Number 4

593 Buying on rumors: how financial news flows affect the share price of Tesla
Nadine Strauss and Christopher Holmes Smith

608 Typology of contemporary corporate communication channels
Dmytro Olehovych Oltarzhevskyi

623 Combinatorial use of communication technologies in organizations
Yaguang Zhu

636 Treating Ivanka unfairly: understanding the impact of Presidential Tweeting on publics’ perceptions and intentions to buycott or boycott corporations
Arunima Krishna and Soojin Kim

653 Student preferences for slogans of higher-education institutions
Andriy Kovalenko

670 The importance of communicating change: identifying predictors for support and resistance toward organizational change processes
Charlotte Schulz-Krappe, Thomas Koch and Johannes Becket

686 Analyzing the corporate social responsibility disclosures of selected companies in India
Amritjot Kaur Sekhon and Lalit Mohan Kathuria

702 Employees as ambassadors: embracing new role expectations and coping with identity-tensions
Rickard Andersson
Buying on rumors: how financial news flows affect the share price of Tesla

Nadine Strauss
Institut für Publizistik und Kommunikationswissenschaft, Universität Wien, Vienna, Austria, and
Christopher Holmes Smith
Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California, USA

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to research how corporate communication regarding a specific corporate event (i.e. Tesla’s tweets about a new product) as well as the framing of both the event itself and the market reactions therewith in the news media influence the formation of the share price of the respective company over time. In so doing, the study provides insights into the nature of market-moving information and the role of financial news flows in shaping market reactions in today’s high-frequency news and information environment.

Design/methodology/approach – Using a multi-method case study approach, combining quantitative intraday event studies with a qualitative text analysis of financial online news and tweets by Elon Musk and Twitter, the authors shed light on the complex interaction between market events, financial information and stock market reactions. The analysis covers a period of four days, encompassing the announcement and introduction of the new battery pack for Model S and X by Tesla as well as the accompanying and follow-up reporting by the financial news media.

Findings – Findings show that market reactions are driven by business events and expectations among the market rather than the follow-up reporting by financial news media. Financial online news instead seems to heavily rely on Elon Musk’s attention-triggering news to sustain its 24-h airtime with a variety of reporting tools, keeping the highly demanded audience engaged. Eventually, Twitter accounts of media visible companies and personalities, such as Tesla and its CEO Elon Musk, have been found to be useful market information sources for day traders and shareholders to trade at a profit.

Originality/value – The study is a response to recent discussions about the legitimacy of Twitter communication by CEOs or representatives of listed companies. The findings show that Twitter communication needs to be well considered in light of strict market regulations (e.g. SEC in the USA) regarding insider-trading and the publication of market-relevant information. In addition, corporate financial communication should avoid impetuous communication via social media channels as this could have deterrent effects on the market valuation of a listed company.

Keywords Financial markets, Event study, Financial reporting, Stock markets, Market reactions, Financial news

Paper type Research paper

The flow of information can severely impact the formation of stock prices (Mitra and Mitra, 2011). Similarly, media representations of companies might not only have a considerable influence on corporate reputation (cf. Fombrun and Shanley, 1990), but might also affect the fluctuations of their share prices (e.g. Scheufele et al., 2011). Scholars have argued that...
the way a company is presented in the news influences public evaluations and opinions about the company’s future business prospects, and hence its market valuation (Pollock and Rindova, 2003). Previous research, however, has investigated the link between media representations and the stock market from a rather static perspective, measuring, for example, the amount of coverage and sentiment expressed in news items over a certain amount of time and the stock market reactions therewith (e.g. Scheufele et al., 2011; Strauß et al., 2016; Tetlock, 2007). Subsequently, studies in this research area have not paid attention to the complex dynamics of event-driven news coverage and its effects on stock market prices. It remains unclear how breaking issues can move the market gradually and how various outlets report on the issues over time, affecting investors’ trading-decisions.

In addition, such event-driven news coverage increasingly originates in the realm of social media (Bollen et al., 2011). Quarterly earnings announcements, product introductions or news by the CEO of a company are regularly released on Twitter and other social media channels to inform stakeholders (Malhotra and Malhotra, 2016). Hence, when investigating business events and their effects on the stock market in today’s fast-moving news and information environment, it becomes crucial to distinguish between sources of information (e.g. social media vs news agency vs press release), the dissemination of news across various media outlets, the timing of coverage, and therewith, the dynamic effects of changing reporting on corporate news and stock market prices over time. Thus, the overarching research question of this study reads:

**RQ1.** How do financial news flows about corporate events influence the stock market prices of companies over time?

However, previous research has led to the “logical conclusion that there is no conclusive and systematic relationship between big news and big price movements” (Schuster, 2006, p. 50). Therefore, instead of looking at aggregate effects of corporate news on stock market prices (e.g. Scheufele et al., 2011; Strauß et al., 2016; Tetlock, 2007), researchers are advised to take a micro-level perspective when investigating how news flows affect stock market prices. In this vein, a case study approach has been chosen to study the highly media visible company Tesla Motors and its introduction of the new battery pack for Model S and Model X in August 2016. The findings give insights into Tesla’s Twitter communication (including its CEO, Elon Musk) about the product introduction, the emerging news dynamics among the major financial news outlets in the USA therewith, as well as Tesla’s stock market reactions as a response to the news and information cycle.

**Theoretical background**

*The relationships between financial news and the stock market*

Knorr Cetina and Bruegger (2002), who studied foreign-exchange dealing rooms through an economic sociological lens, argue that “market reality itself is knowledge generated, that is, has no existence independent from the informational presentation of the market on screen that is provided by news agencies, analysts, and traders themselves” (p. 915). These information flows exist within a crowded and turbulent global media ecosystem where the competition to capture attention across linear broadcast feeds, digital on-demand services and social media networks is fierce. In this “attention economy,” media users – including variously situated social agents actively engaged in the screen-driven activities that constitute modern financial markets – become collectively habituated to a wide variety of discursive formats and presentation styles that continually mount communicative attempts to cultivate awareness and engagement in the hearts and minds of audiences and stakeholders (Webster, 2014). The normalized conventions of these content formats create an everyday state of what media scholar John Ellis characterizes as “mundane witnessing” (Ellis, 2009). Within this context, media studies theorists have shed light on the extraordinary circumstances – variously
characterized as “media events” (Fiske, 1994), “mediatized rituals” (Cottle, 2006) or “media spectacles” (Kellner, 2003) – that frequently erupt within the news cycle and shatter the quotidian pattern of media reception, thereby eliciting more intense forms of coverage rife with “endless detail and speculation about further details” on the unfolding story (p. 85).

When describing financial news flows in the global, attention-seeking and ubiquitous media ecosystem, the issue-attention cycle as introduced by Downs (1972) can be used to explain how financial information develops into a public issue that becomes integrated into market prices until it reaches equilibrium again (cf. Fama, 1970). Downs introduced the framework more than 50 years ago when describing the cyclical process of how attention is paid toward domestic issues in the USA. The five stages are divided in: pre-problem state, alarmed discovery and euphoric enthusiasm, realizing the costs of significant progress, gradual decline of public interest and the post-problem state. In the theory, Downs focuses on the issue “ecology,” explaining how public attention in America has slowly increased toward environmental issues, heighted and demanded political action, but eventually resulted in decreased public interest, being ultimately replaced by other seemingly more important issues at the time.

What is particularly appealing about Downs’ (1972) issue-attention cycle for studying financial news flow is that it takes a public perception perspective, particularly focusing on the attention paid toward certain issues in the news media and the public. In fact, scholars in communication science have long stressed the power of the media in intervening public opinion in terms of the agenda-setting theory and framing theory (e.g. McCombs and Shaw, 1972; Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). Agenda-setting presumes that the attention media pays toward certain issues gets transferred to the public agenda (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). In other words, the more the media talks about a certain topic (e.g. Tesla product introduction), the more likely the audience will recall this topic and rate it as important. Similarly, framing theory suggests that public perceptions of characters (e.g. politicians), topics or institutions are dependent on how the news media frame these (Carroll and McCombs, 2003; Golan and Wanta, 2001). As a consequence, the framing of a certain topic, institution or person in the media in a positive or negative light might impact the way the public perceives and eventually evaluates the objects of the media representations.

Hence, following agenda-setting and framing theory, financial news might also impact how the financial audience perceives the financial markets, or specific stocks in particular (cf. Pollock and Rindova, 2003). Studies in finance, business and sparsely in communication science have made use of this alleged link between media and the public when researching the relationships between news media and the stock market. The vast amount of work ranges from different news media (e.g. The Wall Street Journal; Tetlock, 2007), information outlets (e.g. Reuters news; Uhl, 2014) to the focus on different characteristics of news such as emotions (e.g. Bollen et al., 2011) or expert opinions (e.g. Bar-Haim et al., 2011). While some findings point to correlations between news, the sentiment of the coverage and the stock market on an aggregate level (but are not generalizable), it is still open for discussion how this relationship can be described at the micro-level; hence, when studying news dynamics for a specific corporate event or a specific listed company.

Indeed, scholars in news analytics have highlighted the importance of news flows and the fact that news can switch from positive to negative sentiment for a specific company over time (Moniz et al., 2011). Instead of investigating accumulated reactions to news items, Moniz and colleagues argue that a focus on short-term influences of news events on share prices is more appropriate. Similarly, it is argued in this study that the accumulated and mostly one-way media effect assumption is an oversimplification that takes neither the complexity of multi-media news distribution, nor the diversification and temporal sensitivity of company-related market sentiment into account. In this sense, investigating the emergence of financial news for a particular corporate event over time might give more insights into how the flow of news affect stock market prices in the course of financial reporting.
The case: Tesla Motors. In the past years, shareholders of Tesla Motors have witnessed strong fluctuations of Tesla’s share price as a result of tweets by Elon Musk, containing promising information about the company and its future plans. In August 2018, for example, Musk tweeted that he is considering taking the company private at a price of $420 a share. The market reacted with turmoil and the trading of Tesla shares was briefly suspended on the Nasdaq stock exchange (The Economist, 2018). Musk is known for his tweets that offer hints about new products, announcements or information on Tesla that in turn spawn interest among the financial community and various media outlets to report on the corporate news and market reactions therewith (Malhotra and Malhotra, 2016). Hence, acknowledging Tesla as a newsworthy technology company, Tesla serves as the ideal case study (Yin, 2013), to research how corporate tweets regarding a specific corporate event (i.e. product introduction) affect its share price, and how the framing of both the event itself and the market reactions therewith in the news media influence the formation of the share price over time.

Data and methods
Case selection
Tesla is a US-based automobile company that focuses on the production of electric cars and batteries, with Elon Musk as the CEO of the company. In 2016, Tesla was frequently covered in the news regarding new product introductions (e.g. Model 3 in March), product innovations (e.g. more efficient batteries for its models in August), accidents caused by its self-driving car in May 2016, or the acquisition of SolarCity in August 2016. For this case study, the introduction of the new electric-car battery for the Model S and Model X in August 2016 was selected. The news about the new battery did not only cause broad news coverage across various financial news media outlets, but also let the share price of Tesla respond considerably over the period of reporting. Although this corporate event might appear less relevant when compared to the introduction of Model 3 or the accidents with the self-driving Tesla cars, the choice to investigate the introduction of the new battery was driven by two reasons: it offered a manageable set of data that was adequate for a qualitative, manual text analysis and it was appropriate to conduct intraday event studies because there was no other news at the center of media coverage related to Tesla than the introduction of the new battery on the day of the announcement.

News data
To get insights into the news dynamics across various financial online news outlets and the share price of Tesla, seven top news sources for traders on the US market, including Bloomberg, CNBC, CNN Money, Forbes, Financial Times, Reuters and The Wall Street Journal[1] were assessed. For the analysis, all online news articles that were published by these outlets were collected, including videos, slide shows and audio files from the day of the announcement (August 23, 2016) until three days after (August 26, 2016). In total, 43 news items were analyzed (see for an overview Figure 1).

Tweets
Besides considering the online news articles, the role of Tesla and its CEO, Elon Musk, who announced the new battery on Twitter were also objects of the analysis. Most relevant in this sense was the tweet by Elon Musk in which he promoted the presentation of a new product in the morning of the August 23 as well as one update on this notification during the day, the tweet by the official Tesla account about the actual product introduction, and the eventual retweet by Musk of the product presentation in the afternoon.
Stock market data
In order to compare how the stock market price of Tesla reacted to the announcement of the new product by Elon Musk on Twitter and the online news reporting thereafter, intraday stock market quotes, including the share price and trading volume for Tesla (TSLA) for the period of analysis (August 23, 2016–August 26, 2016) were downloaded from a Bloomberg terminal. Daily stock market data were retrieved from Yahoo finance.

