

# Strategic communication: CSR aspects in Industry 4.0 – case study of IKEA in the Millennials

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## Abstract

This paper examines strategic communication in CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility), this has been the subject of some studies and the increasing popularity of the term strategic communication directly results from developments in emerging markets. The researchers study the importance of employees in the external and internal communication of organizations. Building upon a comprehensive literature review and systematization of concepts at the nexus of strategic communication and management research the following document was written. The new framework combines the multiple perspectives and types of alignment discussed so far, differentiating between external and internal on the digital system. It is useful for future empirical and critical conceptual research to inspire strategic communication scholars and to carry forward research. The main objective is the analysis of the strategic communication of the IKEA brand in the Millennials target as a proposal to trigger a paradigm shift to integrate the strategic and operational levels of marketing CSR in a company. Subsequently, strategic communication is the object to be included in the corporate strategy.

**Keywords** *Strategic communication; Corporate Communication; Innovation; Platform; CSR.*

## Introduction

The benefit demonstrates improves business performance and increases the competitive business advantage of the organization (Mazzei, 2014). Innovation (*I*) is a word that gets thrown around these days but comes in many different forms. *Strategic Communication* is a conceptual word and describes also the social ecology aspect (Hallahan, K., et al., 2007). It derives from the Latin verb *innovate*, composed of the particle *in*, and the verb *novare*, do new, that to his comes from the adjective *Novus*. It means, that is, to change the order of things established “to make new”.

*I* is the ability to analyze the deficit of the present and the past and anticipate change, rather than passively undergoing it. The terms of measurement are the achievement of innovation and the creation of new value. At this time of major crises, of large and unresolved social challenges (for example, climate change, the problem of energy, and long-term sustainability in general) the value achieved by innovation must be measured in more general terms, which consider the multiple aspects of human nature and society. From this important consideration, the concept of *social innovation* or a way of making the world new can produce wealth in a widespread way by generating sustainable improvements in the living conditions of the community. Throughout, thanks to increasingly accessible communication technologies, *I* become not only the box, but it co-generates innovative processes. The exploration of the communicative nature of innovation processes and their impact of this is a part of the implication of human interactions (Merethe, Berg Aasen, Johannessen, 2011) merging in responsive processes of negotiation (George H. Mead 1937, Stacey & Griffin, 2005). Increasingly, however, the debate on *innovation* is approaching the relative emergence of new forms of the economy (primarily *sharing economy* and *collaborative economy*) that according to some authors would be able to propose new paradigms able to overcome the logic of capitalism.

The theory of a new economic system, *Collaborative Commons* explains already changing the way we organize economic life, offering the possibility of dramatically narrowing the income divide. It democratized the global economy in the first half of the twenty-first century (Rifkin, 2014). Sharing the economy, information, retainment, the green energy with social media sites with low and near zero marginal costs, is the Third Industrial Revolution - Internet of Things infrastructure. The industrial capitalism of a previous era has given way to a new form of financial capitalism (Mason, 2021). The financial capitalists, unlike capitalists in Marx's day, now claim their share of the *surplus* by passively extracting interest or economic rents, but not through control of the production process. Companies like Google and Amazon are examples of industrial capitalism which try to reduce the costs of production. Low-cost consumer goods have influenced the world of workers. The greatest concentrations of wealth today still arise from the competition to sell commodities at lower prices. The decisive factor in the choice of purchase changes as the product category changes.

## Searching aspects

The Company is conceived in classical economic theory, as an organization with the ability to combine productive factors (inputs) and processes to achieve greater value (Porter, 1985). This higher value, transferred in financial metrics, assumes the term *profit*. The relationship between company and environment, or rather, between enterprise and ecosystem, recalls the relationship between *me* and “Community”: in both cases, the approach underlies the competition with the context and aims at the achievement of a usefulness individual, which, for the ego-subject, is carried out through the function of

consumption or accumulation, for the company through the production of profit and of market power.

The Porter Value Chain as an objective to finalize is the result to maximize the competitive advantage. This is a conceptual model of the organization. Porter's Competitiveness Model (Fig.1) analyzes the strategic competitive ties of companies with their impact on the formulation of business strategies.

