ROTTERDAM SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT, ERASMUS UNIVERSITY
Part-time Executive Master of Science in Corporate Communication

    

BOOK OF GRADUATES

Research Abstracts 2021

     

RSM - a force for positive change

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BOOK OF GRADUATES

Research Abstracts 2021

Disclaimer This Book of Abstracts is a collection of the original executive summaries of the final theses from the graduates of the MSc in Corporate Communication Programme in 2021. Please note that differences in writing stye, spelling or referencing style may occur as a result.

Preface

This year we celebrate the 23rd graduation of the Part-time Executive Master of Science in Corporate Communication Programme (MCC) at Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University. The programme was founded to foster the academic and professional development of communication professionals, to enable them to communicate and lead with impact. This is still the philosophy of the programme today.

Eleven new graduates have officially been awarded the ***Master of Science in Corporate Communication degree*** *as a result. We are proud to present the abstracts of the eleven theses that have been written by the graduates of this Master programme this year.*

Including this year's graduates, the MCC programme has delivered around 340 MCC graduates. Many of them have made a significant career move after their graduation, which they were able to realise by the knowledge, insights and skills gained by the programme, and even more so by their own perseverance and ability to translate their learning into practice.

Over the last years the current graduates have been challenged with intensive courses, case studies, role plays, management games, the most recent academic theories and guest lectures from worldwide renowned professors from a diverse range of universities and businesses practitioners from different (inter) national companies, in order to support their goals to become even more successful communication professionals.

The new Master of Science in Corporate Communication graduates are: Giulia Boratto, Timon Eiselt, Yasmine Farissi, Monika Kövecs, Karen Loos-Gelijns, Liliana Rodrigues dos Santos, Szilvana Spett, Arie Spruit, Merlijn Stoffels, Anouk Sülter-Posthumus, Chared Verschuur-Ballo.

The new Masters of Science in Corporate Communication are:

- *Giulia D. Boratto*
- *Timon Eiselt*
- *Yasmine Farissi*
- *Monica Kövecs*
- *Karen Loos-Gelijns*
- *Liliana Rodrigues dos Santos*
- *Szilvana Spett*
- *Arie Spruit*
- *Merlijn Stoffels*
- *Anouk Sülter-Posthumus*
- *Chared Verschuur-Ballo*

Part-time Executive Master of Science in Corporate Communication

Rotterdam School of Management Erasmus University

We hope they have learned a lot during the courses over the past years, not only from our education but also from their peers, their 'colleagues' in the corporate communication field. The least we could say, also on behalf of all the teaching staff that worked with them, is that we have learned a lot from them too. Their willingness to discuss situations and challenges from practice in their own organisations and to relate these to the topics discussed in the lectures were inspiring and exciting.

In more than twenty years of the Master of Science in Corporate Communication programme we succeeded in creating an international programme that presents all leading experts in a teaching role. We would like to thank the following people (teaching staff) who contributed tremendously to the success of this programme: Paul Argenti of Dartmouth College U.S.A.; John Balmer of Bradford University UK; Jean-Philippe Bonardi, HEC Lausanne; Peggy Simcic Brønn, BI Norwegian Business School; Michael Etter, King's College London; Carola Hillenbrand, Henley Business School; John Hayes, Leeds University Business School; Mark Hunter, INSEAD; Oriol Iglesias, ESADE Business School; Rita Linjuan Men, University of Florida; Michael Pratt of University of Illinois, Urbana/Champaign; Davide Ravasi of Bocconi University; Eliane Schoonman of Issues Management Institute; Majken Schultz of Copenhagen Business School; Bob de Wit of Nyenrode Business University; Ansgar Zerfass, University of Leipzig and from our Faculty: Cees van Riel, Guido Berens, Pursey Heugens, Gui Liberali, Erik 't Klooster, Florian Madertoner, Lucas Meijs, Stefano Puntoni, Ton Roodink, Lonneke Roza, Ingrid de Vries, Eric Waarts, Yijing Wang all working at the Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University.

It is also with great pride that we welcome Professor Emeritus Cees van Riel to award the 'Impact in Corporate Communication Award' for the most impactful thesis in the field of Corporate Communication. The award is created in recognition to the founder of the Master of Science programme, Prof. Emeritus Cees van Riel.

'The Andreas Innovation in Communication Award' is presented by Ing. Dries van de Beek, Former Chairman of the Board, CCC BV, to the author of the most innovative thesis. The winners of the awards in 2021 are announced during the official graduation ceremony.

We wish all the graduates a bright future with successful careers and we congratulate them with their accomplishment.

Marijke Baumann
Executive Director

Prof. dr. Joep Cornelissen
Academic Director

Part-time Executive Master of Science in Corporate Communication programme

Giulia Deneb Boratto

How to improve leadership and employee communication through an extended period of crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic

COVID-19, the disease identified first in Wuhan, China in December 2019 is the crisis we couldn't anticipate, the one which has changed both personal and work lives of billions of people worldwide. 9/11 taught leaders that it is impossible to anticipate every contingency. Hurricane Katrina was another reminder of the impossibility of completely preparing for disasters. COVID-19 should be understood as a very specific type of crisis on a societal level which, due to its unprecedented nature and domino effect, spurred significant changes for various types of organizations worldwide with a substantial and immediate impact on employees.

Among the various challenges observed in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, there are surely the leadership and communication abilities of leaders that have been severely tested globally during this period. Understanding how employees can cope as well with corporate organizational changes, remaining committed, satisfied, and motivated, is key to the success of organizations, especially in the midst of the ramifications of the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Effective leadership communication skills are indispensable ingredients to motivate, promote a culture of employee recognition, and provide hope for the future to employees, the ultimate drivers for organizational success. During the pandemic though, many executives struggled to quickly pivot from external promotion to transparent internal communication, motivation, and engagement, further elevating the value of employee-organization relationships, culture, and purpose. The pandemic is showing executives that companies can't grow, prosper or even survive without a knowledgeable, engaged, and active employee base, especially in times of prolonged crisis in a rapidly changing environment, such as the continual uncertainty brought on by COVID-19.

Purpose

In relation to organizational changes caused by the COVID-19 crisis, this Executive Master thesis focused on identifying leaders' personality traits and communication competencies, which worked best in keeping the workforce engaged and aligned during COVID-19; on understanding if there were noticeable gender differences in the leadership and employee communication practices, and which type of leadership communication style was considered overall most effective.

The ultimate goal was to investigate if the high-quality information and the sense of shared control generated through two-way symmetrical communication (TWC) and transparent communication (TRC) of responsive leaders (versus assertive leaders) can be positively related to employee communication effectiveness, particularly during times characterized by a prolonged high degree of fear, unpredictability, and urgency (i.e., COVID-19 in this study).

Lastly, the analysis concentrated on the time perspective, one of the most powerful influences on human behavior. Since crises are dynamic and changing, employees' situational awareness also has to constantly change to stay up to date, so is their perception of leadership communication skills over time. The analysis therefore examined as well if/how the perception of leadership and employee communication practices evolved over time during the COVID-19 crisis phases.

Methodology

To test the two hypotheses, the study conducted an online survey with the assistance of a global provider of survey services, SurveyMonkey Audience, in September 2021. To obtain a representative sample with comparable genders, age groups, and corporation sizes across various income levels, a random sample of full time employees (n=130), working in the United States for large organizations across varying industry sectors, was chosen. This research also drew data from focus groups and structured interviews with experienced professionals and leaders (n=14) from different sectors within medium-big size organizations in Europe (Italy, Netherlands, Belgium, and Switzerland).

Statistical data have been extracted to analyze the results of the online survey and interviews. In both cases (online survey and interviews), text-analysis of the open-ended responses has been done via a text analysis software to detect the feeling and sentiment behind open-ended responses. MAXQDA 2020 Analytics Pro was used to get structured data by observing patterns in the text and converting data into computer-readable formats.

Findings

Results showed that a two-way symmetrical communication (TWC) and transparent communication (TRC), associated with a responsive leadership communication style, is positively related to a higher degree of employee communication effectiveness (compared to an assertive leadership style). Especially in times of uncertainty, leadership and employee communication can be enhanced by carefully listening and responding to employees' concerns and needs with empathy, honesty and humanity; by encouraging organizational accountability and well-being through words, actions and decisions without losing sight of the organizational and strategic vision during the crisis; by frequently and timely communicating in a two-way symmetrical and transparent way while informing how leaders are incorporating employees' voices in their plans and organizational changes.

Leadership and employee communication are speculated to affect employee job satisfaction, organizational effectiveness, relationship quality with the organization, and other outcomes, such as workforce feeling of empowerment and engagement. However, the results of this study also put a particular emphasis on the decrease of employees' empowerment and engagement even if overall employees' appreciation of leadership role and employee communication has increased during the same period of time.

"It goes without saying that no company, small or large, can win over the long run without energized employees who believe in the mission and understand how to achieve it."

Jack Welch,
Former Chairman and CEO
of General Electric

While too often leaders focus purely on the business itself putting employee engagement strategy on the back burner, the pandemic has clearly placed a spotlight on the role of leaders, leadership and employee communication in better bridging the communication gaps between management and employees, particularly because employees' needs and expectations have heavily changed since the start of the pandemic. Best practices in leadership communication might not be enough if leaders do not understand better where the disconnect between employers and employees is most acute and how to keep the workforce cognitively, emotionally, and physically engaged in their roles even in the face of difficulties.