Event studies
To find out whether the tweet by Elon Musk or the actual presentation of the new product by Tesla had a significant effect on the returns of Tesla’s share price in the short run, event studies were conducted. Event studies are common practice in research fields such as finance, management and economics. In essence, an event study measures the impact of a particular event on the market value of a company (MacKinlay, 1997). However, while common event studies make use of daily stock quotes, this study uses minutely stock market quotes of one trading day (i.e. the day of the announcement of the new battery by Tesla: August 23, 2016). It is argued that the investigation of intraday stock quotes gives more insights into the immediate reactions of the Tesla share price to the announcement of the new battery than daily quotes. In fact, because Tesla had been associated with various negative issues in Summer 2016 (e.g. Autopilot crashes, SolarCity acquisition), the actual impact of the battery announcement on the Tesla share price would have likely become wiped out when considering daily instead of intraday stock quotes.

Procedure. When looking at the fluctuations of the share prices of Tesla during the day of the announcement of the new battery (August 23, 2016; see Figure 2), there is one point in time in which the price seems to have reacted strongly positively and one in which the share price of Tesla slumped considerably. The rise can be spotted around 11.30 a.m. EST; hence, about the time when Elon Musk made the announcement about a new product on Twitter. The dip can be traced around 15.30 p.m. EST, very likely when Tesla eventually presented the new battery to the public. In order to find out which of the two identified swings of the Tesla share price had a significant impact on its returns, two event studies were run. To do so, the procedure according to MacKinlay (1997) was followed.

In the first step, the events during the day of the announcement (August 23, 2016) were identified. The first event happened at 11.23 a.m. EST when Elon Musk tweeted that there would be a product announcement by Tesla at noon, California time. The second event was identified as the actual product announcement by Tesla at 3.30 p.m. EST. In the second step, event windows were defined, which are the periods in which the security prices of the company are inspected for changes as a reaction to the event. For this study, an event
window of 10 min was chosen to investigate how Tesla shares reacted up to 10 min before and after the respective events took place. To estimate the impact of the events on the Tesla shares, the abnormal returns were calculated. The abnormal return is defined as:

\[ AR_{it} = R_{it} - E(R_{it} | X_t), \]

where \( AR_{it} \) is the abnormal return for stock \( i \) (Tesla) at time point \( t \) (trading minute on August 23, 2016); \( R_{it} \) the actual return; and \( E(R_{it} | X_t) \) the expected return conditional on the return of a comparable market portfolio \( X \) at time point \( t \) (MacKinlay, 1997). Given that for this study the market model was chosen (MacKinlay, 1997), \( X \) is the market return of the Nasdaq index – the index on which Tesla is listed.

In the following step, the estimation window was selected, which is commonly a meaningful number of trading time points prior to the event. For the first event 102 min were used, as this was the maximum number of minutely stock quotes that was available prior to the tweet by Elon Musk released at 11:23 a.m. EST on that day. For the second event (i.e. the actual announcement at 15:30 p.m. EST), 252 trading minutes were used. 252 time points is also the common estimation window employed in event studies (cf. MacKinlay, 1997). By means of the parameter estimates of the normal performance model (intercept, slope), the abnormal returns could be calculated. Afterwards, the accumulated abnormal returns were estimated to get more insights in the impact of the particular event on the share price of Tesla [3]. Eventually, it was tested whether the abnormal returns of Tesla were significantly different from the expected returns 10 min prior and 10 min after the events occurred by conducting two-tailed \( t \)-tests. The results for the two event studies are presented together with the results of the qualitative text analysis in the results section.

**Text analysis**

The two authors of this study read and coded the news items of the seven top financial online news outlets by means of a semi-structured codebook. Rather than using variables with pre-specified values, the codebook was constructed with open questions for each variable, giving the coders the opportunity to assess each news item with an open approach. Besides manifest variables, such as name of the coder, news outlet, date, time, title, author, added content (e.g. video, slide shows, audio), the codebook also included open categories such as pro and contra arguments raised about Tesla and the new battery, voices raised in the news item (e.g. direct quotations by Elon Musk, financial analysts or reporters), information and prospects about Tesla’s share price, the main conclusion of the news item, the prevalent sentiment of the news items and other remarks. The two coders discussed the
categories of the codebook together and solved disagreements before the actual coding started. The sample of news items was divided into two sets so that every coder was able to provide in-depth notations for the respective news items. After sorting all news items based on the date and time of release, a clear timeline of the news reporting emerged that facilitated the investigation of the news dynamics across outlets over time.

Results

Is it all just buying on rumors?

On August 23, 2016 at 11.23 a.m. EST, Elon Musk, the CEO of Tesla, announced on Twitter that there would be a “product announcement at noon California time today.” Not only did this tweet generate considerable engagement on Twitter (i.e. 5,251 retweets; 14,330 likes), it also caused the Tesla share price to jump 1.4 percent from $223.14 at 11.23 a.m. to 226.37 at 11.30 a.m., with a trading volume of 549,981 shares in that period, which accounted for more than an eighth of the total trading volume on that day for Tesla (4,784,400 shares). Although it was not clear what the actual product announcement of Tesla would be at that moment, it seemed that investors bid up Tesla’s share price on pure speculation. While investors reacted with the acquisition of Tesla shares immediately, the mainstream financial news outlets started to speculate about possible interpretations of the cryptic announcement by Elon Musk. Reuters was among the first that reported with a short statement at 11.40 a.m. EST on the tweet and the rising share price of Tesla therewith: “rose more than 1 percent after the post and were recently trading up $3.69.”

The results of the event study in which this first tweet by Elon Musk was treated as an event showed that there was indeed a significant market reaction of the abnormal returns of Tesla at the moment when the tweet was released (11.23 a.m. EST). Besides a few minutes, the significant impact of the event on the Tesla share price persisted up to 9 min after the tweet was released (see Table I and Figure 3). No significant abnormal returns could be found for the 10 min before the tweet was published. However, the tweet did not have a lasting effect on the Tesla share price. Already 30 min after the tweet was published, Tesla stocks declined 0.4 percent down to $223.37, slightly higher than before the announcement.

Not long after the first reporting on Elon Musk’s tweet by Reuters, CNBC weighed in at noon EST and published a video with a short online news article, commenting on the tweet and speculating what the announcement could be about. Phil LeBeau, the Anchor of “Halftime Report” at CNBC reminded the network’s viewers that Musk’s tweets are not typically harbingers of “big news.” Furthermore, when describing the intraday market reactions of Tesla shares prior to Musk’s tweet in CNBC’s news segment, Jon Najarian, the Najarian Family Office Co-founder, saw some unusual activity. He contemplated that there might have been some investors who had access to inside information. When looking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event 1: Tweet by Elon Musk (11.23 a.m.)</th>
<th>Event 2: Announcement by Tesla (3.30 p.m.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Abnormal returns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.23 a.m.</td>
<td>8,553***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.24 a.m.</td>
<td>9,860***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.25 a.m.</td>
<td>3,322*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.27 a.m.</td>
<td>2,133*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.28 a.m.</td>
<td>1,984*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.31 a.m.</td>
<td>-2,930***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.32 a.m.</td>
<td>2,301*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Reported are significant abnormal returns of Tesla for Event 1 (the moment when the tweet by Elon Musk was released) and Event 2 (the moment when Tesla made the official announcement of the new battery); two-tailed t-tests; Event 1: df = 100; Event 2: df = 251. *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001

Table I. Results of intraday event studies for Tesla on August 23, 2016

Buying on rumors
at the intraday stock quotes of Tesla right before the release of the tweet by Elon Musk (see Figure 4), it indeed seems that there might have been some preliminary trading on Tesla shares before Musk tweeted about the upcoming product introduction. Later that day, Elon Musk sent another tweet at 3:02 pm, advertising the revelation, “Journalists Q&A for 30 mins and embargo ends at 12.30.” However, Tesla shares reacted this time only mildly (0.6 percent), rising from $226.16 at the minute of the release to $227.48, half an hour later.

Before the actual product announcement by Tesla at noon California time, there were two more news items published. Bloomberg reported shortly on the reactions of the Tesla share price to the tweet by Musk (“Tesla jumped 2 percent to $27.45 at 11:53 am after rising as much as 2.3%, the biggest intraday gain in two weeks”) and referred negatively to the investigation with regard to the Autopilot car crash as well as to the “trimmed” full-year forecast. In the meantime, CNBC released another online news article with a video of its show “Closing Bell” in which Aswath Damodaran, Chair of Finance Education at the NYU Stern School of Business, analyzed “cash burn” companies; hence companies that require high investments before they become profitable. Although Elon Musk’s announcement was not mentioned directly in the segment, Damodoran reflected upon Tesla as a cash burn company, criticizing the acquisition of SolarCity as the “malignant cash burn part” and
automobile business as the “benign cash burn part.” Just 1 min before the actual announcement of the new product, Tesla’s stock was up at $228.09, 1.7 percent higher than its opening price that day.

The big news – or rather the moment of the big disappointment?
Reuters and Bloomberg were the first to report on the revelation of the new product by Tesla at 3:30 p.m. EST. Right after Elon Musk himself retweeted a tweet by the official Tesla Twitter account, saying “Introducing P100D with Ludicrous Mode, more performance & range for Model S & Model X” at 3:36 p.m. The tweet was linked to a press release on Tesla’s website, where the specifics of the new electric battery were described in more detail. As the front-runner of the news, Reuters wrote in a short article that Tesla is going to provide a “100 kilowatt hour (kWH) battery for its Model S and Model X cars.” Simultaneously, Bloomberg published a video segment in which David Welch reported on the specifications of the battery upgrade and news regarding the Autopilot issue. While Welch stated that the technological advancement of the battery was only “marginal” or “incremental,” he saw the fact that Tesla could say that it had the “fastest car in the world” as “significant marketing news” for Elon Musk.

Only 2 min later, CNBC picked up on the Tesla news. In an online article with a short video segment of CNBC’s “Breaking News,” Phil LeBeau reported on the specifications of the new battery. Interestingly, the Tesla upgrading strategy with its new battery was positively compared with the Apple business strategy (“now you start looking at it like an Apple store”) in another video by CNBC of the show “News Alert” (5.19 p.m.). Although the overall tone of CNBC’s “Breaking News” was positive, there was also some criticism. Reporters pounced upon the fact that Musk did not respond to any question during the conference call relating to the production problems with the Model 3 vehicles or the autopilot accident issue. In this regard, the anchors of CNBC’s “News Alert” show added that the shares of Tesla were “coming back to earth,” speculating if this points to an “overriding concern” of Tesla investors about the added value of the new battery features for Tesla.

When looking at the stock market reactions of the Tesla shares just after the announcement and the first reporting on the news, it seemed that the market rather responded with disappointment to the news about the improved battery pack by Tesla. With a trading volume of 223,773 shares within 2 min, the stock market price went from $228.09 at 3:29 p.m. to $224.75 at 3:31 p.m., losing 1.5 percent of its share price. The results of the event study support these observations (see Table I and Figure 5). Treating the announcement by Tesla at 3:30 p.m. as an event, significant negative market reactions of the Tesla shares up to 9 min after the release appeared (except for minute 3.32 p.m., 3.37 p.m. and 3.38 p.m.). Hence, in comparison to the reactions to the tweet by Elon Musk in the morning, the market responded exactly in the opposite direction. It seemed that shareholders were expecting something more from Tesla than only an improved battery pack.

Before the Nasdaq stock market closed that day with a Tesla share price of $224.84, there was only one more news item by Reuters published online in which the specifics of the new battery were shortly outlined. However, despite the closing of the financial markets on the east coast, the financial news did not stop reporting on the new announcement by Tesla. CNBC continued its reflection on the specifics of the new battery in the “Closing Bell” show. Just 2 min later, a new video was released by CNBC, in which a Senior Research Analyst at Oppenheimer, Colin Rusch, gave his assessment of the new product announcement by Tesla on the phone, supporting his position on the stock despite identifying the new battery package as only an “incremental product improvement” and raising concerns about the acquisition of SolarCity by Tesla. CNBC, on the other hand, released a news item with a video of the show “Behind the Wheels” later that day in which Karl Brauer, Senior Analyst at the automobile research and evaluation company Kelley Blue Book, pointed out that
Tesla needed more than an “incremental improvement.” He considered the high price as the main problem with the new upgrade of the battery.

