

**This is a self-archived version of an original article. This version may differ from the original in pagination and typographic details.**

**Author(s):** Badham, Mark; Luoma-aho, Vilma

**Title:** Introduction to the Handbook on Digital Corporate Communication

**Year:** 2023

**Version:** Accepted version (Final draft)

**Copyright:** © Vilma Luoma-aho and Mark Badham 2023

**Rights:** In Copyright

**Rights url:** <http://rightsstatements.org/page/InC/1.0/?language=en>

**Please cite the original version:**

Badham, M., & Luoma-aho, V. (2023). Introduction to the Handbook on Digital Corporate Communication. In V. Luoma-aho, & M. Badham (Eds.), Handbook on Digital Corporate Communication (pp. 1-16). Edward Elgar. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781802201963.00009>

## **INTRODUCTION:**

### **Introducing and defining Digital Corporate Communication**

Mark Badham & Vilma Luoma-aho

Jyväskylä University School of Business & Economics (Finland)

mabadham@jyu.fi +358503439379

Mark Badham ORCID id: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4521-5294>

Vilma Luoma-aho ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1316-3725>

#### **Abstract:**

This chapter introduces and defines digital corporate communication (DCC) as an emerging field of important research and practice. Despite a growing body of corporate communication research examining how digital technologies are shaping ways in which organizations and stakeholders communicate with each other, this chapter identifies the need for a definition of DCC and the importance of a unified body of scholarly knowledge about DCC. Accordingly, in order to present a unified and coherent meaning of DCC, the chapter integrates a definition of corporate communication with conceptual clarity of terms such as digitalisation and digital infrastructure to propose a definition of DCC. It subsequently introduces this handbook's four over-arching sections that cover: (1) digitally-influenced changes to legacy corporate communication functions, (2) digitally-influenced issues that corporate communication must address, (3) corporate communication's adoption of digital technologies, and (4) corporate communication's role in managing digitalization's effects in society.

**Keywords:** Digitalization, digital corporate communication, digital infrastructures, digital technologies, digital transformation

#### **Why this book?**

The future of corporate communication is unreservedly digital. Indeed, due to digital technology's incremental yet ubiquitous influence on this field over the years, digital corporate communication is already here, and it has been nudging the profession and its professionals towards changes in attitudes, skills, strategies and priorities. Some changes have seen a seismic change, such as the way social media networks and digital platforms have democratized corporate communication, empowering digital savvy stakeholders and disempowering organizations, often challenging old fashioned attitudes to stakeholder relationships and communication. Now, all kinds of stakeholders, from investor activists to past employees, can and do take over organisations' communication reins, steering organizational communication in new and uncharted directions, shifting organizational roles from gatekeeping (Shoemaker, 1991) to gatewatching (Bruns, 2005, 2011). For example, collectives of organisational hateholders (Luoma-aho, 2015) frequently are hijacking communication campaigns by taking over corporate hashtags in social media and retargeting them against corporations. A corporate crisis forming among posts in one Facebook account can spread fast and furiously across online social networks, damaging a corporation's reputation within hours.

These are both exhilarating and challenging times for practitioners and scholars within the profession. As masses of individual consumers and stakeholders master emerging means of communication enabled by technology, so must the professionals of communication. New services, devices, apps and software are emerging onto the market to help organizations solve existing and future communication challenges. Many organisations are responding proactively to the opportunities these present. Increasingly, customers are interacting with chatbots on corporate websites. In 2022, TikTok influencers are creatively collaborating with organisations who share their values and passions. Google Assistant is telling coffee lovers where their branded coffee was grown and roasted. Employees are proactively advocating for their employers' social causes in their personal social media posts. At the same time, the ease of clicktivism and the superficial world of social media and data privacy concerns is contributing to masses of passive and disengaged stakeholders who fail to see the value added by technology.

This volume is titled *Digital Corporate Communication* in recognition of these omnipresent, significant and fast-changing influences, both positive and negative, of digital technologies on the

communication profession and on the external economic, cultural and societal forces shaping it. Despite this, academic studies to date have not been well integrated into a coherent research perspective. This handbook argues that current theorizing on digitalization in the corporate communication literature has not yet adequately defined *digital corporate communication* (DCC) or addressed the wide spectrum of digitalization's effects on and role in corporate communication (for a recent exception, see Brockhaus et al., 2022). Accordingly, there is an evident need for a thoughtful collection of current DCC research that extends and refines our understanding of how digital technologies, devices and platforms (e.g., beyond the dominant focus on social media) are re-shaping corporate communication with various stakeholders. This handbook meets that need by illuminating established and emerging theories, concepts, processes and practices related to DCC in terms of their fit to meet future challenges.

This volume builds a foundation for this emerging research by drawing on contributions from scholars across the globe who are carving out niche scholarly expertise in specialist areas of corporate communication influenced by digital technologies. Their research sheds light on how the discipline can best respond to the digital-driven opportunities and challenges facing it as a research community, a profession, and as individual and collective members of wider society. Accordingly, this handbook provides an extensive overview of current knowledge of corporate communication from a digital point of view. It brings concepts and theories to life via case studies located in each chapter, which serve to illustrate theorizing in different cultural, socio-political and organizational contexts.

### **What is corporate communication?**

Insight into DCC first requires a clear understanding of corporate communication. The term *corporate communication* began in the scientific discourse in the 1970s, emerging from the older discipline and practice of public relations. At the time, corporate communication was sometimes understood as 'corporate public relations' (Lerbinger, 2019), beginning as public relations practiced by industry and commerce (Kitchen, 1997) when the role of business began to rise in society and in higher education institutions (e.g., when business schools began to flourish). Accordingly, because of their unique needs and challenges, business organizations and business schools demanded new approaches to public relations and thus different communication-related tools and activities.

Corporate communication today is linked not only with the discipline of public relations, but also with strategic communication, communication management, organizational communication and marketing communications (e.g., van Riel, 1995; van Riel & Fombrun, 2007). The names of these disciplines are often used loosely and interchangeably in practice and research (Christensen & Cornelissen, 2011; Cornelissen, 2017; Gregory & Fawkes, 2019; Hallahan et al., 2007; Heath & Gregory, 2015), which suggests they contain the same meanings. However, from a scholarly perspective, each discipline has its own loosely connected body of research and thus scholarly community that has developed over time and from which nuanced differences between them have both emerged and merged.