Especially in periods of upheaval, it is imperative for leaders to keep constant and transparent communication with a people-centered mindset and to create a long-term competitive advantage thanks to employees who are engaged, aligned with the business strategy, and believe in the organization goals, purpose, and vision.

As an art and a science, leadership and employee communication clearly elevated to a new level, from necessary to critical organizational priority; they have made the quantum leap for the organization's survival and long-term development.

Biography

Giulia D. Boratto

Giulia D. Boratto is a creative, empathetic, entrepreneurial and results-driven multilingual communications professional, well versed in global brand identity and product management as well as hands-on implementation of 360° corporate communication strategies, marketing campaigns, media relations, corporate social responsibility, and crisis PR.

Boratto has extensive international experience in a senior marketing & communications role within highly diversified industry matrix organizations (consulting, bio/pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, chemicals), working with cross-functional teams spread all over the world (China, Europe, India, Japan, South Korea, Thailand, UAE and the United States).

While working in Italy for Accenture – a publicly listed company global leader in strategy and IT consulting services – she contributed to the development of functional specifications related to customization/enhancement of the ERP software SAP R3 (QM, WM, MM modules) for the firm's client, CNH Industrial. As the company's Marketing & Communication Engineer at Ceramicx Ireland – a leading Irish manufacturer of infrared ceramic & quartz heating elements – she oversaw the agency team responsible for the brand repositioning of the company.

In 2008, she joined Datamars, a global leader in pet identification and reunification product solutions, headquartered in Switzerland. As Product Marketing Manager, she led the market analysis, project management and market launch of three new implantable microchips (FDA approved) and three new RFID readers (from initial concept to final delivery), on a global scale.
In 2015, Boratto then took up the opportunity to move into the specialty chemicals industry and was hired by SONGWON Industrial Group, the world's largest producer of polymer stabilizers. While there as Director Global Marketing & Communications, her role also entailed invigorating brand identity through a corporate rebranding project, powerful communication strategies and dynamic offline and digital collateral designed to incorporate organizational personality, purpose, vision, mission and values, and build a long-lasting awareness in the market.

A Member of the European Association of Communication Directors (EACD), Boratto holds a Master's Degree in Industrial Engineering & Management from Polytechnic of Turin (Italy), one of the most prestigious public institutions at both the International and the Italian level concerning engineering education and research.

Timon Eiselt

Design thinking and its effect on employees

Investigating the value of design thinking in shaping job satisfaction and engaging employees

This research provides a deeper understanding of the effect the application of design thinking has on employee satisfaction and employee engagement job. Furthermore, it elaborates the effect design thinking has on employees' work attitude. Additionally, this research investigates what changed within an organization after the implementation of design thinking in the long run.

This research answers the following research question:

'How do employees associate the application of design thinking with their job satisfaction and work engagement?'

Importance of the topic
Design thinking as a working methodology exists already for many years and has its origin at Stanford university. Over the last few years, it became more and popular worldwide, was implemented by many different organizations and became even a buzzword. It became mainly so popular, because organizations have realized that is favorable to become more customer-focused and that it is of high importance to understand the customer perspective and especially the customer needs nowadays. Design thinking as a customer-centered and problem-solving approach is seen as the ideal method.

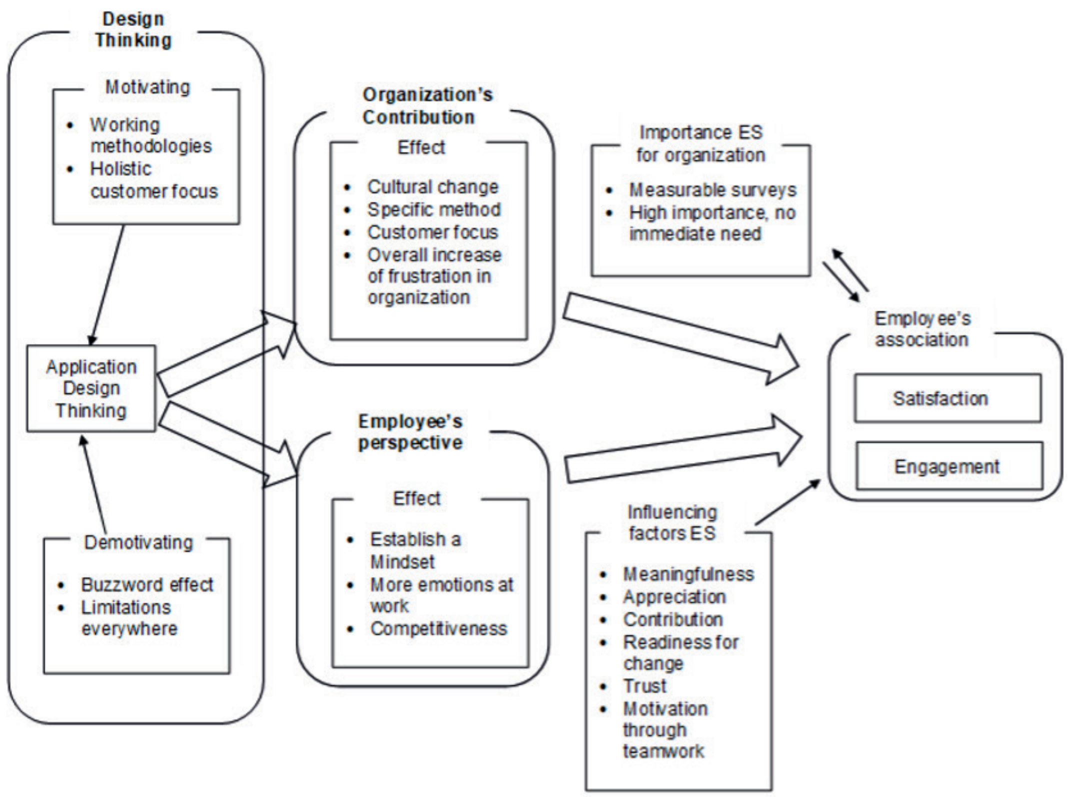
The existing literature provides various research regarding how design thinking can improve product development customer satisfaction. So far, there has no research been done in the field how design thinking might affect the employee satisfaction and engagement level. So, there is a clear gap in literature in this specific field and this research aims to fill this gap to a certain extend.

Data gathering and analysis
The research is building on qualitative data collection through in-depth interviews.The data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Due to the actual pandemic situation all the interviews were conducted online via MS Teams. Thanks to the agreement of all participants all interviews could be recorded as video and audio. For transcription the software amberscribt was used. Afterwards the thematic coding was applied and has the focus on identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning in qualitative data. The is composed of three different phases which are named as open, axial and selective coding.

Results
Based on a qualitative analysis, it can be concluded that design thinking has a positive effect on the satisfaction and engagement level, mainly due to increased motivation, a stimulated open & creative mindset, and the reinforced meaningfulness of the daily work. Design thinking might also increase the individual frustration level at work which is seen as a negative effect. This is mainly due to the fact of mainly two intern limitations like limited time resources and especially weak management support for the method. The results indicate that the majority of organizations implementing design thinking are not fully aware about the extent of an implementation and underestimate

it. This has the consequence that the design thinking methodology cannot be implemented holistically, which has an effect on the quality but also on the motivation of the employees. One of the key results of this research shows, that a majority of employees is looking for a diverse working environment connected with creativity and fun. The design thinking as methodology is suitable to fulfill and cover these employee expectations.

The following conceptual model represents the key results of the research:



Recommendation for further research

First of all, it is recommended that organizations rethink the way measuring employee satisfaction and engagement, since employees are not completely satisfied with the way of measuring it. Another recommendation is to explore an effective way of measuring the effect of design thinking to become more representative. So far, no widely acknowledged measuring exists. In addition, it is highly suggested to further investigate on how design thinking could be applied in an appropriate way in organizations. The goal of a further research could be to create a framework to check if an organization meets all criteria and should start applying design thinking. This will contribute to enhancing the knowledge on how to apply design thinking in a full range in the corporate world.

Biography

Timon Eiselt

Timon Eiselt (1986) is a very internationally oriented marketing & communications professional with a strong background in key account and partnership management.

Born and raised in Switzerland, the researcher, after graduating from high school left his hometown to follow its passion aviation and studied Aviation Management at Internationale Hochschule Bad Honnef (IUBH) in Germany.

During his practice-oriented studies he was already involved in various Lufthansa Group (LHG) projects. After graduation, he returned to Switzerland and started his aviation career at Swiss International Air Lines in Sales and after a short time moved on to the Revenue Management department. His career took its course, he became a Senior Pricing Analyst and later on a Strategy & Commercial Development Manager. This is where he realized he wants to further expand his communication skills and decided to start the master's program at Rotterdam School of Management. He started his studies as a 'communication beginner' and now graduates as a communications expert since he could already apply various insights of the different courses in his workday.

Currently, Timon is working as a marketing & communication specialist for Swiss Travel System, which is a joint venture of the Swiss Tourism Board and the Swiss Federal Railways.

