

Strategic Corporate Communication in the Digital Age

Endorsements

Digital communications are increasingly central to the process of building trust, reputation and support. It's as true for companies selling products as it is for politicians canvassing for votes. This book provides a framework for understanding and using online media and will be required reading for serious students of communication.

Dr Charles J. Fombrun,
Former Professor at *New York University, NYU-Stern School*,
Founder & Chairman Emeritus,
Reputation Institute/The RepTrak Company.

This book has addressed a current and relevant topic relating to an important aspect of digital transformation. Various chapters of this book provide valuable insights about a variety of issues relating to "Strategic Corporate Communication in the Digital Age." The book will be a useful resource for both academics and practitioners engaged in marketing- and communications-related activities. I am delighted to endorse this valuable resource.

Dr Yogesh K. Dwivedi,
Professor at the School of Management
at *Swansea University*, UK, and Editor-in-Chief of
the *International Journal of Information Management*.

This title covers a range of relevant issues and trends related to strategic corporate communication in an increasingly digital era. For example, not only does it address communication from a social media, balanced scorecard, and stakeholder engagement perspective, but it also integrates relevant contemporary insights related to SMEs and COVID-19. This is a must-read for any corporate communications professional or researcher.

Dr Linda Hollebeek,
Associate Professor at *Montpellier Business School*,
France, and *Tallinn University of Technology*,
Estonia.

Corporate communication is changing rapidly, and digital media represent a tremendous opportunity for companies of all sizes to better achieve their communication goals. This book provides important insights into relevant trends and charts critical ways in which digital media can be used to their full potential.

Dr Ulrike Gretzel,
Director of Research at *Netnografica* and
Senior Fellow at the *Center for Public Relations*,
University of Southern California, USA.

This new book by Professor Mark Camilleri promises again valuable insights in corporate communication in the digital era with a special focus on Corporate Social Responsibility. The book sets a new standard in our thinking of responsibilities in our digital connected world.

Dr Wim Elving,
Professor at *Hanze University of Applied Sciences*,
Groningen, The Netherlands.

Dedication

Dedicated to Adriana, Michela and Sam.

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Strategic Corporate Communication in the Digital Age

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- Camilleri, M. A. (Ed.). (2018). *The branding of tourist destinations. Theoretical and empirical insights*. Bingley: Emerald. ISBN: 978-1-78769-374-6.
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Preface

This authoritative book features a broad spectrum of theoretical and empirical contributions on topics relating to corporate communications in the digital age. It is a premier reference source and a valuable teaching resource for course instructors of advanced, undergraduate and postgraduate courses in marketing and communications. It comprises 14 engaging and timely chapters that appeal to today's academic researchers including doctoral candidates, postdoctoral researchers, early career academics as well as seasoned researchers. All chapters include an abstract, an introduction, the main body with headings and subheadings, conclusions and research implications. They were written in a critical and discursive manner to entice the curiosity of their readers.

Chapter 1 provides a descriptive overview of different online technologies and presents the findings from a systematic review on corporate communication and digital media. Mark Anthony Camilleri (2020) implies that institutions and organizations ought to be credible and trustworthy in their interactive, dialogic communications during day-to-day operations as well as in crisis situations, if they want to reinforce their legitimacy in society. Chapter 2 clarifies the importance of trust and belonging in individual and organizational relationships. Kelly-Ann Allen, Gert Tinggaard Sven, Syed Marwan, and Gökmen Arslan (2020) suggest that trust nurtures social interactions that can ultimately lead to significant improvements in corporate communication and other benefits for organizations. Chapter 3 identifies key dimensions for dialogic communication through social media. Paul Capriotti, Ileana Zeler, and Mark Anthony Camilleri (2020) put forward a conceptual framework that clarifies how organizations can enhance their dialogic communications through interactive technologies. Chapter 4 explores the marketing communication managers' interactive engagement with the digital media. Mark Anthony Camilleri and Pedro Isaias suggest that the pace of technological innovation, perceived usefulness, ease of use of online technologies as well as social influences are significant antecedents for the businesses' engagement with the digital media. Chapter 5 explains that the Balanced Scorecard's (BSC) performance management tools can be used to support corporate communication practitioners in their stakeholder engagement. Cidália Oliveira, Adelaide Martins, Mark Anthony Camilleri, and Shital Jayantilal (2020) imply that practitioners can use BSC's metrics to align their communication technologies, including big data analytics, with organizational strategy and performance management, in the digital era. Chapter 6 focuses on UK universities' corporate communications through Twitter. Emmanuel Mogaji, Josue Kuika Watat, Sunday Adewale

