their perception of professional identity.

The theme and main question

Recently a research organization on brands, marketing and communication in the Netherlands organized an event on the topic of purpose. What to think of the growing number of organizations that claim to be purpose-led? They claim to be contributing to the greater good. Is this purpose orientation genuine or does it mainly have a pr-function?

One of the voices that were invited to be part of the line-up, was a spokesperson of a tobacco manufacturer that claims to have as its purpose to contribute to a smoke-free future. This invitation caused a lot of protests amongst public relations professionals, leading to the decision by the organizers to remove the speaker from the

programme. Objections were, amongst others: 'Companies that misleadingly claim that they are in a 'transformation' and have the best interests of the world at heart should not be given a podium'. Or: 'Having this company participate would normalize the tobacco industry.'

This particular incident raises some more general questions that will be explored in this study:

- When is purpose-oriented communication acceptable?
- Who decides about that? How healthy is it for professional collectives and bodies to exclude certain voices of fellow professionals from the conversation?
- Doesn't the call to cancel the tobacco firm show that many professionals think about professional ethics in terms of the dichotomy of saints and sinners, which is superficial, as Fawkes and others have argued?

Methodology

To answer the abovementioned questions, two methods will be used. Firstly, a discourse analysis of the online conversations amongst public relations professionals regarding the cancellation of the tobacco speaker from the event line-up. Secondly, a small number (4 or 5) of interviews with leading public relations practitioners and scholars, several of whom are active members of Logeion, the Dutch professional association for communication professionals.

Results and conclusions

The outcomes of this case study will be related to the theory that is offered by the literature mentioned above and other sources. A case study can be used in training programmes, such as those of universities, where future public relations professionals are educated.

Practical and social implications

Since purpose-oriented communication can be considered to be a trend, it is very important for public relations professionals to look at and engage in it with a critical and moral attitude. This study will contribute to discussions of the societal implications of purpose-oriented communication and its impact on public discourse and perceptions of corporate and professional ethics.

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Keywords

Purpose-oriented communication, Public relations ethics, Professional identity, Dutch context

CBO (community-based organisation) communication strategies to facilitate long-term relationships towards sustainability: A case study of iDUC

van Zyl, Marné, *North-West University (South Africa)*
Kloppers, Elbé, *North-West University (South Africa)*
Bezuidenhout, Louise, *North-West University (South Africa)*

Introduction and purpose

In developing countries such as South Africa, the government does not have the capacity to address all relevant social issues society is struggling with. In this context, the non-profit (NPO) sector is a crucial role player contributing to the wellbeing of society. In South Africa, the NPO sector includes numerous small community-based organisations (CBOs), operating in specific communities. Many of these CBOs are not state-funded and are reliant on donors and other supporting stakeholders to provide the resources they need to be able to continue supporting the community. Several of these organisations reported insufficient resources, including a lack of funds, employees, volunteers, and networks, leading to them closing their doors, regardless of their contribution to the community. In this study we argue that positive long-term relationships with current stakeholders are imperative for these CBOs' sustainability, and that they need to build and maintain these relationships through effective communication.

iDUC is a small CBO situated in Potchefstroom, South Africa, dedicated to raising awareness of sexual assault and supporting rape victims in the community. Given the prevalence of gen-

der-based violence and sexual violence in South Africa, the need for awareness and support for victims is evident. The organisation is situated close to a local university, and a variety of night clubs that students frequent. iDUC's survival depends on its ability to build and maintain positive long-term relationships with the stakeholders who support it financially and through collaboration. In the past, iDUC almost had to shut down due to a lack of supporting stakeholders. Their current supporting stakeholders (night club owners and the local university) are contributing to, and sustaining iDUC through either funding, or collaboration, or both. The supporting stakeholders have an interest in iDUC's survival, since the organisation is contributing to a safe environment for the university's students and the safety of visitors to the night clubs.

The research question this study wanted to answer was: *What are iDUC's stakeholders' perceptions regarding communication between themselves and the organisation to maintain positive long-term relationships?*

Theoretical perspectives

Despite the criticism against the two-way sym-

metrical model, we argued that two-way symmetrical communication would be the ideal to strive toward, given the small size of the CBO, the very small number of supporting stakeholders, and the personal relationship they share. We also argued that the relationship strategies identified in the stakeholder relationship management theory, supplemented by some stewardship strategies specifically for NPOs, should contribute to building and maintaining positive long-term relationships between iDUC and its new supporting stakeholders, towards the sustainability of the organisation. From the two-way symmetrical model, we identified dialogue, a participatory culture, effective conflict management and mutual understanding as crucial principles of effective communication between the CBO and its stakeholders. From the relationship management theory and stewardship theory, we identified relationship strategies and stewardship strategies, specifically relevant to the NPO sector which were integrated to form new CBO stakeholder relationship strategies.

Networking and task sharing were integrated to form a new strategy, networking towards task sharing. Access, positivity, and relationship nurturing were integrated into one strategy called relationship nurturing. Openness, responsibility, and reporting were integrated into a strategy called responsibility. Assurance and reciprocity were integrated into one strategy called reciprocity.

We used the above-mentioned principles and strategies as theoretical framework to guide the empirical part of the study.

Methodology

We employed a qualitative single case study research design. iDUC had only seven supporting stakeholders during the time of study. We used qualitative total sampling and included all stakeholders. Semi-structured interviews were con-

ducted with the participants because the structure allowed us to ask all participants questions on each of the communication principles and strategies, whilst allowing the freedom to add any information they deem appropriate, regardless of it being identified by the researchers beforehand. We combined a deductive and inductive approach in this study to provide a thorough understanding of participants' needs and expectations regarding communication with iDUC.

Results and conclusions

Participants indicated that dialogue, a participatory culture, effective conflict management and mutual understanding were crucial in their relationship with the CBO. They also proposed networking towards task sharing, relationship nurturing, responsibility and reciprocity as critical CBO stakeholder relationship strategies for addressing their needs and building and maintaining a positive relationship with the CBO.

Limitations and future research

The empirical part of the study only included the supporting stakeholders of one small CBO. The inclusion of more stakeholders from more CBOs can build on the understanding of their needs and expectations regarding communication.

Practical and social implications

CBOs can contribute significantly to the wellbeing of society. The integrated CBO communication guidelines can be used to guide CBOs' communication with their supporting stakeholders to facilitate positive, long-term relationships towards the sustainability of the CBO.

Keywords

Community-based organisation (CBO) communication guidelines, Stakeholder relationship theory, Stewardship theory, Supporting stakeholders, Two-way symmetrical communication

Communication and War: Hate Speech, Propaganda War and Denial of Facts in the Tigray Ethiopia War of 2020-2023

Veen, Ton, *Mekelle University (Ethiopia)*
Weleslase, Brhane, *Mekelle University (Ethiopia)*

The UN considers hate speech any kind of communication, verbal, written or behavioral, that is hostile or uses derogatory or discriminatory language against any person or group of people on the basis of who they are, or, in other words, on the basis of their religion, ethnic origin, nationality, race, skin color, social origin, gender and other identity factors. (Ismanov A., 2023)

Hate speech has been steadily on the rise during the past decade. Most importantly, hate speech has also appeared at the highest level of the public administration of some Member States, where transformation into policy is just one step away. The liberal stance towards hate speech was built on the presumption that the state and the social majority would uphold democratic standards under all circumstances, and distance themselves from hate speakers, who would inevitably remain outcasts. But when state representatives remain silent or openly support hate speech and hate crimes, this assumption holds no longer. The non-organized, individual haters derive authority from the failure of the state to intervene (BÁRD, 2020).

Warriors use communication beyond bullet to win the battle. But they use communication not in its good side. They use it in its destructive way amid wars. According to past experiences hate

speech and propaganda war are used in wars.

Inflammatory hate speech catalyzes mass killings including genocide, according to scholars, survivors and, notably, some former perpetrators. By teaching people to view other human beings as less than human, and as mortal threats, thought leaders can make atrocities seem acceptable – and even necessary, as a form of collective self-defense. Such speech famously preceded the Holocaust, the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, and other intergroup mass killings, and unfortunately it is still rife in many countries at risk of collective violence, such as Nigeria, Myanmar, Egypt, and Greece. (Susan-Benesch)

Not only hate speech is applied in wars, but warriors also use denial of massacres and genocides. Warriors deny what they did in wars and try to defame their opponents by labeling the acts even done by themselves. Not only denying the facts, but warriors block all gates of information access. They do not allow the media to report what is happening and is being done during the war. Such kind of situation causes wars to continue all over the world and it harms the victims. Let's look at some literatures on this case.

Denial and distortion of the Holocaust and denial of genocide harms victims and survivors of these crimes and can constitute hate speech by advancing negative stereotypes of individuals or groups based on their identity, explicitly or implicitly. Denial of past atrocity crimes is also a warning sign of societal fragility and of the potential for violence. Today, more than 75 years after the Holocaust and more than 25 years after the genocides in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda, the continued persistence of speech denying or distorting the historical reality of these genocides is a source of serious concern that all stakeholders should confront. (United Nations, 2022, p. 4 Introduction)

The purpose of this research is to investigate how communication plays its role in the Tigray Ethiopia war of 2020-2023. We will examine specifically hate speech, propaganda and denial of facts amid the war. Methods of the research includes but not limited to document analysis, interview, and discussions. Speeches of officials and activists and agenda framing of the media amid the will be interpreted and analyzed.

The study is going to be limited temporarily to the Tigray region. But if necessary and applicable the chance is not encircled geographically and methodologically.

This study can have multifold contributions from regional to global arena. Universally this study can help policymakers give due emphasis to communication in their policies. This research can be utilized by policy makers in widening communication landscape and media democratization as well as freedom of speech.

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A smile is worth a thousand words: The role of internal communications in nurturing an emotional culture of joy at work

Willemse, Michelle, *Erasmus University (The Netherlands)*
Men, Linjuan Rita, *University of Florida (USA)*

Introduction and purpose of the study

The importance of having happy, engaged employees is gaining momentum in popular media, research studies, and organisational policy. Emotional culture within organisations has a significant influence on how employees feel and thereby act, consequently impacting business outcomes and company reputation. An emotional culture of joy is a key manifestation of positive collective emotions, characterised by good humour, cheerfulness, conviviality, fun, happiness, delight and enthusiasm, and is considered instrumental in employee flourishing, performance and resilience (Barsade & O'Neill, 2016; Hartmann et al., 2020; Men & Robinson, 2018; Yue et al., 2021). Internal communications practices shape workplace culture, however studies into the relationship between internal communications and positive emotional culture have been limited.

This study is the first of its kind in focussing on the role of internal communications professionals in nurturing an emotional culture of joy, entailing three research questions:

1. What factors influence the emotional culture of joy in the workplace?
2. How can internal communications professionals nurture an emotional culture of joy?
3. What challenges do they face in doing so?

Literature review

Joy and well-being at work have been the topic of various research papers, but no studies have explicitly looked at the link between an organisation's internal communications function and the emotional culture of joy. Although it is one of the strongest drivers of employee satisfaction and company commitment (Barsade & O'Neill, 2016), joy is difficult to define and measure, despite early attempts to develop a scale to validate its presence in a work setting.

Previous studies on organisational emotional culture and communication practices favoured online surveys and identified the need to gather communications managers' perspectives about cultivating the desired emotional culture. By focussing on the significant role that internal communication can play in nurturing an emotional culture of joy, as a key factor behind employee well-being, this study contributes to developing new theory on the link between organisational communication and positive emotional culture

through a co-oriented approach that incorporates both internal communications professionals' and employees' perspectives.

Methodology

Twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted with two samples: ten internal communications professionals, and ten employees in non-communications functions, which allowed comparison between opinions about the factors influencing joy in the workplace. Non-probability volunteer sampling identified participants of different ages, genders and experience, and who worked at a variety of organisations from a total of nine different countries across mainland Europe (Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, Poland, Spain and Switzerland). Coding categories following a grounded theory approach were used to analyse the data.