If you would like to get in touch with Timon, you can find him on Linkedin.

Yasmine Farissi

Communication in a crisis

Perception of corporate communications and corporate social responsibility, among different stakeholders, during a socio-economic crisis regarding a company that mostly profit from that crisis; the case of Albert Heijn.

The COVID-19 pandemic is an ongoing pandemic and led to a worldwide socio-economic crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic is the biggest pandemic in the history. This crisis was partly unexpected and there was not a way to really prepare for this. There has been done a lot of research about crisis, what to do in a crisis and crisis communication. However, with a crisis that hits everybody in a different way and is relatively new there is an existing gap in literature into understanding the importance of corporate and crisis communication and the impact of corporate social responsibility in a crisis that effects all organizations and people. The study that is conducted is focusing on corporate communication and CSR of an organization in a socio-economic crisis which the organization is financially benefitting from.

To this objective, the general research question is addressed as follows:

'How do different stakeholders, specifically consumers and employees, perceive corporate communications and corporate social responsibility during a socio-economic crisis, regarding a company that mostly profits from that crisis: the case of Albert Heijn.'

The formulated sub-questions are:

- How do consumers and employees make sense of a socio-economic crisis?
- What corporate communication strategies can be applied during a socio-economic crisis, and how are they perceived by employees and consumers?
- How do employees and consumers perceive the urgency and importance of CSR strategies during a social-economic crisis?
- For a company which profited from a socio-economic crisis, how are the values of their corporate communication and CSR strategies recognized by employees and consumers?

Literature

Corporate communication, especially in a crisis context, is of essential importance to survive and develop. Over the last few years, CSR has become a part of corporate communication. More and more stakeholders expect organizations to communicate their social contribution in a strategic manner to earn and retain legitimacy. Different studies confirm that the role an organization has in society is a big part of corporate structure and corporate communication

Research approach

In order to answer the research questions, the research of this study was divided into desk research and field research. The desk research was done through literature review examining the definition of a socio-economic crisis and the fundamentals of corporate communication and corporate social responsibility. Based on these findings a conceptual theoretical framework was developed.

For the field research twenty-six semi-structured interviews were conducted with several employees and customers of different cities in the Netherlands. The intent of the interviews was to understand the importance of corporate communication and the impact of corporate social responsibility during a crisis for employees and consumers from Albert Heijn. A thematic analysis approach was used to provide an open and selective process to analysis the data.

Findings

Both stakeholders stated that the organizations corporate communication was received well. The organizations communication was quick, clear, accessible and transparent. Data shows that the corporate communication strategy was received as it was intended to be. The main message the organization wanted to communicate was to stay safe and keep each other safe, this message was received by all the consumers that participated in the interview.

Both stakeholders agreed that Albert Heijn always has a corporate social responsibility, they believed that the organization fulfilled that responsibility, but all stakeholders had a different view on what the organization did to be socially responsible.

One of the conclusions was that the organizational CSR was not received well. The overall conclusion was that, considering the circumstances around the COVID-19 crisis, Albert Heijn did very good. For all the stakeholders it did not make a difference that Albert Heijn financially profited from the crisis.

Recommendations

Based on the previously elaborated Albert Heijn is recommended to make the following adjustments:

- According to employees the crisis learned the organization to communicate quickly and adjust easy. However, communication was fast it was received as very personal. This was perceived very well by all its employees and should continue in the future.
- All stakeholders claim that measures varied per store. This was received as unpleasant and unclear by both employees and consumers. Albert Heijn should ensure that in the same city, the same measures apply so that it is clear to the customer what is expected of them when entering a store. Consistency is key in communication.
- According to the Marketing and Communication director, different channels were used for marketing communication. The only communication that was perceived by all stakeholders was the communication that was done in the stores. In the future the organization could measure this intermediate and if necessary change its strategy.
- All stakeholders have a different view of the CSR strategy of the organization. The data showed that the CSR strategy was not clear. Albert Heijn should communicate the CSR strategy more visible and clearer.

Biography

Yasmine Farissi

I graduated in 2013 from the Rotterdam Business School and earned my Bachelor in Business Administration. After my studies I followed multiple talent programs at Albert Heijn. These programs have helped me discover what I find important and what I stand for. The different skills that I've developed over the past years during these talent programs helped me being the best version of myself. I have worked in different roles at Albert Heijn. At this moment I'm a Supermarket Manager. In my role I'm the linking pin between customers and employees. Together with my employees I try to fulfill customers expectations.

I'm an all-round leader with the believe that communication is the beginning of every success. I strongly believe that a good commutation strategy is key to get your people on board. By empowering your employees with effective communication strategies, they will be better equipped to deliver the organizations purpose to your consumers. One of the reasons I chose to follow this MSc in Corporate Communication was to challenge myself by improving my communication skills as a leader.

My belief is that change is good, but also inevitable. In both my personal and business life, change is a constant factor. Changes provoke me to reverse thinking and get the most out of myself.

In my spare time I like to travel, explore new places and discover more of the world.

To contact Yasmine, please visit her LinkedIn profile: www.linkedin.com/in/yasminefarissi.

Monika Kövecs

How power distance influences the effect of transformational leadership style on brand-strengthening employee behaviour

In recent years, the conventional way to define brands has been challenged by the raise of social media. It is not only brand managers who define a brand strategy, but various stakeholders must be included in the process and participate in the development. This research reports on contextual dependence of brand-strengthening employee behaviour initiated by transformational leadership style in a co-creation process.

During early efforts, the organizations focused almost exclusively on customers when building the brand. However to build strong brands also other stakeholders should be brought into the branding process. This thesis reports on contextual dependence of brand-strengthening employee behaviour initiated by transformational leadership style in a co-creation process. In the process of co-creation, the leadership style is of crucial importance to orchestrate employee brand-oriented behaviour and to turn employees into fans to bring the brand alive (Ind & Schmidt, 2019).

In view of context, organizations with low power distance may have a different approach to motivate the employees for emotional involvement, than organizations with high power distance. Thus, in a lower power distance versus a high-power distance organizational context transformational leadership style may have different influence on brand-oriented employee behaviour (Den Hartog et al., 1999).

The central research question guiding the study was:

'To what extent does power distance influence brand-strengthening employee behaviour created by transformational leadership style?'

Using quantitative analyses by conducting an online survey with engineering professionals as participants some hypothesized effects were tested. (see Figure 1)

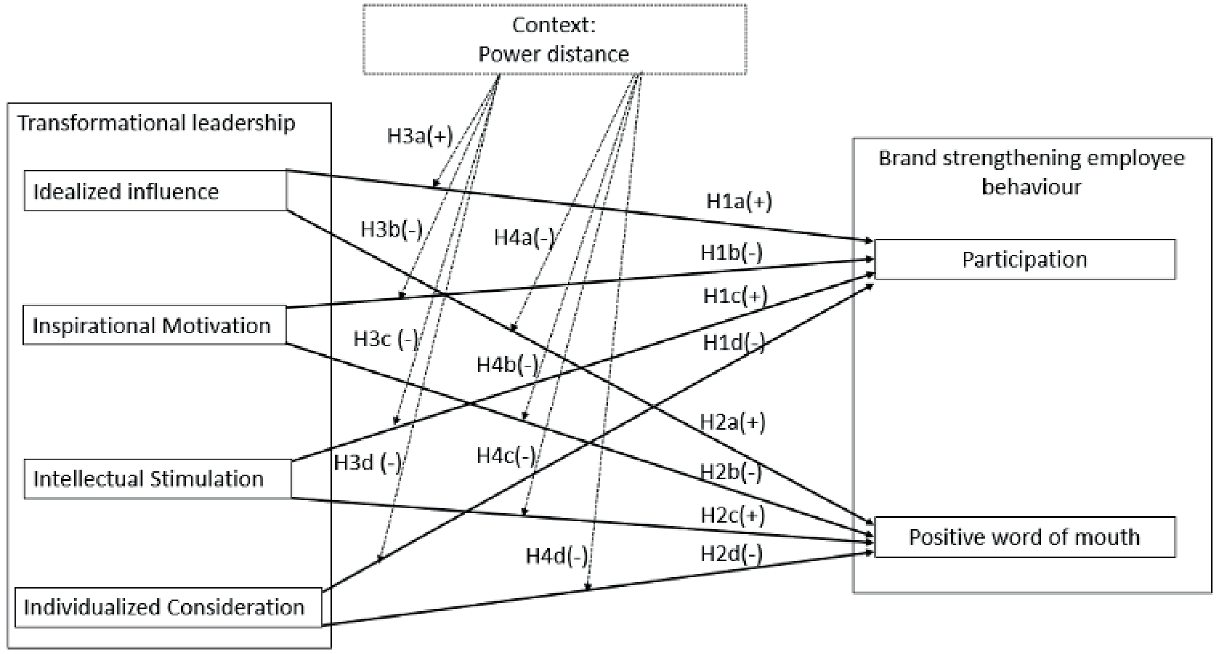


Figure 1 Overall conceptual framework

The results first show that Idealized influence is positively associated with brand-strengthening employee participation. Thus, it can be suggested leaders who act as a role model by authentically living brand values and brand promises in the daily work life positively influence employees to also live the brand.