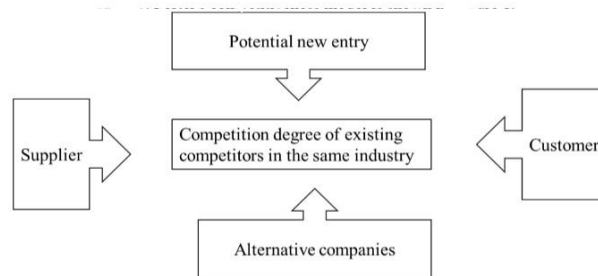


Figure 1. Porter's competitiveness model

In a competitive advantage context, the concept of a Value Chain is based on a management strategy. A series of activities can create value with relationships between the value chain and the combination of a series of value-added activities from suppliers to customers (Fig.1) The competitive advantage may lie in each of the different activities. An enterprise will gain a competitive advantage by performing these activities more efficiently and effectively than competitors. CSR became a priority for leaders in every country (Porter, Kramer, 2006). Porter and Kramer describe a new vision between business and society based on the idea of *innovation* in the social integration of the company. The success of the Company can reinforce the community also.

**Exploring the conditions**

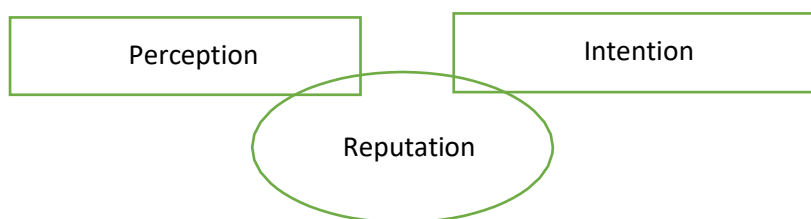
H1) Strategic communication trigger a paradigm shift toward the birth of the collaborative economy already in progress.

The research study, on the other aspect, is about organizational effectiveness and success (Kang & Sung,2017). The employees, not to forget, are the strategic components. The connections typically more frequent and therefore common to multiple enterprises are for example those that are established between internal and external activities. The technological evolution of Information Technology (*IT*) has allowed companies to manage more efficiently all the categories of valuable assets and to exploit the links established between the assets within and outside the company. *IT* permeates each stage of the value chain, influencing not only the way each task is performed and the nature of the links between them but also how the products aim to meet the needs of the customer. Even then, the systems information plays a key role in achieving competitive advantage: the *platform*, is the key tool.

**The implications for research and management**

In companies, the best CSR initiatives within strategic communication are conveyed towards the internal communication of its employees with a channel is a *platform* and can best make decisions about issues and communicate it with a contribution of two models (Morsing et al, 2008). This study based on a reputation survey analyzed two case studies of Danish corporate CSR front runners, first, develop an "inside-out approach" to suggest how managers can manage their CSR activities to achieve a favorable CSR reputation. Employees are a key component in building loyalty and security. CSR communication grows up when taking an "inside-out approach". The company's communication operates across various communication *platforms internal* and *external*. Internal is symmetrical communication and this is derived from the influence of the employee's *perception* of the relationship and the employee's *intention*. These forces influence the system and have consequences on *reputation* such as the subsequent communication behavior of employees about the company and the increase in turnover. CSR communication with employee involvement in grows up the commitment to corporate CSR policies.

Fig.3 EOR – Employee Organization Relationship *Symmetrical Communication* – Own Elaboration



The professional literature has long been supporting the importance of fostering positive employee communication behaviors because influence shows that employee engagement plays a key role in creating positive employee communication behaviors. The internal communications and excellent programs of employees produce quality relationships and supportive employee behaviors toward the organizations (Grunig, 2001).

This significant role of employees' behaviors within and outside of their workplace has been increasingly analyzed by researchers across various disciplines, including business, organizational communication, and public relations. (Kim & Rhee, 2011). The other aspect, evidencing the internal crisis of communication research, begins to examine the close relationship between an organization and its internal stakeholder (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011). Numerous studies have advanced theoretical and practical understanding in the field. Employees' behaviors within and outside of a company have long been studied by scholars in other disciplines. The scholars introduce the concept of *megaphoning*, which describes the employees' 'communicative behaviors. The word of mouth includes family and friends. The employees forward and share information's strengths and weaknesses of information within the personal networks. This is voluntary communication that generates strategic communication, so it is important to convey information useful to others and not contaminated by false (Kang & Sung, 2017; Lee, Mazzei, & Kim, 2018; Park, Kim & Krishna, 2014).