Results and conclusions

The results demonstrate that joy at work stems from factors including: having a connection to the company, meaningful work, a pleasant working atmosphere, room for personal expression, good relationships with co-workers and managers, and receiving recognition. However, the concept of joy at work is somewhat stigmatised, placing internal communicators in a difficult position to argue for greater prioritisation and resources. Internal communicators are seen as having a responsibility to foster joy at work – and while this responsibility does not rest with them alone, communicators' multifaceted skill sets and unique organisational position enables them to rally others around strategies to improve workplace culture. Accounting for the recent surge in remote working and changes in the ways employees meet and forge connections, participants of the study suggested a mix of strategies that include: 1) authentic, symmetrical and transparent communication; 2) responsive and motivating leadership language; 3) role mod-

elling and incentivising behaviours conducive to joy; 4) enhancing employee understanding/acceptance of company purpose and direction; 5) empowering employees with channels and networks to stimulate better workplace interactions and relationships; and 6) active internal listening to create an open and pleasant working environment.

Further research would be valuable in testing and validating these findings – in particular, quantitative research methods using larger samples, longitudinal studies comparing workplace emotional culture before and after the implementation of communications strategies, and case studies as well as manager interviews to detail what factors affect the success of planned strategies. Efforts to develop methods/tools to better measure and compare workplace joy would also be useful.

Practical and social implications

As an emerging area of research, the link between internal communications and emotional culture is still being established. This study contributes towards understanding how a more deliberate focus on employee well-being – specifically, an emotional culture of joy – can be established via strategic communication efforts. It highlights how communicators can utilise their role and position within an organisation to implement measures that do not always require extensive resource investment or in-person presence, but nevertheless mobilise and enable employees in forging meaningful connections and a more positive workplace culture.

Keywords

joy, internal communication, emotional culture, employee well-being

Get Closer: How Personality Tests Enhance Brand Awareness, Attitudes, and Engagement?

Wu, Shih Chia, *The Chinese University of Hong Kong (Hong Kong)*
Zheng, Nanxiao, *The Chinese University of Hong Kong (Hong Kong)*

Introduction and Purpose of Study

Personality tests are mechanisms to measure and categorize individuals' unique characteristics, and they have gone viral on the global internet in recent years. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) test, as one of the forms, is increasingly popular among young generations in China and Korea (Seo, 2022; Yang, 2023). The test is used for socialization in life among youth, including speed dating, like-minded people identification, increased feeling of well-being, and adopted by some employers for talent recruitment. Merchants also capitalize on the tests to develop peripheral products, expanding their commercial values (Yang, 2023).

Following the trend, well-known brands like Disneyland and Loewe have introduced their personality tests to attract consumers' attention (Carter, 2023; Disney News Contributor, 2014). Psychologists have extensively examined its acceptance and approval motives and attributed them to the "Barnum effect," which proposes that individuals tend to accept general descriptions as applicable to themselves. Other recent studies have linked the use of MBTI to adolescents' mental well-being (Hua & Zhou, 2023). However, few studied the personality test as an innovative mechanism for brands to enhance consumer engagement in the field of marketing communication. Therefore, this study serves as

the first to examine the effectiveness of using personality tests for consumers' brand awareness, brand attitudes, and social motivations to engage with the brand.

Literature Review

The study follows the rationale of the Hierarchy of Effects Model (HEM) (Wijaya, 2015) to examine the effectiveness of using personality tests for consumers' engagements. The model suggests a hierarchic way of reacting to marketing communication messages and contains three core stages, cognition, affect, and conation respectively. Responding to the stages, the study focuses on brand awareness (cognition), brand attitudes (affect), and social motivation to engage with the brand (conation). The concept of brand awareness comes from brand equity, and brand attitudes and social motivations of brand engagement are adapted from the dimensions of brand engagement (Xi & Hamari, 2019).

We define the personality test as a creative marketing communication and social tool with the Barnum effect for brands to attract consumers. The personality test is unique compared to other marketing communication tools as it is designed with highly interactive interfaces. Meanwhile, the personality test also features gamification. Since scholars have shown that gamification and interactive content can enhance consumer

engagement (e.g., Bittner & Shipper, 2014), we thus hypothesized:

- H1: The use of personality tests positively influences consumers' brand awareness.
- H2: The use of personality tests positively influences consumers' attitudes towards the brands.
- H3: The use of personality tests positively influences consumers' motivations to engage with the brand.

Method

The study was based on a cross-sectional survey design on Qualtrics. Purposive and snowball sampling were used to locate participants who had participated in a brand's online personality test(s) within the past six months. A total of 170 valid responses were finally obtained from Hong Kong from November 12th to 15th, 2023. Reliability tests for each variable are alpha = 0.73 for the use of personality test; alpha = 0.89 for brand awareness; alpha = 0.82 for attitudes towards the brand; alpha = 0.80 for social motivation to engage with the brand. With SPSS software, Pearson's partial correlation was performed to test the relationships among the use of personality, brand awareness, brand attitudes, and social motivations of brand engagement. Demographics (i.e., gender, age, education level, monthly salary) and frequency of Internet use were controlled.

Results and Conclusions

After running Pearson's partial correlations and entering demographic variables and frequency of Internet use as controls, the results showed that using personality test was related to brand awareness, $r(163) = 0.23$, $p < 0.01$; brand attitudes, $r(163) = 0.30$, $p < 0.001$; and social motivations to engage with the brand, $r(163) = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$. All the hypotheses were thus supported. The correlation matrix also showed positive correlations between brand awareness and

brand attitudes, $r(163) = 0.68$, $p < 0.001$, and social motivations of brand engagement, $r(163) = 0.55$, $p < 0.001$; positive correlations between brand attitudes and social motivations of brand engagement, $r(163) = 0.74$, $p < 0.001$. It merits a mention that the correlation between using personality tests and social motivations of brand engagement (H3) is stronger than the other two (H1 and H2), while the correlation indicating H1 is the weakest. It may suggest that using personality tests could influence consumers' brand engagement more than brand equity.

Practical and Theoretical Implications

The current study presents a unique theoretical perspective by examining the effectiveness of a creative branding mechanism on consumer engagement. It further extends the literature regarding personality tests in psychology into the field of marketing communication. It also supports the HEM model by demonstrating the positive correlations between cognition, emotions, and conation. Practically, the study may enlighten brands to use personality tests as a strategic tool to enhance consumers' brand engagement. The produced Barnum effect using personality tests may form a sense of belonging and good feeling to the brand among consumers. It may also lay the foundation for brands to use personalized engagement to strengthen the connection between consumers and companies.

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Keywords

Personality tests, brand awareness, brand attitudes, brand engagement

The Effects of Digital Activism on Social Wellness of Digital Natives in Singapore

Xu, Zhiying Daphne, *Singapore Management University (Singapore)*

Loi, Hui Ling Fiona, *Singapore Management University (Singapore)*

Loi, Ai Ling Stephanie, *Singapore Management University (Singapore)*

Yeow, Zheng Hoe Vernon, *Singapore Management University (Singapore)*

Yeo, Su Lin, *Singapore Management University (Singapore)*

Companies today are forced to face an increasingly complex set of pressures and demands from multiple stakeholders. The convenience and ease of social media have facilitated digital activism and advocacy for individuals' or groups' social and/or political causes, and companies are pressured to represent publics' causes if they wish to protect their business interests (The RepTrak Company, 2021). In their struggles to manage stakeholder communication in a hyperconnected business environment, business leaders and scholars question the psychology of online activism. Many seek to understand the psychological wellbeing of activists. Some studies (e.g., Klar & Kasser, 2009) have shown that individuals that participate in digital activism do so because such activities help them to find meaning in their lives, encourage self-presentation and expression, and seek social support. When individuals engage in activism, they share an identity with fellow advocates and would compare themselves to others. When perceiving their "in-group" more positively than "out-groups", activism enhances their self-image and social well-being (Drury & Reicher, 1999).

In contrast, research in sociopsychology reported that such activists who are also heavy users of digital media were 48% to 171% more likely to

be unhappy with life, low in wellbeing, anxious, or tend to care more about social comparison and have lower self-esteem (Twenge & Campbell, 2019). Given that such online activism can result in financial and social damages for private and public organisations, this study seeks to better understand the social wellness of digital activists in Singapore. It is paramount that communication professionals, when managing today's highly polarized online audiences, are aware of the sociopsychology profiles of activists despite mixed results from research. With an 84.7% active social media user penetration rate in Singapore, the prominence of social media in everyday life may encourage more digital activism as the younger segments of society use these platforms to influence social change and local politics. Comprehending activists' social well-being can therefore better equip communication professionals to connect and build meaningful relationships with these stakeholder groups. Hence, informed by literature, this study developed a hypothesized framework to predict online activism's (independent variable) positive association with individuals' anxiety (mediator) which further predicts individuals' 1) satisfaction with life, 2) self-esteem, and 3) social comparison (dependent variables).

An online survey administered through an independent firm was conducted between October and November 2022. A total of 600 participants who are Singapore citizens and permanent residents participated in the study. They were aged 21 to 40 years, and our sample is representative of gender and multi-ethnicity of the Singapore society. Participants were surveyed for their demographics and responses to the examined factors needed to test our hypothesized model, i.e., digital activism activity, social media use, anxiety, satisfaction with life, self-esteem, and social comparison. The data was analysed using Model 4 from PROCESS macro V4.2 on IBM SPSS.

Our findings revealed that individuals who participate in social and/or political causes on social media tended to feel more anxious ($p < .001$). Moreover, individual levels of anxiety were found to be negatively associated with self-esteem ($p < .001$), and positively associated with social comparison ($p < .001$). However, no significant association was detected between anxiety and life satisfaction ($p = .409$).

Our study did not reinforce literature that suggested activism's benefits to well-being. First, this could be due to the strict monitoring and censoring of social media content observed in Singapore. Hence, those who participate in activism might feel vulnerable and subjected to social evaluation and scrutiny by others, whether negative or positive (Carleton, et al., 2007). Second, with Singapore's introduction of the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA) in 2019, this might have induced a tendency of self-censorship and passivity amongst the public. Consequentially, this renders digital activists more conspicuous and as the "out-group" of Singapore's society. With heightened vulnerability and anxiety, the negative impact on self-esteem is not surprising. Satisfaction in life could have been non-significant as Singaporeans might hold values and expectations that are more primary over those which are

hedonistic and eudemonistic.

There are practical implications for communication practice and governance, and a twopronged framework could be explored to holistically address the potential impact of digital activism on Singapore activists. To build relationships and brand loyalty, practitioners cannot adopt a one-size-fits-all approach to brand activism as consumers from different cultures may respond differently. With potential adverse effects on Singaporeans, companies should design activism plans that are not only authentic, but responsible and ethical. Safeguards should be incorporated to mitigate the negative impact on all stakeholder groups, such as calibrating the type of activities and reducing the scrutiny from activists seeking benefits to be part of an "ingroup". Additionally, the government should not stifle citizen advocacy while hoping to bolster society from digital harms.

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Fostering Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Organizations: Perspectives from Public Relations Leaders

Yue, Cen April, *Boston University (USA)*

Bradshaw, Amanda S., *University of Mississippi (USA)*

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

Moon, Britt, *University of Mississippi (USA)*

Introduction and Purpose

Public relations has historically spearheaded social campaigns, significantly impacting public opinion through advocacy and communication efforts. Now, the field is embracing a critical role in advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, an area that remains relatively uncharted in public relations research (Mundy & Bardhan, 2023).

This study aims to broaden the understanding of DEI within the context of public relations scholarship. Through qualitative analysis, it seeks to uncover how leaders in public relations define and interpret DEI, assesses the DEI efforts undertaken by organizations to cater to a diverse range of stakeholders, evaluates the contribution of public relations in propelling the DEI agenda forward, and pinpoints the obstacles public relations professionals encounter in the execution of DEI initiatives.

Literature Review

Early pioneering studies indicated that DEI was not prioritized by communication professionals (Hon & Brunner, 2000). The momentum shift-

ed following the PR Coalition's establishment in 2005, advocating for public relations' leadership in DEI, and was further accelerated by the tragic events of 2020—the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery—propelling DEI back into the spotlight for public relations scholars (Mundy & Bardhan, 2023). Current research covers a variety of topics, such as the role of leadership in DEI efforts, the current state of DEI in public relations education, and strategies for engaging with diverse publics.