The results also show a positive association between Intellectual stimulation and brand-strengthening employee participation. Thus, employees feel encouraged to reframe their jobs from the perspective of a brand. The employees feel empowered and supported by their leaders to interpret the brand promise. These findings overlap with results from Morhart (2017), Shaari and Hussin (2015) which suggest that transformational leadership and transactional leadership must be carefully orchestrated by managers to bring the brand to life at customer touch points by turning employees into fans.

The results show a positive association between Intellectual stimulation and brand-strengthening positive word of mouth employee behaviour. Thus, with an intellectually stimulating leader employees take over responsibility from the management for the brand and engage in extra efforts to strengthen the image of the brand to which their own identity is tied by positive word of mouth (Morhart, 2017).

Secondly, power distance only moderated the association between Idealized Influence and brand strengthening employee participation. It appears a dysfunctional dependency can develop between these variables, namely when the leader leaves the organization, employees lack clear orientation. Idealized Influence as charismatic element may in this case foster a potentially unhealthy dependence on the leader (Kark et al., 2003). Particularly in the context of brand-oriented leadership, managers need to actively channel the emotional commitment they trigger in employees, so that employees do not identify only with the person but first and foremost with the brand (Morhart, 2017).

This practically means, that leaders can influence how the brand is built by creating a collective sense of mission and by reassuring the obstacles will be overcome. Also, the encouragement of the employees to try their ideas and not to criticize those will have a positive effect.

The thesis also describes several limitations of the current research and suggestions for future studies e.g., to consider additional moderato variables.

Biography

Monika Kövecs

Monika graduated from Vienna Technical University in Austria as an Engineer in Technical Chemistry and began her career as Patent examiner at the European Patent Office in Rijswijk in 2004. After passing the European Qualification Examination in 2010 to be fit in Patent Law, Monika developed interest in Management. To gain a solid background as a manager she completed the RSM Diploma Programme in Business Management and Leadership in 2014.

Acting as a line manager of patent professionals she realized that communication is crucial for the success of an organization.

That is why she decided to follow the MSc programme in Corporate Communication in 2020. Her main interests are persuasive leadership styles, co-creation and branding.

In her free time, she likes to swim, go to the Opera and to listen to her children performing on the clarinet, violin and piano.

She lives with her French partner Dominique and daughters Lorelei and Rose in The Hague, Netherlands.

To contact Monika, please visit her LinkedIn profile: https://www.linkedin.com/in/monika-kövecs/

Kaen Loos-Gelijns

The battle for the narrative

A strategic communication framework for military operations

In modern warfare, strategic communication is considered the most effective response to contemporary propaganda. Modern conflicts involve a battle of perceptions in which strategic communication is the main weapon of persuasion to shape opinions, attitudes, and ultimately behavior. However, there is minimal theoretical development in the literature on how to use communication as a weapon. Despite the clear need to develop a thorough understanding, policy, and framework for how to influence people through targeted operations, military strategic communication remains a largely unexplored field.

This thesis examined what makes strategic communication in military operations persuasive. In other words, how can we achieve military effects in support of given objectives by informing or influencing target audiences. In addition, this thesis examined the building blocks of strategic communication and how they can be integrated into a strategic communication framework for military operations. The outcome of this research is based on an extensive literature review on propaganda, strategic communication, military strategic communication and the information environment, as well as expert interviews with some of the most renowned international experts in the field of military strategic communication and behavioral change.

The result of the study shows that strategic communication in military operations is all about influencing people. It is about inducing a change in behavior in a target audience to achieve an effect. This requires a thorough knowledge of the cognitive domain of the information environment, and makes target audience analysis the cornerstone of strategic communication, as it identifies the most effective levers to pull and uncovers root causes. Both target audience analysis and the other defining elements, are explained and integrated into a strategic communication framework for military operations. The framework describes the different phases of strategic communication and what it is intended to achieve.

The results of this research shows that strategic communication can provide a non-kinetic way to change the way people think and act in a theatre of operations and can be a real game changer for military operations.

Biography

Karen Loos-Gelijns

Naval commander Karen Loos-Gelijns has been involved with media, information and communication for more than two decades. First as a military journalist, and then in a variety of posts as spokesperson and senior communication manager at the NL Ministry of Defence.

During her time as a military journalist, she travelled the globe to report on the work of the armed forces. She reported on numerous exercises, humanitarian and military operations. In this period she travelled to Albania, Kosovo, Bosnia, the Caribbean, the Baltic States, Iraq, Pakistan, Ethiopia, China, Japan, Vietnam, Indonesia, and many other countries. Her stories focused on strategic importance of the deployment, but also on the (wo) men behind the mission.

In 2012 she was deployed off the Horn of Africa, as staff public affairs officer of the NATO anti-piracy mission Ocean Shield. From April 2014 till May 2018 she was the Chief Communications Officer of the Royal Netherlands Navy and the first female on the Admiralty Board. In this position she was responsible for strategic and crisis communication, public affairs and internal communication.

Since May 2018 Karen is the Commander of the Media Centre of the Ministry of Defence, where she leads a team of hundred communication professionals - like Combat Camera Teams, military journalists, editors and graphic designers - to produce all multi-media Defence news and communication publications.

Liliana Rodrigues dos Santos

How do consumers react to greenwashing facilitated by influencers

Planet Earth is facing a climate emergency. Scientists have long warned that 'an immense increase of scale in endeavours to conserve our biosphere is needed to avoid untold suffering due to the climate crisis' (Ripple et al., 2019). The 2021 report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) speaks clear language. Changes such as rising sea level, crossing global warming level of 1.5°C, and reaching critical thresholds for health and agriculture are only expected to accelerate, intensify and widespread over the next decades (IPCC, 2021). Radical action is required to reduce greenhouse emissions and reach net zero CO_2. For sustainability programs to have an authentic radical and sustained impact, all stakeholders in every industry must work towards the same ambitious outcome: a 2050 net-zero target.

This thesis researches the question of how and if consumers (critically) react to greenwashing as facilitated by influencers.

As an industry, fashion employs hundreds of millions of people and generates great economic value. At the same time, fashion is known as one of the most polluting and exploitative industries. The data is shocking. According to the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2017), '*every second, the equivalent of one garbage truck of textiles is landfilled or burned globally*'.

Motivated by the urgency of the climate crisis, the need to tackle this issue across industries, and considering the negative impact the fashion industry, in particular, has on the planet, it is crucial to investigate the relationships between greenwashing, the consumer's (critical) awareness of environmental sustainability and influencer marketing in fashion. The combination of these concepts has an impact on consumers' perceptions and on a company's opportunity to engage in environmental sustainability as a competitive advantage.

Fashion companies output numerous (un)ethical green claims and consumers can hardly differentiate authentic green claims from greenwashing.
If companies want their ethical sustainability programmes to have a positive and sustained impact as well as to resonate with consumers, then consumers must be able to distinguish ethical from non-ethical messaging in fashion. Therefore, studies continue to be needed to investigate if and how consumers can distinguish between green and greenwashing claims, how consumers react to greenwashing, and if they still believe and support authentic green claims or have become cynical of company's green efforts and claims.

In this day and age, influencers are paramount in promoting and selling garments. For this research, I have chosen a fashion campaign that backfired with the media and the consumers and one that didn't.

On April 22nd, 2021, fashion brand H&M announces Game of Thrones British celebrity Maisie Williams as their Global Sustainability Ambassador. In a forward-looking statement, H&M makes public that 'the actress joins the brand to work towards H&M's goal of using only recycled or other sustainability sourced materials by 2030'. The goal of the partnership is described as, 'to encourage the reuse, remaking, and recycling of unwanted garments with the aim of creating a more circular fashion model' (H&M, 2021).

This announcement is met by consumers with criticism. Six days after, on April 28th, 2021, in what is an unexpected development, the World Wild Fund (WWF) publicly announces actor Maisie Williams as its first WWF Global Ambassador for Climate and Nature (Webwire, 2021).

Earlier on April 14th, 2021, fashion brand Pepe Jeans, of global fashion group AWWG, announced a two-year collaboration with Brooklyn Beckham, son of British ex-footballer David Beckham. Pepe Jeans launched Wiser Future, a sustainable denim campaign, for which Brooklyn Beckham acted as an ambassador, photographer and model.

Throughout this thesis, I investigate how consumers' perception of greenwashing can vary. Findings from an online and social media search and analysis, show that these campaigns were perceived very differently; only one campaign was perceived by the media and consumers as greenwashing.

In short, this thesis analyses a fast-fashion greenwashing campaign that backfired in the media and with consumers and one that didn't and seeks to understand the reasons why that is, as the reason(s) for public outburst for one of the campaigns is not immediately clear.

How can two greenwashing campaigns be perceived so differently? Is it the campaign messaging? Is it the choice of an influencer? Is it the company's reputation? And what does this say about the ways we are trying to achieve impact? These are the questions this thesis seeks to answer.

I conclude with a few practical recommendations for communication professionals drawn from the empirical findings, on how they can leverage (authentic) environmental sustainability campaigns and programmes so to gain a competitive advantage and have a positive sustainable impact on the planet.

