

CORPORATE COMMUNICATION

The book is a collection of articles by Academicians and Professionals on various facets of corporate communication. The author has attempted to cover the recent trends and features in the corporate world. This book can be used as a reference for the Under Graduate and Post Graduate students of Journalism and Communication and Management. This Book can be used by first year BBA students who want to specialize in Corporate Communication and help them to understand the subject better from the professional perspective.

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6.10 Adoption of Collaborative digital workspaces

Corporate companies adopt collaborative workspaces in various departments and such trend within the corporate communication department can also be seen in the recent past. Conversion of corporate communication job from 09 – 04 to 24X7 itself has changed today's office landscape, because it often involves traditional office motifs and norms with new, digital forms of interaction with the introduction of a better digital workspace. It also adds accountability to the one who communicate. Because most digital interactions are recorded in some way and modern project management systems are designed to keep track of progress and interactions, there's a greater level of accountability in a digital environment. Hence the corporates are happy to adopt collaborative digital workspaces.

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Responsibilities of Corporate Communicator

'Business is changing rapidly but changing people's attitude towards business is a different business altogether.'

The environment, in which an organization operates, greatly influences its nature and working. Its success largely depends upon how it is viewed by key stakeholders, such as shareholders and investors, customers and consumers, employees and members of the community in which it operates. To build congenial relations with these stakeholders, the corporate communicator must communicate a way that meets the needs, ideals and aspirations of all its audiences. According to P. Jackson, corporate communication is 'the integrated approach to all kinds of communications produced by an organisation, directed at all relevant target groups.' Before we proceed to explore the role and responsibilities of a corporate communicator it is important to have an overview of corporate communication and its origin.

The period from industrial revolution to the early 1930's was characterised by mass production and consumption. The role of communication was limited to promotion, publicity and selling in expanded markets. The economic reforms in Western nations post 1930s brought diversified roles and professional expertise to the field of communication thereby making communication practices more systematic and skilled. The evolution of organisations from businesses to companies, from companies to corporates and further into conglomerates changed the way business was operated and communication was exchanged. Globalization, digitization and increased competition further strengthened the role of corporate communication

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as a management function. Argenti (2007) observes that various new laws forced the companies to communicate in situations which they were not used to, leading them to create dedicated resources to manage the flow of communications. Some scholars believe that corporate communication is an offshoot of public relations. The public relations function largely comprised of communication with the press but as the demand for information from the public increased, management of corporate image became a specialised task. Gradually, PR metamorphosed into corporate communication covering many other aspects that PR traditionally did not handle. Corporate communication came to 'incorporate a whole range of specialized disciplines, including corporate design, corporate advertising, internal communication to employees, issues and crisis management, media relations, investor relations, change communication and public affairs'. (Argenti, 1996)

Corporate communication is an enabling process that helps the organisation communicate effectively and efficiently with its varied audiences. According to Fernandis (2004), 'Corporate communication is a long term strategic initiative taken by a corporate organisation to communicate the core brand and its core messages to a spectrum of audiences in a globalized market environment. As a management function corporate communication coordinates the communication initiatives of a company into an organised whole'. Van Riel (1995) defines corporate communication as 'an instrument of management by means of which all consciously used forms of internal and external communication are harmonized as effectively and efficiently as possible'. Thus, corporate communication encompasses planning, coordinating and disseminating information in an integrated manner. The sustainability of a company in the 21st century largely depends on strategic communication management, which forms the core of corporate communication.