The public relations industry bears an ethical and moral obligation to lead by example, showcasing the significance of language use in promoting social justice and fostering organizational culture where DEI principles are integral (Wakeman, 2021). As such, it is natural for professionals in public relations to embrace the roles of champions, advocates, and storytellers, working to enhance the way in which we interact with stakeholders universally.

Methodology

This study adopted semi-structured interviews and used purposive and snowball sampling techniques to select participants. Our aim was to

engage senior-level public relations professionals from a variety of industries within the United States. To this end, we reached out to public relations leaders within our network, including those who had been honored with diversity awards, to recommend individuals who could offer insightful perspectives on DEI within public relations. As a result, our sample consisted of 30 participants: 20 identifying as female and 10 as male. In terms of racial diversity, our group included 10 Black or African American participants, 14 White, two Hispanic, and four Asian/Pacific Islander individuals. The interviews were conducted remotely via Zoom between March and July 2023.

Results and Conclusions

First, we found that organizations across various sectors have implemented a broad array of DEI initiatives targeting both internal and external stakeholders. Internally, initiatives focus on fostering an inclusive culture through employee resource groups, bias training, mentorship programs, and promoting diversity in recruitment and retention. Externally, efforts include community engagement, supporting minority and women-owned businesses, and programs aimed at addressing equity issues.

Second, participants highlighted key roles of public relations in advancing organizations' DEI efforts: (1) acting as strategic advisors to leadership, (2) serving as connectors to facilitate dialogue, (3) advocating for DEI as the organizational conscience, and (4) emphasizing important DEI issues and stories as storytellers.

Third, DEI benefits organizations by boosting sales, productivity, and reputation, creating a culture of belonging. It boosts business competitiveness by attracting a more diverse workforce and customer base. DEI initiatives also drive employee engagement and morale while also fulfilling heightened expectations from employ-

ees, customers, and investors for corporate accountability. Moreover, engaging in DEI efforts is crucial in preventing or mitigating potential crises, positioning DEI as indispensable for sustained business growth and, in some cases, for the survival of the business itself.

Finally, the key challenges in communicating and enacting DEI include a lack of commitment from leadership and navigating the complexities of diverse stakeholder expectations. Participants highlight the importance of genuine, sustained efforts rather than performative actions, emphasizing the need for leadership buy-in, adequate resources, and a strategic approach to communications focusing on actions and advocacy. The future of DEI is seen as a continuous journey, requiring patience, persistence, and a focus on genuine cultural change within organizations to address systemic issues.

Practical and Social Implications

This research provides valuable practical insights for public relations professionals engaged in DEI efforts. Our findings illuminate several key strategies for public relations to inspire, engage, and rally both organizational leaders and employees around DEI initiatives. Furthermore, we pinpoint the limitations of current metrics used by organizations to gauge DEI progress, advocating for more sophisticated approaches that transcend mere numerical assessments. Last, we outline several challenges and opportunities for public relations professionals tackling DEI issues, offering an overview of the landscape for those committed to enhancing DEI outcomes.

Keywords

DEI; diversity; public relations leaders; in-depth interviews

Public Relations Meets Artificial Intelligence: Assessing Utilization and Outcomes

Yue, Cen April, *Boston University (USA)*

Men, Linjuan Rita, *University of Florida (USA)*

Davis, Donna Z., *University of Oregon (USA)*

Mitson, Renee, *University of Florida (USA)*

Zhou, Alvin, *University of Minnesota (USA)*

Al Rawi, Ahmed Ibraheem, *University of Virginia (USA)*

Introduction and Purpose

The evolving AI landscape offers both opportunities and challenges for communication and public relations. According to a USC Annenberg report (2023), 80% of professionals believe AI will be crucial for public relations, with applications ranging from big data analytics to chatbots. However, the integration of AI also raises issues of talent, competency, staff support, and ethical concerns (Zerfass et al., 2020).

This study addresses the evident but under-explored potential of AI in public relations. It aims to fill the gap in existing literature, which is scattered and lacks extensive empirical evidence. Through semi-structured interviews with industry professionals, the study explores three key areas: 1) the current landscape of AI adoption in public relations by organizations; 2) the impact of AI on public relations effectiveness; and 3) challenges, risks, and barriers encountered in integrating AI into public relations practices.

Literature Review

As AI gains traction in newsrooms and marketing, its potential in public relations is just emerging (Waddington, 2023). AI's integration into

public relations and strategic communication is challenging, requiring human-like thinking and strategy. Despite these complexities, academic and industry discussions are evolving around AI's role in relationship management, ethics in AI for public relations, and the future of AI in public relations at large (Galloway & Swiatek, 2018; Gregory et al., 2023).

AI in public relations introduces challenges concerning privacy, ethics, and core principles. First, AI systems are built upon prediction tasks that require training datasets reflecting human knowledge. Privacy concerns can emerge from these training datasets, both during their creation and after the development of AI systems. Second, the application of AI systems in the public relations industry raises significant ethical concerns, particularly within the context of communication strategies and programs that have traditionally emphasized values such as transparency and authenticity. For example, most normative theories regarding public relations practice (e.g., dialogic theory) have emphasized reputational and relational outcomes. The field has yet to reach a consensus on how mediated technologies between humans might prevent public communication programs from

achieving such outcomes (e.g., Kent & Theunissen, 2016), here come AI systems where the content, messages, and even the communicators themselves could be fabricated and automated. Developing relationships with stakeholders using AI-enabled tools thus further challenges the fundamental doctrines of ethical public relations practices and poses epistemic threats. It is conceivable that in the near future, what stakeholders perceive as an authentic and transparent response imbued with organizational care may, in reality, originate from an automated machine, blurring the line between ethical and deceitful behavior.

Methodology

In this study, qualitative in-depth interviews were used to gather data. Participants were selected using purposive and snowball sampling, targeting those with significant expertise in public relations. Interviews were conducted via Zoom with 20 public relations professionals from various industries, including 14 men and 6 women. The majority, 14 participants, had over 20 years of experience in public relations, and 18 were in executive or senior management roles. This diverse group represented several countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the Netherlands.

Results and Conclusions

The study found that generative AI tools like ChatGPT and Midjourney are being widely adopted by public relations professionals. Practitioners are using these tools for tasks like content generation, text refinement, media analysis, and meeting transcription. Most professionals believe AI will significantly transform the PR industry and are undertaking self-directed learning to develop AI skills.

Participants agreed that while AI enables practitioners to produce high volumes of content, merely increasing output does not guarantee

communication effectiveness. Professionals believe AI cannot yet replicate the nuanced emotional intelligence involved in building human relationships. However, some think AI could augment organization-public relationship building by freeing up time for more meaningful stakeholder interactions.

To ease AI adoption, interviewees recommend more training, encouraging experimentation, communicating AI's value, and securing leadership endorsement. However, resistance remains due to fears about job loss, ethical risks, and infrastructure limitations. Ongoing concerns include potential bias, misinformation at scale, data privacy, attributing AI content sources properly, and intellectual property infringement. Nonetheless, practitioners express cautious optimism about AI's future in PR with human creativity and strategic oversight retaining importance.

Practical and Social Implications

Key implications include adopting an open-minded approach to AI adoption, evaluating communication needs, establishing AI infrastructure, and formulating pertinent policies. Communication leaders must collaborate across departments for effective AI deployment. The paper also underscores the importance of transparent communication about AI's role and implications, emphasizing the need for upskilling and ethical training. At the functional level, leveraging AI for audience engagement and maintaining a balance between human creativity and machine precision is advised. Professionals should embrace continuous learning to adapt to AI-induced job transformations and utilize AI for enhanced efficiency and work-life balance.

Keywords

AI; adoption; ethics; AI in public relations

In a crisis situation, which public communication message strategies are best deployed using short-form social media?

Alotaibi, Mutas, *Cardiff University and King Abdulaziz University (UK and Saudi Arabia)*
Kinnear, Susan, *Cardiff University (UK)*

Introduction

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, crisis communication strategies have adopted a fundamental change, emphasizing the importance of timely, accurate, and engaging public messages. A research study was conducted to investigate how the Saudi Ministry of Health utilized short-form social media, specifically Twitter/X, to communicate effectively with the public during the recent pandemic. As part of this study, the researcher seeks to determine how different communication strategies, such as awareness, warnings, risk explanations, efficiency messages, and reassurance, contributed to developing trust and engagement among the public. This study focuses on social media's role in crisis communication and provides insight into how governmental organizations can communicate strategically during crisis situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The research seeks to answer a central question: How effective is social media as a strategic communication tool for creating public engagement? It addresses this question by carefully analyzing Twitter data, offering a comprehensive evaluation of Public Relations roles and communication strategies during a global health crisis.

The response of Saudi governmental organizations to the COVID-19 pandemic serves as a compelling case study of how Public Relations roles adapt to the demands of a unique global health crisis. This was particularly evident during a period of significant transformation in Public Relations and communication practices within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The analysis of 1,469 tweets from the official Twitter/X account of the Saudi Ministry of Health sheds light on the effectiveness of messaging strategies and the ways in which specific communication strategies can contribute to public health. This study, part of the expanding literature on crisis communication and public engagement in critical circumstances, underscores the pivotal role that short-form social media plays in reaching diverse audiences during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Literature Review and Theoretical Frameworks

In order to build a theoretical framework to interrogate the data, key approaches and frameworks such as Stakeholder Engagement (Nie et al., 2019), Strategic Communication (Soffer, 2019), Gatekeeping (Kyprianos et al., 2020), Persuasion (Geers et al., 2018), Key Opinion (Wang et al., 2020), and Grunig's Public Information

Model (Hung-Baesecke et al., 2021) are all explored. The literature review highlights the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on crisis communication, emphasizing the use of social media for engaging stakeholders and disseminating information.

Brief Overview of Study Methodology

The study employed a qualitative content analysis of tweets from the Saudi Ministry of Health, made available between March 5 and October 5, 2020. The dataset of 1,469 tweets was meticulously categorized into five distinct themes based on the content of the tweets: Awareness, Warning, Risk Information, Efficiency Messages, and Providing Reassurance. These themes were identified based on the frequency of occurrence of content types and messaging objectives. Each theme significantly contributes to the Saudi Ministry of Health's overall communication strategy. The analysis focused on the strategic communications adopted by Public Relations and Communication professionals at the Saudi Ministry of Health. In addition to engagement metrics (such as likes, replies, and retweets) and tweet types (such as original tweets and retweets), this approach provides insights into how the Saudi Ministry of Health's strategies promote public interaction with their social media platforms and disseminate critical health information to the public.

Findings based on thematic analysis

1. Awareness

The Awareness theme accounted for nearly 30% of all tweets. This reflects the Saudi Ministry of Health's commitment to educating the public about COVID-19 through short-form social media, specifically Twitter/X. This category of messages provides general information about COVID-19, including a description of symptoms, transmission, preventive measures, and general information about the virus. A core

strategy component was consistent awareness messaging to support adherence to health guidelines and ensure they are followed. A notable aspect of communication strategies that the Saudi Ministry of Health implemented was the use of multimedia components, such as photos and videos, which made the messages more accessible and engaging. Implementing this approach was extremely important to promote preventative behaviors and facilitate widespread awareness during the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Warning

Around 17% of the messages were related to the Warning theme, which focused on alerts and immediate health messages, such as increased infection rates and warnings to seek medical advice. With clear and direct communication, the Saudi Ministry of Health aimed to convey the seriousness of the health crisis to the public through short-form public communication. This theme was heavily driven by original tweets, demonstrating the Saudi Ministry of Health's priority of providing timely and accurate information directly to the public. It is evident from the high level of public engagement with these messages, shown by the number of likes, retweets, and replies, that the public is responsive to urgent updates, which highlights the importance of providing timely warnings during a crisis.