Among the most relevant, it is recommended to build relationships and trust with all stakeholders, including high environmental knowledge and concern groups, be it they are consumers of the brand or not; to counsel on, find opportunities, manage and learn from relevant values-led, sustainability-focused collaborations; to manage, build and co-create the sustainability storytelling of the brand and its influencer partnerships with stakeholders; to formulate green goals that are measurable and graspable for the consumer and, to stay the course, be consistent and lead with green-focused campaigns instead of changing topics from one campaign to the next.

Research Questions

- *What are the reasons why some greenwashing campaigns facilitated by influencers result in backlash in the media and social media and others don't?*
- *What are the risks and opportunities linked to using influencers in conveying a firm's environmental messaging?*
- *What are recommended communication tactics when using influencers for a company to gain support in the media and social media for their (authentic) environmental programme?*

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Biography

Liliana Rodrigues dos Santos

Liliana Rodrigues dos Santos is a Marketing and Public Relations Consultant who has lived and worked in six different countries and speaks five different languages. Throughout her career, Liliana has worked for private and public organisations, including a tech company, a design studio, a contemporary art gallery and a start-up.

After graduating in Art History at the University Nova of Lisbon, Liliana took on international roles in Public Relations in the creative industry. Along this journey, she headed the PR and Marketing at an international design agency credited with over 1.900 projects for premium clients around the globe. From the agency side, Liliana worked with brands Louis Vuitton, Starbucks Reserve and SBE hospitality i.a. to launch exclusive collections internationally.

As a Marketing and PR Consultant, Liliana currently works at a marketing agency on corporate accounts in commercial real estate, life sciences and lifestyle. Liliana has been growing into an all-round and experienced corporate communication professional and continues, through work and study, to build a background in ESG.

In her free time, Liliana enjoys doing sports, visiting art exhibitions, travelling and spending time with family and friends. She is happiest when she gets to learn new things and has thoughtful conversations with people.

Szilvana Spett

Can media companies benefit from Blockchain?

The media industry is facing challenges due to digitalization. Media outlets are struggling to cope with fake news, misinformation, and conspiracies. Technology platforms have so far not been successful in their attempts to adequately prevent the dissemination of misinformation. Hence, public trust in the media is at an all-time low.

In the recent years blockchain technology has gained popularity for creating more trust and transparency in the digital world. Research suggests that it could solve some of the problems facing the media industry. In my paper, I endeavor to understand whether the benefits of blockchain suggested by researchers are executable in the real world, or if it is just another hype, which is ultimately too good to be true.

Research Question

My main research question in this paper is the following:

'Can media companies benefit from the use of blockchain?'

Theory

Existing literature points out four main use cases of blockchain in the media industry. These are related to combating fake news, securing intellectual property rights, creating new payment structures, and facilitating new business models. On the other hand, existing literature also points out challenges connected to the use of blockchain. These include privacy issues, problems with accountability, lack of standardization, high energy consumption, and the complexity of the technology.

I use the Theory Acceptance Model (TAM) proposed by Davis in 1985 as my conceptual model. According to TAM, there are two key factors that determine the usage decision when users are presented with a new technology. One is the perceived usefulness (PU) and the other one the perceived ease of use (PEOU). In the conceptual model, I fill these two variables with arguments from existing literature and later compare them with my findings.

Methodology

The paper follows an exploratory approach. My goal is not to provide conclusive evidence, but to facilitate a better understanding of the potential of blockchain technology for the media industry. According to Saunders and Lewis (2017), exploratory studies are well suited to qualitative methods such as semi- and unstructured interviews. I used semi-structured interviews in this paper. I selected six interview participants using purposive sampling and the snowball technique. To analyze the transcribed interviews, I use the approach of grounded theory as suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967).

Findings
My findings partially confirm arguments suggested by existing literature. Most interview participants were thinking about using blockchain to fight misinformation and fake news. However, only very few of them reached the implementation phase. My results suggest that especially in the case of fighting misinformation, blockchain may not be necessary. Other, less energy-heavy distributed ledger technologies also do the job.

To properly mirror my results, I added two additional variables to the TAM model: Social influence and financial means. The arguments mentioned by interviewees indicate, that besides PU and PEOU these two factors also played role in the ultimate decision on the use of blockchain. Social influence mainly relates to the hype around the technology in the time between 2017 and 2019. Financial means relate to the lack of financing a lot of blockchain startups faced, which ultimately lead them to discontinue their project.

Conclusion
All in all, results indicate that the initial hype around blockchain in the media industry has cooled off. Only a few projects have reached the implementation phase. And even in those cases, blockchain was often replaced by less energy-heavy distributed ledger technologies. These latter projects are mainly driven by big media companies rather than small startups. The most promising one seems to be Project Origin. Project Origin is an alliance of four companies: CBC/Radio Canada, BBC, New York Times, and Microsoft. They are working on developing a way to prove the provenance and technical integrity of media content. Project Origin has partly merged with another initiative called Coalition for Content Provenance and Authenticity (C2PA). C2PA is an alliance between Adobe, Arm, Intel, Microsoft, and Truepic. It develops the technical standards, which will also be the foundation of the Project Origin idea.

While blockchain seems less useful for fighting misinformation, it may be useful in other contexts in the media industry: Despite the many discontinued projects most of the participants still see a future for blockchain technology. They think that the problem around energy consumption will be solved as the technology matures. They mainly see blockchain as useful in cases where a higher security level is needed. In the media industry, this could for instance be paying contributors with digital tokens or other transactions related to a digital value.

Recommendations
Before starting any project in the area of blockchain I would like to encourage media companies to acknowledge that despite the hype around blockchain, the technology is not a solution for any issue. In many cases in the context of media applications, the security level offered by blockchain simply is not necessary. In such cases, I would urge media companies to consider alternative solutions such as a private distributed ledger with a limited number of participants. In turn, this would offer the added benefit of decreased energy usage. It is also important to look at other solutions provided by bigger tech companies and buy them as a service before thinking about building any solution in-house. I would like to encourage media companies to closely follow the development and improvements of blockchain. As the technology matures further, additional areas of implementation may emerge.

Biography

Szilvana Spett

Seeing different parts of the world has always been my passion. I was born in Hungary but have lived in multiple countries, including Austria, Switzerland, South Africa, and Brazil.

After growing up bilingually with Hungarian and German, I went to study in Vienna and Switzerland. I completed my bachelor’s degree in Political Science and English Literature at the University of Bern. But life led me to work in journalism. My love for the media industry has its roots in an internship in Zurich.

I have now been working as a journalist and later chief editor for the past seven years at the new agency Café Europe Nachrichtenagentur in Switzerland. There I focus on topics connected to the economy, politics, and innovation. Working with daily news is like an addiction for me. Hence, so far, I have never thought about changing jobs.

However, I also witnessed the shift from traditional newspapers to digital media. While this shift is challenging, I also find it extremely interesting. The future of the media industry excites me. I want to explore new business models and implement technological innovations.

Therefore, I will now put the ‘pen’ aside and leave journalistic tasks to talented colleagues. The next challenge for me will be related to business development at Café Europe.

Arie Spruit

Facing red hot socio-political issues: what are schools to do?

Brand activism occurs when organizations take public stances on controversial social and political issues (Kotler and Sarkar, 2017). It has also been described as an up-and-coming marketing tactic for brands that want to stand out in the crowd (Moorman, as cited by Vredenburg, 2020).

This is a topic that many organizations are struggling with. Practice shows that communication professionals, quite often acting as the social antenna of the organization, can play a crucial role in dealing with these controversial issues. Like the communications and marketing departments at Nike, that decided to use its massive campaigning power to support American football player Colin Kaepernick's protest against racial inequality.

Recent research strongly focuses on the possible positive and negative effects of brand activism when used by commercial consumer brands in the US like Nike, Unilever and Patagonia. Whereas the boards of non-profit organizations are dealing with the same controversial issues. This thesis focuses on brand activism in the non-profit sector aimed at members from the generational cohort of Gen-Z. The central research question of this thesis is:

'Which elements of brand activism by non-profits have a positive effect on the brand attitude of members of the Gen-Z target group?'

Empirical study at Zadkine

Based on the literature study four hypotheses are developed to test the effect of the independent variables of brand-cause fit and perceived authenticity on the dependent variable brand attitude. Second, the moderating effect of issue involvement is tested. The focus of the study is narrowed down to the context of a specific non-profit: Zadkine, an educational organization in the city of Rotterdam that offers over 200 vocational courses to approximately 12.000 students.

Results

A survey presenting a fictional example of social brand activism was completed by 112 students of Zadkine. The findings and results of its quantitative analysis reject three of the four hypotheses, meaning that the expected effects from earlier studies cannot be convincingly confirmed by the study of the sample group of this thesis. The results do however confirm that higher levels of perceived authenticity induce a significantly more positive brand attitude amongst members of Gen-Z. The analysis also shows that issue involvement does not have the expected moderating effect, but a direct positive effect on brand attitude.

Potential influencers of brand attitude

Conclusively, this thesis shows that the elements of perceived authenticity of company statements and the level of issue involvement have the potential to positively influence the brand attitude of members of the Gen-Z. For Zadkine, the finding and results are a useful starting point for further investigation of its student's perspectives on controversial issues.