Olaleye, and Dandison Ukpabi find that British universities are increasingly using this medium to attract new students, to retain academic employees and to promote their activities and events. Chapter 7 investigates the use of mobile learning (m-learning) technologies for corporate training. Ashley Butler, Mark Anthony Camilleri, Andrew Creed, and Ambika Zutshi (2020) shed light on key contextual factors that can have an effect on the successful delivery of continuous professional development of employees through mobile technologies.

Chapter 8 evaluates the effects of influencer marketing on consumer–brand engagement on Instagram. Inês Rios Marques, Beatriz Casais, and Mark Anthony Camilleri (2020) identify two types of social media influencers. Chapter 9 explores in-store communications of large-scale retailers. Sabina Riboldazzi and Antonella Capriello (2020) use an omni-channel approach as they integrate traditional and digital media in their theoretical model for informative, in-store communications. Chapter 10 indicates that various corporations are utilizing different social media channels for different purposes. Ciro Troise and Mark Anthony Camilleri (2020) contend that they are using them to promote their products or services and/or to convey commercial information to their stakeholders. Chapter 11 appraises the materiality of the corporations' integrated disclosures of financial and non-financial performance. Pablo Rodríguez-Gutiérrez (2020) identifies the key determinants for the materiality of integrated reports. Chapter 12 describes various electronic marketing (e-marketing) practices of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises in India. Tejinderpal Singh, Raj Kumar, and Prateek Kalia (2020) conclude that Indian owner-managers are not always engaging with their social media followers in a professional manner. Chapter 13 suggests that there is scope for small enterprises to use Web 2.0 technologies and associated social media applications for branding, advertising and corporate communication. Oluwasola Oni (2020) maintains that social media may be used as a marketing communications tool to attract customers and for internal communications with employees. Chapter 14 sheds light on the online marketing tactics that are being used for corporate communication purposes. Mohammad Hajarian, Mark Anthony Camilleri, Paloma Díaz, and Ignacio Aedo (2020) outline different online channels including one-way and two-way communication technologies.

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Chapter 1

Strategic Dialogic Communication Through Digital Media During COVID-19 Crisis

Mark Anthony Camilleri

Abstract

Institutions and organizations are increasingly using the digital media to communicate with stakeholders on a day-to-day basis and during crisis situations. Therefore, this chapter presents a bibliographic analysis on digital corporate communication technologies. The grounded theory's inductive approach was used to capture and interpret the findings from Scopus-indexed publications. The articles were scrutinized in their entirety, including their research questions, methodologies and interpretation of the findings. Afterwards, this contribution identifies the opportunities and challenges that emerged during an unprecedented coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. In conclusion, it implies that there is scope for institutions and organizations to incorporate digital and social media in their crises' communications and risk management plans. This will enable them to be in a better position to engage in credible and transparent dialogic communications with different stakeholders.