3. Risk Information

In the Risk Information communication theme, approximately 12% of the tweets contained specific responsibilities and precautions the public should take, such as social distancing and wearing a mask to prevent infection. An authoritative tone is often used in these messages, emphasizing the importance of each individual's role in preventing COVID-19 spread. The Saudi Ministry of Health conveyed the message of accountability and responsibility by utilizing hashtags such as #We_are_all_responsible to convey a

sense of shared responsibility among the public. Using this theme illustrates how governmental communication can enhance the reach and impact of health directives by providing informative content that emphasizes the public's responsibility.

4. Efficiency Messages

About 25% of tweets are Efficiency Messages, which provide updates on the Saudi Ministry of Health's actions and capabilities, such as hospital capacity and preparation. With the use of reliable statements and spokesperson announcements, the Saudi Ministry of Health provided credibility to its messages, reassuring the public that it was prepared for all scenarios. This theme was often accompanied by visual content and featured real-time information, which helped increase transparency. By demonstrating efficiency, the Saudi Ministry of Health improved public confidence in response measures and encouraged adherence to health guidelines.

5. Providing Reassurance

The messages categorized under the Providing Reassurance theme, which accounted for 16% of the data, were aimed at decreasing public concerns by offering support and acknowledging health employees' efforts. In addition to empathizing, expressing appreciation, and encouraging optimism, the tweets often included retweets from other Saudi governmental organizations' accounts. During a time of uncertainty, this theme provided a comforting presence to the public in the Saudi Ministry of Health's communication. As a result of addressing the public's emotional needs, the Saudi Ministry of Health created a sense of community and resilience in the public during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide insight into the Saudi Ministry of Health's adapted approach to

crisis communication. It highlights the strategic implementation of Twitter/X to communicate with the public more effectively. Each thematic area supported different aspects in response to crisis communication, from disseminating essential health information to promoting a safe community environment. It is important to note that the Saudi Ministry of Health used original tweets for critical messages, accompanied by visual aids and multimedia elements, which helped to improve the clarity and accessibility of messages, which are critical in reaching diverse audiences.

Furthermore, the Saudi Ministry of Health's response to the evolving COVID-19 pandemic crisis is evident in its engagement metrics over time. Over time, the Saudi Ministry of Health changed its focus from awareness-building to reassurance and efficiency updates as the crisis grew and progressed. The need for flexible communication strategies that evolve with the crisis demonstrates the importance of Saudi governmental organizations being able to address changing public needs and concerns as the crisis moves forward.

In addition to informing the public, the Saudi Ministry of Health also demonstrated social responsibility and built trust by linking message content with engagement objectives. The study shows that short-form social media can be a powerful tool for fostering two-way communication during times of crisis if utilized strategically and could serve as a model for other governmental organizations worldwide that want to foster two-way communication during crises.

Implications and Contributions

This study contributes unique perspectives to the field of crisis communication, especially in the context of governmental Public Relations during health crises. To begin with, it emphasizes the effectiveness of multiple thematic communica-

tions strategies, multimedia-driven engagement strategies, and other media-driven strategies to capture the general public's attention and promote behavioral compliance. Governmental organizations can take advantage of short-form platforms, for example, Twitter/X, to build trust, encourage community action, and manage public sentiment.

Findings suggest that varied message themes—ranging from awareness to reassurance—essential for addressing various public needs during a crisis. Other governmental organizations can adopt this multifaceted approach to enhance their own crisis communication strategies. By combining informational content with emotionally engaging messages, Public Relations professionals can help promote resilience and social responsibility, which are crucial in managing widespread crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes the importance of strategic flexibility. An effective communication strategy is critical to enhancing public engagement and is best achieved when the content emphasis is adapted according to the crisis stage and public sentiment variations. A framework for crisis communication can be developed based on these insights. This framework can be applied to a variety of crisis situations, and it is not limited to the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusion

A compelling case study on the use of short-form social media for crisis communication can be found in the Saudi Ministry of Health's use of Twitter/X during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Saudi Ministry of Health effectively communicated with the public, promoted health guidelines, and built community trust during the COVID-19 pandemic by applying a thematic approach that included awareness, warning, risk information, efficiency, and reassurance.

The importance of effective, audience-centered communication strategies in crisis communication is being demonstrated increasingly in this study, which reveals how governmental organizations can use short-form social media to meet the public's needs more efficiently in crisis situations. Therefore, going forward, these insights are likely to be useful as a valuable source of guidance for Public Relations and Communication professionals looking to improve and strengthen their engagement and communication strategies and create crisis response plans.

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Well-being. A regenerative and structured approach to corporate welfare: engagement, inclusion, sustainability and communication

Milan, Gloria, *ICDLAB Sostenibilità e Comunicazione (Italy)*

Martello, Stefano, *Comm to Action (Italy)*

Bonometto, Caterina, *ICDLAB Sostenibilità e Comunicazione (Italy)*

Corporate welfare: well-being as a key word to improvement

In order to maintain and promote well-being inside and outside its boundaries, an organization has to deal with innovative approaches and techniques, bringing together the necessary expertises in terms of inclusion, sustainability and communication. Being effectively well-being oriented is a key value in modern organizational assets: it certainly helps to improve corporate growth, reputation and competitiveness in the market and to encourage stakeholder engagement activities. Moreover, many studies highlight how well-being represents a fundamental pillar also for the achievement of certain Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030: Goals 3 - “Good health & Well-being”, 5 - “Gender Equality”, 8 - “Decent work and economic growth”, 10 - “Reduced inequalities”).

Understood as “The capacity of an organization to promote and maintain the highest degree of physical, psychological and social well-being of workers in all types of employment” (Avallone, Bonaretti, 2003), organizational well-being is starting to play an essential role in the general debate, not only on a theoretical level but also in pragmatic terms. For that reason, it is nowadays

a foundational requirement for companies to embrace strategic approaches in order to manage social sustainability.

In our analysis “Well-being: A regenerative and structured approach to Corporate Welfare: engagement, inclusion, sustainability and communication”, we decided to deepen a specific certification process, which some Italian companies have already chosen and which has already shown positive results regarding work environment and local communities’ issues. Among various tools, Family Audit seems to represent an exceptional instrument to first measure and then improve the well-being of the people working within an organization, such as institutions, companies or associations.

Our lecture aims at underlining the variety of aspects taken into account by Family Audit (including organizational culture, work organization, people caring, communication strategy and territorial welfare), the proposed actions and, especially, their potential benefits for the organization, the employees and the territory. On a second level, this paper analyzes significant activities undertaken by organizations to gradually achieve well-being, both internally and external-

ly, on a pragmatic level. It is overall important to prioritize innovative and sustainable systems of corporate welfare achievement in order to show companies and institutions how to benefit from a methodological and structured approach and to efficiently progress in terms of brand reputation, stakeholder engagement and community relations.

The Family Audit certificate: definition, history and scope

The Family Audit certification is a voluntary certification process, set up in 2010 by the autonomous Province of Trento (Italy), focused on the issues of work-life balance, inclusion, social equity. Nowadays, it is adopted by several organizations, located in the North-East side of Italy mostly. As a management tool available to all types of organization (small, medium, large but also private or public), it intends to certify their commitment to adopt measures in favor of work-life balance, gender equality, equal opportunities, organizational well-being and territorial welfare.

However, the advantages of Family Audit are not only significant for the organization (increased productivity, reduced turnover, more visibility, professional management development, talent attractiveness, CSR development, partnerships and territorial welfare), but also for the employees and local community. For instance, it has been verified that Family Audit represents a pushing key value for organizational flexibility, welfare services and work-life balance. It also offers the possibility to investigate gender equality and inclusion inside the organization enhancing the general work environment. Furthermore, the certification process reports on the attractiveness of the district and the virtuous networks which are installed in the area, showing how they can be implemented. By doing so, Family Audit considers the essential link between territory and people, embracing the principle of so-

cial sustainability.

Since 2012, Family Audit has been recognized by the Italian Council of Ministers as a tool for the national spread of the “work-life balance” culture. Between 2014 and 2015 international recognitions were made in favor of the Italian tool: in 2014, the European Institute for Gender Equality in Vilnius (LT) recognizes the standard among the top nine European “good practices” in terms of reconciliation; in 2015, it was presented at the headquarters of United Nations (NY). One year later, an agreement between the State of Italy, the Regions and the Autonomous Province of Trento and Bolzano was signed (pursuant to Article 4 of the Legislative Decree no. 281/1997) in order to nationally promote the standard. Finally, Family Audit was included in the informative system of the Chamber of Commerce network in 2019 (Provincial Council resolution no. 1152).

The process of certification: accessibility, schedule and application

As previously mentioned, Family Audit is a voluntary certification process which is available to every kind of organization: institutions, companies (small, medium and large), associations. It is meant to represent a useful tool both for the private and public field.

The itinerary of the certificate is divided into five different phases, which have a duration period of ca. 3 years and can be summarized as follows:

1. Preliminary phase: process of gaining an initial understanding of the organizational context, thanks to the acquisition of personnel-related data. Duration: 6 months (approximately)
2. First phase: involvement of a benchmarking analysis and creation of an activity plan, divided into 7 macro-areas of KPIs (work organization, organizational culture, communication, company welfare, territorial welfare,

gender equality and flexible organization). Each macro-area consists of a variety of aspects which has to be taken into consideration (see chapter 4). Duration: 5 months (approximately)

3. Certification process “base-line”: improvement of the plan and gaining of a basic-level certification.
4. Implementation phase: implementation of improvement actions.
5. Employee evaluation: the employees evaluate the improvement plan.
6. Executive certificate: the certificate is released. Duration: 3 years (phases 3,4,5 included)

The process is actually being undertaken by 414 Italian organizations, which are mainly distributed in the north side of Italy. 9% of them finds itself in the preliminary phase of the certification process, 62% has a “base line” certificate and 22% finished the process gaining an executive certificate. In particular, the organizations diversify themselves into:

- Large organizations (with more than 100 employees) are divided into 110 private organizations and 72 public organizations;
- Medium organizations (with 16 to 100 employees) are divided into 91 private organizations and 55 public organizations;
- Small organizations (up to 15 employees) are divided into 49 private organizations and 8 public organizations.

Current data show how the certification system is spreading in the country and can be useful to different realities and professional environments.

Significant insights from the certificate

Family Audit gives us a chance to deepen the state of art of well-being within the sample. In particular, it helps organizations to identify useful actions to foster progress and welfare improve-

ment. One significant insight was identified into the macro-area of communication: thanks to the inquiry promoted by Family Audit, 997 actions have been undertaken by organizations in order to steady sustainable communication plans.

Understanding how and to what extent communication works as a strategic lever to foster the improvement of well-being is a key factor in the modern environment. Nowadays, the climate of an organization must be oriented towards the well-being of employees and, in so doing, it must build a good corporate reputation even outside. If based on values such as equity, inclusion and social justice, internal communication contributes to the direct involvement of employees in the construction of a convergent language and shared goals, helping the organizational culture to positively evolve. On the other hand, external communication becomes an effective tool to improve brand awareness and reputation, while conveying corporate values and setting virtuous circles in motion for the social and economic development of the territory.

In recent years, the issue of employee well-being has become increasingly important, bringing benefits also to the local community thanks to effective communication channels. It is essential that communication disseminates strategic approaches and significant values in order to spread good organizational models. For instance, communicating inclusion projects and strategies signifies to delete all forms of discrimination while respecting diversity and equal opportunities. To spread good practices is fundamental for organizations: global inequalities represent one of the biggest obstacles to sustainable development.

Furthermore, building and maintaining a good reputation through communication practices within organizations means to generate values which are not only economic, but also social and relational. To frame differentiated engagement and communication paths enables a higher level

of social integration, contributing to better ethics and responsibility in interpersonal relations. An organization that adopts ethical principles and standards can communicate to its various audiences promoting transparent behavior, valuing integrity, social responsibility, respect for human rights, environmental sustainability and fair treatment of employees, customers and communities.

Family Audit: the correlation between communication and improvement of organizational well-being

In order to progress our analysis, determining whether and how communication within the Family Audit is a distinctive lever in generating organizational well-being, we decided to consider a sample of 30 organizations (small, medium and large) with the Executive Certificate of Family Audit and to focus on two different hypotheses:

- to demonstrate how employee well-being (based on the values of equity, inclusion and social justice) can contribute to their direct involvement in the construction of a language and objectives consistent with the new values, thus consolidating the organizational culture;
- to demonstrate how these values improve corporate reputation and, at the same time, engage virtuous circles of social and economic development in the local community.