The findings and results of this study add more insight to the existing studies about the effects of brand activism aimed at members of Gen-Z and the effects in a non-profit context. Clearly, the construct of brand activism offers a lot of opportunities for further research. Further research will be crucial to help brand activism to reach a more mature phase.

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Biography

Arie Spruit

Arie Spruit (1980) is an experienced and all-round marketing & communication professional with a great passion for external communication and issues- and reputation management. After completing a bachelor program Creative Communications at Inholland University of Applied Sciences in 2004 he started his communications career at a subsidiary of Dutch energy company Eneco. Since then he has had a number of different communication roles, ranging from marketing communications and event management to internal communications and employer branding at different parts of the company.

In 2014 he joined the corporate communications team at Eneco's Rotterdam headquarters as a spokesperson and PR- and issues manager. In the years following he helped to expand Eneco's media presence as an innovative and sustainable player in the energy transition, while dealing with a number of complex stakeholder issues. In 2020, after 15 years in the energy sector, he took up a new challenge and switched to Zadkine, a large vocational school with many locations in the greater Rotterdam area. At Zadkine he currently combines the position of marketing communications team with the role of corporate spokesperson and PR manager.

According to Arie, being able to building good internal and external relationships is the most crucial element of the communication profession. During his career he has always tried to build his own relationships by being as accessible as possible while maintaining a sense of humor in every situation. Arie lives with his wife and three children in his hometown of Ridderkerk.

Merlijn Stoffels

Framing for the good cause

The relationship between frames and mechanisms for giving

Millions of Dutch people are actively involved with charity organizations to make society healthier, fairer, and more sustainable. They do that because they are socially committed, and in most cases without direct reward or consideration. In the Netherlands alone private donors give yearly about 1.5 million euros to charitable organizations. Unfortunately, these results are no guarantee for the future. During the coronacrisis almost all organizations lost income, it proved once again the vulnerability of the charitable sector. In addition, charities have been affected for years by declining subsidies from governments. Research shows that these gaps can only be filled in by private donors. This emphasizes the importance for aid organizations to more successfully engage with them. 'Framing for a good cause', is the title of this research. The question is if charity organizations are reaching the (future) donors at the right time with the right message? And if they consider the reasons why the most generous people in Europe, the Dutch, want to help? In short, the answer is no.

Literature

This research will build on the basic theoretical framework as established by Mirjam Vossen, Baldwin van Gorp, René Bekkers and Pamala Wiepking. They respectively examined the 'frames' that aid organizations use and the 'mechanisms for giving'. In their research "In search of the pathetic victim" (2016), Vosse and van Gorp made a frame analysis of how media and NGOs communicate in text and images about victims of disasters.

The researchers came up with four categories to distinguish the frames from each other:

- the victim;
- progress;
- social justice;
- bad governance.

In their research, Bekkers and Wiepking came up with eight mechanisms that encourage donors to give to charities.

According to them, it is about:

- the awareness of the need for help;
- the request for assistance;
- costs and benefits;
- altruism;
- reputation;
- psychological benefits;
- value;
- impact.

This theoretical framework is used in this thesis as the basis for the qualitative research.

Research

The researcher interviewed employees, who work or have worked for charity organization, about their experience with the use of frames and the giving mechanisms. They work for humanitarian organizations an animal health- and nature conservation organizations. The assumption of the researcher is that most charitable organizations have not consciously chosen to tell the story from the perspective of one or more frames. He also expects that the organizations have not chosen to focus in their communication one or more intrinsic motivations of donors to donate. Another option is to combine those two and choose frames that are appealing for the groups selected based on the mechanisms of giving. The expectation of the researcher is that the effect of this way of working will be that the communication will be more effective. The (potential) donors would feel more involved with the organizations and therefore be more willing to donate.

Findings

The research shows that the organizations have not captured the frames and mechanisms of giving. The management leaves it mostly to the individual employees to decide what 'frame' to use or what 'mechanism to give' to focus on. Another conclusion is that the 'victim frame', in which the victim is portrayed as pathetic and helpless, is by no means something that belongs to the past. On the other hand, the charities are more than ever aware of their contribution to the image of people in poor countries. Yet still fundraising campaigns exist with images of starving children presented without any kind of context. As a result, the image persists that development countries are still totally relying on the superior countries in the West. And the people in these countries are portrayed as defenseless victims of disasters who are doomed without help or intervention from the white humanitarian workers. Of course, there is much more diversity and nuance in the image's humanitarian organizations are presenting in their campaigns nowadays, but there is still a world to win.

This research also shows that more and more organizations are opting for frames that focus on progress and social justice. Magic words that are used by many organizations are 'show them in their strength' and 'show not the victim but the helping hand'.

The question is whether the willingness to donate can be further increased if you know as an organization what the motivations the donors to contribute. And what happens if you approach the selected donors with stories and frames that resonate with the reasons why they want to help. For example, are the potential donors more touched by the stories of the victims, or do they prefer to see strong people who need a helping hand to overcome the disaster? Based on the research results, we can cautiously answer this question with a 'yes'. By combining giving mechanisms and the frames you can ensure that your message reaches the target group, and this would have a positive effect on revenue. This is the experience of the aid organizations who have experimented with this way of working.

Recommendations

According to this research the goals of charity organizations can be better met if people's intrinsic motivations to give, the so-called 'mechanisms of giving', are addressed in communication and fundraising. And if organizations also opt for a narrative which seamlessly connects with the perception of the chosen target groups, the effectiveness of the communication could be increased even further. More research is of course needed to further substantiate this, but the first results seem hopeful. It would be worthwhile for charity organizations to start experimenting with this approach as well. Not only for individual givers, but also to convince large donors, companies, and institutions to support the charities. Hopefully this will be part of the solution to fight the dwindling support for charitable organizations. The support that the charities so desperately need to achieve their goals; to ease the suffering and make the world a better place to live.

Biography

Merlijn Stoffels

Merlijn Stoffels (1977) considers himself as storyteller, a corporate communications professional but above all a doing gooder. As a journalist at the Dutch Broadcasting Foundation (NOS) he got acquainted with the secrets of politics, foreign affairs, and crime. In that role, he could report about the challenges people were facing for which solutions had to be found. When he switched from the news business to the humanitarian aid sector, his network and research skills helped him to stand up for the most vulnerable people again. Experience also enabled him to prevent or mitigate reputation risks and to strengthen the brand by revealing stories of interest to the public.

In the last ten years, Merlijn has travelled around the globe to emphasize the need to assist people affected by disasters or conflicts as a helping hand to give them the strength to take back control of their lives and make them more resilient for upcoming disasters.

As a manager, he has empowered Red Cross communication experts nationally and internationally with skill share trainings. In the Netherlands, he and his team are responsible for media relations and online- and public communications. A newsroom was created to be able to reach the audience 24-hours per day with relevant stories. Together with the departments lobby, marketing- and fundraising campaigns were developed to engage with potential donors and voluteers and to advocate for a better life for the most vulnerable people in the world.

The five things Merlijn believes in as a communications professional: teamspirit, multichannel communication, engaging content, innovativity and social inclusion. With the theoretical knowledge Merlijn has gained, by completing the Executive Master in Corporate Communications, he will be able to perform better as a communications manager. And last but not least he will have the toolkit to step up as an advisor to the board of directors.

Anouk Sülter-Posthumus

Research powered by communication

A case study on the communication strategy of Dutch autonomous operating applied research institutes.

The Dutch government stated the ambition that science needs to be more connected to society and should have maximum impact. The Dutch Organization for Scientific Research (NOW) announced appraisal and financial reward for institutes that create impact. At the same time, only 4 to 8% of Dutch researchers spend time on transferring knowledge (Koens, Hofman and De Jonge, 2018)[1].

Why don't researchers spend more time distributing their information to anyone that might be interested? And why don't they aim for the results to be comprehensible to everyone, with or without a scientific background? Isn't research meant to inform and inspire, so paradigms can be shifted and knowledge can be used in practice? These questions inspired us to take a closer look at the communication drives, efforts and results of researchers. Especially those of applied research institutes, since their results in particular are meant to have impact on society.

Comparing three applied research institutes

This study focused on applied research institutes that operate autonomous, because most institutes aren't part of, for instance, an university or governmental organization. In this research we call these organizations autonomous operating applied research institutes: AOARIs. We aimed to find out whether AOARIs even wish to pursue a communication strategy to create impact on society, how they actually perform and what barriers and incentives they encounter.

We spoke to three AOARIs, with different types of funding: the first AOARI is fully subsidized, the second one acquires funding from paid assignments, the third AOARI is 'hybrid' (initially relying on paid assignments, but now also carrying out a long-term subsidized project). Of each AOARI we interviewed a scientist, a manager and a communication advisor (except for the AOARI that doesn't employ a communication adviser).

Communication is important, but difficult in practice

All AOARIs we spoke to stated that they think communication is a great way for their research to create impact on society. Their preferred strategy seems to be to interact with stakeholders about their research, instead of only informing them. Subsidized AOARIs – the institute as a whole as well as the sub-institute – seem the most active and interactive communicators. They told us they are quite willing to allocate time and funding for communication. Does this mean we can see a flourishing amount of communication activities in practice? Unfortunately not. AOARIs relying on paid assignments appear to be more hesitant communicators. Besides that, all AOARIs we spoke said in reality they experience difficulties communicating. At best they were sometimes informing and only occasionally interacting with stakeholders. It seems the level of communication of AOARIs in general isn't as high as they like it to be. Therefore, we conclude that the main question isn't whether AOARIs think communication is important (they think it is), nor which strategy they like to use (to inform or to interact). But rather how to make AOARIs more active communicators in general.