This chapter explains and defines corporate communication through six distinguishing attributes: (1) the communicating entity, (2) the purposive nature of communication, (3) the management of communication, (4) the object of communication, (5) the overall emphasis on communication, and (6) the goal of communication. Although each of these key attributes are interlinked and thus interdependent, they are separated here as distinct building blocks from which a coherent definition may emerge.

**(1) Communicating entity:** Corporate communication has long since shed its business-only focus.

For almost two decades now, corporate communication has been linked to all communications not only in large multinational corporations, but also in small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs) and public sector and not-for-profit organizations (Oliver, 2004). Accordingly, although corporate communication retains strong links to commerce, it also embraces other types of organizations, such as governments, public sector agencies, NGOs, trade associations, and social movements. For this reason, the word *organization* as the communicating entity is a key component in forming a definition of corporate communication.

**(2) Purposive nature of communication:** The question of the purposive nature of communication points to the wider ontological theorization of communication agency. Corporate communication is linked to the idea that communication professionals working for or on behalf of organizations may actively intervene in organizational communication processes and thus communicate on purpose for strategic reasons. According to Christensen and Cornelissen (2011), “corporate

communication research is mostly focused on the controlled handling and organization of communication (Cornelissen, 2008a; Christensen, Morsing, et al., 2008)” (2011, p. 384). For this reason, the word *strategic* is an important component in shaping a corporate communication definition.

**(3) Management of communication:** The word ‘corporate’ in the term corporate communication emphasizes that any type of organizational entity ideally should present a unified, coherent organizational or ‘corporate’ message by coordinating all forms of its communication to provide a consistent organizational image to all its stakeholders (van Riel, 1995). Corporate communication is identified as a core management function responsible for coordinating all communications (Christensen & Cornelissen, 2011, p. 386) under one banner, department or discipline to both external and internal stakeholders. Thus, corporate communication has been seen as having the ability to ‘orchestrate’ the varying messages and communication activities emanating from within the organization (van Riel, 1997).

Corporate communication scholarship also acknowledges that an organization may speak with many different voices simultaneously to build and maintain legitimacy in a complex world. In other words, organizations may differentiate their messages to adapt to different audiences (Hill & Winski, 1987; Onkvisit & Shaw, 1987), strategically communicate in ambiguous ways (Eisenberg, 1984) to accommodate multiple conflicting interpretations and expectations of diverse stakeholders, and manage multiple identities (Cheney, 1991).

A corporate communication perspective also understands that organizational messages often do not emanate from organizations themselves; increasingly, stakeholders initiate messages affecting organizations (e.g., when they complain about an organization or its products and activities) as well as join other stakeholders’ conversations in which organizational messages are discussed and debated. This describes collective stakeholder-to-stakeholder communication in which organizational intangible assets such as reputation and legitimacy are discursively inflated, debated and deflated. For this reason, corporate communication, and strategic communication scholars more recently, have begun to question how much agency communication professionals have over communication in this context. Emerging participatory-type communication and

stakeholder-centric communication approaches suggest that organizations should value stakeholders' offline and online conversations about organizational matters, even from hateholders (Luoma-aho, 2015), and for this reason should seek to participate in them to listen to (Macnamara, 2017), learn from (Macnamara, 2017), and even love (Badham, 2020) them. Nevertheless, emerging from corporate communication theory is the perspective that at least some level of management of communication is imperative, which is why the word *management* is a key component in an emerging definition of corporate communication.

- (4) Object of communication:** One of the distinctions between public relations and corporate communication is centered around the object of communication: publics, audiences, stakeholders and society. Distinctions between these terms are important. Predominantly, public relations scholars consider publics to be “groups of individuals who face a similar problem, recognize it, and organize themselves to address it, regardless of whether they have a direct interest in any organization involved with the issue (Dewey 1927)” (Valentini, 2021, p. 9). Thus, publics often may be considered to be temporary and somewhat separate from organizational interests and ties, particularly when compared to stakeholders.

Although both corporate communication and public relations disciplines may be separated by their unique approach to the object of organizational communication, the concept of audiences suggests that they are spectators in organization-managed, one-directional communication processes and recipients of organizational messages and thus they have limited agency in these processes. While public relations traditionally refers to ‘target audiences’, which suggests they are viewed as assets to be used for organizational purposes, corporate communication tends to refer to ‘stakeholders’ who are dependent on and affect and are affected by organizations and their activities and communication either directly or through intermediaries (Freeman 1984; Luoma-aho & Paloviita, 2010). This approach to stakeholders indicates corporate communication’s interest in treating them as more equal partners in the business of the organization and conducting communication with them in interactive, participatory ways. Thus, corporate communication aims to simultaneously engage with stakeholders while being mindful of prioritizing the organization’s overall strategy.

Increasingly, organizations are stepping forward as socio-political actors in society, entering public debates as advocates for and opponents against causes and issues. In this way their public statements reflecting their point of view are designed to contribute to public opinion in society. Thus, society has become one of the objects of communication for corporate communication professionals. Accordingly, the words *stakeholder* and *society* are important components contributing to an emerging corporate communication definition.

**(5) Overall emphasis on communication:** As indicated in its name, the discipline of corporate communication focusses predominantly on communication. While public relations is focused predominantly on an organization's management of its relationships with various publics (organisation-public relationship research dominates public relations scholarship), corporate communication tends to emphasize at its core the management of an organization's communication with its stakeholders. In other words, while public relations emphasises an organization's management of relationships with key publics, corporate communication's emphasis is on managing communication for relationships with key stakeholders. Thus, corporate communication is seen as a management function within an organization that seeks to oversee and coordinate communication between and with stakeholders. Thus, the word *communication* is important in the definition of corporate communication.