Employee behaviors are important because strategic communication assumes an effective role and plays work performance for corporate reputation and can change the perception of the external public in different ways (Morrison, 2014, Lee, 2017; Miles & Mangold, 2014). Can be improved, with the mood, performance, and productivity and grow the corporate reputation of the external public.

The crisis period, after the COVID – 19 pandemic has upended every aspect of life from work, and lifestyle to the professional from the interaction with customers, to the purchases of products, and supply chains. The impacts of this will change over the next five years and on the customer's needs. Of course, seeing the opportunities emerging from this crisis is not the same as being able to seize them. Many companies cannot operate as have in the past and must adapt the core to meet satisfied customers' needs, identify new opportunities and create innovations, initiatives and build a new foundation to remain competitive in the period.

The employees in the recovery time can be an ambassador of a company or share negative impressions. Scholars during the crisis have recently begun to emphasize the critical role of employees' communicative behaviors information may play a key role in solving organizational crises effectively. In the crisis period, the strategic importance of the employees' role as problem solvers. Organizations are looking for increasingly effective strategies to interact and maintain relationships over time with their employees (Waters et al., 2013). It is a multi-level (interpersonal and organizational) and multi-dimensional (job and tasks related to human and benefits-oriented) concept for organizational members (Ni, 2007).

EOR has been classified into three levels: individual (types of employees and styles of top management), organizational (developmental stages and types of organizations) macro-environmental (employment prospect).

Public relations and employee relations have been considered the foundation of any organization that helps to achieve positive relations with the external public (Cutlip et al, 2005). Strategic communication in the relationship with employees has been sometimes limited from employees to top management. Sometimes the one-way communication by the top management to the employees has been sender-oriented and has caused much criticality towards the management because of the non-listening by the employees (Seitel, 2006). The classification is *Trust, Control mutuality, Relational satisfaction, and Relational commitment*.

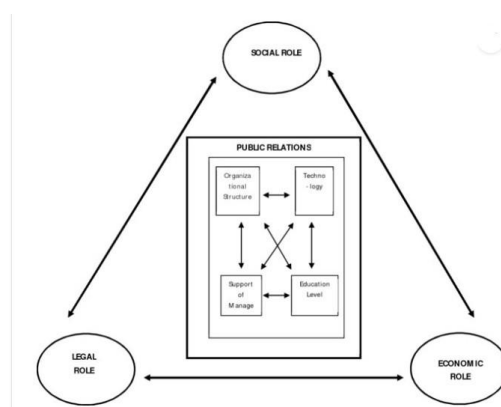


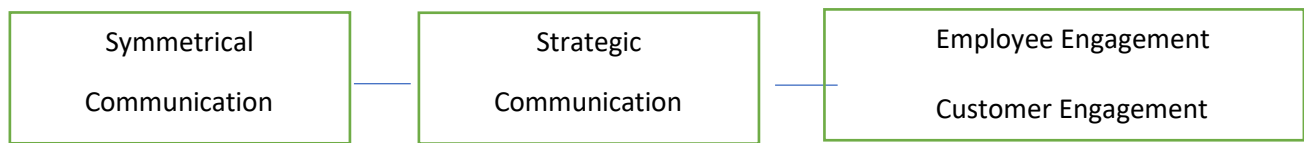
Fig.4

Second organizational communication literature has typically included eight major traditions when examining internal communication: *communication channels; communication climate; network analysis; superior-subordinate communication; the information-processing perspective; the rhetorical perspective; the cultural perspective; the political*

perspective (Putnam and Cheney, 1985).

There are strategic aspects and studies showed that communication between employees if it is *strategic* has positive results.

Fig.5- Own Elaboration



CSR follows some lines of actions that are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of the society (Bowen, 195). CSR is a forum for sensemaking, diversity opinion, and debate over the conflicting social norms and expectations attached to corporate activity” (Guthey and Morsing, 2014) CSR can influence existing key business metrics, such as return on capital employed (ROCE) or economic valueadds (EVA), in several ways. The new media platforms such as the Internet and social media, allow strategic communication with a stakeholder–centered approach across communication platforms. These include media spaces such as websites, blogs, and social media ( Holtzhausen ,2008) Public Relations generally focus attention on attitudes and communicative actions whereas focusing on ROI (Return Of Investment). In a recent study of German Corporations, the communicators shared the opinion that strategic communication creates positive images also (Zerfass, Schwalbach, Bentele, & Sherzada, 2014). Fig.6 tried to understand how a socially responsible way of thinking may alter investment decisions (Petersenand Vredenburg,2009) The results have shown that corporate social responsibility was a significant variable in the decision-making process. To reduce potential risks involving the target market, corporate social responsibility might be seen as a strategic communication tool (Fig.3)

Fig.6



Fig. 1. A Model of Strategic Communication Management

The measurement of reputation identified by (Stacks, et al. 2013): is visibility, credibility, authenticity, transparency, trust, relationships, and confidence.