What are the barriers for each type of funding?

There appear to be barriers that are so powerful that the most basic, informational communication activities already constitute a challenge. The AOARIs we spoke all said their researchers are responsible for the communication activities regarding the research

1. Koens, L., Hofman R., & de Jonge, J. (2018). Drijfveren van onderzoekers. Goed onderzoek staat nog steeds voorop. Den Haag: Rathenau Instituut project. We asked them – and their managers and communication advisers – what barriers specifically prevent their researchers from communicating as much or in the way they would like to. Their answers differed and again, it seems the type of funding is of influence. A short overview of what we heard, written from the perspective of the researchers:

- **Subsidized AOARIs:** We are in charge of our budget in general. We can determine by ourselves the height of the communication budget, as well as how we spend it specifically. But still, many times no (significant) part of the budget is allocated for communication. We usually feel we don't have the time to communicate properly. And, to be honest, we also feel a personal reluctance. Either because we don't want to be in the limelight or because we don't know how to do it right (i.e. to use social media, how to manage press so they will publish a nuanced story or how to write condensed information).

- **AOARIs relying on paid assignments:**
Communication isn't usually part of a research project, not in focus and time nor in budget.
We let our client decide about our communication efforts. Because they own the research and we wish to maintain a good relationship in case of future assignments. And that is okay, because many of us feel some reluctance to communicate. Also, since the budget doesn't provide any room for communication activities, we would be doing it in our own free time anyway. If we can find the time in general, because when a research is published, we've already started a new project.

Let's create more impact!
This case study is an exploratory research. Future research among a larger amount of AOARIs should determine whether the results of this study are applicable to AOARIs in general. If the results correspond, we need to think of ways to increase the communication activities of autonomous operating applied research institutes. For instance, we could try to get subsidy providers (like ZonMW) to make communication part of their subsidy demands. Researchers then are obliged as well as facilitated to undertake communication activities. We could also provide funding solely for creating impact, i.e. by the NWO. This enables AOARIs that rely on paid assignments to get paid for communication about research that was carried out at the request of their clients.

Biography

Anouk Sülter-Posthumus

For almost 20 years Anouk Sülter-Posthumus has provided communication advice to communication departments and board of directors, developed communication strategies and directed teams to produce various communication means. She has worked within communication agencies, as a freelance consultant and has been employed by non-profit organizations. Anouk has a broad experience in corporate communication and media handling of non-profit organizations and has lead account teams as well as communication departments. She loves her area of expertise, but she still can't choose: the communication business or to help her team members to achieve their potential within that business. So presumably, she will be happiest by continuing to do both. Anouk lives close to Amsterdam together with her husband Pim, their four children and their dog.

Chared Verschuur-Ballo

Wired to belong

Towards an internal communication framework that designs belongingness in the virtual workplace

The main objective of this research is to design a framework for employee experience where a sense of belongingness takes center stage. This research contributes to a large body of knowledge available on 'belonging at work' and helps fill the gap in literature on 'internal communication and belongingness in the virtual workplace'.

To achieve this objective, I sought to answer the question:

'Which internal communication strategies cultivate a sense of belongingness in the virtual workplace?'

If the coronavirus were a behavioural change campaign, it would have been the fastest ever, with results overnight. It compelled us to wash our hands regularly, wear masks and keep physical distance from loved ones and strangers alike. It sent us to stay indoors and work from home.

Challenges of working from home
Working from home provided its own challenges. Lockdowns demanded a lot from parents, as they navigated through working and parenting at the same time (Craig & Churchill, 2021). Socio-economic and gender equities were magnified (Collins et al., 2021) (Xue & McMunn, 2021). Workers, especially those who lived alone (Gao & Sai, 2020), felt isolated and stretched, taking a toll on their mental well-being (Cotofan et al., 2021) (Riguzzi & Gashi, 2021).
These challenges provided an opportunity for internal communication. With almost everyone working from home, organisations faced the challenge of engaging and motivating employees continuously.

Opportunity for internal communication
Before the COVID-19 pandemic, a new hire would socialise with colleagues during coffee breaks or at the watercooler. These spontaneous meetings at work are no longer possible when all meetings have moved to the virtual space. In the employee journey of a new hire during the coronavirus pandemic, various transitions are taking place: being part of a new organisation with new rules and processes and working with a new team which is physically elsewhere.

How would a new hire feel a sense of belongingness at work if the spontaneous touchpoints that make navigating a new job easier are no longer there? This study looked into internal communication strategies that cultivate a sense of belongingness in the workplace. It singled-out belonging since it has been known to contribute to workplace safety (Malone, 2016), well-being (Waller, 2020), sense of meaning (Schnell et al., 2019) and workplace productivity (BetterUp, 2020).

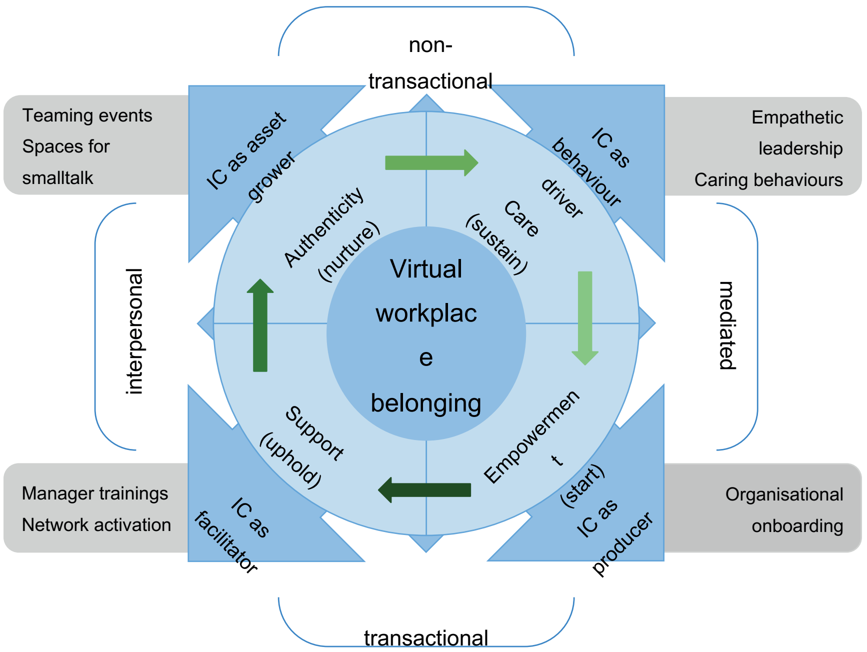
Methodology and data analysis
To achieve the study's main objective, 20 newly-hired employees and eight internal communication professionals were interviewed virtually using a semi-structured format. Interview questions were guided from the integrative framework for belongingness proposed by Allen, et al. (2021) and the factors that McClure and Brown (2008) mentioned in their research. To guide data analysis, the qualitative triangle presented by Khandar (2009) was used followed by the open, axial and selective coding techniques.

Findings and conclusions

The findings revealed that:

- There are four elements that design belongingness in the virtual workplace. These can be called Authenticity, Care, Empowerment and Support.
- Of these four components, IC can play a role in organisational onboarding, employee network activation, developing events where employees can have a sense of achievement together and advocate nurturing leadership.
- Line managers are vital in creating a sense of belongingness in the virtual workplace but fail to do so.
- To achieve a sense of belongingness, sustainable change is required and IC professionals are aware of this and are willing to play a part.

The study ends with a new framework for belongingness in the virtual workplace and recommendations for practice and future research.



New model for virtual workplace belonging (Verschuur-Ballo 2021).

New model for virtual workplace belonging (Verschuur-Ballo 2021).

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Biography

Chared Verschuur-Ballo

Hi, I'm Chared (Manila, 1977) and I consider myself a progressive optimist. 2021 marks my 24th year in the fields of journalism, development communication and corporate communication. My professional background has led me to experience the glamor of TV news and participate in historical events, appreciate the beauty of science while chatting with Nobel prize awardees, grasp the workings of European-funded projects, fathom the paradox of international development and realise the impact of belonging, or lack thereof, in the workplace.

I have been an in-house communication professional for 10 years (2019) when I decided to pursue the Executive Master of Science in Corporate Communication at the RSM Erasmus University to stay relevant and resilient in the face of constant change. This education provided me with a high-level and holistic understanding of corporate communication which I intend to practice to create more value in the areas where I work.

With my updated knowledge and renewed confidence, I decided to build my own company, Good Comms, communication for positive change. My mission is to contribute to a more sustainable, positive and equal world through good communication. Good Comms specialises in inclusion-oriented external communication, strengths-based storytelling and belonging-centred internal communication. I deliver this through strategic advice and mentoring, interim project/corporate communication, training and workshops.

