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# Editorial 29.6: Gender equality, workplace culture and engaging with *publics*

In editorial 27.4 (Topić, 2022), I wrote about the increase in equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) – known as diversity, equality and inclusion (DEI) in the US – scholarship in the *Corporate Communications: An International Journal* (CCIJ). Equally, in editorial 29.2 on diversity and innovation, I have argued that CCIJ continues to publish EDI/DEI works and that “CCIJ is emerging as a journal that increasingly publishes equality scholarship in corporate communication, contributing towards knowledge creation in this field as well as widening participation and bringing inclusivity to scholarship by opening doors to equality scholars in corporate communication” (Topić, 2024a, p. 118). This issue also continues in that manner, and we present several articles that tackle gender equality in public relations and corporate communications, as well as papers that tackle workplace culture and leadership. In terms of workplace culture and leadership, CCIJ publishes an increased number of these papers, thus also emerging as a venue for this work. However, whilst we regularly publish gender equality papers and present a popular venue for that work, this issue goes further and innovates research in this area by studying unconventional issues such as spillover effects of gendered communication and the impact of gender stereotypes on *publics*’ crisis response. What is more, we focus further on studying *publics* and their levels and modes of engagement with organisations and how *publics* respond to organisational messages.

In this issue, Michal Chmiel writes about the societal impact of brand public relations (BPR) on gender equality. Using an experimental method and a sample from three countries ( $N = 378$ ), the author examined the mechanism of the societal impact of BPR. The effects of spillover of evaluations between two sub-brands of a house-of-brands company, caused by positive publicity about communication co-created by Public Relations (PR), were analysed. The findings supported the existence of a positive spillover of evaluations. The author demonstrates that consumers of a female brand (Dove) changed their views about a typical woman in society by learning about how a related male brand (Lynx/Axe) communicated, and establishing these communication behaviours was enabled by using PR and the *publics* concept, not psychological theory, to explore behaviour, with which the author contributes to public relations theory and methodology. The author also shows how organisations can positively influence *publics* when they engage in responsible communication grounded in gender equality. Sining Kong, Michelle Marie Maresh-Fuehrer and Shane Gleason write about the impact of gender stereotypes on *publics*’ crisis response. The authors used two industries as case studies (automotive vs daycare) and two spokespersons (male and female), as well as two crisis response appeals (emotional and rational), to examine the effect of gender stereotypes in crisis communication. The findings have shown that “either matching spokesperson sex with sex differed industry or matching sex differed industry with appropriate crisis response appeal can generate a more positive evaluation of the spokesperson and the organisation”. In an industry associated with females such as daycare, female spokespersons generate more organisational reputation than males, whereas in a male-associated industry, such as automotive, male spokespersons are perceived as having more expertise than females. The results thus show that gender stereotyping occurs across different sexes but also in associated industries. In the automotive industry, crisis response messages using a rational appeal generated more behavioural change, thus confirming a gender-role congruity bias, meaning that the higher the incongruence between gender stereotypes and the gender role of a job, the greater gender bias. This study demonstrated the impact of socially gendered stereotypes on perceived gender roles and how these prejudices influence PR professionals who serve as