The landscape of corporate communication is changing rapidly with the shifting technologies, faster pace of transmission and ever increasing audiences. Corporate communication assists an organisation in determining the most advantageous role communication can play to influence the key publics it aims to interact with. It contributes majorly towards altering perception, changing attitude and managing how people perceive an organisation. The primary role of corporate communication is to manage a company's reputation and help build public consent for the organisation and its business. In today's globally competitive business environment public consent can no longer be assumed; it must be earned and earned continuously. (Gibson, 2004)

goal of corporate communication is to create corporate image in the minds of the public and maintain corporate reputation while keeping the corporate vision intact. However, since every organisation has a distinct identity and field of operations, it needs to develop and exchange content that defines its distinctiveness. This makes the role of a corporate communicator even more challenging in an organisation. Professionals with specialized skills work as corporate communicators to coordinate and integrate the different functions of an organisation towards achieving a unified and coherent goal.

7.1 Role and Responsibilities of a Corporate Communicator

In the day to day routine, a corporate communicator is engaged in a variety of activities ranging from preparing press releases and producing communication materials, designing engaging interactive content for the audience, internal counselling, handling customer/consumer inquiries, gathering information, conducting research, sifting through research data for valuable information, devising effective communication strategies, working on communication plans, making presentations and performing other administrative tasks within the organisation. Depending upon the size of an organisation, a corporate communicator may be performing any or all of these tasks. These activities may be characterised by variety and brevity and each practitioner may handle it in a different manner but all communicators need to coordinate with different departments of the organisation for smooth conduction of these responsibilities. Despite the variety of activities, the researchers have identified some general predominant roles based on the overall range of activities that the corporate communicator officers (CCO) generally perform. These include:

- ▶ Preparing communication material and selecting appropriate media to deliver it to various stakeholders.
- ▶ Diagnosing communication processes of an organisation and resolving communication issues.
- ▶ Acting as a mediator between an organisation and its stakeholders to ensure improved understanding and better relationship between the two.
- ▶ Collaborating with other managers to identify and solve communication problems.
- ▶ Guiding the decision making process of an organisation.
- ▶ Managing crisis communication.
- ▶ Evaluating the reputation of the company and its key officers.

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company.

- Promoting participation and involvement of the stakeholders in the organisation.
- Assisting the organisation in managing corporate social responsibility.

To begin with, the most important task for a corporate communicator is to identify the stakeholders. The stakeholders or target audience of an organisation may be defined as the groups of people who influence a company's success. It is important to identify them and understand their communication needs so that effective communication may be designed. Organisations comprise of network of people who communicate with each other on different occasions and for different reasons. Communications within an organisation flow vertically and horizontally, formally and informally, internally and externally, linking the employees to each other, to the management and also to the many external publics of the organisation. Not all communications are aimed towards fulfilling company's goals and objectives but to some extent all communications influence the perception of the workers and the observers about an organisation and its activities which in turn affects an organisation's external image, perception and reputation.

Media convergence, new technologies and new analytics demand a new communications model in every six to seven months. Thus, a corporate communicator needs to devise new communication strategies based on how people get their information. The role of a corporate communicator can take several forms, from writing a simple press release to managing a critical company crisis. However a few basic core responsibilities of a CCO can be listed as under:

- **Communication** – Though this may appear to be the most basic responsibility of a communicator but it is definitely the most challenging one. Communicating involves the entire process of identifying the target audience, selecting appropriate channels, designing suitable message and evaluating its impact on the receiver. Thus, this one word encompasses a whole set of activities that keeps the corporate communicator engaged throughout the year. The audience base is expanding beyond geographical boundaries and media tools are converging rapidly offering more viable,

communicator even more challenging. In order to be successful, a corporate communication practitioner needs to cater to the ever growing number of stakeholders by selecting suitable communication channels based on their information, consumption patterns and designing messages that influence their attitudes and perception favourably towards the company. Planned communication can help the organization build awareness, reinforce goodwill, deliver meaningful content and correct misleading information. Bata has always been a popular shoe brand in India. However, it has always been associated with school shoes and formal wear leaving the company almost disconnected with the younger generation for decades. To bounce back into fashion and lifestyle space and to ensure higher traction with the younger demographic, the company recently launched the 'Surprisingly Bata Campaign'. With KritiSanon and Sushant Singh Rajput on board as brand ambassadors, the campaign led to improved youth connectivity, increased footfalls and rich dividends for the brand. Strategic communication was used to reposition the brand among the younger generation. Apart from advertising on all major national and regional television channels and print mediums, the social media communication of the brand went beyond shoes and offered diverse content like wardrobe curation, do-it-yourself videos and interesting contests to engage the younger customers. Further, the brand also intends to tie up with popular youth portals like PopXO to create engaging store activities where fashion influencers create some of the best looks for the young consumers using new Bata designs.