In the course of the evening, a few more online articles were published. CNBC, The Wall Street Journal and the Financial Times neutrally reported on the news and the stock market reactions therewith. In contrast, Bloomberg and Forbes critically reported on the introduction of the new battery. Bloomberg criticized that Tesla “ha[d] already pushed investors’ horizons out so far” given the numerous announcements Elon Mask had made that year. Forbes saw the new battery as “an answer to a question few were asking.” In particular, Forbes listed a number of challenges Tesla was still facing, such as the mass production of Model 3 or the outcome of the investigations with regard to the Autopilot accidents. Not only did Reuters emphasize these challenges in another online article as well, the problem with the SolarCity acquisition and the accidents with Tesla’s Autopilot cars were also taken up in CNBC’s show “News Alert” released later that day. As one expert in the show stated, “the SolarCity deal to me is partially out of necessity to keep the whole magic kingdom alive.”

The next day: follow-up reporting
The next day news items were released that provided a morning briefing for investors before the markets on the New York Stock Exchange opened. CNN Money, for example, warned that Tesla could experience “higher-than-normal volumes Wednesday after it unveiled a new battery,” while Reuters, CNBC and The Wall Street Journal only briefly and neutrally referred to the introduction of the new battery by Tesla from the previous day. In the hours before the stock market opened, both CNBC and Bloomberg released video segments that were already published the day before, accompanied with online news articles. Furthermore, Forbes published an online article offering its rationale for placing Tesla at the top of the “Forbes Most Innovative Companies” list in 2016. Also giving room for expert opinions, the analysis by Forbes was more extensive when compared to previously published news articles by other outlets. Various arguments were given why Forbes had decided to designate Tesla as the most innovative company (e.g. Autopilot, mobile app for shared Tesla cars, Gigafactory).

It seemed that the positive follow-up reporting on Tesla and its new battery as well as the rather positive evaluations of analysts had pushed Tesla share prices up that morning.
With $227.05, investors bid up Tesla shares by almost 1 percent compared to its closing price $224.84 from the previous day. This increase, however, remained unnoticed by the financial news. Instead, Bloomberg released a piece of the column “Money Stuff” by Matt Levine in which he commented on market news from the previous day, shortly mentioning the introduction of the new battery by Tesla, but not its increased opening price.

Compared to the previous day, the online news articles by the financial news outlets appeared much longer, providing more insights and background information. Forbes, for example, released another piece in which Robert Bradley Jr, the Founder and CEO of the Institute for Energy Research, critically commented on Tesla and the fact that the company is mainly based on governmental funding. Before the market closed that day with Tesla shares dropping almost 2 percent from its opening price down to $222.62, reaching practically the share price of the day previous to the battery announcement, two more financial news items were identified. CNN Money neutrally reported in an online article on the new battery for Model S and X with a short clip that showed the Tesla Gigafactory; Bloomberg released another item which included an audio file in which two reporters spoke about Tesla’s new battery.

When news is no longer news
In the following days of the week, the amount of reporting on the new battery by Tesla waned. The major financial news sources such as Reuters or Bloomberg were not even writing about it anymore. Instead, there were two more articles by Forbes on August 25, 2016 that were only indirectly related to the Tesla announcement from two days ago, but which put Tesla and its stock in a negative light. One in which Professor, Pop-Science Author and Blogger Chad Orzel criticized carmakers’ methods of acceleration tests, including Tesla. And another article by Forbes in which Tesla was identified as one of the most shorted Nasdaq 100 component. The same day, CNBC released a news item in which the benefits and specifics of the new battery pack were outlined one more time.

Overall, the follow-up reporting by the financial news outlets focused less and less on the new battery pack by Tesla. On Friday, August 26, 2016, The Wall Street Journal published an article about the advanced driver-assistance programs in which the news about the new battery pack was only mentioned in passing. In another article that was published 15 min after, The Wall Street Journal argued that electronic cars are at the forefront while positioning Tesla as the “standard-bearer.” Similarly, an article published by Forbes placed Tesla with its Model 3 as the model example for electronic carmakers. However, the plea for electronic cars and the laudatory words for Tesla in these articles had little impact on the stock price of Tesla that day. Although the stock market price of Tesla slightly recovered on August 25, 2016 with an opening price of $223.11, up 2 percent from its closing price the previous day, it closed $2.15 lower at $220.96. Tesla ended the trading week with a price of $219.99, 1.9 percent lower than its opening price ($224.17) on Monday morning.

Discussion
Financial issue-attention cycle: reporting on news or making news?
Recapitulating the news reporting about the announcement of the new battery by Tesla, the analysis has given valuable insights into the financial news reporting cycle and the emergence of business news and its impacts on Tesla’s stock market price, respectively. Partly in accordance with the first stage of the issue-attention cycle (Downs, 1972), the announcement of the new battery has raised limited attention in the media, given that only few news outlets (Reuters, CNBC, Bloomberg) reported on the tweet by Elon Musk right after. However, the public, and particularly investors, responded considerable, given that Tesla’s share price rose mostly after the tweet by Elon Musk that conveyed the ambiguous announcement of a new product introduction in the morning.
In the second stage, according to Downs, attention gets sparked and more people become aware of the issue and are optimistic that the issue can be solved. In case of Tesla, the vast amount of reporting on the new battery could indeed be found on the day of the announcement itself. Even though Tesla had not yet specified the news, it seemed that the news outlets were making use of every bit of information to fill their airtime and to report on the speculations before Tesla made the actual product introduction. It occurred that both the media and the public were eager to hear more about the opaque announcement by Elon Musk. While the news media needed the information to make sense of the news, investors sought the information to find out how to best trade on the new announcement.

The third stage in the issue-attention cycle is reached according to Downs (1972) when the public recognizes the connection between the solutions and the problem, realizing what it would eventually cost to solve the issue. Although there was not an explicit need in “solving” the new product announcement by Tesla, the third stage as defined by Downs can be spotted in this case when the media and investors noticed that the new battery did not meet the expectations of the market; hence right after the release of the new product by Tesla. On the one hand, the media reported extensively about the implications of the new battery for Tesla and its share price, determining that it was overall only an “incremental improvement”; investors, on the other hand, reacted with disappointment in the new product by selling their shares right after the announcement.

At the height of the discussion, the financial media kept on reporting on the Tesla news, even after the market had closed. CNBC, Bloomberg and Reuters presented themselves as frontrunners, providing ongoing reporting to its audience with updates on the new product introduction, featured with videos, audios and photo slide shows. In so doing, the TV news shows by CNBC and Bloomberg made use of various financial reporting tools, such as discussion tables, staffed with experts from the automobile and tech industries, live call-ins (e.g. with analysts, conference calls), interviews with experts and intraday stock market charts, enabling reporters to discuss the immediate stock market reactions in real time (cf. Ahern and Sosyuro, 2015). While these TV shows and the online news articles published by CNBC, Reuters and Bloomberg were rather neutral in their reporting about the specifics of the new battery, relying heavily on citations by Elon Musk and Tesla, Forbes and The Wall Street Journal appeared to provide more in-depth and partial reporting. The criticism against Tesla overall seemed to resonate. In particular, the SolarCity deal and the Autopilot crashes as well as Tesla’s struggle to produce and deliver an affordable vehicle for the mass were seen as the main reasons why investors did not react with enthusiasm to the news about the battery.

Eventually, the fourth stage of the issue-attention cycle is characterized by a decreasing interest for the issue on the side of the public as argued by Downs (1972), followed by the fifth post-problem stage, which emerges when the issue has been replaced by another, new issue or topic. These final two stages become reflected in the media coverage about Tesla’s new battery during the three days after the announcement when reporting about the new product overall declined and attention in the financial news seemed to have switched to other, seemingly more relevant, topics. Forbes and the Wall Street Journal, for example, presented more detailed analyses of Tesla in the days after the announcement, yet focusing on other topics such as Tesla’s business strategy or issues the company was facing (e.g. Tesla nominated as the most innovative company; most short-selling share). However, Tesla’s share price did respond to the follow-up news reporting in the subsequent days. In essence, there was little left behind from the initial enthusiasm and “rumor trading” as seen right after the release of Elon Musk’s opaque tweet on Tuesday morning.

Buying on rumors and day trading
The analysis of the news dynamics surrounding the introduction of the new battery by Tesla has shown that financial news reporting rather plays a limited role in influencing...
short-term market reactions. Instead, announcements by corporations themselves (e.g. via Twitter) can trigger market participants to react immediately and – likely also for this reason – evoking a stream of further news reporting. As the event studies, but also the inspection of the stock market reactions over the course of four days have shown, the market reacted strongest to the Tesla news when Elon Musk tweeted about the new product announcement and when the news eventually got released by Tesla and retweeted by Musk. These responses imply that investors were buying on the simple speculations of what the new product announcement could have been about.

Hence, the Tesla share price reactions based on Elon Musk’s tweet do not only suggest that market participants react to news items that are not yet verified, or which are still based on speculations (Hirshleifer et al., 1994; Oberlechner and Hocking, 2004), it also shows that this investor behavior is at add odds with the rational market behavior that representatives of the efficient market hypothesis promulgate (e.g. Fama, 1970). Rather than waiting until the actual revelation of the announcement and assessing the value of the news before making a trading decision, some shareholders seemed to have traded purely on the belief that other traders might also react upon this tweet and that Tesla might reveal a new product that would increase the market value of the company. In this vein, this market behavior rather seems to be in line with herd-like reactions and irrational market decisions that are caused by emotions, such as the fear of missing out on a lucrative investment (Nofsinger, 2005; Prechter, 2001; Shiller, 2003).

Following this, the subsequent slump of the Tesla stock price as soon as the introduction of the new battery was actually made resonates with Hirshleifer et al.’s (1994) findings on aggressive day trading. It appeared that some traders were actively buying Tesla shares in the morning before and after Elon Musk vaguely notified the public about a new product announcement, and then sold their shares again after the actual news was eventually revealed. By betting on the increase of the Tesla share price based on Musk’s tweet about the announcement and its subsequent fall, informed day traders were able to sell their shares at the right moment, and at a profit. Hence, believing that the majority of traders will react to ambiguous information in a certain way might confer investors the opportunity to successfully trade on speculations or rumors.

**Implications, limitations and future research**

Based on this case study it can be assumed that being vigilant to high-profile Twitter personalities of listed corporations (e.g. the Tesla’s CEO Elon Musk) might render first-hand information on investments for retail and professional investors. However, while this might provide profitable trading opportunities for day traders, it also poses a risk to companies and its share price. Besides legal issues in terms of information disclosure violations (SEC, 2013), Twitter activity by corporations and CEOs of listed companies might also lead to more speculative short-term trading of stocks which can be detrimental for a fair valuation of companies. Indeed, after Musk’s tweet about considering taking the company private in August 2018, there were heated discussions whether the tweet violated the Regulation Fair Disclosure act (Ross Sorkin, 2018).

In this regard, it has to be noted that the results of this study do not allow for generalizations across listed companies. Tesla Motors with its media-savvy CEO Elon Musk can be considered an exception rather than the rule (Malhotra and Malhotra, 2016). Only few CEOs of publicly traded companies are regularly active on Twitter and use the potentials of such social media channels (42 of the 500 Fortune CEOs had a Twitter account as of September 2014; Malhotra and Malhotra, 2016). Future research is therefore invited to compare these findings to other listed companies and to organizations that do not enjoy such a strong visibility on social media. Furthermore, there might also be differences across various stock market environments, countries, industries or points in economic times. In this vein, this study has made a first step to
invite scholars in communication science and economics alike to take a case study approach and combining qualitative and quantitative methods to explore the complex interaction between corporate events, news flows and stock market reactions.

Notes
1. Except for The Wall Street Journal, the top news sources ranking for investor were retrieved from: www.earnforex.com/articles/top-7-news-sources-for-financial-trader/; There was no article available from The Economist related to the new battery by Tesla within the period of analysis.
2. The expected return is composed of \( E_i = \alpha + \beta R_{mt} + \epsilon \), where \( i \) is the Tesla share price; \( \alpha \) the intercept; \( \beta \) the slope; \( R_{mt} \) the actual return of the Nasdaq index at point \( t \) (trading minute on August 23, 2016), and \( \epsilon \) is the error term.
3. The accumulated abnormal returns, together with the Excel calculations for each event, can be requested from the author of this dissertation.

References
Fiske, J. (1994), Media Matters, Everyday Culture and Political Change, Minnesota University Press, Minneapolis, MN.


Corresponding author
Nadine Strauss can be contacted at: nadine.strauss@univie.ac.at

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website: www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm
Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com
Typology of contemporary corporate communication channels

Dmytro Olehovyh Oltarzhevskyi

Institute of Journalism,
Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Kyiv, Ukraine

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to distinguish the corporate communication channels by typology, by the designation of their characteristics and features of application, as well as to institutionalize the concept of corporate media.

Design/methodology/approach – In the theoretical part, with the help of general review, critical analysis, systematization and generalization, the main scientific works devoted to corporate communications have been studied. In practical part, the method of typology there has been used and descriptive analysis of types of communication channels has been carried out.