**(6) Goal of communication:** While the word 'relations' in the term public relations indicates this discipline's strong focus on an organization's relational 'ties' with target audiences (Beger, 2018), corporate communication theory does not tend to accentuate organization-stakeholder relations (for *OSR theory*, see Badham, 2020) as a goal of communication. There are exceptions, of course (e.g., van Riel, 1995, p. 26). Favourable relations with stakeholders and the general public in society are considered an important intangible asset of organizations (Canel et al., 2020; Zerfass & Viertmann, 2017) that corporate communication professionals should seek to nurture and acquire. Other organizational intangible assets that corporate communication actions contribute to include organisational legitimacy (Suchman, 1995), identity (van Riel & Balmer, 1997) and reputation (Barnett et al., 2006). The importance of these different tangible and intangible assets will vary by sector, organization type, as well as the society surrounding the organization.



Interestingly, in the digital realm the value of intangible assets appears to be gaining in importance, as digital platforms make reputation and social capital more visible for stakeholders. Although tangible communication outputs such as press releases, tweets and website content are important, these are simply ways to achieve intangible assets, which are considered more important to organizational management. Accordingly, *the maintenance of organizational intangible assets*, as an end goal of communication, is a key term in the formation of a corporate communication definition.

For the purposes of clarity, and taking the above definitions, conceptual ideas, key attributes, and key terms (italicized below) into account, CC can thus be defined analytically and in encompassing terms as:

*An organization's strategic management of communication with internal and external stakeholders and more broadly within society for the maintenance of organizational intangible assets.*

The next section examines how the digital world is shaping corporate communication, which suggests that a new, refined definition is required to contribute to a holistic understanding of the discipline.

### **What is digital corporate communication (DCC)?**

#### **Digital corporate communication practices**

Although 87% of executives surveyed by Gartner in 2018 agree that 'digital' is an important priority for business, communication leaders struggle to understand the meaning of 'digitalization' and the role they should play as businesses seek to prioritize digitalization (Bryan, 2018). However, the emerging communications field known as CommTech (Communication Technology) is very much focused on addressing the challenge of how digital technologies can modify communication processes along the whole stakeholder journey with the organisation (e.g., Arthur W. Page Society, 2021; Weiner, 2021; Brockhaus et al., 2022). CommTech's specific focus is on using digital tools, techniques and data to enable organizations to personalize closer engagement with stakeholders, such as by creating and delivering content and managing and analysing feedback.

The Arthur W Page Society for Global Communication Executives (a leading professional association for senior public relations and corporate communication executives and educators) lists communication technology as one of the most urgent development areas for global brands and organizations in the 2020s. The Society's CommTech guide (Arthur W. Page Society, 2021) states that a CommTech system is built on three elements: the technologies available to us, the skills needed to make use of these technologies, and the methods to enculturate the use of these technologies.

The 2021 European Communication Monitor (Zerfass et al., 2021) reports that a vast majority of communication practitioners across Europe emphasise the importance of digitalising stakeholder communication processes (87.7%) and building a digital infrastructure to support internal workflows (83.9%). Three out of four communication departments and agencies acknowledge they are relatively experienced in using external digital platforms for stakeholder communication and in providing collaboration platforms for their team members. However, only 60% of communication departments and agencies in Europe have well-developed approaches for digitalising their communication processes. Of concern is that about 40% of practitioners across Europe believe their department or agency is not adequately digitalising stakeholder communication processes and building digital infrastructure such as supporting internal workflows within a communication department or agency. To address this digital communication immaturity, Brockhaus et al. (2022) developed a framework to help practitioners to uncover and evaluate the level of digital maturity of communication departments and agencies.

### **Digital corporate communication research**

The increasingly widespread use and abuse of digital technologies for communication purposes by organizations, their stakeholders and wider society has led to a plethora of academic communication studies examining the nexus between digital technologies and communication approaches, processes and practices. As society and the organizations within them gradually come to terms with the ubiquitous nature of digital technology in our everyday lives, the rate at which we are studying and thus trying to make sense of the impact of digital technologies on communication within and by organizations is rapidly expanding. Recent examples of such studies include Brockhaus et al.

(2022), Ewing et al. (2019), Etter et al. (2021), Freberg (2020), Lutrell et al. (2021), Wilson et al. (2020), and Wright and Hinson (2017).

Academic research in corporate communication has so far focused predominantly on new media and channels enabled by digital technology, such as social media, internet and websites (Duhle, 2017). Studies examining how organizations and stakeholders use social media as a communication tool have become one of the more dominant research areas in corporate communication. Other focal points of research include how digital technologies are shaping ways in which organizations and stakeholders communicate (for *digital dialogic principles and communication* see Capriotti et al., 2021 and Zhou & Xu, 2022; for *digital channels* see Oltarzhevskiy, 2019), interact (for *digital activism* see Ciszek, 2016; for *digital social advocacy* see Chalmers & Shotton, 2016) and relate (for *digital communicative organization-stakeholder relationships* see Lock, 2019). Scholars have recently begun to examine how big data and digital technology (e.g., AI and automation) are reshaping practices in corporate communication from the perspective of practitioners (e.g., Cacciatore et al., 2017; Bajalia, 2020; Wiesenberg et al., 2017; Wiencierz & Röttger, 2019; Zerfass et al., 2020).

However, despite this growing body of research, only a few corporate communication studies (with a heavy focus on the digital effects shaping corporate communication) explicitly refer to *digital corporate communication* (see e.g., Etter et al., 2019) or *online corporate communication* (Garcia et al., 2017; Oksiutycz & Kunene, 2017). In comparison, public relations studies refer to *digital public relations* (Kim et al., 2010; Sommerfeldt et al., 2012; Yaxley, 2012; Huang et al., 2017; Zhou & Xu, 2022), *online public relations* (Kitchen & Panopoulos, 2010; Ye & Ki, 2012) and *Internet-related public relations* (Khang et al., 2012; Ye & Ki, 2012) when examining new media, social media, websites and the Internet. This handbook addresses the need for a single body of published knowledge under the nomenclature of *digital corporate communication* to contribute to the widening knowledge gap in this increasingly important research and practice topic.