- **Corporate Reputation Management** – Business organisations often come under attack from various groups of the society which makes reputation management an inevitable part of corporate communication. Every organisation has its own identity and reputation. The primary role of corporate communication is to manage the company's reputation and help it in achieving public consent for its activities. It takes years for a company to build good reputation but one adverse situation can put years of work at stake. In the age of internet, companies can come under public scrutiny within seconds and online communities can be formed instantly on common issues. Thus, reputation management in the age of new media has become a complex task. Thus, CCOs need to monitor and study public

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perception and work towards positive positioning of their company in the perception of the stakeholders that they deal with. According to Reputation Institute, a good corporate reputation is vital for an organization to perform well. Around 40% of a [public] company's market performance can be attributed to non-financial factors associated with its corporate reputation. The most effective reputation management approach involves promoting the company honestly, implementing customer experience processes, redressing consumer complaints with defined TAT (turn-around time) and actively engaging with customers online. A recent example is that of Zomato, the online food delivery platform. On July 31, 2019 a customer tweeted to the company that he didn't accept a delivery because the executive belonged to a particular religion. Zomato responded with its now memorable "*Food is religion*" statement. Applause and support for Zomato followed. There were angry tweets too, accusing the company of hypocrisy. One-star ratings were doled out for the app. Meanwhile, Zomato continued to trend. The overarching sentiment was positive and benefitted the company.

➤ **Building Corporate Identity** – Like individuals, corporate organisations also have identities. However, corporate identity is never "fixed": it constantly changes according to the internal and external changes of the organisation. It is the esteem or image of the organisation; it refers to the way in which a company is assessed by the people associated with it either externally or internally. The perceptions of different stakeholders like employees, investors, distributors and customers collectively build corporate identity of an organisation. A positive corporate identity can be a strategic asset to gain competitive advantage in the long run. The corporate identity is built by various symbolic characteristics like the logo, name, slogan, typography and colour, aesthetic characteristics like architecture, stationary, design, presentation but most importantly by the way it communicates with its stakeholders. Thus, in order to build an effective corporate image, the corporate communicator needs to design effective communication strategy that integrates all characteristics of an organisation from name and logo, to office infrastructure and design, marketing, employees, ethics, product, promotional activities and advertising.

➤ **Consumer durable and automobile brands like Honda, Maruti Suzuki, Sony, Apple have built a strong corporate identity by using the same logo, theme, punch-line and tone through all its communication.** Balaji has

concentrated on the theme 'Value for Money' for years which is reflected in its communication and services. In service sector most of the financial institutions such as LIC, ICICI Bank and HDFC follow the approach of corporate identity as consumer trust is most important factor in their field of operations. Apart from these Taj group (hospitality sector) also follows the same strategy. Its luxury, leisure, business and budget chains all carry the common Taj identity.

➤ **Corporate Advertising** – Advertising is a persuasive communication that influences a large number of people with a single message. It is a mediated communication controlled by the advertiser that aims to promote an idea, product or service whereas the aim of corporate advertising or institutional advertising is to strengthen the image of the brand or organisation in the minds of the public. According to Parri and McDonald (1985), corporate advertising is a special, paid and impersonal form of communication used by organisations to transmit its key corporate attributes and values and build a desired corporate image among the chosen target group. This advertising aims to benefit the reputation of the organisation rather than promoting any specific product or service. CCO may thus use corporate advertising to achieve any or all of the following objectives- strengthen company's reputation, inform the public about company policies, endorse company's products and services, build favourable attitude about the company, enhance investment opportunities and financial viability of the company, publicise company's achievements, promote its business interests, present and defend company's position and inform stakeholders about its best practices.