Findings – The research distinguishes the types of channels used in modern corporate communication. It reveals that corporate communication channels can be divided into two main types according to the criteria of relation to the company: outsiders and insiders. Then the channels can be divided into broad functional subtypes: events, advertising, media and a specific category – social media. The typological separation also can be based on the auditorium and communication technologies indications.

Originality/value – This study makes a significant contribution to the development of studies of corporate communication through structuring communication channels. The establishment of types, features and prospects for the development of communication channels, in particular such specific ones as corporate and social media, contribute to a more systematic approach to the methods of their use. From a practical point of view, companies can be guided by the results of this research during the formation of a mix of corporate communication.

Keywords Corporate communication, Corporate communication channels, Corporate media, Corporate publishing

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

In the global information space the corporate communication occupies a special place. On the one hand, they help companies manage the flows of business information necessary for the daily operation of the enterprise, production management, promotion on the market of goods or services. On the other hand, corporate communication plays a significant role in establishing relations with the outside world, shaping the image of the company and its brands. This is important because the business is closely integrated into the system of public relations, into the field of state, social and economic interests. Correctly formed corporate communication provides a symmetrical constructive dialogue with the public both externally and internally, helping to build long-term relationship with partners, and thus provide a stable market position and more efficient business development.

Theoretical and practical interest in corporate communication arose in the second half of the twentieth century as a result of the active development of commercial-industrial associations and the beginning of business globalization. Over the years, the scientific world has formed a fairly clear idea of the nature and purpose of corporate communication, providing the appropriate theoretical foundations and link with the empirical basis. In general, corporate communication is devoted to a significant amount of scientific research, mainly American and European scholars, among whom it is worthwhile to point out several names. Thus, Oliver (1997) conducted a thorough analysis and synthesis of interdisciplinary approaches to corporate communication, Quirke (2002) focused on problems of the effectiveness of management of internal communication. Using business
cases, Argenti (2009) investigated the coordination of corporate communication systems and aspects of the formation of the information environment in which the company develops.

The recent emergence of new scientific papers in the field of corporate communication worldwide (Beger, 2018; Goodman and Hirsch, 2015; Jethwaney, 2019; Lerbinger, 2019; Stanton, 2016) suggests that interest in this topic is not fading. This is explained by the objective needs of the business in the effective levers of communication and psychological influence on the behavior of the masses, tools for interaction with the target audience, which help to increase the effectiveness of moral and motivational management functions.

A preliminary analysis of the theoretical background has shown the need for further systematization and deepening of research in the field of corporate communication. The main scientific and practical problem is that insufficient attention is paid to the study of communication channels, their functions and applications. This problem is actualized due to the fact that in the digital age, almost on daily basis, there are new means of communication that have their own peculiarities, possibilities and disadvantages. Businesses are actively responding to such innovations, borrowing new technologies of information exchange. For example, if 10 years ago, social networks had only an entertainment destination, now millions of companies through their help successfully conduct their business. As soon as there are new tools to involve the audiences, corporations immediately seek to take them to their communications arsenal. They develop their own mobile applications, use chat bots and virtual reality technologies. And this is absolutely right, because business will not make progress without innovation. However, even the most innovative tools are not capable of maximizing the benefits of not understanding their nature, mechanisms of interaction with other elements of a system that is capable of giving birth to synergy. At the same time, a well-balanced scientific view and structuring of knowledge about corporate communication channels, understanding their role and place in the general information space open up new opportunities, make communication more effective.

Theoretical background

Corporate communication

The term corporate communication appeared in scientific discourse in the 1970s. Formerly, the traditional notion of public relations was used to define the communication process of companies with a wide audience. The idea of modern researchers that “corporate public relations” was the original name for “corporate communication” (Lerbinger, 2019) is quite right. In this characteristic, the sphere of application of communication efforts – business field – comes to the fore. Other definitions also point to the complete affiliation of corporate communication to the business sector. In particular, it is argued that the main theoretical basis for corporate communication is public relations as practiced by industry and commerce (Kitchen, 1997, p. 29). According to the same logic, the methods of communication of business institutions differ from government and non-profit organizations (Lerbinger, 2019).

The emergence of a new specialized concept of corporate communication was associated with two factors. On the one hand, it is the growth of the role of the business organization itself as a prominent actor of public communications and an independent speaker. On the other hand, it is an expansion and complication of the communication needs of business, which went beyond the usual communication with the press and demanded the establishment of a dialogue on a new professional level, both with the external and internal audiences. Thus, the transformation of concepts took place. Corporate communication brought together many functions, and public relations began to be seen as one of the elements of corporate communication (Horton, 1995). In addition, the term “corporate communication” more accurately reproduces the essence of this phenomenon. First, the term “communication” actually covers all communication roles, activities and tools, some of
which cannot be described as PR. Second, PR usually focuses on external audiences, which is just one of the areas for corporate communications. Finally, some researchers consider the term public relations to be outdated, since “ties” mean the combination of different things (Beger, 2018). On the other hand, corporate communication foresees systemic interaction, a permanent dialogue of interconnected communities, which eliminates the contradictions between public and business interests and harmonizes them.

Like other areas of communication, corporate communication deals with information flows. Corporate communication is called “the process that collects information from the business environment, develops messages from the information and sends them to get specific economic results” (Horton, 1995, p. 21). However, corporate communication should be characterized more fully as a management function that is responsible for overseeing and coordinating work performed in a variety of special fields such as media connections, external and internal communications (Cornelissen, 2008, p. 4). van Riel (1995) defines corporate communication as “an instrument of management, through which all consciously used forms of internal and external communication are harmonized as effectively and efficiently as possible, in order to create a favorable basis for relationships with groups on which the company is dependent” (p. 26). Oliver (1997) suggests that communication can well be an instrument for corporate well-being (p. 32).

Consequently, corporate communication is an important management tool that helps to reconcile the goals and forms company’s internal and external communications. This is necessary in order to create the basis for the favorable relations with the groups on which the organization depends. In this context, it is appropriate to use the established expression “friendly relations,” which means symmetrically acceptable and beneficial relations between the business organization and the public. Principles of this dialogue are based on “trust, credibility, openness, relationships, reciprocity, network symmetry, horizontal communication, feedback, adequacy of information, employee-centered style, tolerance for disagreement and negotiation” (Grunig, 1992, p. 558). If a company is capable of building effective communication, it has the chance to establish open, trusting relationships with groups of strategic partners. In turn, properly formed internal and external communications should serve the business interests of the company: to shape the company’s image, its products, brands, increase the loyalty of stakeholders, stimulate sales, etc.

**Corporate communication channels**

From the very beginning, the Lasswell’s (1948) linear model of communication was used exclusively to describe the process of mass communication. However, over the years, it has been modified, improved and eventually turned into a “conceptual tool for all acts of communication” (Sapienza et al., 2015, p. 608). Thus, in our opinion, this classical theory can be applied to the description of the principles of corporate communication.

One of the key components of the Lasswell’s model is the communication channel, which is an important link on the way from the message generator to its recipient. The operating of channels should take into account many factors: audience profile, features of the content being transmitted, saturation of the information field and so on. That is why selecting the appropriate media for communication plays a central role in successful communications (Goodman, 1994, p. 16). At the same time, the practice of corporate communication requires the ability of professionals to identify the most effective channels for the exchange of information.

Currently, the communication channel is interpreted as the medium through which the message is sent to the relevant audience, for example, a printed media or broadcast (electronic media) (Business Dictionary, 2017). Earlier, some researchers criticized the notion of “channel,” considering a problematic metaphor due to its connotation that media act as “pipes” or “conduits” (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996, p. 30). But, in spite of this, in our opinion,
this definition is universal and most acceptable for the communication sphere. Because the channel can be not only mass media, but also other means of transfer of information, which will be discussed below in the context of corporate communication. This approach is consistent with Cornelissen (2008), which defines the communication channel as the methods and media used by a company to communicate and interact with its stakeholders. Scientists also pay attention to the fact that the company’s strategy depends on the availability of channels that can be used in corporate communications (Zaremba, 2010). In addition, now the term “communication channel” is associated with the IT field. It also responds to current concepts of content distribution methods that actively migrate to online space using modern digital technologies.

Analyzing theoretical work, we found that it is the communication channels that are one of the least investigated elements of corporate communication. Why? In a constantly changing environment, it is difficult to choose constants and describe their state. Despite the fact that communication channels as a category remain a static element of the system, the rapid development of technology leads to changes in the tools by which companies communicate with the outside world. New channels are replaced by old ones. Today, no one mentions the popular means of communication 20 years ago, such as pager, fax or ICQ. This can be demonstrated by the example of communication with staff. In the past, it was simple, as the CEO sent a letter to employees telling about the company’s news. In the modern environment, internal communication is defined as strategic and form a much more complex part of the company’s corporate communication mix (Beger, 2018, p. 363). Corresponding corporate communication channels are also changing, developing and improving. Smart marketers have moved from a reliance to traditional channels (e.g. television, radio, outdoor, print advertising and brochures), to an integrated media mix, one that now includes social media options (e.g. mobile phones, interactive websites, Facebook pages, YouTube, blogs, Twitter, podcasts, online forums and wikis) (Lee and Kotler, 2011, p. 361).

As can be seen from the analysis of theoretical background, the separation of corporate communication takes place on the basis of typical communication channels, each of which has its own functionality, features of content distribution, quantitative and qualitative characteristics of audience coverage and performance indicators. Therefore, the actual task for both scientists and practitioners is the correct identification of communication channels, the identification of certain patterns of their application and taking into account these data during the implementation of specific projects.

**Development of the corporate media concept**

As it sounds paradoxically, the company’s own communication channels were separated into an independent scientific and practical concept before the very concept of corporate communication arose. Devitt (2008, p. 95) calls corporate periodicals a “new genre,” which became the answer to the philosophy of system management that originated at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The scientist also notes that in changing the position of man in the production system, the corporate edition was responsible for changes in the relationship between managers and their subordinates and also met the needs for re-personalization of the company.

In different countries, this term was affected by different phrases. American practices used the definition of company newspaper, house magazine, employee magazine, work journal. In the English tradition, according to the relevant terms, the periodicals of a particular type were fixed: house journal, house organ, work magazine. The same approach was used in the practice of German communication: werkzeitschriften, hauszeitschriften, kundenzeitschriften. In France, the term la presse de l’entreprise was used.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the development of corporate press has inspired many American researchers to more deeply consider this communication phenomenon.
Wilson (1915) analyzed how internal corporate periodicals can influence the performance of an enterprise. Newton (1921) developed this topic, focusing on communication methods. The features of newspapers for the company’s staff were also studied by O’Shea (1920). The relationship between the effectiveness of the impact of corporate magazines on quality of content was established by Ramsay (1920). Already more than 60 years ago, researchers have realized that corporate media is an essential part of well-coordinated public relations programs (Henkin, 1946).

Among the scholarly works of recent decades, it is possible to distinguish the analysis of the composition of American corporate periodicals performed by Riley (1992). Interesting is the dissertation by Swenson (2012), who, on a historical example of the corporate magazine Ford Times, investigated corporate communication in their cultural and social dimensions.


Particular attention should be paid to the development of theoretical and practical concept of corporate media in the post-Soviet space, which was conditioned by the transition of the economy to new standards of marketing, corporate communication and personnel management. This was when the twenty-first century began. It was marked by a burst of scientific interest in corporate media and the emergence of a number of papers (Chemyakin, 2006; Gorcheva, 2008; Murzin, 2005), in particular in Ukraine (Oltarzhevskyi, 2013; Todorova, 2007, 2010). These studies were not only related to corporate communication, public relations and marketing, but also the theory of mass communication and journalism.

At the end of the twentieth century to indicate this particular type of media, often used corporate publishing, where the word corporate refers to membership of any company, production and commerce structure, regardless of the type of business organization and type of business. Today, in our opinion, this term needs a wider interpretation. For a more voluminous and meaningful definition of this channel of corporate communication, we propose to use the term “corporate media.” It means a special kind of media, the founder of which is a company and which is used by it for information support of its main activity: the formation of a positive image, the exchange of information within the organization between employees and the distribution of its outside, among clients, partners, etc.

According to Müller (2011), corporate media have long been rivaling traditional mass media and demand more than ever before. Such competition also affects the publishing market. In particular, only Germany, Austria and Switzerland each year invest €5.8bn in corporate periodicals, and annual revenue growth in corporate publishing is 15 percent (Kientzler, 2018). With the development of corporate media, the notion of “corporate journalism” has been established as a functional component of corporate communication, helping companies promote corporate ideas, shape positive image and achieve organizational goals (Fisher, 1992). The current rapid quantitative and qualitative development of corporate media is due to a number of objective reasons. The main among them is the transformation of the information environment and the growth of the importance of internal and external business communications.