Another challenge is that a search through corporate communication studies back to 2010 reveals that a definition of digital corporate communication has not yet emerged. Marketing scholarship has defined digital marketing and legitimized it as field of research (see Kannan & Li, 2017), yet corporate communication has not defined digital corporate communication despite the

breadth of research in this area. Accordingly, in order to present a unified and coherent meaning of DCC to various internal stakeholders (e.g., corporate communication scholars and practitioners), external stakeholders (e.g., colleagues in other disciplines and practices), and wider society, a definition of DCC is needed and provided here.

But first, definitions of *digital*, *digitalization* and *digital transformation* also are needed. Unfortunately, like other professions and fields of study, corporate communication practitioners and scholars tend to rather loosely refer to these terms. Indeed, *digitization* and *digitalization* are sometimes used synonymously despite having different meanings. For this reason, interpretations and definitions of these concepts are offered below from both academic and professional practice points of view to try to shed light on a DCC point of view and to formulate a DCC definition.

### **Digital technologies, digital infrastructures and digitalization processes**

Definitions of *digital* in *The Oxford English Dictionary* (n.d.) relate to numerical digits and their use in representing data in computing and electronics as well as to “signals, information and data represented by a series of discrete values (commonly the numbers 0 and 1), typically for electronic storage or processing”. A synthesis of the definition of *digital*, in its adjective form, from both *The Oxford English Dictionary* (n.d.) and *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (n.d.) describes a type of device, image or period of time or space characterized by its electronically-enabled function, formation, storage, iniquitousness, and empowerment; and, as a noun, the term refers to a medium in a digital format or a mechanism or device characterized or operated by digital technology. Typically, *digital* is contrasted with *analogue*.

The terms *digital platform* and *digital infrastructure* often are used synonymously. A digital platform is a corporate-owned digital media infrastructure (software-based or hardware-based) intended for users to share and co-create content for social purposes (e.g., YouTube, Facebook, Twitter) (Schwarz, 2017). As utilities that generate new societal functions and business opportunities, they also “facilitate complex multisided market exchanges (between media consumers, license holders, content creators, telecoms operators, investors) by way of digital automation (Eriksson, Fleischer, Johansson, Snickars, & Vonderau, 2017)” (Schwarz, 2017, p. 377). The dual nature of these infrastructures both empowers and constrains user interaction and expression (Eriksson et al., 2017).

Although there are many slightly differing definitions of *digitalization*, they predominantly refer to a social or socio-technical process. Communication scholars Brennan and Kreiss (2016), one of only a few communication scholars to offer a definition of digitalization, refer to digitalization as “the way in which many domains of social life are restructured around digital communication and media infrastructures” (2016, p. 556). In information systems literature, one of the first scholars to offer clarity of digitalization, Tilson (2010), defined digitalisation as a socio-technical process in which digital technologies, which are integrated into or consist of software, platforms, information systems and devices, are integrated into processes, structures, capabilities and products. In this process, digital technologies become embedded into an overall digital infrastructure (Tilson, 2010). More recently, Legner et al. (2017) defined digitalisation in the information systems context as “[...] the manifold socio-technical phenomena and processes of adopting and using these technologies in broader individual, organizational, and societal contexts” (2017, p. 301). Within a more social context, when “interactions move away from analogue technologies (snail mail, telephone calls) to digital ones (email, chat, social media), both work and leisure domains become digitalized” (Bloomberg, 2018, p. 3).

Although *digitization* and *digitalization* are both processes, they are quite different in meaning. Frenzel et al. (2021) found a tendency in information systems research to define digitisation as a technical process of data conversion, generation, storage, or processing. Information systems scholars Legner et al. (2017) define digitization as “[...] the technical process of converting analogue signals into a digital form, and ultimately into binary digits.” (2017, p. 301). In contrast, digitalization has mainly been referred to in the literature as “a socio-technical phenomenon, the use of digital technologies, and their influence on societies, businesses, and personal lives” (2021, p. 7). This handbook prefers the concept of digitalization, as it more aptly applies to the process in which digital technologies transform both corporate and corporate communication practices with the aim of improving communication with organizational stakeholders and in society more generally.

From an organizational point of view, digitalization is designed to transform organizational life. Indeed, digital transformation is one of the most important challenges for organisations of all types and sizes in the coming decades (Nadkarni & Prügl, 2021; Hess et al., 2016). Digital

transformation is understood as “the intercept of the adoption of disruptive digital technologies on the one side and actor-guided organisational transformation of capabilities, structures, processes and business model components on the other side” (Nadkarni & Prügl, 2021, p. 236). In their McKinsey report, Bughin et al. (2019) define digital transformation as “an effort to enable existing business models by integrating advanced technologies” (2019, p. 1). In sum, according to Bloomberg (2018), “we digitize information, we digitalize processes and roles that make up the operations of a business, and we digitally transform the business and its strategy” (2018, p. 5; *italics introduced for emphasis*).

### **Definition of digital corporate communication (DCC)**

This handbook presents the argument that although *digital technologies* are a key contributing factor shaping significant changes in corporate communication processes and practices, these technologies also contribute to *digital infrastructures* and overall *digitalization processes* which in turn also influence corporate communication processes and practices. Accordingly, the following attribute is integrated into the earlier framework of six attributes forming a definition of corporate communication:

(7) **Digital effects shaping communication:** The intersection of digital technologies, digital infrastructures and digitalization processes is identified as the main three-fold factor forming and shaping digital corporate communication in significant ways.

As such, taking these seven attributes of corporate communication and their related key terms into account, the following definition of digital corporate communication (DCC) is offered:

An organization’s strategic management of digital technologies, digital infrastructures and digitalization processes to improve communication with internal and external stakeholders and more broadly within society for the maintenance of organizational intangible assets.

### **How is this handbook structured?**

This handbook is divided into four over-arching sections covering (1) digitally-influenced changes to legacy corporate communication functions, (2) digitally-influenced issues that corporate communication must address, (3) corporate communication’s adoption of digital technologies, and (4)

corporate communication's role in managing digitalization's effects in society. As shown in Figure 1 below, this handbook follows the four spheres of digital development in corporate communication.