Keywords: Corporate communication; digital media; digital communication; social media; crises; COVID-19

1.1 Introduction

Corporate communication practitioners can avail themselves of a wide range of digital media, to convey commercial information and/or to interact with stakeholders and the general public. They can use them to create electronic content to inform and educate online users about their products or services (Cornelissen, 2008; García García, Carrillo-Durán, & Tato Jimenez, 2017; Köhler & Zeffass, 2019;

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Krishna & Vibber, 2017). Alternatively, they may utilize the digital platforms to communicate about their organizations' activities, including corporate social responsibility practices and/or to engage with online users, in real time (Camilleri, 2018a, 2020). Institutions and organizations may usually promote their activities and/or offerings through websites or other digital media including blogs, vlogs, video clips and social media, among others (Fraustino & Connolly-Ahern, 2015; Killian & McManus, 2015; Ruehl & Ingenhoff, 2015). Their websites can have responsive designs and different formats of verbal, vocal and visual content to appeal to their targeted audiences. Their corporate communications content can be displayed in web pages; blog posts, social media posts, eBooks, online articles, review sites, product FAQs, videos and micro-videos; pictures, infographics and animated GIFs, among other media. Marketers are also expected to create appropriate content and to ensure that their online sites are presented in an attractive and user-friendly format and structure. They can optimize it for mobile screens, as this medium has surpassed desktop traffic. Moreover, their online domains have to be responsive in terms of load time, content length, voice search, image and video processing.

Institutions and organizations can develop corporate websites or blogs that may be accessed through organic queries via search engines like Google and Bing, among others (Romenti, Valentini, Murtarelli, & Meggiorin, 2016). These search engines will usually identify quality content in their search results. Hence, corporate communication practitioners and digital marketers ought to create fresh, engaging content with a growing number of quality links to enhance the quality of their websites. They have to make sure that their landing (home) page features a great design to improve the online users' experience (Camilleri, 2019a). Moreover, they may utilize social media networks like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn, among others, to disseminate their content to their subscribers and to engage in interactive conversations with them (Camilleri & Isaias, 2020; Champoux, Durgee, & McGlynn, 2012; García-Orosa, 2019). Corporate communication practitioners can also work with online influencers who are capable of attracting large audiences. This latest development reaffirms the link between high-quality, corporate communication and the digital media (Camilleri, 2017a). Organizations including corporations as well as small businesses ought to be familiar with the digital and mobile technologies (Melewar & Navalekar, 2002). They can use them on a day-to-day basis to forge relationships with different stakeholders including employees, customers, suppliers, investors, media, regulatory authorities and the community at large (Bachmann, 2019; Costa-Sánchez & Míguez-González, 2018; Loureiro & Gomes, 2016) or during crisis situations (Champoux et al., 2012; Krishna & Vibber, 2017).

In this light, this chapter appraises previous theoretical underpinnings that were focused on strategic dialogic corporate communications in the digital age. Afterwards, it synthesizes the findings from relevant academic literature and discusses about the latest opportunities and challenges facing organizations, following the outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. In conclusion, this timely contribution puts forward key implications to practitioners and identifies future research avenues.

1.2 Corporate Communication Through Digital Media

The disruptive technologies are supporting institutions as well as organizations in their corporate communications. They allow them to improve their interactive engagement with stakeholders, while enhancing their legitimacy in society (Mohd-Sulaiman & Hingun, 2020; see Hoffmann & Aeschlimann, 2017; Sunar, Kusnayat, & Aziz, 2018). The latest digital communications are synchronous and dynamic as they enable online users to exchange information in real time (Romenti et al., 2016; Turner, Wilkie, & Rosen, 2004). They have facilitated the corporate communication practitioners' content marketing and increased their two-way interactions with different audiences (Abratt & Cullinan, 2017; Holliman & Rowley, 2014; Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016; Rowley, 2008).

1.2.1 Social Media

Social media platforms enable symmetric, dialogic communications in an online environment where there is limited gatekeeping (Camilleri & Costa, 2018; Overton-de Klerk & Verwey, 2013). Individuals and organizations can use them to establish their authority and trust among stakeholders by consistently creating high-quality content that is relevant to them. They are encouraged to create engaging content to communicate with targeted audiences. Their online content can turn "viral" as online users may be intrigued to re-post it again through the social media. Such electronic word-of-mouth publicity and user-generated content are usually perceived as highly trustworthy sources for prospective customers (Chu & Kim, 2011; Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019; Ye, Law, Gu, & Chen, 2011). Thus, corporate communication practitioners are increasingly subscribing to different social media networks, including Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn, among others, to increase the reach of their content (Beltrá, Medina, & Correia, 2020; Champoux et al., 2012; Costa-Sánchez & Míguez-González, 2018).