Consequently, considering corporate media as an instrument of corporate communication, we see in them, first of all, an efficient communication channel that has high credits of trust for the target audience. This trust provides partner dialog – communication, exchange of professional information. In the communications system, corporate media is the company’s own channel, which is characterized by relatively wide coverage, direct access and high quality contact with the target audience. Due to its nature, corporate media use the same levers of influence on the public consciousness as the mass media. However, the undeniable advantages of corporate media are direct access to the audience, involvement in its affairs, low probability of distortion of information and low cost of delivering messages compared to
advertising costs of the media. On the other hand, corporate media can form a stable and well-managed information field, which facilitates effective messaging not only within the company but around it.

And more about one functional advantage of corporate media as a channel of communication. The format and communication purpose of any media should correspond to the scale of its activities. In turn, the breadth of the thematic spectrum dictates the way of its distribution. In other words, to tell a team of 1,000 people about an internal event in the life of an enterprise, it makes no sense to post a publication on this topic in a mass newspaper with a millionth circulation. In addition, the subject and scale of such a message may not correspond to the concept of a mass publication. Instead, corporate media publish such articles appropriately and effectively.

What communication channels do companies use?

As in real life companies pursue specific market goals and objectives, each of them will use its own appropriate set of communication tools to disseminate information and interact with stakeholders. In particular, corporate communication relates to various outbound communication channels deployed by organizations to communicate with customers and other constituencies (Balmer and Greyser, 2003, p. 125).

It is believed that the main communication channels of companies with a wide audience are traditional mass media and advertising channels. In this case, mass media channels are all means of transmitting messages that involve a mass medium such as radio, television, newspapers and so on, which allows one or some individuals to reach the audience of many (Rogers, 2003, p. 18). However, in fact, the specifics of corporate communication are far from limited to their use.

In order to find out which business channels most often are being used to achieve their communication goals, we analyzed the statistics provided due to courtesy of the Association of Corporate Media, Ukraine (ACMU). This public organization was founded in 2006 and unites professionals in the field of marketing, PR, journalism and advertising. Its mission is to develop the corporate media market. In order to popularize the most successful projects, share professional experience and increase the level of corporate media, ACMU holds the annual contest “The Best Corporate Media of Ukraine.” Any company, both Ukrainian and foreign, can submit their media projects to the competition. Evaluating the projects, the organizers of the competition simultaneously collect statistical data that give an idea of the qualitative and quantitative development of the sphere of corporate communication. These data include the total number of companies that use corporate media, as well as the industries in which these companies operate. For example, today banks and financial companies (21 percent), agrarian companies (14 percent), heavy industry (12 percent), energy (11 percent) and also FMCG companies (9 percent) have the largest amount of corporate media in Ukraine. The competition data also reflect the percentage of different types of communication channels: print and digital, for internal and external audiences. But the main objective of these statistics is to highlight the types of channels that companies use the most frequently: printed newspaper and magazine, social network pages, video website, digital newspaper and magazine, etc. In our study, we relied on data obtained in 2018 during the analysis of 119 projects submitted to the corporate media contest. In order to track certain trends, we compared them with the 2014 figures. Immediately, we note that these results are not exhaustive and are not representative for the entire corporate communications industry globally because different countries have their own historical traditions, as well as the technical and financial possibilities of using communication channels. But they are a definite benchmark in our research reflection. In addition, these statistics do not take into account the importance of “event” as category at all, since it cannot be considered as a media channel. However, from our point of view, this element
must be present in the model of the typological separation of communication channels. Anyway, the statistical data of the ACMU served as the starting point for the formation of a list of corporate media channels used to create our typological model (Table I).

As can be seen from the table, the vast majority of companies communicate with their audiences through their own communication channels (corporate media): print and digital newspapers and magazines, videos, websites, etc. The advantage of using their own channels is that the company can fully control their content and the flow of interaction with the audience. On the other hand, these channels mainly use the one-way communication model, which does not allow the audience to engage in an interactive discussion of information, as in the new media. That is why some companies are trying to add modules for commenting messages, features like and other two-way communication tools in their digital newsletters and other online resources.

The second place in terms of the frequency of use of corporate communication channels is occupied by social networks, which over the past five years have demonstrated growth more than doubled – from 8 to 17 percent. Social networks not only simplified the access of business to the mass audience, but also qualitatively changed the principles of communication. Scientists explain these opportunities by saying that “social media allows societies to communicate directly and instantly with their stakeholders, marking a shift from the traditional one-way output of corporate communications to expanded dialogue between company and consumer” (Matthews, 2010, p. 17). Social media channels have opened up new opportunities for companies to benefit from platforms in recent years, where users meet, communicate, exchange ideas and even create products (Adlmaier-Herbst, 2014).

In general, communication through social networks is based on a win-win strategy. In other words, the company wants to be heard, and the audience wants to get useful information about new products or services, interesting news from brand, etc. On the pages of social networks, the interests of both sides coincide. According to scientists, thanks to the development of social media channels, people can learn about a product or service through reviews, blogs or groups and decide whether or not to use that product or service. Then, organizations are no longer the ones in power at the moment of controlling information about their products in the social media world. It is important to understand that there are still companies who need to work on strategies for embracing social media for communication (McCorkindale, 2010).

The significant decrease (from 36 to 28 percent) of the level of use of printed corporate media, most likely, is due to two factors. First, this channel cannot provide an interactive dialogue, as online resources allow. Second, the cost of distributing printed content is higher than that of the digital media.

The presence of specific communication channels, such as a printed calendar, a corporate souvenir, a printed book and an annual report, in the table requires a separate explanation. In modern corporate communications, the calendar have lost the initial function of the reference edition and turned into a carrier of text and image visual information about the company, its mission and competitive advantages. On the other hand, the calendar is used as a corporate souvenir, a business gift for employees of the company, its partners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of communication channel</th>
<th>Printed newspaper, magazine (%)</th>
<th>Page on social network (%)</th>
<th>Video (%)</th>
<th>Web site (%)</th>
<th>Digital newspaper, magazine (%)</th>
<th>Printed calendar (%)</th>
<th>Corporate souvenir (%)</th>
<th>Printed book (%)</th>
<th>Annual report (%)</th>
<th>Mobile app (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent of total 2018</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of total 2014</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table I. Corporate communications channels used by Ukrainian companies

Note: According to the Association of Corporate Media, Ukraine (ACMU)
and clients. Corporate souvenirs can also be considered as one of the channels of communication other than the media, as they convey to the audience certain corporate messages and images. A corporate book should be considered as a non-periodic publication, where you can publish large volumes of text, images. This channel is needed for companies who want to tell about their rich history, achievements, charismatic person of founders. The book can be used both as a corporate gift and as a PR-drive for a presentation, charity event or other event. Unlike the book, the annual report is published annually to familiarize the public with the results of the company's activities. It is an inalienable attribute of formal corporate reporting and, at the same time, a tool for communicating with such an important specific audience as investors and shareholders.

Despite the fact that the analyzed statistics give a general idea of the company's use of the main communication channels, we did not find in them other important forms of interaction with stakeholders. An example of this is corporate events, which are considered as a special form of group communication, created to form, strengthen or correct stereotypes, attitudes of the target audience (Rotovskiy, 2006). Based on this approach, we propose to distinguish the category of corporate events into a separate type of specific corporate communication channels. Depending on the objectives, it can be various presentations, conferences, exhibitions, fairs, charities, sales, sports events, concerts or variations of events that help companies solve specific communication tasks.

**Typology of communication channels**

Although in our research, we focus on modern corporate communication channels, it is hard to make a clear cut between the technologies of the past and the present. First, according to the theory of Riepl (1913), new and advanced media are not able to completely replace the old ones. Accordingly, new and old communication channels will always exist in parallel reality, meeting the needs of different audiences. Second, not all modern channels can be considered an entirely new phenomenon. They should always be considered through the historical prism of communication development. Some developments, like corporate blogging, are, of course, fairly new: they are made possible by the development of digital communication technologies. Most trends, however, have predecessors in the history of business enterprise (Christensen et al., 2008, p. 14). Friedl and Vercic (2011, p. 85) are called traditional corporate communication channels employee magazines, intranet news, corporate television, e-mail and the “board-of-directors’ newsletter” as well as face-to-face communication and staff meetings. Also, they claim that the new channels today are related to social media and include channels such as blogs, microblogging, wikis, social networking, podcasting, video and photo sharing and instant messenger as well as discussion forums.

Attempts to systematize and group communication channels on similar signs have appeared for a long time. Over 20 years ago, Zmud et al. (1990) went as far as to differentiate communication channels into five categories in their study. They are face-to-face, group, written, traditional communication technologies and computer-mediated communication technologies. Then, they identified several channels in each group. An additional criterion suggested by the researchers was the formal or informal channel guidance. Although with the development of communication technologies this model has become irrelevant, it demonstrates a fair attempt to classify channels by functional and methodological features.

Lee and Kotler (2011) share communication channels on three types: mass, selective and personal. Mass media channels are called for when large groups of people need to be quickly informed and convinced of a problem or desired behavior; selective channels are used when targeted markets can be achieved more cost effectively through targeted channels such as direct mail and the internet; personal channels are more costly but sometimes warranted in order to achieve behavior change goals. This model was developed for marketing purposes and was based on the principles of audience separation and scale of communication activity.
In general, audience appointment can serve as a key feature for the typology of corporate communication channels. Traditionally, researchers distinguished two large audience: internal (personnel) and external (consumers, clients and partners). Each one depends on the other to achieve economic transactions. Of the two, however, external communication is more important because it results directly in an economic transaction and wealth transfer to the organization. Looked at simplistically, a single seller does not need internal communication. The seller is dependent on him or herself to make the sale (Horton, 1995).

Similar attempts to identify types of corporate channels by auditorium are owned by A. Clear and L. Weideman (2004). These researchers carry out a division between the media – a technical channel used to convey messages to a large variety of audiences (the general public), and house publication – activities related to the coverage of events in the organization and aimed at workers (internal media) and groups outside organization (external media).

In connection with the expansion of the spectrum of corporate communications tasks, a new version of typology has recently been crystallized, based on the core communicative goal of the project. That is, the type of channel within the company is determined depending on the company’s division goals (HR department, PR department, sales department, marketing or investor of the project) and the needs of the target audience. According to this principle, there are four types of corporate media (Todorova, 2010):

1. HR channels (aimed at loyalty and motivation of the company’s staff, popularization the system of key values of the organization, strengthening the reputation of the brand of the employer);
2. PR channels (formation of the company’s managed image; integration of external PR-communications into a single stream; generation of inquiries from the industry press; formation of awareness and positive attitude to the company’s products and services);
3. marketing channels (increase of sales volumes); and
4. commercial channels (obtaining profit from project implementation due to third-party advertising and/or sale of edition to end users. Related goals – increase of sales volumes, PR).

Analyzing the possibilities for demonstrating corporate responsibility through corporate communication tools, Dawkins (2004, p. 119) concludes that “employees are an underutilised and potentially powerful channel for enhancing a company’s reputation for responsibility among its key stakeholders.” In this regard, a separate question arises: can a company employee or, in general, any person be considered a communication channel? After all, as we noted above, the communication channel is primarily a technical means of transmitting information. Instead, a person in this model is an active participant of the process, a source of communication, even if it simply retransmits alien messages. At the same time, in any case, a person will use the appropriate communication channel: whether it is a page in social networks or a speech during a corporate event. Therefore, in no way reducing the role of personal communication in corporate interests, we would not characterized a person as a communication channel.

Another approach to the typology of communication channels can be borrowed from Korolko (2001), which proposed to divide PR tools into two categories: uncontrolled and controlled. Uncontrolled tools include articles, press releases, press conferences, personal speeches, interviews, television news, special programs and reports. Controlled tools include the means of printed communication (directories, informational materials, bulletin boards, newsletters, annual reports, internal periodicals and educational materials); means of audiovisual communication (presentation materials, films about the organization, messages
means of interpersonal communication (discussions, round tables, consultations, collective events and demonstrations); PR advertising that does not provide incentives (statements, appeals, announcements, symbols and signage).

It should be noted that the above mentioned methodology of separation is based on a rather vague criterion of control of the communication channel, which in real life conditions may differ. For example, during the discussions, press conferences may suddenly change the timing of the event. In this case, due to the intervention of unscheduled speakers, secondary messaging may come to the fore, and important information may be lost, on the contrary. And it is absolutely clear that this criterion cannot be applied to social networks, which are guided by the principles of self-organization and almost complete non-control.