### **Part I: Digitally-influenced changes to legacy functions**

Overall, the chapters in this first section deal with how digital technologies, digital infrastructures and digitalization processes are influencing long-standing, traditional core functions and strategic activities of corporate communication within different types and sizes of organizations. In short, the chapters in this section address the question: *How are digital technologies changing older practices within corporate communication?*

With an illustrative example of the Swedish Transport Administration, the chapter on internal communication investigates how digital communication tools and platforms offer organizations new possibilities for communication between organizational members through the reciprocal influence these tools/platforms and humans exert on each other. With a look at the British Monarchy as an illustrative example, the chapter on branding presents the Total Corporate Brand Communication model, which illuminates how digitally-influenced stakeholder communication can be accommodated into digital brand communication. Referring to the Global Strategic Communications Council (GSCC) as an illustrative example, the chapter on media relations examines how, despite the digital transformation of both journalism and media relations practices, news media outlets remain an important intermediary through which organizations can reach stakeholders with carefully crafted messages. Through the illustrative example of the Italian fashion house Dolce & Gabbana, the chapter on corporate reputation explores how emotionally-charged positive, negative and neutral social evaluations of organizations expressed in social media constantly shape organizations' reputations over time in these digital arenas; it also examines the role of fake news and AI applications in reputation formation. The chapter on investor relations and financial communication looks at the multinational enterprise software company SAP SE and examines how the effects of digital technologies on corporate relationship management with sophisticated and financially powerful stakeholders is shaping new roles for investor relations officers as data scientists and expert listeners. While social media has allowed organisations to create interactive and personalized experiences about diverse corporate social responsibility (CSR) topics and activities with different stakeholders, the

popularization of social media also has enabled stakeholders to discover new and powerful ways to force organisations to be more accountable and report their commitments to environmental and socially responsible efforts; the chapter about CSR communication illustrates all this with the example of Nutresa, the leading processed food company in Colombia. Through the illustrative example of the multinational confectionary company Mondelez, the chapter on stakeholder relationship management explores how the evolution of digital communication technologies contributes to a stakeholder-centric approach to cultivating enhanced, meaningful relationships with stakeholders while also opening organizations up to direct critique from hateholders. Finally, through the UNICEF measurement framework case study, the chapter on measurement and evaluation examines how digital technologies offer advantages for measuring corporate communication (e.g., real-time automated data collection and analysis) as well as challenges (e.g., with data-based profiling).

## **Part II: Digitally-influenced issues affecting organisations**

The chapters in this second section examine how corporate communication is responding to and dealing with digitally-shaped societal issues and stakeholder challenges impacting organizations. Organizational crises can emerge when stakeholders such as activists hijack organizational messages and when stakeholders' complaints about products and services are not managed well. Thus, organizations addressing rising issues that can affect their intangible assets require a deep understanding of how to take advantage of digital technology to manage diverse stakeholder relationships and respond to complaints. In short, chapters in this section address the question: *How is corporate communication dealing with digitally-influenced issues and challenges affecting organizations?*

The chapter on issues management, illustrated through the case example of the #deleteuber boycott, explores how organisations use digital technology to strategically monitor, analyse and respond to emerging socio-political issues important to stakeholders. The chapter on activism explores how activists make use of digital tools to target organizations across supply chains to achieve their socio-political aims; it examines this phenomenon through the illustrative example of the Asia Pulp and Paper (APP) company. Through the VW Golf case study, the chapter on the rise of paracrises and AI examines how to integrate digital channels into crisis and paracrisis communication and how AI



offers the potential to identify crisis risks as well as actual crises. Using the illustrative example of the Singaporean electronic payment service provider NETS, along with its advertising agency Havas Worldwide Singapore, the chapter on crisis communication and crisis life cycles shows how digitally-driven communication tactics can be adopted at each stage of a crisis life cycle to help corporate communication professionals manage crisis communication more effectively. Referring to the case example of the Italian fashion house Gucci, the chapter on complaint management examines how the corporate communication function can mitigate consumer criticism or complaints about organizations and their products or services before they collectively escalate into socially-mediated crises in digital arenas. Referring to the Scandinavian airline SAS case, the chapter on hostile hijacking of organisational crises examines how organisations can prepare for and respond to hostile hijacking of organisational crises in digital arenas from ideologically motivated disinformation operators by looking out for four tell-tale signs. The related chapter on brandjacking and character assassinations examines how dissatisfied activists weaponise social media affordances to disrupt organizations' narration through character assassination of organizational leaders and hijacking organizations' communication campaigns; it illustrates this through the two illustrative examples of McDonald's and Boeing.

### **Part III: Corporate communication's adoption of technology**

In the third section, scholars explore how corporate communication practitioners are making use of (and should make more use of) digital infrastructures, digitalization processes and digital technologies, such as artificial intelligence, gamification, voice assistants and image-based apps, as well as manage algorithm-enhanced leadership and social media influencers. In short, these chapters address the question: *How is corporate communication embracing and adopting digital technologies and the influential actors mastering them?*

Drawing on the illustrative example of the global medical technology company Siemens Healthineers, the chapter covering digital transformation of the corporate communication function examines how the function of corporate communication is building digital infrastructures for communication management purposes and thus digitally transforming itself in this process. The chapter on social media influencers examines how an influencer relations approach and corporate influencer

programmes helps corporate communicators harness the disruptive power of influencers, empowered through online social networks, to their advantage; it draws on the illustrative example of a Unilever influencer campaign in Germany. Using case examples such as Nissan, Google and Deloitte, the chapter on gamification explores how corporate communication can apply the application of game elements in non-game contexts to offer stakeholders a new kind of participatory storytelling experience that may deepen organisation-stakeholder relationships. Presenting a Vodafone case study, the chapter on AI and its implications for corporate communication roles and responsibilities examines how corporate communication roles will be re-shaped as many of the operational tasks are automated and infused with AI, how roles can become more strategic, and proposes an ethical guardian role within organisations. Referring to the local government authority for Sydney (Australia) as a case study, the chapter on artificial intelligence (AI) and extended intelligence (EI) explores how AI and EI (the idea that AI can extend human intelligence), which includes machine learning, chatbots, augmented reality and virtual reality, are disrupting corporate communication while also offering more interactive and immersive organisation-stakeholder communication experiences. Through the illustrative example of Deliveroo France, the chapter about algorithmic leadership explores how, through AI and automated technologies, algorithms that increasingly perform many management and leadership functions previously executed by humans require corporate communication professionals to integrate interactive communication and emotional engagement in unique, complex social communication processes. The chapter discussing visual communication examines how corporate communication is creating a visual content architecture to more effectively serve organisations' visual communication with stakeholders, and illustrates this through the case of the Dutch brewing company Heineken. The chapter covering voice communication investigates how voice platforms such as Amazon Alexa (and Alexa for Business) offer novel communication and relational opportunities within, between and beyond organisations; examples such as McDonald's 'I'm Lovin' it' audio signature are offered for illustrative purposes.