spokespeople, which reinforces the findings from the previous study that demonstrated how positive portrayal of women can have a spillover effect on *publics*. In addition to that, these two innovative studies move away from doing liberal feminist studies on organisational gender equality and instead offer something new and show how gendered stereotypes at the societal-level influence organisations and *publics*, showing that jobs can be gendered and influenced by gender stereotypes as well as that PR can have an impact on tackling gendered inequality and stereotypes when women are portrayed as intelligent beings rather than objectified, thus also contributing to the advancement of the perception of PR as more than just PR (Coombs and Holladay, 2013). What is more, these two papers demonstrate how to work with *publics* and that *publics'* views sometimes need to be challenged and organisations have an influence to do that with their large online following. Continuing with the new research agenda, Carmen Daniela Maier wrote about human social responsibility from a perspective of discursive empowerment of women innovators across organisational borders. The author looked at how challenges and achievements of human social responsibility are addressed by women innovators across the organisational borders of various industries to clarify the empowering roles of discursive strategies employed by Women in Innovation (WIN) organisation when communicating about women innovators' demanding realities and about their collaborative initiatives to introduce changes about gender, diversity and intersectionality. The results based on an analysis of blogs looking at concepts such as a social semiotic perspective on discourse and social, intellectual and symbolic capital showed that the WIN discourses "both disclose contemporary gender, diversity and intersectionality challenges across organisational borders as well as promote ways of breaking the barriers that prevent women innovators from thriving. The discursive strategies recontextualise women innovators as resourceful social actors with multiple identities. Their social actions are discursively recontextualised as collaborative challenge-solving enterprises. These recurrent discursive strategies accomplish empowering functions at individual, relational and collective well-being levels through materialising new intellectual and symbolic capital when revealing the manifestations of bridging and bonding social capital". The paper contributes to the knowledge of the impact organisational communication can have on the position of women and how careful communication can have an impact on women's perceptions among *publics*. Akshita Arora and Kuldeep Singh wrote about board gender diversity and social disclosures using Indian companies as a case study. The authors argued that "results support the idea that women are more conscious of social concerns and that having a gender-diverse board has a favourable impact on social disclosures. It also shows that when there is only one woman director on the board, she might not be able to affect social disclosures in a company; however, two or more women on board may significantly influence social disclosures". This is a finding well known in feminist literature; for example, some ecofeminists have argued that women are more likely to engage in environmentalist behaviour and also engage in CSR activities and that, as a result, we should celebrate women's differences in organisations rather than dressing this behaviour into feminine and labelling it as undesired (Topić, 2021; Tannen, 1986, 1990, 1995; Vukočić, 2013; West and Zimmerman, 1983). In this issue, also, in a study on *femvertising*, Christian Rudeloff and Joke Bruns write about female empowerment in social media communications, opening the issue of *femwashing* and arguing that companies need to develop messaging strategies that reduce the risk of being seen as insincere in their *femvertising* communications. Using an online experiment, the authors argue that "philanthropic and explicit brand promises have more positive effects on brand equity and endorsement outcomes than symbolic brand promises". More substantive statements have a more positive effect on reputation, along with perceived relationship-building efforts than symbolic statements, meaning that when brands communicate concrete messages that focus on an organisational change, *publics* perceive these activist messages as more aligned with the issue and see brands as more authentic. In addition to that, the authors argue that "it seems plausible to assume that social media engagement with *femvertising* messages is highly motivated by stakeholders' intentions to support the cause, but not necessarily to the same extent by the intent to support the company

involved,” showing that understanding *publics* is ever more relevant if organisations are to communicate effectively. This group of papers shows the importance of not just communicating gender equality but also meaningfully engaging with these practices at the organisational level before communication happens, as *publics* do not just automatically accept positive messages but look at whether messages and organisations that disseminate them are aligned with their values.

Papers tackling gender issues contribute to knowledge on gender equality and show the role of gendered views and how they impact organisations and practitioners, thus having the potential to advance practice. In addition to papers tackling gender equality in various contexts, we also present two papers tackling the fashion industry. Fashion is one of the most criticised industries in the context of a sustainability debate, but it is also an industry that employs and serves women more than most other industries (Parkins, 2006; Scott, 2006). The industry is also most likely to be prone to crisis, and Sophie Louise Johnson conducted a systematic literature review on the industry (1972–2022) to look at crises and trends in literature. Findings show an increase in “the fashion industry crisis with clear emergent themes such as sustainability, emphasising the truly global and multidisciplinary nature of the industry. Findings also reveal a genuine lack of theoretical grounding, with over 80% of the articles coded using no crisis communication theory. The findings also suggest value co-creation ought to be a priority for this agenda moving forward, as it overlaps with emerging themes and is a practical tool and concept to support crisis prevention and management through an extension of the Stakeholder Relationship Model (SRM) Model”. Tahira Javed, Ali B. Mahmoud, Jun Yang and Xu Zhao wrote about green branding in fast fashion, focusing on examining the impact of social sustainability claims on Chinese consumer behaviour and brand perception. The authors explored the role of altruistic values in promoting sustainability within the well-known fast fashion brand and how these values shape brand image, consumer satisfaction and brand equity. The findings, based on 257 Chinese study participants, have shown that there is a “direct and a positive relationship between green brand image and consumer purchase intentions, emphasising the need for clothing and textile industry marketers to strategically promote altruistic values in their sustainability efforts and highlighting the importance of ecological awareness in shaping consumer behaviour in the Chinese context. This approach enhances green satisfaction and green brand equity and ultimately leads to higher green purchase intentions”. These two interesting studies give an insight into developments in a fundamentally women’s industry, where sustainability has been on the agenda recently, and thus, the industry has become prone to crises. Altruism as a concept is an interesting one for further research as two studies in this issue open this as a concept that influences *publics*, thus contributing to the industry’s work and understanding of the *publics*.