During the first step of the examination, we interviewed 10 organizations from the sample asking questions concerning 4 different topics:

1. The relationship between Family Audit values and the creation of new language and values;
2. The relationship between the new language and values and the creation of virtuous circles of social and economic development for the territory;
3. The relationship between Family Audit and

brand reputation;

4. The relationship between Family Audit, stakeholder engagement and communication strategies (internal and external).

Regarding the first question, the sample declared that good management of Family Audit actually leads to social benefits, such as an inclusive language and psychophysical well-being oriented objectives. It certainly constitutes an efficient method to manage employee engagement on work-life balance issues and it gives organizations a better understanding of inclusion and social justice matters.

The second question, with regard to economic and social development of the territory, showed that organizations have perceived Family Audit as a proficient *stimulus* to cultural and financial growth thanks to its ability to identify and spread social values and territorial welfare. In particular, the creation of Family Audit districts incentivizes the creation of virtuous networks where to develop economic and social benefits for the employees and their families. In addition, round tables between companies were created thanks to Family Audit in order to better communicate and raise awareness of organizational well-being, work-life balance, equity and inclusion among many people.

The latter topic has been investigated also in the third point of the interview. Organizations seem to significantly value the growth provided by Family Audit in the field of brand reputation: the certificate works internally and externally to excel organizational image and contents. On the one hand, the virtuous process helps the retention of employees who work in a welcoming environment. On the other hand, it encourages talent attractiveness because of the renewed brand values, which are actually sensitive to well-being and work-life balance issues. As a consequence, the brand can benefit from a higher profile with institutions and professional associations.

Finally, the sample underlined how Family Audit upholds stakeholder engagement and communication strategies. In fact, the certification commits the organization to pay special attention to internal and external communication, focusing on multi-directional and transversal relations. It prioritizes the importance of listening to employees' needs and requirements in order to allow shared solutions. It also disseminates good practices and actions amplifying the trust of employees and raising stakeholder awareness on professional welfare issues.

Overall results and conclusions

The growing impacts of sustainable practices in organizations has increasingly spotlights related issues in the work environment. Well-being appears nowadays as one of the top priorities for local communities, employees, companies and general institutions. Being aware of the most compelling actions and techniques to improve corporate welfare becomes an essential requirement to take a further step in sustainability.

Family Audit provides a specific answer to the problem, giving a strategic methodology and approach to improve the organizational awareness towards engagement, inclusion, sustainability and communication, and make substantial changements in the system.

We investigated the pragmatic application of the certification process, asking a sample of organizations whether they conceived it as a pivotal factor to access corporate welfare. Did the certificate assist in visualizing critical areas, eligible for improvement? Did it actually enhance climate in the workplace? Was it helpful to better communicate company values to stakeholders and outside the organization? Were virtuous circles in the territory created thanks to it?

From the previous analysis, we reached the conclusion that Family Audit effectively represents a

useful tool to enhance well-being both in the organizations and communities. Significantly, the examination underlined fundamental drivers for the success of corporate well-being: a strong commitment from the organization and the entire governance, but also bottom-up and up-bottom communication process. These appear to be the *sine qua non* requirements to spread engagement, inclusion, sustainability and actual communication strategies.

Moreover, the certification extends its impact beyond internal improvements, fostering a sense of shared responsibility and partnership within the local community. By encouraging a culture of transparency and collaboration, Family Audit promotes the creation of networks where organizations, institutions, and civil society can work together towards common sustainability goals. This interconnectedness not only enhances corporate welfare but also strengthens social cohesion and fosters long-term, sustainable development. The ripple effect of these practices can lead to more resilient and inclusive communities, amplifying the benefits of corporate well-being beyond the organization itself.

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News Agencies as a Blind Spot in PR Research. Results of Qualitative Interviews in the New Media Landscape of the Early 21st Century

Sievert, Holger, *Macromedia University of Applied Sciences Cologne (Germany)*
Meißner, Florian, *Macromedia University of Applied Sciences Cologne (Germany)*
Inderhees, Marco, *Macromedia University of Applied Sciences Cologne (Germany)*

Introduction

In recent years, PR research has been concerned with a great deal of important theoretical work, but it has also regularly published new comprehensive handbooks on very different fields as well as discussing the roles of social media and even more artificial intelligence (cf. chapter 2.1 for details). However, traditional PR work also remains important in a different way. Within this field, a clear ‘blind spot’ can be seen in current as well as in earlier works: the undoubtedly existing importance of news agencies for PR professionals is hardly or not at all discussed.

This is astonishing since the general relationship between public relations and journalism, as well as differences and similarities between the two fields has long been extensively studied (for newer publications, also giving an overview on previous ones, cf. Hoffmann, 2022, Meissner & Vogler, 2022, Weder et al., 2023). Most of these studies have shown a very close relationship between PR professionals and journalists (or PR and journalism more general), but also, that there are significant differences in the perception of the impact of these relationships.

In these and other works, journalism typically refers to traditional mass media such as daily newspapers, magazines, radio or television, and

in more recent works also partly to journalistic blogs and social media. News agencies, however, and their significance for the field of public relations is only mentioned as a marginal aspect. As Nelissen & Hendrickx (2023) state: “News agencies are regularly mentioned in scholarly works among the principal sources of information for legacy news organisations and titles [...]. However, little is known about how these agencies themselves source news.”

This research paper aims to make a small exploratory contribution in this strand of research, which has received far too little attention. And when talking about news agencies, also another classic element has to be taken into the focus: the press release (which is now often more generally and correctly called “media release”). Although it has sometimes been declared dead, there are many good arguments that in this case, too, the dead live longer (Sievert & Sasse, 2017). The paper will therefore use qualitative interviews to show how agency representatives and media representatives see the current role of press releases, especially in relation to agencies, as well as the importance of agencies in the dissemination of press releases.

Theoretical Foundations & State of Research

PR research, News Agencies and a Changing Media Environment

Current research in public relations (PR) encompasses various topics, including crisis communication strategies aimed at restoring public trust (Coombs, 2020), strategic planning for public relations (Smith, 2020), the evolving role of strategic PR leadership (Gregory & Willis, 2022), media relations (Johnston, 2020), strategic management (Tam et al., 2022), the impact of social media and influencers on public opinion compared to traditional media (Casaló et al., 2020), and the role of artificial intelligence in PR (Hassan & Angawi, 2024), to mention only a few. Valentini (2021) highlights the importance of integrating knowledge of communication structures and processes, emphasising a global perspective that is sensitive to cultural and epistemological diversity. Furthermore, Valentini underscores the need for new theorising efforts to better understand the evolving discipline of PR, drawing on contributions from scholars worldwide and presenting diverse perspectives. The themes addressed by Valentini, such as cultural sensitivity, global perspectives, and theoretical innovation, are recurring topics within the field of public relations research. The power dynamics within PR departments have been explored (Grunig, 2020), and communication models remain an important subject (Grunig & Kim, 2021). All in all, news agencies receive little attention in PR research, and the term “news agencies” is rarely used in the current PR discourse (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2020). Nevertheless, it is important to note that many researchers have extensively explored the relationship between PR and journalism (Schwarz, 2016).

According to some very basic definitions, news agencies are “organizations employing journalists and established to supply news reports to other organizations in the news trade”

(Czarniawska-Joerges, 2011). They have always played a significant role as gatekeepers and in history in many countries (Lewis et al., 2008; Palmer, 2019; Surm, 2020; Vyslozil & Surm, 2020) and even actually it is undisputed that news agencies play a central role as suppliers of information for media offerings (Mbaya, 2021). According to e. g. Boumans (2018) news agencies are a key target for any actor seeking media attention: “Apart from the agency’s massive reach, they also have an important validation function: a message gains in status when agencies report on it.”

Against the background of digital changes, however, the function of news agencies is also differentiated, ultimately even asked whether they are “anachronism or lifeblood of the media system” (Jukes, 2022). On the one hand, it is plausible to assume that the importance of agencies is increasing in the course of digitalisation, because many media editorial offices are operating with declining resources in the face of falling advertising and subscription revenues and, especially in the online sector, under greater time pressure (Dogruel et al., 2019), which is why the need for already prefabricated news is increasing. On the other hand, the easier availability of information online also means that media newsrooms are turning to cheaper sources such as government information etc. – in addition to or instead of agency material (Welbers et al., 2018). Media houses have started to cancel their subscriptions to basic services, i. e. the former core business of an agency – even media houses that are themselves co-owners of the agency (Rantanen et al., 2019; Pfaff, 2021). The question of the role of news in the digital age is by no means new (Boyer, 2011) but it is more urgent than ever given the abovementioned developments.

According to Forde and Johnston (2013), there has been “little academic attention” in news agencies’ functioning, earning them the title of ‘silent partners’ of news organisations. In a recent

review on media business and management, for example, news agencies are only mentioned at all in very few places (Zydorek, 2018). The extent to which media newsrooms are increasingly using more or increasingly using less agency material in the midst of the structurally difficult situation and whether and how news agencies' business models are changing in the midst of the digital transformation (Rantanen, 2020) remain open questions.

Following Vogler et al. (2022), the limited existing research focused on news agencies can be categorized into three main areas: (1) structures and business models of news agencies, (2) importance of international agencies in foreign reporting, (3) importance of agencies in media markets of individual countries. Conversely, there is a scarcity of studies concerning smaller and specialized news agencies, as well as investigations into the utilization of agencies by local and regional media outlets. Additionally, there is a notable absence of broader media economic studies that investigate the dynamics between media organizations and news agencies.

Press Releases, News Agencies and many open (research) questions

As already mentioned above, one important source for news agencies are also press releases. According to Deg (2017), press releases are the most widely used standard means of public relations. Schach (2022, translated) also sees press releases as "one of the oldest but still most important types of text in media relations". Although the communications industry regularly sings a farewell to this instrument because the publication results are getting worse and worse, there are many sectors and subject areas, but also

media, that work with press releases as regularly as ever.¹ Hilmann (2017) rightly points out that with increasing workloads, journalists now have less time to check press releases for relevance (not to mention editing or fact-checking). Catenaccio (2008) already emphasises the "hybrid position along the informative-promotional continuum, and that identification of its communicative purpose relies as much on core as on peripheral textual features". Now more than 100 years old, its significance in today's world is, however, repeatedly questioned on principle. Forbes magazine e. g. asks, "Are Press Releases Dead?" (Rampton 2016). On the one hand, there are the professionals who proudly point to the relevance of the press release, on the other hand, their colleagues argue that it is antiquated and ineffective. Various practitioners in the US also wonder if the press release might survive and note that the press release in its traditional form, i. e. as a central public relations tool that brings news directly to the inbox of every reporter, has had its day (Richard 2016). And according to Sievert & Sasse (2017), who further analysed data from Sievert & Preppner (2017), press materials rank only fourth as a research method among full-time journalists (59 percent use them regularly), and only fifth among part-time journalists (50 percent). On the positive side, however, all this also means that half of the journalists still work with press releases.

While the literature on news agencies is limited, there is almost no research at all on the use of press releases by news agencies as well as on the relationship of the agency world to corporate communicators. Given the crucial importance that news agencies have as a source of information, as well as the great interest of PR professionals to have news agencies disseminate

¹ As examples, Schach mentions public relations work in the municipal and regional area. She also points out that in online communication, press releases are now also used for direct communication. Because on the internet, press releases are freely accessible to all users and then do not have to convince journalists as gatekeepers. In both cases, however, the topic and the content of the text are the essential success factors (Schach, 2022). Other authors even describe increased areas of use, such as in science communication, even if this sometimes leads to a "conflict of ownership" (Autzen 2014).