The performance and the measurement of it is a connection with the role of strategic communication. The divergence between the outcomes performances and the expectations can create different results. From thispoint of view, strategic communication requires the help of the employees and stakeholders.

The measurement of this is the contribution of communicators to ROI and other key organizational metrics. This changed with the big data and with the smart algorithm it follows and with subsequent actions generated follows another algorithm by a post. The algorithm compiles a profile and is an indication about the reader also. Mayer - Schonberger and Curier (2013) explain that big data complete the DNA profile of a single human being. The weaknesses of big data are high costs and are unable to provide new solutions to business problems. The methodology of the research is a study with the analyses of the traditional quantitative survey methodology and qualitative data collection such as the in-depth interview (Boyd & Crawford, 2013). The measurement of social and online media indeed provides new methods for measuring strategic communication outcomes. The social media metrics are used to determine their value with qualitative analysis of social media.

### **IKEA**

It is a multinational company founded in 1943 by Ingvar Kamprad. Ikea operates in the field of furniture and furnishings

for the home offering different practical, comfortable and sustainable solutions for the environment. IKEA is the world's largest supplier of furniture and utensils, with 331 self-owned and franchised shops in 41 countries. Since its inception, IKEA's vision has been to create a better everyday life for many people by offering a wide range of well-designed, functional home furnishings at low-price that many people can afford their products. IKEA Foundation initially focused only on architecture and interior design. They believe that home is the most important place in the world. Over the years, IKEA becomes active in addressing the root causes of child labor as well as endeavors with major partners to promote children's rights and education(IKEA Foundation, 2020). Ikea finds solutions to current changes and needs to have a beautiful and functional home in fact is constantly updated.

### Research Methods

Millennials or "generation Y" are the first category of people to be raised in close connection with new communication technologies. In fact, they are part of the most educated population about corporate social responsibility. As a result, the increased demand for fair and sustainable behaviors has increased the pressure on businesses, which have integrated into their current methodology of doing business the concept of sustainability. Millennials are those people between the ages of 18 and 37 and their peculiarity is that they grew up in a dominated society by the Internet (Crosthwaite, 2016) and therefore are involved and influenced constantly by the web.

In this paper, we want to analyze the communication channels used by companies to convey their CSR practices and how these affect the behavior of Millennials. Moreover, through a sample survey on this target, want to understand how the new generation is informed about the issues of CSR. The aim is to check whether large retailers communicate correctly and effectively CSR to Millennials.

The survey was carried out between July and August 2022 and was subjected to a sample of Millennials living in Italy. We have prepared questionnaires by using Google Forms to ensure the respondents can easily access the questionnaires. To describe the data of the quantitative survey taken in only the number of persons who completed the entire survey, so as to have a comparison in percentage terms with the rest of the other questions. There are 126 respondents, but the data will be described and Analyzed with a sample of 105. We use the cross-sectional study to allow us to answer research questions because the data collection time is reduced, the costs are lower, and the data is collected only once.

The survey was structured in two main parts: the first part was used to analyze the knowledge of the CSR of the Millennials and how much their consumption choices are; the second, however, has served to verify whether the distribution uses the correct means of communication to communicate with this audience. In addition, we provide structured questionnaires and distribute them to respondents. In our questionnaire, we used the Likert Scale to get the results from the questionnaire filled out by the respondents. The Likert scale will be used to measure a person's perception and attitude or opinion. The Likert Scale has five scale options, Scale one, Scale two, Scale three, Scale four, and Scale five. Scale one is strongly disagreeable. Scale two is disagreeable. Scale three is neutral. Scale four is agreeable and Scale five is strongly agreeable. The questionnaire consists of some sections such as the background of respondents, the feedback after visiting, and the opinions on the shopping experiences. The questions by using the Likert scale to analyze the collected data