Currently, Facebook has 2.45 billion users. Other popular social media networks include Instagram (1 billion users), Reddit (430 million users), Snapchat (360 million users), Twitter (330 million users), Pinterest (322 million users) and LinkedIn (310 million users) (SEJ, 2020). These networks have become very popular communication outlets as they promote online content and allow synchronous interactions, in real time. In addition, some of them, including Facebook, provide messenger systems, including Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp. They also offer live video functions to enhance virtual communications.

Twitter is a platform that is based on topical content. Generally, its users are encouraged to use keywords and hashtags on certain topics, in particular locations. Twitter posts have a 280-character limit. Therefore, its subscribers have to articulate short, focused messages (Siano et al., 2018). Its subscribers are expected to dedicate time to look after their account as they need to respond to their followers to avoid negative criticism (Camilleri, 2018b). Like Facebook, Twitter enables direct, two-way communications among subscribers (Caerols-Mateo, Viñarás-Abad, & González-Valles, 2017). Hence, it can be used to engage in interactive conversations with other users.

LinkedIn is another effective tool, particularly for personal branding. This social network helps its users to identify and engage with influencers who share similar interests. Companies and individuals can also use this site to create online articles like a blog. Pinterest and Instagram enable their users to share images and ideas with others in their networks. They are focused on the dissemination of visual content. Instagram and Snapchat can feature videos and user-generated content. They may include influencer marketing material (Hajarian, Camilleri, Diaz, & Aedo, 2020; Rios Marques, Casais, & Camilleri, 2020). Moreover, practitioners are increasingly uploading short, fun videos which often turn viral on YouTube. This site offers an excellent way to humanize or animate corporate communication content through video content.

The usage of social media has radically influenced the style of personal and corporate communications as well as the dissemination of knowledge and information. Platforms can be personalized, self-managed and interconnected. They can blend written content with images, videos and hyperlinks (Brennan & Merkl-Davies, 2018). This disruptive innovation has led individuals from different demographic segments in society to refine their digital and communication skills, as social media has impacted their way of thinking, talking and even their social lives (Dyuzhev & Boichenko, 2019).

In a similar vein, social media platforms may be used by businesses and other organizations to illustrate their communication to stakeholders through verbal, visual and vocal content. For example, nongovernmental organizations can raise awareness about political, social and environmental issues. Businesses can use social media to communicate about their corporate social (and environmental) responsibility (CSR), corporate governance, responsible procurement, philanthropic and stewardship practices, etc., in different markets (Camilleri, 2015, 2016a, 2017b, 2019b; Fombrun, 2005; Mendes-da-Silva, Christensen, & Richardson, 2008; Troise & Camilleri, 2020; Weder, Einwiller, & Eberwein, 2019). These online networks are also effective monitoring tools. They feature the most trending topics and contemporary issues (Lestari, Suryana, Mulyana, & Hidayat, 2019). Social media users can utilize the hashtag (#) to enhance the visibility when they share content. For example, some of the most popular hashtags for corporate communication practitioners include #communication, #marketing, #digital, #CSR, #sustainable, #EcoFriendly, #sustainability, #ZeroWaste #CircularEconomy, #CSRcomm, etc. Hashtags may be used to raise awareness on charities, philanthropic institutions as well as on nongovernmental organizations and trusts (Camilleri, 2016b, 2016c).

The social media have transformed the communicative dynamics within and between corporations and their external environment (Bruce & Solomon, 2013; Capriotti, Zeler, & Camilleri, 2020). These platforms have potential to empower their subscribers to engage with others, on a wide array of topics. Individuals, groups, organizations and institutions can use them to promote their content online and through ubiquitous mobile technologies.