The research presented above, which is linked to the notion of understanding *publics* and organisations being committed to the values they communicate, also leads to the issue of leadership and workplace culture. We already discussed workplace culture in *CCIJ* in the context of a special issue on internal communication. In that issue, we showed that whilst historically the workplace culture has happened in a traditional setting, it now also happens in a hybrid form and thus must be studied differently, opening the question of internal communication as an important aspect of the workplace culture (Cole *et al.*, 2014; Topić, 2024b). In this issue, Renee Mitson, Hao Xu and Jay Hmielowski wrote about understanding the efficacy of leadership communication styles in flex work contexts, a study covering trends in an increasingly remote workplace. The study examined leadership styles to understand perceptions of leadership by remote workers using online survey results ( $N = 403$ ). The findings showed that “whilst higher perceptions of leadership communication styles (responsive, vigilant and motivating language) were related to increased employee satisfaction, the amount of time spent working remotely did not moderate these relationships”. In addition to that, “the findings suggest that the benefits of demonstrating leadership communication strategies can be extended from physical environments to online spaces”. Laura L. Lemon, Claudia Bawole, Nancy H. Brinson and Bahareh Amini wrote about

using the concept of boundary turbulence from communication privacy management (CPM) theory to better understand how employee monitoring impacts employee engagement. The findings, based on responses from a survey ( $N = 633$ ), showed that people who are monitored at work distrust their company and find ways to resist being monitored, thus signalling that monitoring does not adequately capture employee engagement and that, in fact, leads to disengagement. Authors argue that management needs to implement clear privacy rules, which should be based on mutual consensus so that employees can build trust with organisations. These rules should be live and prone to changes based on feedback and the need for accuracy as well as data management for employees since they have access to employee privacy. Communication is key in the implementation of these policies because if employees are kept “abreast of monitoring system changes in real-time and strategic internal communication underpins all decisions made by management, employee engagement will not be compromised”. These papers advance knowledge on workplace culture in an increasingly remote context, looking at concepts such as leadership as well as an important and innovative issue of workplace monitoring, thus opening avenues for an increased understanding of the workplace culture in an increasingly digitalised and remote world. What is more, employees are internal *publics* and need to be brought on board if organisations are to succeed, as has been argued decades ago by Betsy Plank, the first woman to serve as the president of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) (Gower, 2022). Therefore, understanding employees’ views of leadership and workplace monitoring is increasingly relevant for organisations in general, but especially for those that conduct business remotely. Furthering the argument of the importance of employees and the internal *publics*, Christiane Marie Høvring and Anne Gammelgaard Ballantyne write for this issue about internal social media, looking at literature tackling how internal social media serves as a means of internal communication and the implications internal communication has for communicative practices. The authors argue that there are interrelated issues potentially limiting our understanding of internal communication respective to internal social media communications and call for further research into this issue, including the view of technology and the meaning creation process and how these issues impact internal communication. The rise of new technologies indeed requires innovative solutions to talking to employees, and internal social media presents a promising channel for sharing knowledge, enhancing communication and collaboration and creating engagement among employees from different departments, hierarchical levels and geographical distances (Men *et al.*, 2020), the latter being important in the context of increasingly remote workplace culture. The authors argue for adopting a socio-material perspective, a view where humans and technology produce a socio-material practice afforded by internal social media, thus looking not just at the user perspective in using internal social media but also at the cultural context surrounding technology and its users (Gode *et al.*, 2020), taking into consideration the diversity of perspectives, experiences and abilities of employees and the cultural context in which they work, and this furthermore calls for diversifying research into internal *publics* and treating them as diverse as we already do with research on external *publics*.

Finally, the last group of papers looks at issues such as CSR and crises in organisations, which can be again linked to both workplace culture and leadership, as well as the importance of segmenting and understanding *publics*. Ruqin Ren and Bei Yan write in this issue about online faith-holder communities in crisis (groups of individuals who are individuals who like and trust a brand and publicly express positive opinions), arguing that these groups play a significant role in brand reputation crises, but there is a lack of theoretical framework to explain the process in which these groups endure harm in the brand reputation whilst collectively building their reputation. The study challenged the view that online users are independent, static and reactive during brand crises and instead argued that online faith-holder communities are connected, proactive and dynamically adaptive groups in crisis situations; thus, the authors propose a dual-challenge model, highlighting the importance of internally fostering collective resilience whilst externally coordinating crisis responses in a faith-holder