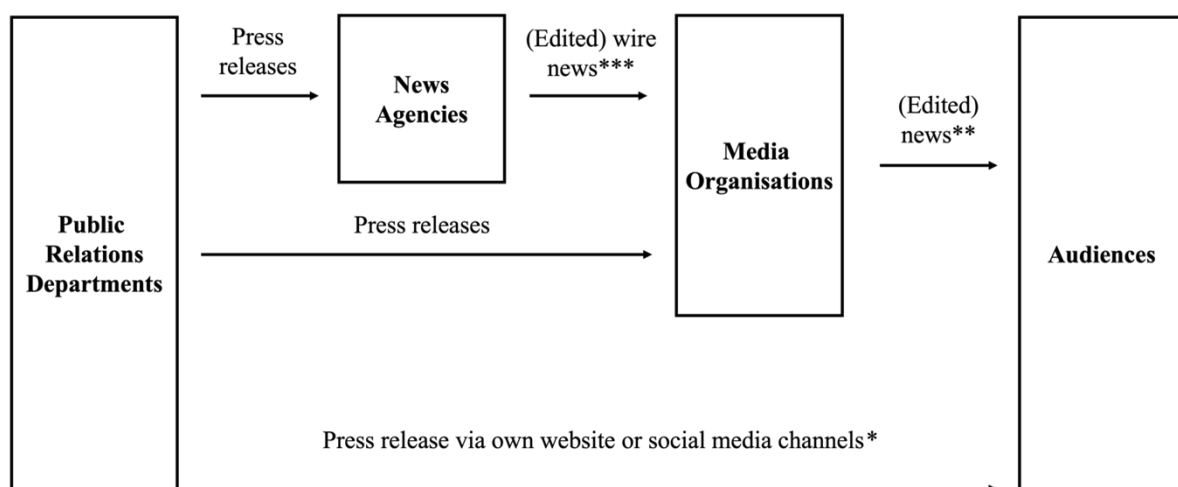
the content of their press release, this is regrettable from two perspectives: from the point of view of PR professionals, who can thus better shape their work with fair conditions for all, but above all from the point of view of society, which should better understand such relationships in the interest of transparent communication.

Nevertheless, there are some exceptions and three of them should be mentioned here: Boumans (2018) is one of the rare examples to investigate on the news agencies' reliance on organisational press releases for their output on a broad empirical base. According to his content analysis of several thousand press releases over ten years in the Netherlands, both the news agency under investigation as well as newspapers reproduce press releases to a very limited extent. The similarity seems to be even significantly lower in the case of releases from NGOs, and the ratios remain overall stable over time for all media except for the quality newspapers, whose journalism scores are statistically significantly decreasing over time (the Churnalism Index resembles the degree of similarity between a press release

and a media text, see Boumans, 2018).

Based on two case studies already more than a decade ago, Johnston & Forde (2011), using the example of Australian Associated Press (AAP), traced press releases through AAP and into the daily news around the world, while also analysing the media culture that accepts agency material to be used and reused without checking accuracy, and often without attribution. According to the authors, the article suggests "the need for a shakeup in how media researchers view news sources, as well as a closer analysis of news agency domination within the news environment" which showed an increased potential for error and inaccuracy, e. g. due to insufficient fact or agenda checking.

One of the newest research publications is from Belgium (Nelissen & Hendrickx, 2023). It is based on a case study of how Belgium's national, multilingual news agency sources its science news. The findings reveal "a large, potentially worrying, dependency on information subsidies and their assumed factuality from press releases



Credibility level: * = low because owned media / ** = average, for quality media also high / *** = high due to impartial and reliable reputation

Figure 1. Communication process between Public Relations departments and (mediated) publics. Source: Own model and illustration.

and other news agencies, largely sourced locally.” Due to the described lack of systematic knowledge, but also based on the few existing literature the authors tried to visualise the flow of information between PR departments, agencies, media organizations and audiences (figure 1). As one main aspect, the image shows additionally that different ways of dissemination are associated with different levels of credibility – given the fact that media coverage, and in particular news agency coverage, increases not only the reach, but also the credibility of corporate messaging.

Following the findings of this chapter on theoretical foundations and state of research regarding press release, news agencies and the relationship between both aspects, the following two main research questions appear and shall to be answered through the explorative, qualitative research of this paper:

How do news agencies use and scrutinise PR material and how important are press releases for them in this context?

How do news media organisations use wire news/agency reports when they appear to be based on press releases, and do they label the agency material as such?

Methodology

Qualitative guided interviews were conducted with representatives of agencies, media organizations to reconstruct a detailed picture of editorial practice, but also of the economic aspects of the topic². The interviews included semi-structured forms of questioning techniques (Loosen, 2016). This means that the interview guide ensured that the research questions were ad-

dressed. On the other hand, this interview form offered sufficient openness to allow the interview partners to bring up their own aspects in the conversation. The interviews were analysed using qualitative content analysis (Fürst et al., 2016). Both deductive and inductive coding was applied in order to potentially include new aspects brought up by the interviewees.

The interview guide developed was based on the “value chain of the news agency” developed by Theurl (2009) in order to depict the different phases and processing steps of the editorial workflow in the agency and the reporting media organization. Further aspects related to the research questions were included as well. Press releases were asked for as a source of information, whereby this was only mentioned as one of several examples. The interview partners could actively take up this example or not. A standard guide was prepared for the agencies on the one hand and the media houses on the other. The interview guides for the representatives of agencies and media organizations were slightly adapted to the background of the respective interviewee. Firstly, sample included five representatives from a total of four different media companies together covering the local, regional and national news. Secondly, five representatives of news agencies were interviewed, two of them in a double interview. Two large agencies as well as a smaller one were included in the sample. Most of the interviewees hold leadership positions. Of the ten interviewees, three are women and seven are men. Names and organisations were anonymised. The interviews were all conducted in German, the following translations into English were made by the authors of this paper with the support of the AI-based tool DeepL.

² The study presented in this paper was conducted in combination with a quantitative content analysis in collaboration with the University of Zurich (Vogler et al., 2022). Both sub-studies were part of a contracted research project commissioned by the North Rhine-Westphalian Media Authority on the importance of news agencies in today’s media landscape. The use of press releases by news agencies was a secondary aspect of the qualitative interviews, the results of which are presented in this paper.

Table 1: Sample of media representatives for the qualitative interview study.

Media type	Position
National, private TV station	Head of Politics Department
National, private TV station	Multimedia Editor
Regional radio station	Head of News
Local radio	Editor-in-Chief
Digital offer of a regional newspaper publisher	Head of Digital Desk
News agency I	Editor-in-chief
News agency I	CEO
News agency II	Deputy Editor-in-Chief; Head of the Regional Office for Germany (double interview)
News agency III	Editor-in-Chief

There are of course a number of limitations and desiderata in the approach presented here: The limitation lies in a rather small sample, which is due to the general context of the study and its thematically much broader focus (see Footnote 2). Potential further research adding to this first exploratory study could include a broader qualitative survey research, supplemented by quantitative elements, an additional content-based analytical comparison of press releases, agency reports and published media contributions, as well as an international comparative perspective on the topic.

Results

News agencies and PR output like press releases as source³

First of all, it is interesting, especially with regard to research question the authors formulated above, how important are press releases as a news source for news agencies and how do they use and process PR material. Here, a very differentiated picture emerges among the interview partners of the qualitative survey on which this

is based.

For example, in response to the open question about sources of information, one of the agency representatives interviewed quite explicitly mentions press releases as a central, very important element:

Of course, we also receive a lot of material, on the one hand from media clients, but also from many press offices. Hundreds of press releases, e-mails and so on come in every day, and of course we sort them out and evaluate them. (Agency representative 1).

However, this person also mentions the press release by itself only in fourth place after their own correspondents, the internet and other “classic media” on the way from a topic or event to an agency report.

On the other hand, another interviewed agency person refers more to a specific area of press releases as a source, albeit also at a very prominent point in the interview:

³ In addition, it would also be interesting to look at the PR output ‘press release’ also from a media perspective. Generally speaking and as a result out of the qualitative interviews, press releases continue to be very important, for instance in the context of political coverage or local journalism – despite some information overflow. However, due to reasons of space this cannot be further elaborated here.

... basically, the sources are often emails, websites, [and] the regular news feeds [...] – these companies that distribute press releases from listed companies or OTS [a specialized service for distribution] with the press releases. Meanwhile, also a lot of Twitter, a lot comes via Twitter. (Agency representative 3)

What significance press releases have in relation to, for example, own correspondent reports often remains unclear. However, it is noticeable that if correspondents have exclusive material, it is a competitive advantage for news agencies if they can report ahead of the publication of an official press release – and thereby also ahead of competitors on the media market:

So sometimes, of course, information comes first from the correspondents, because they get a message from a company, from a politician, from some crucial office, before it is disseminated to the general public, by press release, for example. (Agency representative 4)

Some large agency representatives, on the other hand, do not mention press releases as a source of information without being asked specifically, but emphasise another aspect in which press offices, not necessarily press releases, play a role:

We use the [sources of information] that all good journalists use, that is, their personal contact. That means the fact that of course people are aware that news agencies can contribute to the dissemination of their concerns, meaning press offices or others. (Agency representative 5)

This shows how important it is also for PR professionals to maintain personal contacts with journalists even in the age of social media. The key here seems to be early or exclusive access to information, which may be advantageous also for the communicator who can influence the time of publication and can secure a certain degree of attention.

What all agency representatives have in common is that when talking about press releases – although not always exclusively related to them – journalists are relatively quick to mention a detailed fact check, illustrating the notion of journalistic independence and scepticism.

In one case, moreover, the handling of press releases is viewed critically not only in terms of their factuality, but also in terms of their tonality, frame and context, and approaches of “constructive journalism” are explicitly recommended for handling them here:

So just as an example, [...] solution-oriented journalism or people-friendly, constructive journalism. You can make reports like this: More and more illegal entries into Germany. Such press releases from the statistics authorities are also taken up. But you can also look at it in a solution-oriented way or with a different perspective [...] That is, we also try to take another look at some topics, one that is alternative. Not in the sense of alternative facts, but in the sense of multi-perspectivity. (Agency representative 1)

Notably, agency representatives mention press releases often when it comes to cross-financing the agency’s core business, describing their service of paid distribution of PR material, which is entirely separate from the journalistic department according to one interviewee:

So there is the core area of news agency [...]. That is, what is commonly known as [...] producing a basic stock of news and distributing it to the media of the country as a basic service. And around this basic service, around this core service, there are [...] other companies, [...] which [...] serve additional business models. (Agency representative 2)

Agency news and press releases

The second research question, i. e. how do news media organisations use wire news/agency reports when they appear to be based on press

releases and whether agency material is labelled as such can unfortunately only be answered to a limited extent as a result of the interviews. An argument brought up in the course of the interviews is that not to publish press releases themselves but to wait for the corresponding agency report is much easier for the editorial office as the agency does the job of transforming the information into a piece of news, including the necessary fact-check:

It can also happen that we say, “Hey, here’s a press release, is the agency actually doing something about it? So with every press release it’s a bit of a decision: do we have to be quick with it, then we’ll do it ourselves, or yes, AFP or dpa will report it anyway. Then we take it from there. (Media representative 1)

In addition, ultimately, this is generally about the question of how media deal with agency reports in general, as well as ultimately also the naming of agencies as sources and the mentioning of the press release possibly also contained therein as a sub-source. In this context, the so-called “agency privilege” is a crucial aspect. This privilege means that in Germany, news agencies are considered sources with privileged access to information, allowing editorial offices to take over agency reports as a rule without further verification. If any of the reported information is wrong, it is the agency that is liable, not the agency’s client who relayed the information. Thanks to this rule, news agencies in Germany have the same status as authorities or government sources, for example, where there is an obligation to communicate truthfully. If the agency privilege did not exist, journalistic due diligence would require that every single agency report be subjected to a new fact check by the respective media house (Vogler et al. 2022). Conversely, for corporate communicators, this means that news agencies are very attractive channels for information dissemination because agency reports are considered highly credible and media organizations will often use the content without

further editing.