1.2.2 Mobile

The mobile devices have become a part of our daily lives. We use them while we are out and about (Butler, Camilleri, Creed, & Zutshi, 2020). Individuals can

access the Internet through their laptop, smartphone or tablet from different places. They can read their emails and posts on social media networks. Alternatively, they can share pictures, listen to podcasts and watch videos or live streams. Therefore, organizations and their content marketers are encouraged to create responsive and scalable mobile-friendly applications (apps) to improve their users' browsing experience through different technologies and applications (apps). For example, search engines like Google and Apple's Safari are two of the most popular apps that are found in mobile devices. Their search engines serve their online or mobile users in their search queries, as they list and rank websites for them.

1.2.3 Search Engines

The search engines' algorithms identify pertinent information from corporate websites and present snippets and links to them, in their search results. The items that appear in the first page of the search results are placed in a better position than others which are featured in the latter pages of the same search query.

The search engine optimization term (or simply SEO) is the process of getting traffic from "free" "organic," "editorial" or "natural" listings on search engines. The search engines are supposed to feature and signal the most relevant and highest quality content to their users. As a result, top-ranking search results tend to have lots of social shares, while those ranked lower have fewer. Several organizations are striving in their endeavors to improve their placement in search engine results.

There are opportunities for them to leverage their content through search results. They may create high-quality, online content that can be captured through search engines, including blogs, if they use appropriate keywords and present relevant material.

1.2.4 Blogging

Blogging, guest blogging and the curation of websites are a great way to disseminate corporate communications. These digital media outlets may be used to raise awareness about social and environmental issues. The regular contributions on blogs allow their users to connect with other individuals and organizations who share similar values, ideas and opinions (Brennan & Merkl-Davies, 2018; Kristina & Payal, 2013). Notwithstanding, blogs and websites possess analytical tools that can reveal which content had the biggest impact on their audiences.

1.3 Data Capture and Analysis

This research relied on the grounded theory's methodological approach to capture and interpret the findings (Eisenhardt, Graebner, & Sonenshein, 2016). An inductive approach was used to collect the data from Scopus-indexed publications. The search results from the systematic review were focused on those publications that featured the words "corporate communication" and "digital" in article titles, abstracts and keywords. The researcher scrutinized the journal articles' content in their entirety, including their research questions, methodologies and interpretation of the findings.

There were 91 contributions that were listed in Scopus' repository. These articles were published between January 2000 and June 2020. Thirty-nine of them were journal articles that were in English. Their top three subject areas were related to business, management and accounting (27), social sciences (22) and computer science (3). [Table 1.1](#) presents a complete list of these contributions. It endorses their authors, describes their research approaches and features the keywords of their articles. This research has excluded two out of 39 as they did not have identifiable authors.

For the record, there were just eight journal articles that were captured when the search query included “corporate communication” and “digital media.” Moreover, there was only one article that included “corporate communication” and “COVID-19” in the search results (i.e., [Xifra, 2020](#)).

1.4 Strategic Communication During Coronavirus Pandemic: Opportunities and Challenges

1.4.1 Dialogic Communication During the Crisis

The coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) has had an impact on political and socioeconomic structures and on their communication processes ([Xifra, 2020](#)). It has affected the institutions and organizations' stakeholder engagement. As a result, their communications and public relations departments had to respond to an unprecedented COVID-19 situation. The information they received about health, safety and continuity was not always consistent and trustworthy ([WHO, 2020](#)). Yet, they had to engage with stakeholders, including employees as well as customers, to restore their faith and trust, thereby providing a sense of stability to them ([McKinsey, 2020](#)). They were expected to communicate in a clear and straightforward manner and as frequently as possible about their preventative social and fiscal measures in order to restore confidence in their organization.