community. These *publics* are important to the brand but rarely studied, and thus, this paper provides an outline of how to effectively work with these groups and understand their activism. Bitt Moon, Chang-Won Choi and Eugene Kim write for this issue about negative CSR associations' impact in non-crisis situations, looking at explaining how CSR and negative corporate ability (CA) associations led to negative word-of-mouth (WOM) intentions. The study focuses on the mediating role of revenge and avoidance motives in the relationship between negative CSR and CA associations and the intention to generate negative WOM, thus looking at the behaviour of *publics* in non-crisis situations and their perceptions of organisations. The authors argue that "negative CSR associations have a stronger association with negative WOM in non-crisis situations compared to negative CA associations [ . . . ] A negative perception of CSR leads to public anger and results in severe harmful behaviours, even in non-crisis situations [ . . . ]". In addition to that, in the case of CA associations, which have traditionally been a primary factor influencing product evaluation or purchase intentions (Tao and Wilson, 2016), the authors found that negative CA associations do not trigger negative WOM as significantly CSA associations do in a non-crisis context. What is more, individuals perceiving negative CSR are more likely to employ active and confrontational coping strategies compared to those perceiving negative CA, i.e. when a company violates moral standards important to the individual, they might experience negative emotions, leading to a stronger motivation to attack the organisation. Negative CA associations are more closely related to the avoidance motive compared to negative CSR associations because individuals who perceive negative CA are more inclined to distance themselves from the organisation compared to those who perceive negative CSR, which suggests that negative CA associations tend to trigger passive and avoidance-oriented coping behaviours rather than active and confrontational ones. This paper offers a similar finding: as those tackling gender equality presented earlier in this editorial, *publics* look at values exposed by the organisation and act accordingly depending on the perceived match of mismatch; thus, organisations need to understand their *publics* and their values before engaging in communication. Shing-Wan Chang and Gabriel Alexander Dos Santos Berwanger write about CSR communication and value co-creation and how these processes shape consumer well-being and brand love in the post-COVID-19 pandemic. The authors draw from the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) to provide an integrative model to investigate how argument quality and source credibility of CSR communication affect customer value co-creation behaviour, which then results in increased brand trust. Additionally, the authors looked at how brand trust and the perception of COVID-19 risk influence both brand love and subjective well-being. In that, the authors conducted research on an innovative case study using coffee shop customers and found a positive association between source credibility and customer value co-creation such as customer participation behaviour (CPB) and customer citizenship behaviour (CCB). The authors also argue that "argument quality is revealed to have a significantly positive effect on customer citizenship behaviour (CCB) but a non-significant effect on customer participation behaviour (CPB). Additionally, the study identifies that customer value co-creation behaviour significantly promotes brand trust. Finally, findings indicate that brand trust and the perception of COVID-19 risk significantly influence brand love and subjective well-being". Nora Denner, Benno Viererbl and Maike Weismantel, for this issue, write about the role of CEO communication in effective crisis management, looking at whether the communication of private information about a CEO can create a positive pre-crisis image that serves as a buffer during actual crises. The authors argue that "the communication of private information about a CEO contributes to the improvement of public image perceptions when a crisis occurs. This effect is influenced by the recipient's identification with the organisation as well as perceptions of empathy and competence toward the CEO. Notably, stronger effects are observed in the context of a victim crisis". Jee Young Chung and Eyun-Jung Ki write, for this issue, about first impressions of a company, looking at identifying how firms position their corporate reputation in their initial public offering (IPO) communication. The study also looked at whether the presentation of corporate reputation was related to IPO success. The authors argue that "bigger

(in terms of revenue) IPO companies featured more “impressiveness” in their IPO prospectus, leading to greater IPO success. Bigger (in terms of both revenue and number of employees) IPO companies featured more “respectability” impressions in the IPO prospectus, although they did not achieve direct IPO success on the first day of IPO. Different types of industry used different information cues to feature “impressiveness” and/or “respectability,” suggesting that different types of firms view different cues to be important to IPO communication”.

In summary, this issue tackled gender equality and workplace culture, including leadership, CSR and crisis research, continuing previous research and opening new research avenues. We particularly show how gender prejudices influence work, practitioners and organisations; how workplaces are changing and how these changes impact workplace culture, particularly leadership and workplace monitoring, which comes with privacy concerns. We continue to focus on studying *publics* and how to positively engage with them. In an increasingly digitalised world, publics are no longer passive recipients of organisational communication and organisations need to positively engage with these groups; however, organisations are still responsible for engaging in a way that does not appease any groups within *publics* and should promote a positive view that fosters EDI and change and challenge views of publics when needed. *CCIJ* welcomes further research studying *publics*, particularly from a behavioural perspective as well as a situational PR theory perspective.

**Martina Topic**

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