#### **Part IV: Corporate communication's response to digitally-influenced effects in society**

In the fourth section, chapters examine corporate communication's response to technology's critical effects in society, such as the ubiquity of big data and resulting disinformation, polarization and

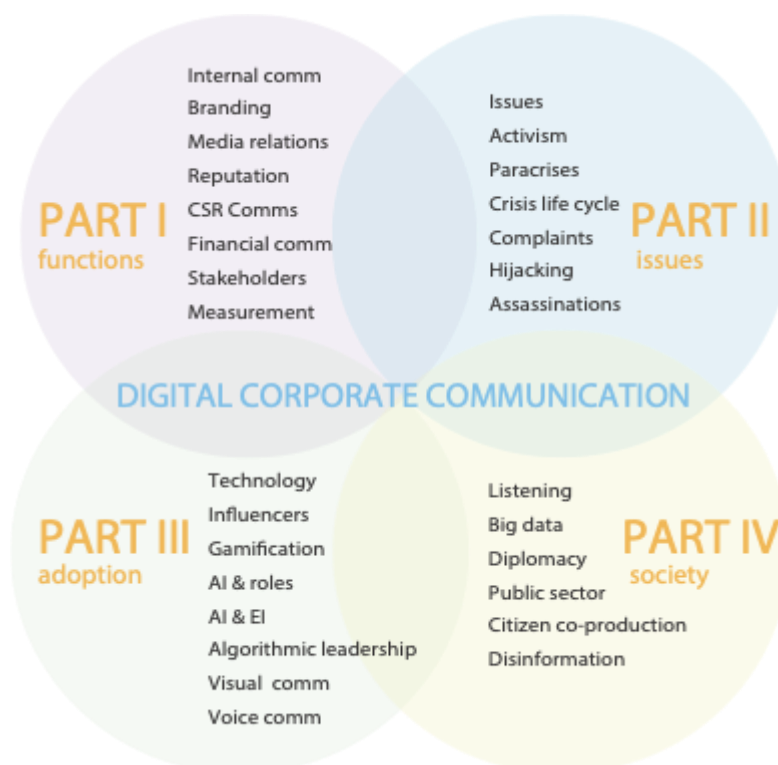
hegemony, as well as the complementary effects in society, such as corporations' improvement of their home country's images across global audiences as well as public sector organisations' use of digital technology to co-produce public services with their citizens. Thus, organizations are looking to better understand how to listen to stakeholder concerns in society so they can better manage stakeholder relations and respond to both negative and positive effects in society, such as through diplomacy, citizen engagement and public sector communication. In short, chapters address the question: *How is corporate communication dealing with the effects of digital technologies in society?*

Through the illustrative case of the multinational insurance and financial services company Achmea, the chapter on organisational listening examines principles and approaches for effective listening in and by organizations, digital technologies that facilitate organisational listening methods, and the resulting benefits these afford organisations and their stakeholders. Drawing on multiple examples such as Facebook skirting the European Union's GDPR laws, the chapter on the market for big data presents the perspective that, as a producer and beneficiary of the big data market, corporate communication contributes to corporate organisations' hegemony over stakeholders. The chapter on digital public diplomacy of nation-states and connected voices explores how digitalization is enabling corporations to interact with global stakeholders who evaluate them based on the image of their country of origin, and how this process enables these corporations to shape the international diplomatic discourse; an illustrative case study of Presence Switzerland, the specialised public diplomacy unit at the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, is presented. Using the Finnish Tax Administration as an illustrative example, the chapter covering public sector organisation (PSO) communication examines how the traditional text-based, one-directional informational communication approach of many PSOs is being challenged by citizens' expectations of real-time dialogue with them, albeit often spiced with emotion-infused digital memes, and how a more contemporary online, interactive, visual and intimate approach may be more suited to citizens' expectations. The chapter covering co-productive citizen engagement, through a case study of the Madrid City Council's smartphone app, examines how digital technology improves the way PSOs can listen to, communicate with, and engage in real time information exchange with citizens to enhance joint efforts for the co-production of public services. Finally, referring to the case of the European

Union’s response to a Covid-19 vaccine disinformation campaign, the chapter on disinformation explores how exponential growth in social media as a source of information has enabled the spread of disinformation and yet also how these same digital channels can be used by organisations to address concerns of stakeholders and strengthen relationships of trust.

The final chapter concludes with recommendations for future research directions.

**Figure 1.** The four parts of the Handbook of Digital Corporate Communication.



## References

- Arthur W. Page Society. (2021). *CommTech Guide*. <https://commtechguide.page.org/getting-started-in-commtech-from-professional-to-pathfinder/a-new-profession-emerges/>
- Badham, M. (2020). Love wins: A love lens approach to cultivation of organization–stakeholder relationships. In R. Tench, A. T. Vercic, & S. Einwiller (Eds.), *Joy: Using strategic communication to improve well-being and organizational success*, *Advances in Public*

*Relations and Communication Management* (Vol. 5, pp. 3–20). Emerald Publishing Ltd., Bingley, UK. ISBN 978-1-80043-241-3.

Bajalia, A. (2020). Where are we now? Public relations professionals discuss measurement and evaluation. *Public Relations Journal*, 13(2).

Barnett, M., Jermier, J., & Lafferty, B. (2006). Corporate reputation: The definitional landscape. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 9, 26–38.