The question is to what extent media companies nevertheless make additional efforts to check agency reports when they use them for their coverage. The interviews indicate that this is clearly an exception:

We do [check an agency report] on topics that seem suspicious to us in some way. But the fact is, I have to be honest, that because we subscribe to dpa, we have the so-called agency privilege. So nothing can happen to us in terms of press law if we take over the dpa as it is. Quite simply for reasons of time. (Media representative 2)

The qualitative interviews also show that the importance of agency material and its labelling practices depends very much on the type of media. This might be partly similar for press releases. When it comes to online media of daily newspapers and especially the websites of radio and television providers, there is quite often labelling: “Well, two-thirds [of online news] is already labelled [with our agency acronym], I would say.” (Agency representative 1). Online, attention is also often paid to and marked when several agencies and sources are mixed: “We also do that, because sometimes it happens, for example, that we mix several agency reports together [...] and then also mark both agencies underneath” (media representative 1). But there is much less labelling in the radio and TV sector, which one interviewee explains as follows:

I think it would disturb the flow, because then I would have to mention it five times in every programme. Then we would have maybe four times dpa and once AFP, roughly estimated [...] On the one hand, that would disturb the flow a bit and on the other hand, one has to honestly say [...] the listener will probably ask himself, do they actually know anything themselves? We are a kind of reading machine for the dpa. (Media representative 2)

Summary & Conclusion

This research paper aimed to address the “blind spot” in public relations (PR) research concerning news agencies. The qualitative interviews analysed have illuminated the complex dynamics of how news agencies interact with PR professionals, particularly regarding their use of press releases. The findings highlight the still substantial, but yet largely underappreciated role of news agencies within the broader framework of PR practices.

The first research question explored how news agencies utilise and process PR material, particularly press releases. The analysis showed that news agencies have a nuanced approach towards press releases. Although press releases are recognised as an essential source by all interviewees, their importance varies depending on the agency’s size and the specificity of the information. Smaller agencies, which often serve niche markets, are more reliant on press releases to identify relevant news topics. Larger, more generalist agencies, on the other hand, rely heavily on personal contacts with PR professionals rather than just on press releases, emphasising the value of building relationships within the industry.

The second research question sought to understand how news agencies perceive the relevance of press releases in today’s media landscape. Despite ongoing debates about the relevance of press releases, the study found that they continue to be an important tool for PR professionals aiming to secure coverage through news agencies. However, the effectiveness of a press release depends significantly on its alignment with the thematic focus of an agency. In a rapidly evolving digital media environment, where time pressure and declining resources shape editorial decisions, press releases can provide ready-made content, but they are not always prioritised unless they offer exclusivity or particular value.

Overall, this study reveals that the role of news agencies in PR research remains really underestimated. While the relationship between PR professionals and journalists has been extensively studied, the pivotal role that news agencies play as intermediaries and gatekeepers in the information flow is still insufficiently explored. News agencies not only serve as channels of distribution but also as validators that can significantly enhance the credibility of PR content. The distinction between traditional journalism and news agency work must be considered, particularly as agencies operate under different constraints and serve as critical links between PR practitioners and broader media channels.

This paper, therefore, underscores the need for further research into the relationship between PR and news agencies, particularly in the context of the digital transformation and evolving media consumption patterns. Despite the limitations of this study, including the small sample size, the focus on written communication and its exploratory nature, the findings contribute hopefully some useful insights into the ongoing discourse in PR research. By shedding light on the topic mentioned, this study encourages a deeper examination of how PR strategies can be optimised by understanding and effectively leveraging the function of news agencies in today’s media ecosystem as well as in the future. And the knowledge gained in this context may also be helpful in better understanding future reputation management in general - also in relation to the coming age of generative artificial intelligence, which was briefly mentioned in the introduction and which may also be important to mention at the end.

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Navigating Informed Health Choices: Sociocultural Factors and Information Channels in the Context of Chiropractic Services in Croatia

Takahashi, Marta, *Catholic University of Croatia (Croatia)*

Introduction

The goal of this study is to conduct an exploration of the information channels and media content that influence individuals' decisions to use chiropractic treatments. In doing so, the aim is to understand not only the types of platforms and sources that people rely on but also the specific attitudes and characteristics of individuals who choose chiropractic care. This involves investigating whether people primarily obtain information from personal recommendations, social media, or scientific literature, and assessing the level of trust they place in these different sources.

Beyond simply mapping out the information sources, this paper seeks to uncover the sociocultural factors that shape these individuals' attitudes toward healthcare, particularly focusing on the influence of post-materialistic values such as personal growth, health investment, and self-expression. These values may play a key role in steering individuals toward complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) practices like chiropractic, as they emphasize personal agency in health decisions and a shift away from reliance on conventional medical authorities.

By examining the demographic characteristics of chiropractic users—such as age, education level, and socioeconomic status—this study is

providing insights into who is most likely to turn to chiropractic treatments and why. Understanding these profiles will help clarify how societal values, such as materialism or post-materialism, and trust in different information sources influence health behavior. The research aims to identify patterns in information-seeking behavior, including whether individuals are more likely to trust informal channels like word-of-mouth and online searches over formal, scientific sources.

Ultimately, the goal is to shed light on the broader implications of these findings for public health and the role of scientific literacy in shaping healthcare decisions. The study will help identify gaps in public trust toward scientific sources and offer recommendations on how to bridge these gaps by making validated, research-based information more accessible and compelling for the public. By understanding how and why people choose chiropractic care, it is possible to contribute to better public health strategies, improved communication of medical knowledge, and more informed healthcare decision-making processes in society.

Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM)

Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) refers to a diverse and evolving set of

healthcare practices that exist outside of conventional biomedical systems. Unlike standard medical approaches that are deeply integrated into public health infrastructures, CAM operates either in parallel with or as alternatives to mainstream healthcare frameworks. These practices range from well-known modalities such as chiropractic care, acupuncture, and herbal medicine, to more specialized approaches like homeopathy, naturopathy, and energy healing (WHO, 2019). Globally, CAM has grown significantly over the past few decades, driven by an increasing interest in holistic approaches to health that emphasize prevention, wellness, and individual responsibility.

One of the defining features of CAM is its autonomy from the regulatory structures that govern conventional medicine. In countries like Croatia, CAM providers—including chiropractors—are not subject to the same stringent legal and professional regulations that apply to conventional healthcare providers. This regulatory gap often results in limited public oversight, varying standards of practice, and uneven public recognition of these therapies. Without clear legal frameworks, it becomes difficult to guarantee the consistency and safety of CAM treatments, which further complicates their integration into national healthcare systems (Cerjan-Letica & Letica, 2010).

In terms of public health policy, CAM occupies a unique position. On one hand, it appeals to individuals seeking alternatives to conventional medical treatments, particularly those who feel dissatisfied with the limitations of modern biomedicine. On the other hand, it exists in a regulatory grey area, which presents challenges for healthcare policymakers who must balance the demand for patient autonomy with the need for clinical efficacy and safety. Despite these challenges, CAM continues to be a significant component of the healthcare landscape. Its popularity persists, often driven by patient testimonials,

cultural beliefs, and dissatisfaction with the pharmaceutical-centric model of conventional medicine. Given the immense variety and diversity of CAM practices, it is unrealistic to expect any universal standards or general regulatory frameworks that would apply to all CAM modalities. This diversity makes it difficult to create a cohesive, universally accepted legal and professionalization process for CAM. Each modality within CAM, from chiropractic to naturopathy, has its own set of principles, practices, and theoretical underpinnings, which complicates efforts to integrate them into formal healthcare systems or to create standardized professional guidelines (WHO, 2019). For example, while chiropractic care is largely focused on the mechanical health of the spine and musculoskeletal system, other CAM practices, like acupuncture or homeopathy, are rooted in entirely different philosophical and medical traditions, making standardization across the board a challenge.

In light of these complexities, the professionalization of CAM is an ongoing process. In some countries, certain CAM practices have been more successfully integrated into public health systems, often through legal recognition, certification programs, and insurance coverage. For instance, chiropractic care is more widely regulated and accepted in countries such as the United States and Canada, where practitioners must adhere to specific educational and professional standards (Stochkendahl et al., 2019). However, in many other regions, including parts of Europe, CAM practices remain largely unregulated, leaving patients and providers in a legal limbo (Stochkendahl et al., 2019). Thus, while CAM holds great potential for expanding healthcare options and promoting individualized care, its future depends on the development of more structured frameworks that can ensure both efficacy and patient safety.

Sociocultural (Postmaterialist and Materialistic) Values

The choice to engage with CAM therapies, including chiropractic treatments, is often deeply intertwined with broader sociocultural shifts in values, particularly the distinction between materialistic and postmaterialistic worldviews. Postmaterialism, as conceptualized by sociologist Ronald Inglehart, reflects a value system that prioritizes self-expression, personal development, and quality of life over economic and material concerns. In contrast, materialistic values focus on economic security, physical safety, and basic needs, which were historically more pressing in earlier stages of socioeconomic development (Axén, Hestbaek, Leboeuf-Yde, 2019; Coulter & Willis, 2007).

As societies progress through stages of economic development, individuals tend to shift their focus from materialist concerns—such as financial security, employment stability, and physical protection—to postmaterialist concerns like self-actualization, personal well-being, and environmental sustainability. This shift in values has profound implications for healthcare choices, as people become more interested in maintaining their health through preventive and holistic means rather than merely treating diseases after they occur. In this context, CAM methods are particularly attractive, as they align with postmaterialist values by emphasizing the importance of personal empowerment, natural healing, and long-term wellness strategies (Inglehart, Baker, 2000).

One of the core characteristics of postmaterialist values is a focus on self-care and personal well-being as essential aspects of one's life goals (Axén, Hestbaek, Leboeuf-Yde, 2019). Individuals who hold postmaterialist values are more likely to take an active role in managing their health, seeking out information on preventive care and exploring alternative healthcare op-

tions such as CAM. These individuals often view health not merely as the absence of disease, but as a dynamic state of physical, emotional, and mental well-being that requires ongoing maintenance and investment. This holistic view of health is a cornerstone of many CAM practices, which emphasize balance, prevention, and the integration of body, mind, and spirit.

For postmaterialists, healthcare is not just a practical necessity but an integral part of personal development. The pursuit of alternative health methods like chiropractic care, acupuncture, or herbal remedies is seen as a form of self-expression, where individuals make autonomous choices about their health based on their own beliefs, experiences, and preferences. These choices are often informed by a desire to avoid the perceived limitations of conventional medicine, such as the over-reliance on pharmaceuticals or invasive procedures, and to explore more natural, individualized, and non-invasive options.

In contrast, materialistic values, which are more prevalent in societies or communities where economic security is still a major concern, tend to align more closely with traditional, biomedical approaches to healthcare. Individuals who prioritize materialist values are often more risk-averse in their health decisions, relying on conventional medical treatments that have been scientifically validated and widely accepted. For them, healthcare is primarily about addressing immediate physical needs, such as curing illness or managing symptoms, rather than focusing on long-term prevention or holistic well-being. However, it is essential to note that many individuals hold a combination of both materialist and postmaterialist values, resulting in a hybrid approach to healthcare. These individuals may rely on conventional medical treatments for acute or serious conditions but also explore CAM methods for preventive care, stress management, or chronic conditions where conven-

tional medicine offers limited solutions. This blending of values reflects a broader societal trend towards pluralism in healthcare, where people are increasingly open to integrating multiple approaches to achieve their goals (Schwartz, Rubel, 2005), including the health.

The rise of CAM can also be seen as part of a broader cultural shift towards postmodernist values, which emphasize the rejection of grand narratives, including the biomedical model of healthcare as the sole path to health and wellness (Axén, Hestbaek, Leboeuf-Yde, 2019). In a post-modernist framework, individuals are encouraged to question traditional authority, including medical professionals, and to seek out their own paths to health. CAM's emphasis on personalized, patient-centered care fits well within this framework, as it offers individuals the autonomy to make healthcare decisions that align with their personal values, beliefs, and experiences.

The increasing popularity of CAM therapies like chiropractic care is not merely a reflection of dissatisfaction with conventional medicine but also a manifestation of deeper sociocultural shifts towards postmaterialist and postmodernist values. As individuals prioritize self-care, holistic health, and personal empowerment, CAM offers an appealing alternative to the often impersonal and disease-centered focus of conventional medicine. Understanding the sociocultural dynamics that drive the use of CAM is essential for healthcare providers, policymakers, and researchers who aim to meet the evolving needs of a population that is increasingly diverse in its healthcare preferences and values.