Many companies like Hindustan Unilever Limited, Procter & Gamble, Volkswagen, General Motors take part in corporate branding, wherein instead of branding only one particular product or brand, they brand the corporate itself. Procter and Gamble's ArielMatic detergent powder targets the upper middle class segment who own a washing machine and are willing to pay a premium for improved quality. They recently started campaign #ShareTheLoad that addressed the changing role of women in a progressive society and urged the males to share the load by helping them in laundry. The ad went so viral that even Sheryl Sandberg, Chief Operating Officer of Facebook, praised the ad by saying that the ad helped in changing stereotypes. It stressed on creating a world where both men and women are truly equal, even in their domestic roles.

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➤ **Crisis Management** – Crisis is an adverse event which may be caused due to a natural calamity or maybe created due to internal or external human conflicts, change in government policies, project closure or financial instability. Each category of crisis whether man – made or natural requires careful handling. The reputation and goodwill of a company during crisis greatly depends upon how it responds to the situation, how it takes care of the people affected and most importantly how it plans to rebound after a crisis. Communication plays an important role in various stages of managing a crisis. The three major phases of crisis management are pre – crisis phase, crisis phase and post – crisis phase. If the crisis situation has already been anticipated, the CCO can play a vital role in mitigation and prevention of the crisis through negotiation, communication and preventive action. During the crisis, it becomes important for the organisation to communicate its stand and future course of action. During crisis, all stakeholders – employees, shareholders, suppliers, policy makers, financial institutions and above all the media wish to know the truth and thus communication takes the centre stage. The post – crisis communication phase needs to highlight relief, recovery and rehabilitation measures being undertaken by the organisation. The CCO may send press releases, organise press briefing, buy space in the media or create a special blog to address the crisis situation on behalf of the company and thank the stakeholders for standing by the company.

Nestle India faced a major PR crisis in the year 2015 when it failed to convince its valued customers against the charges of excess levels of lead pressed against its Maggi noodles. Once the top selling noodle in India, Maggi was banned in April 2015 and 35,000 tons of the product was removed from the store shelves. Its reputation was severely damaged and sales badly affected. Though several PR and crisis management experts believe that Maggi failed in handling corporate communications effectively during crisis, it is a fact that it has regained 60% of the market share with improved PR and communication. The company substantially increased its communication staff and engaged specialised staff to manage communications and public affairs. The company also started emphasising on health and nutrition which was reflected in its future advertising and communication initiatives. Initiatives were also taken to actively engage the audience on social media and a section dedicated to updates about Maggi was added to their website. Twitter and other platforms were used

successfully for #WeMissYouToo campaign that reminded the people of the emotional value that the product once had for them. Videos, comments, posters, everything went into the rebuilding the connection that the product had with its consumers. The Maggi shares have doubled since the noodles ban in 2015, suggesting that the company has navigated the crisis well.

➤ **Employee Relations** – Effective coordination and control in the organisations can only be achieved through communication. Though most companies have HR departments to address employee issues, corporate communication works mainly towards keeping the employees motivated and dedicated towards the organisation. While information relating to company policies and procedures, negotiations with trade unions and welfare activities of the employees are managed by HR department, stories highlighting the achievement of employees and the organisation in mass media to boost the morale of internal stakeholders are the responsibility of the corporate communicator. Different tools like face to face communication, house journals, employee stories in media, bulletin boards, brainstorming sessions, video magazines highlighting creative talents and achievements of the employees on web pages of the organisation, employee blogs, etc. are used by CCOs for effective and engaging communication with the employees. Apart from these in – house cultural clubs and societies may be created within organisations to build rapport between the management and the employees. Open days where employees bring in their families to participate in various activities is another popular technique used to increase employee engagement. Effective corporate communication can help management to connect with the employees and motivate them to turn organisational goals into their personal goals.