Based on a theoretical analysis of existing approaches, we offer our own model of typological separation of communication channels for their affiliation with the company (Figure 1).

The above scheme shows the separation of the main corporate communication channels by belonging to a company into two types: outsiders and insiders.

Outsiders channels are those non-company channels (public events, mass media and advertising) and can be used by pre-contracted owners, mainly on a fee basis. For example, you can become a sponsor of the conference and instead have the opportunity to enlist a company’s speaker, company logo placement and other manifestations. You can also purchase advertising space in the media for posting your company, airtime for corporate video clips, and more. The opportunity to get free mention of the company in the media is due to the presence of weighty PR drives and professionally organized media relations.

Insiders channels are those channels that were specifically created by a company and/or owned by a company for communicating with stakeholders. The advantages of this type of channels are the ability to freely use them at the discretion of the company, at any time, without the additional payment of media services. For example, your own website allows...
you to place any number of corporate news free of charge in the form in which they need companies. Its own internal corporate journal provides the company with the ability to formulate its editorial policy and publish articles in a format that is most appropriate to its target audience.

As you can see, in the center of our proposed model is a rather branched type of corporate media. By types of media, it is divided into printed, broadcast and digital channels. Among them, the most used, according to our observations, remain printed corporate periodicals (newspapers and magazines), including corporate books and calendars that are equated with them, as well as digital channels (first of all, corporate website, online media).

Significant prospects for using corporate video are due to the attractiveness of multimedia content for the audience and the increasing availability of video production, driven by the rapid development of technology. Of course, corporate video is more like a media product than a communication channel. But its self-sufficiency and the wide range of applications in various communication situations (e.g. social media broadcasting, corporate events, product sales sites, etc.) give us reason to describe the video as separate channel for corporate communication.

Innovative digital corporate media are mobile applications. In external communication, they are used as a tool for customer interaction, to account for trade turnover, accept orders and exchange official information. For staff, they serve as an internal mobile portal, which provides corporate news, presents the company’s internal services, for example, it can even book meeting room, order corporate transfer, etc. In general, mobile apps allow businesses to be online 24/7 with their customers, employees, using the new features of smartphones.

Insiders channels also include corporate events. For convenience, we divided them into auditorium on internal, external and media events. Each such event gives the company the opportunity to deliberately communicate with the interested audience, form the agenda it needs, and control the flow of communication. By organizing any own corporate event, the company independently develops its format, theme and implementation mechanism. Instead, in order to communicate with the right audience through outsiders events, the company has to adapt to the proposed format, which can affect the quality of communication.

A separate type of communication channels that can be used for corporate purposes is social media. On the basis of belonging, they are at the junction of both categories outsiders and insiders. Legally, physically and technically, social media do not belong to your company, but almost unlimited, and mostly free of charge, they can be used to distribute corporate communications. In this case, the owner of the communication channel is responsible, and your company is responsible for the content (text, audio and visual) that it hosts. The undeniable advantage of social media is the online format, democratic communication principles that can unite individuals around solving common problems, allow them to express public opinion and attract the attention of a large circle of people. The popularity of this channel is due to the possibility of simplified sharing of content and participation in its creation, which allows you to express yourself, share thoughts, emotions and thus join a community. One more plus of social media is saving money on the technical supporting of the communication channel.

The unique communication channel for promotion of corporate information can be digital games, which attract attention due to the spirit of adversity. Increasing the popularity of this instrument in the world has led to the establishment of cyber-sport. Gaming technologies in external corporate communications promote interaction with consumers, especially the youth audience. And in internal corporate communications, they can be used in the training of staff and during corporate events aimed at team building.

A special role in the presented typological model is given to digital communication channels. The main advantage of digital content is that it is comfortably perceived by modern users, easily processed and shared. It is easy to search in online space, to bind with
other digital materials. The multimedia content allows including text, photo, video, audio, hyperlinks in it. Digital channels are completely interactive, provide ongoing online communication with audiences and can support any offline activity. That is why the future of corporate communication is connected with the digital channels.

Significant trends for the global information space are the interpenetration of communication technologies and convergence, which is expressed in the merger of different types of content into a single flow and interaction of communication tools. What does this mean for modern companies? By organizing corporate communication, it is important to link all channels to a single integrated system. This allows you to relay messages in a variety of ways, achieve synergy, and thus increase their impact on the audience. The combination of different channels and the creation of a balanced mix of communication channels make it possible to organize an effective trust dialog with stakeholders, which contributes to the achievement of marketing and business goals.

**Conclusion**

Active development of corporate communication requires a clear understanding of the typology of channels through which such communication takes place. It is important to know, since each channel has its own functional features, audience characteristics, capabilities and content distribution constraints. And this, in turn, is necessary for the creation and efficient management of the mix of corporate communication channels.

From the study, it follows that corporate communication channels can be divided into two main types by the criterion of belonging to the company: outsiders and insiders. Then they can be divided into broad functional subtypes: events, advertising, media and a specific category – social media. At the next level, the typological separation takes place on an auditorium (internal and external audiences) and technology of information distribution (print, broadcast and digital).

The list of corporate communication channels is not permanent, it is constantly changing in line with the development of communication technologies and changes in the communication behavior of the audience. It is possible to predict that in the conditions of a saturated information space, traditional mass channels (television, radio, press and outdoor advertising) will continue to lose the share of voice in the distribution of corporate information. Instead, the social media will come to the fore in terms of the number and quality of the reach of the audience.

In connection with the development of corporate communication, the company’s own channels – corporate media, which are well-managed and focused on the appropriate target audiences, are coming to the forefront. Corporate media are ramified system that functions in a single space and coexist with traditional mass media in parallel. The advantage of corporate media is that they work on the territory of a communicator, live up to its problems and, accordingly, can respond promptly to its requests. The variety of corporate media shows their ability to adapt to the transformations of the information space.

Analyzing the structural composition of corporate media, it can be assumed that the overall increase of digital communication channels will continue to reduce the number of printed periodicals. In our opinion, in the near future, corporate communication will actively develop in the segment of social media (primarily social networks), online video, mobile applications. However, print corporate media will not disappear completely due to the fact that the tradition of consuming information from paper carriers will remain strong, especially in light of the theory of “fast and slow” reading. In addition, some print media can change their initial features and establish themselves in other categories of communication channels, such as corporate books and calendars.

An important channel of corporate communication remains an event. Although it is not able to provide immediate contact with the mass audience, this channel may be useful for
direct qualitative contact with participants, organization of trustful dialogue, cooperation
with opinion makers. Usually events can serve as an occasion for their coverage by other
means of communication. The format of corporate events may also vary according to the
need for time, audience and business specifics.

A distinctive trend in the development of corporate communication channels is the mixing
of media formats, technological convergence and the merging of various communication tools.
And it also provides additional opportunities for more effective management of the
information environment inside and around the company. Comprehensive balanced use of
traditional and innovative communication channels, access to a wide range of audiovisual,
text and multimedia tools can enhance the impact of communication on target audiences. It
also allows you to vary the vectors and intensity of communication, helping to properly
distribute communication efforts and save resources. At the current stage, an effective mix of
corporate communication should be based on a wide range of corporate and social media,
which can be supplemented, if necessary, to reach the broad audience with traditional mass
channels, primarily TV and outdoor advertising.

In general, corporate communication will continue to be actively used by companies for
more effective interaction with society, marketing strategy implementation, enhancement of
employee motivation, corporate culture strengthening and loyalty of consumers and clients.
Therefore, the typological model of distribution of channels of corporate communication will
be improved, and the channels themselves will require further in-depth study and scientific
and practical substantiation, taking into account the latest trends, enhancing the
digitalization, convergence and universalization of communications.

References
personal information”, available at: www.researchgate.net/publication/270281374_Public_-
Relations_in_the_Digital_World_Global_Relationship_Management_Personal_information
(accessed March 25, 2019).


Balmer, J.M.T. and Greyser, S.A. (2003), Revealing the Corporation: Perspectives on Identity, Image,

Springer, Hong Kong.

definition/communication-channel.html (accessed March 23, 2019).


Christensen, L.T., Morsing, M. and Cheney, G. (2008), Corporate Communications: Convention,

Media Studies, Juta, Lansdowne.


Fisher, L. (1992), The Craft of Corporate Journalism: Writing and Editing Creative Organizational

study”, Public Relations Review, Vol. 37 No. 1, pp. 84-86.


**Corresponding author**

Dmytro Olehovych Oltarzhevskyi can be contacted at: oltarzhevsky@gmail.com

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website: www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm

Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com
Combinatorial use of communication technologies in organizations

Yaguang Zhu
Department of Communication, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas, USA

Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to critique and extend contemporary scholarship on information and communication technologies (ICTs). This paper argues that the focus on the selection and use of a single communication medium limits the understanding of current ICT use in organizations. A combinatorial perspective is needed to capture the complexities of multiple ICTs use for achieving communication goals and completing tasks.
Design/methodology/approach – This paper addresses the trending phenomenon of combinatorial use of ICTs by offering a critical review of the theoretical studies and empirical research in scholarly books and journals and deriving novel theoretical research questions that set the stage for future studies.
Findings – This paper identifies how combinatorial ICT use as a perspective that uniquely elucidates ICT use in organizations, clarifies key terms used in previous research and proposes theoretical and operational recommendations for researchers and corporate practitioners who are interested in studying the combinatorial use of ICTs.
Originality/value – This paper highlights that understanding the combinatorial use ICTs in complex work environments could have significant implications for productivity and efficiency of individuals and corporations. This paper serves as a catalyst for on-going research conversations regarding combinatorial ICT use, while assisting organizational communication researchers and practitioners in describing, theorizing and advancing ICT implementation, use and outcomes.
Keywords Combinatorial use, Information and communication technologies (ICTs), Media choice and use, Workplace communication
Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction
Organizations have been increasingly relying on information and communication technologies (ICTs) to support flexibility in organizing mechanisms, to facilitate innovation and responsiveness and to manage communication processes within and across organizational units (Rice and Leonardi, 2014). Over the past two decades, organizational communication researchers have developed dozens of media choice theories to explain how people choose certain ICT in organizations. Some media choice theories have focused on the technological aspect (e.g. Daft and Lengel, 1986), and some have focused on the social aspect (e.g. Fulk et al., 1990). While we can conceive of ICTs narrowly as tools to accomplish specific tasks or more broadly as an orientation toward the world, the majority of studies on media choices presume that ICT users usually have particular reasons or an identifiable motivation to select (or not to select) a specific ICT at any given point in time. However, if we look at patterns of ICT use in organizations today, one of the most striking characteristics seems to be that many users do not always select one medium over another anymore (Hassoun, 2012). Instead, as organizational settings have been increasingly saturated by a wide array of ICT alternatives (e.g. instant messenger, group support systems, intranets, video conferencing, virtual collaboration and social media), more individuals use a mix of ICTs over time and draw on different modalities (Leonardi et al., 2012; Stephens et al., 2008).

As a huge amount of organizational resources – such as time and money – have been invested in ICT solutions, it is crucial to understand the complexities involved in using
combinatorial ICTs for achieving communication goals. Toward this end, this paper seeks to address such trending phenomenon by offering a critical review of the theoretical studies and empirical research in scholarly books and journals relating to combinatorial use of ICTs in organizations, and deriving novel theoretical research questions that set the stage for future studies and practices. In doing so, we first look back at theoretical foundations that specify how a range of antecedents affect combinatorial use of ICTs. We then review both the theoretical frameworks and the key empirical findings for combinatorial use of ICT. This paper concludes by discussing theory-driven directions for future research and suggestions for corporate practices.

Theoretical foundations of combinatorial use of ICT

In this section, we begin with defining key terms related to combinatorial use of ICT. Drawing on interdisciplinary research from communication, management and information system, we focus on explicating core definitions involving ICT, media choice, media capabilities and combinatorial use. Next, we synthesize theoretical perspectives that elucidate the role of ICT use in balancing multiple relationships in organizational communication, such as materiality and human agency, medium and message, time and task completion and cognition and affect.

Defining key terms

As conceptual definition is a prerequisite for any theory-driven research (Wacker, 1998), it is essential to define several key terms concerning how people use combinations of ICT in organizations. First, for the purpose of this paper, we refer to ICT as “devices, applications, media, and associated hardware and software that receive and distribute, process and store, and retrieve, and analyze digital information between people and machines (as information) or among people (as communication)” (Rice and Leonardi, 2014, p. 426). Clearly, this definition sheds lights on the entwined nature of information and communication, which can also serve as an umbrella term for “communication technology” or sometimes simply “technology” in organizational communication research.