### Summary of Respondents' Demographics (N= 105)

Tab. 1

<i>Age</i>	<i>Percentage %</i>
<i>21/28</i>	24
<i>29/30</i>	29
<i>31/37</i>	48
<i>Gender</i>	
Male	35
Female	65
<i>Nationality</i>	
<i>European</i>	100
<i>Level of Education</i>	-

<i>Finished compulsory education</i>	85
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Tab. 2 Survey on Customers

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Percentage %</i>						
<i>The definition of CSR</i>	44% the sense of responsibility that an enterprise or any other business entity demonstrates towards the community and the environment, natural and geographical both as a social context, in which it operates						
<i>CSR Company</i> Yes, I know No, I don't know	77.9 % 22.1%						
<i>CSR Company's most known</i> IKEA COOP GOOGLE APPLE	28 % 21% 25% 30%						
<i>Reference communication channel</i> Company website Social Network <table border="1" data-bbox="368 1249 681 1406"> <tr><td>-</td><td>Facebook</td></tr> <tr><td>-</td><td>Youtube</td></tr> <tr><td>-</td><td>Instagram</td></tr> </table> Newspaper Television	-	Facebook	-	Youtube	-	Instagram	100% 100% 42.3% 28.5% 29.2% 5% 25%
-	Facebook						
-	Youtube						
-	Instagram						
<i>Reviews</i> Yes No	78% 22%						
<i>Social Report</i> Yes No	100%						

23.48% of the respondents are aged between 21 and 28, 33% between 29 and 30 finally a 48.19 % are aged between 31

and 37 years. The female sex was predominant with 65.7% participation, compared to 34.3% of male individuals. The two pie charts below represent the situation of the place of residence and the level of Instruction of the participants: the level of education of respondents is medium, as 85% finished compulsory education.

Consequently, at the first application of the survey as many as 44% of participants answered correctly identifying the definition of CSR. This data indicates, as now the theme, despite there being no specialized courses in schools but is growing and spreading rapidly.

The Millennials have been asked to indicate at least one company that according to them applies the principles of CSR and to mention an example. Respondents' answers are divided almost in half because 77.9% know at least a CSR company and 22.1% say the opposite. CSR communication question, companies communicating to millennials is the scale of knowledge between Coop (21), IKEA (28), Google (25), and Apple (30). The reference communication channel to collect information about any type of company is the website, in second place the social networks (Facebook, YouTube, Instagram,.) followed by newspapers and television programs. In addition, the Millennials before purchasing or using a service, make use of reviews and of the experiences of others who consumed that good or service before them. No one consulted a Social Report

CSR in the consumption choices of millennials represents the role that represents CSR in the consumption choices of Millennials has become a fundamental attribute in their purchasing decision-making. This is due to the fact that the demand for transparency and a strong *brand reputation*, is very important for deciding which company they trust. Millennials are strongly influenced by social networks and the opinions of their peers. Relevant in the store must help customers to recognize sustainable products. Increasing visibility and information in the shops of local or organic products with a new approach is a must if you want to communicate the concept of sustainability. Regarding artificial intelligence, the Millennials prefer interaction about cabinet construction.

Tab. 3 Own Elaboration

CSR Case	CSR Strategy	CSR Consumption
IKEA	Digital Platform inside	Social Network Platform

Fig .6 tells about this and the importance of consulting. These results have shown that corporate social responsibility was a significant variable in the decision-making process. Tab. 3 is the final result.

### Conclusions

The performance of strategic communication internal and external have new perspectives and challenges, particularly in terms of performance. CSR is an important pillar of strategic communication and creates shared value. This conceptual study searches for how corporate social responsibility and social media usage could become significant components considering strategic communication management through an in-depth literature review. Strategic communication through platforms internal and external is the purposeful use of communication by an entity to engage in conversations of strategic significance to its goals and the entity includes all kinds of organizations (e.g., corporations, governments, or non-profits).

This article addresses the concept of “communication” in strategic communication and proposes a new lens through which to view communication to deepen knowledge of strategic communication, as well as to significantly improve the alignment of strategic communication with the demands of today’s strategy development process. The literature overview showed that case studies are used quite often as descriptive methods that lead to generalized suggestions, but do not offer any practical tools or actions for a company. The analysis carried out with an online survey among millennials highlighted how CSR is known is a key value but not anchor driving.

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