Fluent in English, Filipino and Dutch, I have a fondness for ancient civilisations, creating mnemonics, DIY crafting, intensive organising, lifelong learning and sci-fi. I live in Pijnacker with my husband Mark and son Quint with whom I love going on ultralight travels and re-discovering nature.

If you'd like to stay in touch, do send a message to **chared@goodcomms.nl** or connect with me on LinkedIn at **www.linkedin.com/in/charedbv**.

Coaches

Joep Cornelissen
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Joep Cornelissen is Professor of Corporate Communication and Management at the Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University. The main focus of his research involves studies of the role of corporate and managerial communication in the context of innovation, entrepreneurship and change, and of social evaluations of the legitimacy and reputation of start-up and established firms. In addition, he also has an interest in questions of scientific reasoning and theory development in management and organisation theory.

His work has been published in the Academy of Management Review, Journal of Management Studies, Organisation Science and Organisation Studies, and he has written a general text on corporate communication (Corporate Communication: A Guide to Theory and Practice, Sage Publications) which is now in its fourth edition. He is an Associate Editor for the Academy of Management Review, a Council member of the Society for the Advancement of Management Studies, a former General Editor of the Journal of Management Studies (2006-2012) and serves on the editorial boards of the Academy of Management Journal, Journal of Management, Journal of Management Studies and Organisation Studies.

Paul A. Argenti
Professor of Corporate Communication
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Professor Paul A. Argenti has taught management, corporate responsibility, corporate communication, and healthcare management starting in 1977 at the Harvard Business School, from 1979-81 at the Columbia Business School, and since 1981 as a faculty member at Dartmouth's Tuck School of Business. He has also taught as a visiting professor at the International University of Japan, the Helsinki School of Economics, Erasmus University in the Netherlands, London Business School, and Singapore Management University. He currently serves as Faculty Director for Tuck's Leadership and Strategic Impact Program, and Tuck's executive programs for Coach.

Professor Argenti's textbook, Corporate Communication, Seventh Edition, was published through McGraw-Hill/Irwin in 2016. He also published the first edition of a seminal work in 2016 entitled Corporate Responsibility for Sage, which focuses on corporate values, shared value, corporate character, and the purpose of the corporation in modern society. Argenti co-authored (with Courtney Barnes) *Digital Strategies for Powerful Corporate Communication,* published by McGraw-Hill in 2009. Some of his other books include: *Strategic Corporate Communication*, published in 2007 by McGraw-Hill, The Power of Corporate Communication (co-authored with UCLA's Janis Forman), published by McGraw-Hill, and The Fast Forward MBA Pocket Reference (several editions), released through Wiley. Professor Argenti has written and edited numerous articles for academic publications and practitioner journals such as Harvard Business Review, California Management Review, and Sloan Management Review.

Professor Argenti also blogs regularly for publications such as Harvard Business Review, the Washington Post, and US News & World Report and appears frequently on radio (NPR and APM) and television (CNBC Fox Business) commenting on topics related to management, communications, reputation, and corporate responsibility.

Professor Argenti is a Fulbright Scholar and a winner of the Pathfinder Award in 2007 from the Institute for Public Relations for the excellence of his research over a long career. The Ethisphere Institute also listed him as one of the most influential people in Business Ethics. He serves on an advisory board to the President of the World Bank and the Board of Trustees for the Ethisphere Institute. He has also served on advisory boards to CEOs globally for a variety of companies. Finally, he has consulted and run training programs in communication for executives at hundreds of organisations over the last three decades including General Electric, The Detroit Lions, Mitsui, Novartis, and Goldman Sachs.

Guido A.J.M. Berens (PhD)
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Dr. Guido Berens is an Assistant Professor at the Corporate Communication Centre (department Business Society Management) of Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University. He earned his doctoral degree in Corporate Communication from the Erasmus Research Institute of Management (Erasmus University) and Master degrees in Psychology and Philosophy from the University of Nijmegen. Guido's research interests include corporate communication, corporate social responsibility, and issues management. His research has been published in the Journal of Marketing, Journal of Management Studies, and Journal of Business Ethics, among others. Guido teaches Research Methodology as well as Communicating Sustainability in the Master and PhD programmes at RSM.

Mark Lee Hunter (PhD)
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Mark Lee Hunter is a recognised innovator as a scholar and media practitioner. He is a founder of the Global Investigative Journalism Network and the lead author of its manual for practitioners, Story-Based Inquiry, published by UNESCO in 2009 and currently available in 14 major and minor languages. He co-founded the Future Media Management Programme at Stockholm School of Economics Riga, which trains independent media leaders from the former Soviet countries. He has taught stakeholder crisis and leadership communication at RSM since 2006. At the INSEAD Social Innovation Centre, where he is an Adjunct Professor, he co-founded the Stakeholder Media Project, whose work on emerging media sectors and communities has been published in Harvard Business Review, California Management Review, MIT Sloan Review, and Corporate Communications Review as well as practitioner journals. The most recent of his ten books is Power is Everywhere: How stakeholder-driven media build the future of watchdog news (2017). He has won seven US and international awards for his scholarly writing and journalism. Since 2006 he taught and consulted (for Al-Jazeera, RTE, France Télévisions and others) in 40 countries across Asia, Europe, Africa, the Arab world and the Americas. He earned his doctorate at the Université de Paris II (in French, his second language) and his undergraduate degree at Harvard. When not working, he plays the electric guitar, solo and in bands.

Erik van 't Klooster (PhD)
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Over the past 10 years Erik has been a teacher (both bachelor and master level) and a consultant on marketing strategy, marketing communications and consumer behavior. Also, Erik has coached many master theses on a wide range of marketing topics (e.g. consumer retail, b2b marketing, financial services, brand management, marketing automation, social media). Erik is experienced in both qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Florian Madertoner
Lecturer
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Florian Madertoner is a Lecturer at the Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University. He holds a degree in Banking- and Finance. Florian's research interests include Capital Structure Theory, Behavioral Finance and the Economic History.

He is responsible for the course "Economics" in the bachelor study programs International Business Administration and Business Administration. In addition, Florian teaches "Corporate Finance" and supervises bachelor theses in both programs. In the master program Finance & Investment Florian supervises Master theses.

Florian teaches the elective "Finance for Communication Professionals" in the executive master program Corporate Communication as well as the executive training "Finance for Non-Financials".
He has been awarded multiple awards for his teaching activities: the "Professor of the Year Award" five years consecutively from 2016 to 2020 for his undergrad course "Corporate Finance" in the programs IBA and BA. In 2020 Florian has also been awarded the "Professor of the Year Award" for his course "Economics" in the IBA program as well an award for "Best Adaptation to the Coronavirus Situation".

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Lucas C.P.M. Meijs is professor of Strategic Philanthropy and Volunteering at Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University (RSM). Professor Meijs' current research focuses on issues related to strategic philanthropy, volunteer/non-profit management, corporate community involvement, voluntary energy as a natural resource and involved learning (life-long development by volunteering).

He served two term as the first non-american co-editor in chief of Nonprofit and Voluntary Action Quarterly. He has been an appointed member of the Raad voor Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling, the official policy advisory body for the Dutch government and parliament.

He was a guest researcher at the Centre of Philanthropy and Non-profit studies at the Queensland University of Technology in Australia. He has also been a visiting scholar at the University of Georgia's Department of Political Science as well as its School of Social Work.

Professor Meijs teaches NGO/NPO management and several business-non-profit relations courses at the master level, as well as service learning, consultancy and social entrepreneurship at the bachelor level.

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Dr. Lonneke Roza is a part-time Adjunct Assistant Professor at Rotterdam School of Management and she specializes in non-commercial (i.e. impact first and impact only) strategies to create positive social change. Her research is mainly focused on (employee engagement in) Corporate Citizenship & Corporate Social Investments. She published articles in renowned journals such as Journal of Business Ethics and Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly. In addition, Lonneke is the leading editor on the first academic book on Corporate Foundations, published by Springer in 2019. Her latest project is a co-edited book *Employee Engagement in Corporate Social Responsibility (2020),* by Sage.

Next to her position at the university, Lonneke is the manager community investment at NN Group. She leads her team to develop and implement their commitment to society. She also serves as a chair of the board of Vattenfall Foundation (corporate foundation) and on the board of Facilicom Group Foundation (corporate foundation), KPN Mooiste Contact Fonds (corporate foundation) and Lokale Fondsen Nederland (umbrella organization for community foundations). She is frequently asked to speak at public events and conferences on the role of businesses in society.

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Yijing Wang is Assistant Professor of Organization and Corporate Communication in the Department of Media and Communication at Erasmus University Rotterdam. She teaches in the International Bachelor program in Communication (IBCoM) and Masters in Media and Business, as well as supervising MA and BA thesis students. Before joining the department in September 2015, she was Associate Dean for Asia and Assistant Professor of Business and Society Management at TIAS Business School, Tilburg University. She obtained Master degree in Financial Economics with a high distinction from School of Economics, Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands, and a PhD degree in Corporate Reputation and Stakeholder Management from Rotterdam School of Management (RSM), Erasmus University Rotterdam. Her research and teaching interests include corporate reputation management, corporate social responsibility, managing sustainability, investor relation and crisis communication. She is author of several international publications in journals such as Business Horizons, Journal of Business Ethics and Corporate Reputation Review.

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