Second, the discussion of media choice and use – which refers to how people select and use different communication media in organizations – lays the foundation for the process of defining combinatorial use of ICTs. As scholars increasingly recognize that people are more likely to use multiple ICTs to communicate, the community of ICT research views media choice and use in a combinatorial fashion, and studies oftentimes treat “multiple media use,” “multiple communication media use” and “multiple ICT use” interchangeably (e.g. Jung and Lyytinen, 2014; Leonardi et al., 2012).

Third, the notion of media traits refers to the potential structures provided by an ICT which influence the way that individuals can transmit and process information (Rice, 1987). In general, this line of research assumes that different ICTs have relatively static and objective characteristics (e.g. a medium can or cannot transmit voice, a medium can or cannot document a copy of a message). Individuals may perceive these characteristics in different way or change their perception over time (Carlson and Zmud, 1999).

Finally, the idea of combinatorial use stems from mathematical theory and has been applied to many disciplines, such as computer science, information system and economics (Hanson, 2003). Despite that previous studies used the original concept inconsistently, the combinatorics perspective provides scholars with a conceptual frame for understanding and examining multiple ICTs use within an organizational setting (Stephens, 2007). In this paper, we define combinatorial use of ICT as “the strategic integration of multiple information and communication technologies in processes to achieve communication goals across a variety of organizational settings.” In sum, the aforementioned concepts provide the foundation for studying different theoretical perspectives of ICT use in organizations.
Theoretical perspectives on ICT use in organizations

Theoretical perspectives pertaining to ICT use in organizations typically fall into three traditions: technological determinism (Daft and Lengel, 1986), social constructionism (Fulk et al., 1990) and more recently, technical materiality (Leonardi, 2011). Through an extensive literature review and a theme-developing practice, Rice and Leonardi (2014) argued that the three traditions jointly contribute to the understanding of several aspects of ICT choice and use: influences (e.g. intentions, emotions, norms, power), implementation (e.g. organizational structure, social interaction), use (e.g. problems, knowledge) and outcomes (e.g. adoption/acceptance/adaptation, organizational assimilation, conflict, knowledge management). This review provides fertile soil for research concerning combinatorial ICT use in organizations, especially given the state of perpetual flux that makes capturing and understanding ICT choices in organizations ever more challenging.

Alternatively, Stephens and Mandhana (2016) illustrated the evolution of ICT choice and use via three theoretical waves of thinking. The first wave represents a technologically deterministic stance and focuses more on technical attributes of the media instead of the context or interactions between people, such as the media richness theory (Daft and Lengel, 1986). The second wave provides an alternative view on media choice and use by addressing the issue of social influence on media-related behaviors in communication, such as the social influence model (Fulk et al., 1990). The third wave highlights the recent line of research focusing on combinatorial ICTs use, especially a range of theoretical and empirical works emerged investigating how people use ICTs sequentially (Stephens, 2007) and engage in simultaneous conversations with others using ICTs (Reinsch et al., 2008). The key takeaway from this wave is: combinatorial use of ICTs, either sequentially or simultaneously, enables individuals to convey information and create shared meaning based on temporal matters required to the performance of organizational work (Ballard and Seibold, 2004).

Besides Rice and Leonardi’s (2014) theme development efforts and Stephens and Mandhana’s (2016) three waves of thinking, substantial research effort has aimed at identifying contextual factors that shape ICT choice and use in organizations, including time pressure, recipient availability, urgency of the problem, physical distance between communication partners, number of message recipients and participant experiences and relationships (Carlson and Zmud, 1999; Treviño et al., 2000). These studies usually focus on the selection of one communication medium, primarily e-mail, or on the comparisons between two media, often face-to-face vs certain electronic medium. However, the focus on selection or use of a single communication medium limits our understanding of current media usage in organizations, and may not capture the complexities of combining media in communication processes. As Walther and Parks (2002) suggested, “communication efficiency may rest on sequences or combinations of ICTs rather than isolated choices about a discrete medium” (p. 534). Therefore, theoretical perspectives focusing on combinatorial ICT use become a welcome contribution to the world of ICT and organizational communication research in light of the changing media landscape. Following this line of research, next we draw inspiration from existing research on combinatorial ICTs use and unravel research gaps in the literature.

Past research on combinatorial use of ICT

Past research on combinatorial use of ICT is nested in the view of communication as a process (Poole, 2013). Monge and Kalman (1996) proposed that three concepts are central to the scientific understanding of communication processes: sequentiality, simultaneity and synchronicity. Sequentiality shows the unfolding of a communication process over time, while simultaneity reflects the configuration of a specific moment and how entities coexist in this moment. Synchronicity captures the parallel unfolding of multiple processes through time. These concepts represent different but equally important elements of communication
processes involving combinatorial use of ICT and collectively showing what constitutes an occurrence in a moment and what unfolds over time (Poole, 2013). Drawing upon these concepts, previous studies have explored how people use multiple ICTs in a combinatorial fashion, either simultaneously or sequentially, to coordinate and complete workplace tasks, form shared understanding, and shape social relationships (e.g. Leonardi et al., 2012; Stephens and Davis, 2009). Next, we will trace the development of research on combinatorial use of ICT and present two main bodies of studies: ICT succession theory (sequential use of ICTs) and multicommunicating (simultaneous use of ICTs).

**Sequential ICT use and ICT succession theory**

Since its introduction by Stephens (2007), ICT succession theory has emerged in the literature as a prominent perspective for understanding how combinations of ICTs predict communication effectiveness and efficiency in workplaces for certain types of tasks. More specifically, this theory explains how ICTs are used as follow-up technologies to help people accomplish a range of workplace tasks, such as persuasion, status, information, problem solving and documentation. The central proposition of the theory is that the repetition of a message through two different types of ICTs leads to the greatest communication effectiveness and efficiency related to task completions. For example, a message sent once face-to-face might be followed up by an e-mail, which is considered to be more effective than repeating messages using a single medium or no repetitions at all.

The framework of ICT succession theory moves beyond the aforementioned contingency-based approach and proves more fruitful when using subsequent ICTs, in succession, to complete work tasks. To date, many studies have applied the framework to making sense of a variety of communication processes that occur through combinatorial ICT use (e.g. Leonardi et al., 2012; Stephens and Rains, 2011). For example, in the context of an interpersonal influence attempt, Stephens and Rains (2011) found that participants who received a sequence of two messages through combinatorial ICTs (e-mail/face-to-face and face-to-face/e-mail) exhibited higher evaluations of message effectiveness and increased behavioral intentions than participants who received a single ICT.

ICT succession theory also extends combinatorial ICT use to the consideration of complementary modalities of ICTs. The theory makes specific predictions concerning how maximizing complementary modalities of ICTs over time might influence effectiveness of tasks. Stephens (2007) defined complementary ICT as “a sequential use of multiple ICTs with modality-expanding capabilities” (p. 496). Modality expansion is associated with complimentary forms offering “expanded cues” or higher richness, which in turn provide “error-reducing redundancy for equivocal and uncertain tasks” (Stephens et al., 2008, p. 197). In using complementary ICTs sequentially, modality expansion occurs by using a successive ICT that offers different communication modes – such as auditory, visual or textual – through the initial ICT. For example, individuals who receive an e-mail message (text-based information) about a topic and then get a phone call (audio information) are more likely to attend to the messages than those who receive the messages from a single ICT (either e-mail or phone call) in a repetitive fashion.

**Simultaneous ICT use and multicommunicating**

In the modern office, it is not enough to do one thing at a time. This multitasking way of work has also been integrated into ICT use, and people use combinatorial ICTs in a simultaneous manner (Stephens and Davis, 2009). Work demands often require a single employee to use multiple ICTs to work on several different tasks, from responding to urgent e-mails and instant messages to attending a virtual meeting or sharing a complicated document. Thus, instead of asking why a manager only uses e-mail to get in touch with his/her subordinates in workplace now rather seems to be: why does this manager combine the
use of multiple ICTs at the same time? In order to shed lights on this relevant question for combinatorial ICT use, scholars have linked the concepts of simultaneity with combinatorial ICT use in a wide array of studies on multitasking (Poposki and Oswald, 2010) and multicommunicating (Reinsch et al., 2008).

In previous research, task switching has been considered as a critical component of the conceptualization of multitasking (Oswald et al., 2007). A commonly cited definition of multitasking is “accomplishing multiple task goals in the same time period by engaging in frequent switches between individual tasks” (Salvucci and Taatgen, 2011, p. 7). Task switching involves the frequent requirement to shift attentional resources to other tasks within a restricted time period. This means even when tasks are performed simultaneously (e.g. listening to a meeting’s audio recording and writing a report), multitasking exists when attention is shifted between two or more tasks (Oswald et al., 2007). Based on the research on multitasking, the concept of multicommunicating was developed to address a commonplace communication phenomenon regarding people’s participation in two simultaneous conversations. Compared with multitasking, multicommunicating not only requires adequate attention on task switching, but also coordination between the two (Reinsch et al., 2008). As Stephens (2012) put it, multicommunicating is more challenging to perform as a practice because it demands more attention and coordination on both tasks (i.e. conversations).

Multicommunicating refers specifically to managing multiple conversations, using nearly synchronous media (e.g. face-to-face conversation, telephone calls, text messaging, video conferencing, e-mail, etc.; Reinsch et al., 2008). Not only influenced by multitasking research, this concept also draws upon other established works, such as polychronicity (Bluedorn et al., 1999), theories of self-presentation (Goffman, 1959, 1967) and media richness theory (Daft and Lengel, 1986). As Reinsch et al. (2008) argued, the uniqueness of multicommunicating entails “the micro-transitions among roles and sub-roles, the on-going pursuit of an appropriate set of instrumental and relational objectives within each conversation, the monitoring and interpretation of responses to one’s actions, and the concomitant ceding to each of several others some level of control over one’s own behaviors” (p. 10). Stephens et al. (2012) further elucidated this distinction by comparing dovetailing (sequential interactions) with multicommunicating (simultaneous interactions).

According to social influence theory (Fulk et al., 1990), multicommunicating using combinatorial ICTs can be contagious due to “statements and behaviors of coworkers, behavioral norms, and social definitions of rational behavior” (p. 70). Stephens and Davis (2009) confirmed this social contagion aspect of multicommunicating at workplace by finding organizational members would engage in similar behaviors, if they see others multicommunicating using ICTs. Furthermore, organizational norms offer an alternative lens to explicate the widespread of multicommunicating using ICTs (Reinsch et al., 2008). Organizational norms can contain both the imitation of observed behaviors and individuals’ perceptions about what is considered as an appropriate behavior, which tend to influence the frequency and practice of multicommunicating (Stephens and Davis, 2009). For instance, if a team member perceives that the norm for productivity during a group meeting outweighs the norm for full attention or immediate responses, he/she is more likely to engage in multicommunicating practices. In a relatively opposite scenario, Turner and Reinsch (2010) found that the absence of norms regarding multicommunicating (e.g. what to multicommunicate, when to multicommunicate and where to multicommunicate) is likely to increase the possibility for misunderstanding in workplaces.

Multicommunicating has received increasing attention from organizational and communication scholars. Previous studies have linked multicommunicating with collaborative decision-making processes (Dennis et al., 2010), message equivocality (Turner and Reinsch, 2007), social influences (Stephens and Davis, 2009) and relational outcomes (Cameron and Webster, 2013). To theorize the underlying mechanism of
multicommunicating behavior, scholars have identified a range of key factors, including the flexibility of communication tempo, the compartmentalization of conversations, the existence of multiple and conflicting interpretations of an issue (i.e. equivocality) and the intensity of interactions (Reinsch et al., 2008; Turner and Reinsch, 2010). Moreover, aiming to operationalize individuals’ multicommunicating behaviors, Stephens (2012) found that multicommunicating in workplace meetings consists of five major communicative functions: understanding, influencing, supporting others, being available and participating in parallel meetings. These functions can further influence both task and relational outcomes of employees’ work, which are synthesized next.

In light of task outcomes, prior studies have suggested that multicommunicating may increase, decrease or have no effect on job performance (Turner and Reinsch, 2010). For example, some studies found that multicommunicating could improve job performance by getting more things done at one time (Cameron and Webster, 2013). However, other studies on dual-task interference and task switching indicate multicommunicating practices degrade job performance (Turner and Reinsch, 2007, 2010). Indeed, multicommunicating can significantly increase cognitive load when people cycle among two or more conversations interpret difficult information and balance diverse social roles with each of their conversational partners (Cameron and Webster, 2013). Regarding relational outcomes, researchers have found that a conversational partner may feel unsatisfied, offended, insulted or undervalued, when he/she realizes that the focal individual is involved in a conversation other than their own (Cameron and Webster, 2013). Alternatively, the conversational partner may appreciate that the focal individual is more accessible to them (Reinsch et al., 2008) and interpret multicommunicating as a sign of diligence and efficiency (Stephens, 2012).