Indian Hotels, a group which operates the Taj chain of hotels, has successfully been able to create a culture wherein the performance of their employees is improved through the guidance of senior leaders at employee orientation efforts. Tata club at Jamshedpur is another example of Tata Motors' employee engagement where frequent get together for employees and their families is organised where they come together and have fun. The Community Development Centres (CDCs) have also been established all across India by the company to merge family values into Tata Motors' organizational culture. To promote education and encourage the achievements of employees' children, awards are also given

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company.

► **Government Relations** – Business operates within strict legal boundaries. Any expansion or new venture cannot be undertaken without the involvement of the government. Most big companies have a separate wing altogether to manage government relations as it requires contacts and experience and also because they want it to be strictly confidential. However, in other organisations government relations too are handled by corporate communicators. Lobbying, also referred to as public affairs is the major part of government relations management. Various associations like Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), Association of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (ASSOCHAM) and Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) communicate with the government bodies on behalf of the industries and negotiate on agendas that suit the interest of different sectors. To safeguard the individual interests of the company or to garner government support and funding for an important project, the role of a corporate communicator comes to fore. To maintain positive government relations, CCO needs to devise long term goals and short term objectives in accordance with the goals of the organisation. The organisation needs to have constant interaction with the government. Positive communication can go a long way in building cordial relations between the government and businesses. Planned communication strategies implemented through press briefings, press conferences, public gatherings, annual general meetings, corporate literature, positive news and columns in the media and socially relevant CSR activities can successfully create a positive image of the company among the public and authorities. On January 7, 2009, RamalingaRaju, the erstwhile Chairman of Satyam Ltd., India's leading IT firm, e-mailed his resignation to market regulator SEBI admitting to financial irregularities. The crisis impacted several companies associated with Satyam. However, due to the steady relations with the government in the past, the communications team handling the issue convinced the government for immediate intervention. The real value at stake was not the company's tangible assets but the clients, employees and most importantly its reputation. The effective partnership between the industry and government worked well and an interim board consisting of industry stalwarts was set up to assess the true worth of Satyam and to seek suitable investor and management. The swiftly conducted bid was

handed over to Tech Mahindra. It was hence believed that ongoing and long term partnerships between the government and the corporate sector can not only successfully manage crisis of this proportion but also help to address legal/regulatory lacunae of the industry.

► **Media Relations** – Most of the information that people receive today is through media. Media and corporate communication are interdependent and interlinked. While corporate communicators rely on media to disseminate their messages to the public, media expects corporate communicator to provide newsworthy business information. The different tools used by the communicator to interact with the media are press release, press note, handout, rejoinders, press conference, press tour and press briefing. A corporate communicator ensures regular interaction with the media so that the company maintains its media presence. Effective media relations are the key to successful corporate communication. However, building lasting relationship with the media requires mutual trust and understanding. A corporate communicator must know about the company objectives, its competitors, market dynamics, legal and financial operational framework and organisations future projections to develop effective and selling corporate stories. Good relations with the media not only ensure adequate media presence of the organisation but also help the CCO in dealing with negative publicity and propaganda.

► **Corporate Social Responsibility** – The World Bank has defined Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as operating a business in a manner that meets or exceeds the ethical, legal, commercial and public expectations that society has of business. CSR has now become an integral part of business. Under CSR initiatives organisations take responsibility of the impact of their activities on the society and undertake activities that improve the life of community at large. CSR activities are undertaken not only to fulfil the legal binding on the companies but also to nurture and improve the relationship of the company with the community it operates within. CSR activities are undertaken in diverse thematic areas like health, environment, education, poverty alleviation, housing, women empowerment, livelihood and child development. The importance of CSR in global corporate agenda is growing rapidly and so is the need for companies to communicate their CSR initiatives effectively. From stakeholder engagement to CSR reporting, communication is a core

Satyam

part of any corporate responsibility program. CSR communication can enhance user engagement with the brand, build greater brand loyalty, help the employees understand and embrace their role in meeting the company's environmental and social commitments, mobilize stakeholders for a common cause.