Bloomberg, J. (2018, April 29). Digitization, digitalization, and digital transformation: Confuse them at your peril, *Forbes magazine*.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/jasonbloomberg/2018/04/29/digitization-digitalization-and-digital-transformation-confuse-them-at-your-peril/?sh=189c02682f2c>

Brennan, J.S. & Kreiss, D. (2016). Digitalization. In K. B. Jensen & R. Craig (Eds.), *The International Encyclopedia of Communication Theory and Philosophy*. Wiley Online Library.

Brockhaus, J., Buhmann, A., & Zerfass, A. (2022). Digitalization in corporate communications: Understanding the emergence and consequences of CommTech and digital infrastructure. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, Volume ahead-of-print, 1356-3289. DOI 10.1108/CCIJ-03-2022-0035

Bruns, A. (2005). *Gatewatching: Collaborative online news production* (Vol. 26). Peter Lang Pub Inc.

Bruns, A. (2011). Gatekeeping, gatewatching, real-time feedback: New challenges for journalism. *Brazilian Journalism Research Journal*, 7(2), 117–136.

Bryan, J. (2018, September 17) *What digitalization means for corporate communications*, Gartner. <https://www.gartner.com/smarterwithgartner/digitalization-means-corporate-communications/>

Bughin, J. Deakin, J & O’Beirne, B. (2019, October). Digital transformation: Improving the odds of success, *McKinsey Quarterly*.

- Canel, M. J., Luoma-aho, V. & Barandiarán, X. (2020). Public sector communication and public-valued intangible assets. In V. Luoma-aho & M. J. Canel (Eds.), *Handbook of public sector communication* (pp. 101–114). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Capriotti, P., Zeler, I. & Camilleri, M.A. (2020). Corporate communication through social networks: The identification of key dimensions for dialogic communication. In M.A. Camilleri (Ed.), *Strategic corporate communication in the digital age*, Emerald.
- Cacciatore, M. A., Meng, J., & Berger, B. K. (2017). Information flow and communication practice challenges: A global study on effective responsive strategies. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 22(3), 292–307.
- Chalmers, A.W. & Shotton, P.A. (2016). Changing the face of advocacy? Explaining interest organizations' use of social media strategies. *Political Communication*, 33(3), 374–391.
- Cheney, G. (1991). *Rhetoric in an organizational society. Managing multiple identities*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.
- Christensen, L. T. & Cornelissen, J. (2011). Bridging corporate and organizational communication: Review, development and a look to the future. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 25(3), 383–414.
- Ciszek, E.L. (2016). Digital activism: How social media and dissensus inform theory and practice. *Public Relations Review*, 42, 314–321.
- Cornelissen, J. (2017). *Corporate communication: A guide to theory and practice* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.) Sage Publications Ltd.
- Digital. (2022). In Merriam-Webster's online dictionary. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/digital>
- Digital. (2022). In Oxford English Dictionary's online dictionary. <https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.jyu.fi/view/Entry/52611?redirectedFrom=digital#eid>
- Duhé, S. C. (Ed.). (2017). *New media and public relations* (3rd ed.). Peter Lang.

- Eisenberg, E. (1984). Ambiguity as strategy in organizational communication. *Communication Monographs*, 51, 227-242.
- Eriksson, M., Fleischer, R., Johansson, A., Snickars, P. & Vonderau, P. (2017). *Spotify teardown: Inside the black box of streaming music*. MIT Press.
- Etter, M., Winkler, P. & Glozer, S. (2019). New responsibilities for digital corporate communication, In M. Morsing, U. Golob, & K. Podnar (Eds.), *CSR Communication Conference 2019: Conference Proceedings*, Izdajatelj: Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana.
- Etter, M., Winkler, P., & Pleil, T. (2021). Public relations and social media, In C. Valentini, (Ed.), *Public relations* (Handbook of Communication Science, 27) (pp. 159-174). DeGruyter Mouto.
- Ewing, M., Men, L. R., & O'Neil, J. (2019). Using social media to engage employees: Insights from internal communication managers. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 13(2), 110–132.
- Freberg, K. (2020). Social media for strategic communication: Creative strategies and research-based applications. *Journal of Public Relations Education*, 6(2), 200-204.
- Freeman, M.E. (1984). *Strategic management: A stakeholder approach*.
- Frenzel, A., Muench, J. C., Bruckner, M. T. & Veit, D. (2021). *Digitization or digitalization? Toward an understanding of definitions, use and application in IS research*. AMCIS 2021 Proceedings.
- García García, M., Carrillo-Durán, M. V. & Tato Jimenez, J.L. (2017). Online corporate communications: website usability and content. *Journal of Communication Management*, 21(2), 140-154.
- Gregory, A. & Fawkes, J. (2019). A global capability framework: Reframing public relations for a changing world. *Public Relations Review*, 45(3), 1-13.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2019.05.002>

- Hallahan, K., Holzhausen, D., Van Ruler, B., Verčič, D. & Sriramesh, K. (2007). Defining strategic communication. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 1(1), 3-35.
- Heath, R. E., & Gregory, A. (2015). Introduction: Defining strategic communication – Groundings, forewarnings, and calls to action. In R. E. Heath, & A. Gregory (Vol. Eds.), *Strategic Communication: (Vol. 1)*. Sage: Sage Benchmarks in Communication pp. xxxi–xxxvi.
- Hess, T., Matt, C., Benlian, A., & Wiesboeck, F. (2016). Options for formulating a digital transformation strategy. *MIS Quarterly Executive*, 15(2), 123–139.
- Hill, J. S., & Winski, J. M. (1987, November 16). Goodbye global ads. Global village is fantasyland for big marketers. *Advertising Age*, 22–36.
- Huang, Y.-H. C., Wu, F., & Huang, Q. (2017). Does research on digital public relations indicate a paradigm shift? An analysis and critique of recent trends. *Telematics and Informatics*, 37, 1364–1376.
- Kannan, P.K. & Li, H. (2017). Digital marketing: a framework, review and research agenda, *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 34(1), 22-45
- Khang, H., Ki, E.J., Ye, L. (2012). Social media research in advertising, communication, marketing, and public relations, 1997–2010. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 89, 279-298.
- Kim, S., Park, J.H. & Wertz, E.K. (2010). Expectation gaps between stakeholders and web-based corporate public relations efforts: Focusing on Fortune 500 corporate web sites. *Public Relations Review*, 36(3), 215–221.
- Kitchen, P.J. (1997). Was public relations a prelude to corporate communications?, *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 2(1), 22-30.
- Kitchen, P.J. & Panopoulos, A. (2010). Online public relations: the adoption process and innovation challenge, a Greek example. *Public Relations Review*, 36(3), 222–229.
- Legner, C., Eymann, T., Hess, T., Matt, C., Böhmman, T., Drews, P., Mädche, A., Urbach, N. & Ahlemann, F. (2017). Digitalization: Opportunity and challenge for the business and