Methodology

The survey was conducted online, with a sample of 200 respondents from Croatia, 100 of whom had experience with chiropractic treatments and 100 who did not. It was conducted in March 2024. All respondents are adult citizens of the Repub-

lic of Croatia, and the research was anonymous. A method of deliberate, convenience sampling was chosen, as the exact number of chiropractic users in the population is unknown.

The questionnaire examined the sociocultural characteristics of the respondents and the information channels they used while researching CAM versus conventional medicine, and making informed decisions. In addition, sociodemographic data of the respondents were collected (gender, age, county, level of education). Where applicable, the data were compared with the results of the 2021 Census of the Republic of Croatia (Census 2021). The data from Census 2021 refer to adult citizens of the Republic of Croatia (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

H: The research subjects who display an acceptance of predominantly post-materialistic values have a tendency towards the use of information channels that are supportive of complementary treatment methods, including chiropractic, while the opposite is true for the subjects who predominantly accept traditional social values.

To demonstrate post-materialist and materialist values, the standard Inglehart materialism-post-materialism scale (Inglehart, 1997) was used. In this scale, respondents are asked to answer 12 questions that represent either materialist or post-materialist values.

Materialist values in Inglehart's scale include a high level of economic growth, making sure this country has strong defense forces, maintaining order in the nation, fighting rising prices, a stable economy, and the fight against crime.

On the other hand, post-materialist values in Inglehart's scale encompass seeing that people have more say about how things are done at their jobs and in their communities, trying to make our cities and countryside more beautiful, giving people more say in important government

decisions, protecting freedom of speech, progress toward a less impersonal and more humane society, and progress toward a society in which ideas count more than money.

The questions were presented in three sets of four questions each. If a respondent selects two post-materialist items in a set, they are considered a post-materialist. If they select two materialist items in a set, they are considered a materialist. If they select one post-materialist and one materialist item, the respondent is considered to have mixed values.



Figure 1: The number of respondents who have/have not tried chiropractic (N=200)

Results

Out of 200 respondents, 46.5% are men and 53.5% are women, which is a 1.7% deviation from the 2021 Census (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2022) (Table 1). Among the respondents, 13.5% are aged 18 to 24, 16.0% are aged 25 to 34, 29.5% are aged 35 to 49, 21.0% are aged 50 to 64, and 20.0% are over the age of 65. Compared to the 2021 Census, the largest deviation is in the 65+ category, at 6.9%, which is to be expected given that this is the oldest population, generally less trusting of digital technology, and the questionnaire was completed digitally (Table 2). All counties are represented in the research, with the largest deviation compared to the 2021 Census in the City of Zagreb (a 7.2% deviation). In this research, 27% of respondents are from the City of Zagreb, while according to the 2021 Census, the figure is lower at 19.8% (Table 3).

Table 1: Structure of respondents by gender (N=200)

Gender	N	%	2021 Census (CRO)
Male	93	46.5	48.2
Female	107	53.5	51.8
Total	200	100.0	100.0

Table 2: Structure of respondents by age (N=200)

Age	N	%	2021 Census (CRO)
18 – 24	27	13.5	9.6
25 – 34	32	16.0	13.7
35 – 49	59	29.5	24.2
50 – 64	42	21.0	25.6
65 +	40	20.0	26.9
Total	200	100.0	100.0

In this research, the structure of respondents by education level is divided into six categories, while in the 2021 Census it is divided into three categories. Primary school or less is the only category that is consistent in both the research and the 2021 Census. In this research, 2.0% of respondents fall into this category, while in the 2021 Census, it is as high as 20.4% (a deviation of 18.4%). This result was somewhat expected, given that, according to the Census, the least educated group is among the oldest population, which participated the least in the questionnaire. Two- or three-year secondary school was completed by 9.5% of respondents, and four-year secondary school by 61.5%, meaning that 71% of participants in this research completed secondary education. According to the 2021 Census, 55.5% of citizens of the Republic of Croatia have secondary education. An undergraduate degree was completed by 2.0% of respondents, a graduate degree by 15.5%, and a postgraduate degree by 9.5%, making 27% of participants in

Table 3: Structure of respondents according to counties (N=200)

County	N	%	2021 Census (CRO)
Bjelovarko-bilogorska	4	2.0	2.6
Brodsko-posavska	3	1.5	3.4
Dubrovačko-neretvanska	6	3.0	3.0
Grad Zagreb	54	27.0	19.8
Istarska	8	4.0	5.0
Karlovačka	8	4.0	2.9
Koprivničko-križevačka	8	4.0	2.6
Krapinsko-zagorska	8	4.0	3.1
Ličko-senjska	3	1.5	1.1
Međimurska	11	5.5	2.7
Osječko-baranjska	12	6.0	6.7
Požeško-slavonska	4	2.0	1.7
Primorsko-goranska	10	5.0	6.9
Sisačko-moslavačka	6	3.0	3.6
Splitsko-dalmatinska	14	7.0	10.9
Šibensko-kninska	4	2.0	2.5
Varaždinska	7	3.5	4.1
Virovitičko-podravska	2	1.0	1.8
Vukovarsko-srijemska	5	2.5	3.7
Zadarska	5	2.5	4.1
Zagrebačka	18	9.0	7.7
Total	200	100.0	100.0

this research highly educated. At the national level, 24.1% of the population in the Republic of Croatia is highly educated (Table 4).

Information about chiropractic was obtained from surroundings (friends/acquaintances/family) or personal experience by 33% of respondents. Information about chiropractic was accessed by 27% of respondents through social media or internet searches, while 19.5% were informed through television, newspapers, or radio. Perhaps the most striking figure in this data is the small percentage – just 5.5% – of respondents who obtained information from pro-

fessional or scientific sources. This low number points to a significant gap in the public's engagement with scientifically rigorous information. In a country like Croatia, where CAM (Complementary and Alternative Medicine) methods such as chiropractic care are still not fully regulated or integrated into the formal healthcare system, the public's disregard for scientific validation can lead to an overreliance on anecdotal evidence and non-expert opinions. The lack of engagement with scientific literature is particularly troubling because it suggests that many individuals are not benefiting from the wealth of peer-reviewed research that could inform safer,

Table 4: Structure of respondents according to education (N=200)

Education	N	%	2021 Census (CRO)
Elementary school or less	4	2.0	20.4
Two-year or three-year high school	19	9.5	55.5
Four-year high school	123	61.5	
Undergraduate studies	4	2.0	24.1
Graduate studies	31	15.5	
Postgraduate studies	19	9.5	
Total	200	100.0	100.0

Table 5: Source of information about chiropractic (N=200)

Source of information about chiropractic	N	%
Surroundings (friends/acquaintances/family) or personal experience	66	33.0
Social media, internet searches	54	27.0
Television, newspapers, or radio	39	19.5
From professional/scientific sources	11	5.5
Other	0	0
I am not informed	30	15.0
Total	200	100.0

Table 6: The ratio of post-materialist, materialist, and mixed values individuals who use or do not use chiropractic (N=200)

Post-materialists / materialists / mixed	N	%
Post-materialist individuals who use chiropractic	36	18.0
Post-materialist individuals who do not use chiropractic	16	8.0
Materialist individuals who use chiropractic	6	3.0
Materialist individuals who do not use chiropractic	17	8.5
Mixed value individuals who use chiropractic	58	29.0
Mixed value individuals who do not use chiropractic	67	33.5
Total	200	100.0

more effective healthcare decisions. Chiropractic care, like any other medical treatment, carries potential risks alongside its benefits, and these risks are best understood through a careful review of clinical studies and expert guidelines. 15% of respondents stated that they were not informed about chiropractic (Table 6).

Using Inglehart's post-materialism scale, the study examined how many post-materialists, materialists, and individuals with mixed values were among chiropractic users and those who are not. Among the surveyed chiropractic users, 18% were post-materialists, 3% were materialists, and 29% had mixed values. Among respondents who do not use chiro-

practic, 8% were post-materialists, 8.5% were materialists, and 33.5% had mixed values.

H: Confirmed.

Post-materialists are more inclined to use chiropractic, whereas materialists are more likely to avoid it. The majority of respondents have mixed values, which in literature aligns with human nature and the values of our society (Maldini, 2008).

The hypothesis positing that research subjects who exhibit a preference for predominantly post-materialistic values are more inclined to utilize information channels supportive of complementary treatment methods, such as chiropractic care, is substantiated by the findings of this study. The data indicates that individuals who embrace post-materialistic values tend to be more open to and actively seek out chiropractic treatments. Conversely, individuals who predominantly adhere to materialistic values, which emphasize traditional social norms and often prioritize established, conventional medical practices, exhibit a marked reluctance toward chiropractic care. This aligns with a broader cultural tendency where materialists are more likely to rely on mainstream medical solutions and are skeptical of alternative treatments.

Conclusions

Investigating the channels through which respondents in Croatia gather information about chiropractic reveals a troubling and rather unexpected reality: Croatian citizens display a significant lack of trust in scientific sources. Instead, they tend to rely on personal networks, such as recommendations from friends, acquaintances, and family, as well as their own experiences. Additionally, a considerable portion of their information comes from online sources, especially social media. This finding is particularly concerning when it comes to healthcare, where accurate and scientifically validated information

is crucial. The preference for unverified, informal channels over reliable, scientific research represents a setback for the scientific and medical communities. It highlights a widespread problem—not just in Croatia, but in many other parts of the world—where people are increasingly inclined to trust what they come across on social media platforms, rather than turning to peer-reviewed scientific studies or healthcare professionals.

This trend is not only dangerous in terms of the spread of misinformation, but it also reflects a deeper issue within society—an erosion of trust in expert knowledge and scientific evidence. The fact that people are more likely to trust what is read on a Facebook post or a forum than what is published in a scientific journal suggests that efforts to promote science-based healthcare must be significantly intensified. In the realm of health and well-being, this can have serious consequences, leading to the spread of incorrect or harmful health practices, and it can ultimately hinder people's ability to make informed decisions about their own health.

To address this problem, comprehensive changes need to occur across multiple levels of society. First and foremost, it is essential to raise awareness about the importance of using reliable, scientifically validated information when making healthcare decisions. This can be achieved through educational campaigns that promote critical thinking and media literacy, helping people to distinguish between trustworthy sources and misleading information. These campaigns should emphasize the dangers of relying on unverified sources, particularly in health-related matters, where misinformation can have real, harmful effects.

Moreover, it is crucial to encourage greater collaboration between the scientific community, healthcare professionals, and the general public. Scientists and healthcare experts need to make

their work more accessible and relatable to the average person, breaking down complex medical research into understandable terms, and making this information widely available. Public trust in science could be strengthened if the language and format of scientific studies were made less intimidating, and more engaging for those outside of the academic sphere. This could also help bridge the gap between everyday experiences and scientific knowledge, allowing people to see how validated information directly applies to their health and well-being.

Before any significant regulatory changes—such as the legal regulation of CAM (Complementary and Alternative Medicine) methods—can be considered, it is crucial to conduct more research into how people obtain their information about healthcare. Studies that explore CAM practices, sources of information, and the sociocultural factors shaping the public's attitudes toward health are essential. These studies will provide a clearer understanding of the current landscape and help identify key areas where interventions are needed. Such work can also support policymakers in making informed decisions about how to regulate CAM practices in a way that prioritizes public safety and informed choice.

Only once this body of research is established, and the public begins to have access to relevant, reliable, and user-friendly literature, can we hope to shift the prevailing attitudes. Guiding the public toward more trustworthy information is not a quick fix; it requires sustained efforts from educators, healthcare professionals, and policymakers alike. However, with a strategic approach, it is possible to create a future where science-based healthcare methods are the norm, and people feel empowered to make informed decisions about their health based on credible, well-founded information. In doing so, we can help ensure that health-related choices are guided by facts rather than trends, benefiting both individuals and the wider society.

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