In many cases, governments, institutions and organizations including businesses and media have provided useful information on social distancing and hygienic practices to the general public. They encouraged citizens to remain calm and stay safe. This was the moment of truth for them to engage in dialogic communications with their publics ([Bortree & Seltzer, 2009](#); [Capriotti & Kuklinski, 2012](#); [Kent & Taylor, 1998](#); [Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007](#); [Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001](#); [Wang & Yang, 2020](#); [Yang, Kang, & Cha, 2015](#); [Yang, Kang, & Johnson, 2010](#)). The governments had to communicate with organizations and their citizens to instill trust in their preventative measures. Very often, they were following the recommendations of local and international health authorities ([WHO, 2020](#)). This is in stark contrast to previous crisis situations, where institutions or organizations were not always responding to their stakeholder messages in a timely manner ([Camilleri, 2017b](#); [Roshan, Warren, & Carr, 2016](#)).

The organizations' openness and willingness to engage in dialogic communication with stakeholders is usually evidenced during times of crises ([Coombs, 2007](#); [Yang et al., 2010](#)). Crises are a source of reputational threat as organizations as well as institutions will usually react in different ways. For example, during

Table 1.1. List of Scopus-indexed Publications on Digital Corporate Communication.

Authors	Year	Source Title	Research Approach	Keywords
Segars and Kohut	2001	<i>Journal of Management Studies</i>	Empirical (quantitative)	Shareholders, strategic communication, credibility, efficacy, commitment, responsibility
Champoux, Durgee, and McGlynn	2012	<i>Journal of Business Strategy</i>	Review (case study)	Facebook, social media, crisis management, corporate communications, consumer complaints
Killian and McManus	2015	<i>Business Horizons</i>	Empirical (in-depth interviews)	Social media strategy, customer relationship management, corporate communications, integrated marketing communications
Jones	2005	<i>Journal of Business and Technical Communication</i>	Review (conceptual)	Collaboration, collaborative writing, professional writers, intranet, XML
Bruce and Solomon	2013	<i>Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice</i>	Review (conceptual)	Corporate communications, digital real estate, media anarchy, network effects, scalability, reputation economy
Ruehl and Ingenhoff	2015	<i>Journal of Communication Management</i>	Empirical (semi-structured interviews)	Social networking sites, communication management, stakeholder analysis, social media, public relations, corporate communications
Melewar and Navatekar	2002	<i>Marketing Intelligence and Planning</i>	Review (discursive)	Corporate identity, financial services, corporate communications, e-commerce
Ngai and Singh	2014	<i>Journal of Business and Technical Communication</i>	Review (content analysis)	CEO messages, corporate communication, Greater China, bilingual text, content analysis

Table 1.1. (Continued)

Authors	Year	Source Title	Research Approach	Keywords
Overton-de Klerk and Verwey	2013	<i>Communication</i>	Review (theoretical)	Convergence, dialogue, dissent, organizing, paradigm, paradigm shifts, paradigmatic debates, postmodern communication practice, stakeholder empowerment, strategic communication
Fraustino and Connolly-Ahern	2015	<i>Journal of Public Relations Research</i>	Empirical (quantitative)	Social media, corporate messages, Facebook, online communication, corporate ability, corporate social responsibility
Romenti, Valentini, Murtarelli, and Meggiorin	2016	<i>Journal of Communication Management</i>	Empirical (quantitative)	Social media, measurement, scale development, dialogic conversations
Brennan and Merkl-Davies	2018	<i>Accounting and Business Research</i>	Review (conceptual)	Corporate reporting, accounting communication, connectivity
Grafström and Falkman	2017	<i>Journal of Organizational Change Management</i>	Review (content analysis)	Leadership, Twitter, rhetoric, CEO communication, corporate narratives
García García, Carrillo-Durán, and Tato Jimenez	2017	<i>Journal of Communication Management</i>	Empirical (quantitative)	Digital media, strategic communication, corporate communication, communication management
Loureiro and Gomes	2016	<i>Journal of Promotion Management</i>	Empirical (quantitative)	Corporate communication management, digital strategies of communication, public relations, social network sites
Turner, Wilkie, and Rosen	2004	<i>New Library World</i>	Review (descriptive)	Libraries, corporate communications, promotional methods, partnership