- information systems engineering community, *Business & Information Systems Engineering*, 59(4), 301–308.
- Lerbinger, O. (2019). *Corporate communication: An international and management perspective*, John Wiley & Sons.
- Lock, I. (2019). Explicating communicative organization-stakeholder relationships in the digital age: A systematic review and research agenda. *Public Relations Review*, 45(4), 1-13.
- Luoma-aho, V. (2015). Understanding stakeholder engagement: Faith-holders, hateholders and fakeholders, *Research Journal of the Insitute for Public Relations*, 2(1).  
<https://instituteforpr.org/understanding-stakeholder-engagement-faith-holders-hateholders-fakeholders/>
- Luoma-aho, V. & Paloviita, A. (2010). Actor-networking stakeholder theory for corporate communications, *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 15(1), 47–69.
- Lutrell, R., Emerick, S., & Wallace, A. (2021). *Digital strategies: Data-driven public relations, marketing, and advertising*. Oxford University Press.
- Macnamara, J. (2017). Creating a ‘democracy for everyone’: Strategies for increasing listening and engagement by government. The London School of Economics and Political Science.  
<https://www.lse.ac.uk/media-and-communications/assets/documents/research/2017/MacnamaraReport2017.pdf>
- Nadkarni, S., & Prüggl, R. (2021). Digital transformation: a review, synthesis and opportunities for future research. *Management Review Quarterly*, 71(2), 233–341.
- Oksiutycz, A. and Kunene, S.J. (2017). Contribution of online corporate communication to brand reputation among millennials in the Vaal region, *Communicatio*, 43(3-4), 74-94.
- Oliver, S. M. (Ed.). (2004). *Handbook of corporate communication and public relations: Pure and applied*. Routledge.
- Oltarzhevskiy, D.O. (2019). Typology of contemporary corporate communication channels, *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 24(4), 608-622.

- Onkvisit, S. & Shaw, J. J. (1987). Standardized international advertising: A review and critical evaluation of the theoretical and empirical evidence. *Columbia Journal of World Business*, 22, 43-55.
- Schwarz, J. A. (2017). Platform logic: An interdisciplinary approach to the platform-based economy. *Policy & Internet*, 9(4), 374–394.
- Shoemaker, P. J. (1991). *Gatekeeping*. Sage.
- Sommerfeldt, E. J., Kent, M. L. & Taylor, M. (2012). Activist practitioner perspectives of website public relations: Why aren't activist websites fulfilling the dialogic promise? *Public Relations Review*, 38(2), 303–312.
- Suchman, M. C. (1995). Managing legitimacy: Strategic and institutional approaches. *Academy of Management Review*, 20(3), 571–610.
- Tilson, D., Lyytinen, K., and Sørensen, C. (2010). Research Commentary—Digital Infrastructures: The Missing IS Research Agenda, *Information Systems Research*, 21(4), 748–759.
- Valentini, C. (Ed.). (2021). *Public relations* (Handbook of Communication Science, 27). DeGruyter Mouton.
- van Riel, C. B. M. (1995). *Principles of corporate communication*. Prentice Hall.
- Van Riel, C. B. M. (1997). Research in corporate communication: An overview of an emerging field. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 11, 288-309.
- van Riel, C. B. M., & Fombrun, C. (2007). *Essentials of corporate communication: Implementing practices for effective reputation management*. Routledge.
- van Riel, C. B. M., & Balmer, J. M. T. (1997). Corporate identity: The concept, its measurement, and management. *European Journal of Marketing*, 31, 341-355.
- Weiner, M. (2021). *PR technology, data and insights: Igniting a positive return on your communications investment*. Kogan Page.
- Wiencierz, C. & Röttger, U. (2017). The Use of Big Data in Corporate Communication. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 22(3), 258-272.

- Wiesenberg, M., Zerfass, A. & Moreno, A. (2017). Big data and automation in strategic communication. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 11(2), 95-114.
- Wilson, C., Brubaker, P., & Smith, B. (2020). Cracking the snapcode: Understanding the organizational and technological influences of strategic social media adoption. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 14(1), 41–59.
- Wright, D. K., & Hinson, M. D. (2017). Tracking how social and other digital media are being used in public relations practice: A twelve-year study. *Public Relations Journal*, 11(1), 1-30.
- Yaxley, H. (2012). Digital public relations - revolution or evolution? *The Public Relations Handbook*, 411–432.
- Ye, L. & Ki, E. (2012). The status of online public relations research: An analysis of published articles in 1992-2009. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 24(5), 409–434.
- Zerfass, A., Verhoeven, P., Moreno, A., Tench, R., & Verčič, D. (2020). *European Communication Monitor 2020. Ethical challenges, gender issues, cyber security, and competence gaps in strategic communication. Results of a survey in 44 countries*. Brussels: EUPRERA/EACD.
- Zerfass, A., & Viertmann, C. (2017). Creating business value through corporate communication: A theory-based framework and its practical application. *Journal of Communication Management*, 21(1), 86-91.
- Zerfass, A., Buhmann, A., Tench, R., Verčič, D., & Moreno, A. (2021). *European Communication Monitor 2021. CommTech and digital infrastructure, video-conferencing, and future roles for communication professionals. Results of a survey in 46 countries*. Brussels: EUPRERA/EACD.
- Zhou, A. & Xu, S. (2022). Digital public relations through the lens of affordances: a conceptual expansion of the dialogic principles, *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 1-19.