Novartis a world leader in healthcare has core businesses in pharmaceuticals, vaccines, consumer health, generics, eye care and animal health. Novartis India Limited has initiated *Arogya Parivar* scheme to address healthcare needs of rural India. It is termed as a first of its kind effort by a Big Pharma in India. Novartis India employs health educators to create awareness among the rural population on diseases, prevention and treatments. Under the system, the health educators also refer patients to doctors, apart from making the products available in pharmacies and briefing the physicians about the programme and treatments. According to the Novartis website, this initiative has delivered health education to approximately 24 million people in India across 11 states and provided health diagnosis and treatment to 2.5 million people (Novartis, 2016). In addition to the extensive list of benefits provided to rural Indian populations, the company's fact sheet also describes how the 'commercially-viable program ... began returning a profit after 30 months and since 2007, sales have increased 25-fold' (Novartis, 2014).

The ever changing market dynamics is constantly making the job of a corporate communicator more challenging. The instantaneous transmission of information and multiplicity of its sources has not only reduced the attention span of the consumers but also made them doubt the information offered to them about various products and services. Thus, creating effective mental and emotional associations of the brand or company with its customers is becoming a challenging task for the communicators. Apart from this, it has become imperative for companies and brands to maintain visible online presence. Social media is constantly evolving, and the accessibility of live streaming options like Facebook Live, Instagram Live, YouTube Live, and many more means that brands and influencers can connect with their audiences in real time. Thus, it is imperative for communicators to find the best way to connect with their audience through live platforms. Online platforms offer greater opportunities to share written and visual content. Thus, engaging storytelling initiatives have to be undertaken to build distinctiveness and value of the brand.

From banners to billboards, from radio and television commercials, to ads on the internet, the advertising overdose has made consumers reach a blind spot. They now pay lesser attention to advertised content. Thus, broader corporate branding strategies rooted in public relations, sponsorship and corporate citizenship have grown in importance in the media – mix for influencing perceptions and cutting through the crowded media marketplace to position the company behind the products (Ries and Ries, 2002). Further, Product differentiation has always been a challenge for the companies. Easy availability of low cost imitations of popular brands and proliferation of international franchises around the world has led to increased homogeneity of products and services. Thus, corporate communication is becoming the new source of creating brand differentiation and creating brand distinctiveness.

In early 1960's Marshall McLuhan foresaw a single world community, connected by modern telecommunications and called it the Global Village. Today, with blurring national boundaries, world has become a global marketplace making it imperative for companies to build global image. The early 90's brought yet another concept into the business vocabulary – Glocal. It's expanded version 'think global, act local' has not only been put into effective use by corporate communicators but even the 'Make in India' scheme popularized by Modi government was based on this dictum. Thus, the situation has become even more challenging for corporate communicators who need to maintain global quality standards, adopt digital technologies and build a global presence.

Recent research amongst the corporate communication practitioners indicates that many still need to become fully familiar and comfortable with the ins and out of the new technologies and work out how they might be used most effectively for their organisations. The information consumption patterns and audience engagement with the media is changing at a rapid pace, offering new challenges for the communication practitioners. The flow of information has become multi-dimensional. In the recent years stakeholders have become much more active in voicing their opinions towards the organisation and empowered with new media technologies they have also started expecting the organisations to engage in more interactive and dialogue based communication. The communicators must thus learn how to combine proven techniques and strategies of corporate communication with latest technologies for successful and results driven meaningful interaction.