Directions for future research on combinatorial use of ICT

This section considers how organizational communication researchers might use existing theories and frameworks to advance combinatorial use of ICT and to fill in research gaps. Specifically, despite the widespread of combinatorial ICT use in communication research, few studies have sought to integrate communication strategies and media capabilities with combinatorial use of ICTs and clarify how the interplay between materiality of ICTs and human agency factor into the combinatorics perspective ICT use. These gaps open two vistas for future research: the strategy-driven approach and the affordance approach. In an attempt to address these opportunities, we discuss a range of research questions that are relevant to today’s technologies as well as significant for future ICTs and changing organizational forms.

The strategy-driven approach

As stated above, the media choice literature has considered a myriad of contextual factors that influence media choice, including access to various ICTs, availability of communication partners, users’ experience with the medium, user’s personal style in using media, time and cost advantages and communication task requirements (Treviño et al., 2000; Straub and Karahanna, 1998; Webster and Treviño, 1995). From this body of work, a contingency-based theory of media choice has emerged. One compelling alternative to the contingency-based approach is to examine how communication strategies influence choice (George et al., 2013), which is worthy of attention in future studies on combinatorial ICT use.

Kasper and Kellerman (1997) defined communication strategies as the means by which communication goals are fulfilled. This definition can be explained extensively by communication complexity, which results from the use of limited resources to ensure successful communication under problematic and uncertain conditions (Te’eni, 2001). Communication complexity grows as the demands of the communication process on mental resources approach their capacity, while strategies are the means by which complexity is reduced (Rasmussen, 1986). Therefore, communication complexity plays a major role in the
choice of strategies, since it reflects the plausibility of errors or difficulties in communication. As Te'eni (2001) argued, with the aim of achieving communication goals, people harness communication strategies to cope with communication complexity. Based on the perspective of communication strategy, Te'eni (2001) and Dennis et al. (2008) proposed two communication frameworks that can be used to explain ICT choice in a comprehensive manner. Next, we turn to these two communication frameworks to explain combinatorial ICT use in organizations.

First, Te'eni’s cognitive-affective model of organizational communication was based on an extensive review of the communication literature across many different academic fields (e.g. communication, information systems and management). This model incorporates three basic factors: inputs to the communication process (task, sender-receiver distance and values and norms of communication with a particular emphasis on inter-cultural communication); a cognitive-affective process of communication; and the communication impact on mutual understanding and relationship. The glue that bonds these factors together is a set of communication strategies aimed at reducing communication complexities (including affective complexity, cognitive complexity and dynamic complexity).

Te'eni (2001) identified six communication strategies: contextualization, affectivity, control, perspective taking and attention focusing. The first strategy – contextualization – can be broadly described as the provision of explicit context in the message. Specifically, contextualization as used here refers to “the situation in which the message was created, detailing such issues as who is communicating with whom, when, and under what conditions” (p. 266). Second, affectivity involves including emotions, and not necessarily pleasant ones, in the message. Third, there are two types of control, one by testing and adjusting, and the other by planning. The former involves carefully monitoring the communication event and regulating and tweaking it when and where necessary, in order to better manage the message as it is being transmitted. The latter type of control involves preparing the message, its content and its transmission ahead of time, a process that may also involve anticipating various contingencies and determining how they might be dealt with. The fourth strategy is perspective taking, where the sender actively considers the receiver’s point of view. The last strategy is attention focusing; senders using this strategy attempt to "direct or even manipulate the receiver’s processing of the message" (p. 266).

Given the salient role communication strategies play in choosing ICTs, we present the following research question:

RQ1. What are the potential benefits of each communication strategy (i.e. contextualization, affectivity, control, perspective taking and attention focusing) in guiding combinatorial ICT use across different communication complexities?

Second, media synchronicity theory (MST) focuses on matching communication media capabilities with the communication processes. According to Dennis et al. (2008), synchronicity is a state in which individuals are working together at the same time with a common objective. They defined media synchronicity as “the extent to which the capabilities of a communication medium enable individuals to achieve synchronicity” (p. 581). Different communication processes require different levels of media synchronicity for the best result. Dennis et al. (2008) posited that the key to effective communication is the match between the synchronicity level supported by media capabilities and the synchronicity level required by two primary communication processes: conveyance and convergence.

Conveyance focuses on the transmission of a diversity of information from a sender of information to shape the understanding of the receiver, while convergence focuses on clarifying the meaning or understanding of information already exchanged or shared. Both conveyance and convergence can be conceptualized as communication strategies (Dennis et al., 2008). To support these communication strategies of MST, five media capabilities – symbol sets, parallelism, transmission velocity, rehearsability and reprocessibility – are utilized. Symbol sets are the number of ways in which a medium allows information to be encoded for communication.
Parallelism reflects the number of simultaneous transmissions that can effectively take place. Transmission velocity is the speed at which a medium can deliver a message to intended recipients. Rehearsability is the extent to which the medium enables the sender to rehearse or fine-tune a message during encoding, before sending. Reprocessibility is the extent to which the medium enables a message to be reexamined or processed again, during decoding, either within the context of the communication event or after the event has passed.

What distinguishes MST from other media choice theories is that MST does not focus on media characteristics, but their capabilities; MST does not focus on task types, but their underlying communication strategies (Dennis et al., 2008). It is important to note that MST is a theory intended to predict communication performance (e.g., communication speed, effectiveness), not choice. However, Dennis et al. (2009) subsequently conceptualized how MST can inform media choice predictions, because matching media capabilities with communication strategies is essential in making an appropriate media decision. Therefore, we propose the following research question:

**RQ2.** To what extent do communication strategies (i.e., conveyance and convergence) exert influence on combinatorial use of ICTs with high/low synchronicity?

The affordance approach

Another consideration for studies concerning combinatorial ICT use is to incorporate the affordance approach. The concept of affordance is multivalent, which generally refers to what material artifacts such as ICTs allow users to do. This concept was originally used by an Ecological Psychologist, James Gibson (1986), to explain how animals perceive their environments. As he suggested, animals tend to perceive the environment through its affordances, the possibilities of uses it affords. Gibson (1986) also emphasized that affordances should be understood as relational, triggered by “the particular ways in which an actor, or set of actors, perceives, and use an object” (p. 145). In this view, affordances of different ICTs are constituted in the relationships between people and the ICTs with which they come in contact. As Treem and Leonardi (2012) put it, ICTs (i.e., materiality or technological artifacts) exist “independent of people, but affordances do not. Because people come to materiality with diverse goals, they perceive a technology as affording distinct possibilities for action” (p. 146). People tend to act by relying on their localized agency, which often results in unexpected ways of using ICTs (Leonardi and Barley, 2008). In other words, media choice is an individualistic event governed by a user’s localized agency as a user acquires great familiarity toward her or his media options and communication tasks. Media perceptions and subsequent behaviors are thus essentially local and reflect specific ways in which each user will configure her/his niche. This perspective calls for a deeper understanding of how to characterize people’s localized agency and how this agency constitutes a critical element of combinatorial use of ICTs. Thus, the following research question is proposed:

**RQ3.** What is the role of individuals’ localized agency in shaping combinatorial use of ICTs?

The affordance approach highlights that it is worthy to not only understand combinatorial ICT use based on features, but also consider the affordances they offer to users. The advance of this theoretical extension is at the right time, given the constantly changing nature of ICTs made it difficult for researchers to define specific ICTs and distinguish their characteristics and functions. Especially, the multifunctional trend of contemporary ICTs, such as smartphones, complicate this further due to the converging of previously separate ICTs (e.g., telephony and data communications) into features on single devices. Consequently, existing models of combinatorial use of ICT may fail to do justice to the
realities of ICT use in organizations. Taking ICT succession theory (Stephens, 2007) as an example, it becomes unprecedentedly challenging to achieve maximizations of modalities through complementary successive ICT use, because technological convergence increasingly shapes the multimodal landscape of ICTs. Researchers may find ICT succession theory dilemmatic when realizing that modality expansion is increasingly inapplicable, as technological convergence allows the integration and manipulation of all forms of information, data and knowledge.

Indeed, ICTs adoptions in organizations, especially social media, is outpacing empirical understanding of combinatorial ICTs and our theories about why they may influence various organizational communication processes (Raeth et al., 2009). New forms of ICTs have arisen, diffused and been incorporated into everyday practices in corporations, non-profit organizations and government agencies. The affordance approach enables us to generate a novel understanding of the relationship between human agency and the materiality of ICT (Rice et al., 2017), especially the combinatorial use of multiple newly popularized social media technologies – such as blogs, wikis, social networking sites and microblogging. From an affordance standpoint, Boyd (2011) proposes that social media technologies – especially social networking sites – are shaped by four major affordances: persistence, replicability, scalability and searchability. Similarly, through synthesizing previous studies of social media adoption in organizations, Treem and Leonardi (2012) uncovered four relatively consistent affordances enabled by social media: visibility, persistence, editability and association. They posited that: “the activation of some combination of these affordances could influence many of the processes commonly studied by organizational communication theorists” (Treem and Leonardi, 2012, p. 143). Rice et al. (2017) advanced ICT affordance research by identity six reliable and valid affordances of ICTs in organizational contexts: pervasiveness, editability, self-presentation, searchability, visibility and awareness. Taken together, using the affordance approach has great utility in explaining why people using combinatorial ICTs may engage in similar or disparate, successful or unsuccessful communication and work practices. We, therefore, advance the following research question:

**RQ4.** How does ICT affordances influence combinatorial ICT use in processes of organizational communication?

**Practical suggestions for corporate communication**

*RQ1 and RQ2* highlight the importance of incorporating communication strategies to understand how combinatorial ICT use shapes workplace communication. Corporate managers should learn to critically evaluate both internal and external corporate communication needs, develop an appropriate strategy and create technological pipelines that sustain effective communication and collaboration. Strategical plans might include task forces to investigate how combinatorial ICT use impacts workplace productivity and even corporate identity, culture and vision. Moreover, managers should be cautious about possible setbacks of combinatorial ICT use, such as interruption and information overload (i.e. over-exposure, excessive consumption, and input abundance of information and data). Combinatorial ICT use might exacerbate the problem of interruption by disrupting thought processes and work flows, causing individuals to take longer to complete task.

Workplace training and workshops are encouraged to improve employees’ attitudes toward combinatorial use of ICTs and perceptions of their usability, especially when new ICTs are implemented. Emerging ICTs such as artificial intelligence-powered chat bot, digital collaboration platforms and enterprise social media are increasingly reshaping employees’ action and interaction in domains such as product design, platform work, hiring and customer services. For instance, teams might adapt Slack – a cloud-based set of proprietary team collaboration tools – as a way to quickly communicate with multiple
departments within the company. But a smaller group of millennial employees might have an iMessage group to coordinate immediate work needs, while creating a Snapchat group to congratulate team members on their personal successes. Given the friction that can occur between new ICTs and employees, a comprehensive evaluation plan is required to achieve a successful organizational change.

RQ3 reminds corporate managers of individuals’ localized agency in shaping combinatorial ICT use. It is important to note the potential drawbacks of having employees adapt multiple ICTs without allowing them to make the system their own. If employees do not find the new ICTs helpful in accomplishing their work tasks, they will modify certain features and, in doing so, modifying their use of the new technology (Lewis, 2011). The participatory design approach of workplace ICTs (Schuler and Namioka, 1993) might provide insights on how to involve employees in actively sharing roles and responsibilities in design making. These employees are end users who may peripheral to the traditional design process but are also recognized as legitimate stakeholders with the ability to impact the outcomes of combinatorial ICT use.

Both RQ3 and RQ4 are designed to enhance the understanding of how combinatorial ICT use shapes employees’ work processes and interactions, and how such combinatorial practice is shaped by employees’ perceptions and needs. For example, some employees might get enough e-mails on a daily basis, so when a colleague has a quick question it is much easier to receive an instant message and/or a brief phone call. Given the inherent dynamic nature of the relationships between employee, ICTs, context and work purposes (Zhu and Smith, 2019), managers should consider developing a strategic plan to analyze ICT affordances over time, such as how employees connect with clients, prepare and transmit documents, and complete team projects.

Conclusion
In modern workplaces, the number of ICTs available to employees constantly increases (e.g. mobile phones, intranets, instant messaging, social media), in addition to e-mail, telephone, voice mail and face-to-face communication. As a result, understanding the use of multiple ICTs in complex work environments could have significant implications for productivity and efficiency of individuals and organizations. In order to accomplish the aim of advancing the understanding of combinatorial ICT use, this paper sought to clarify terminology used in previous research, specify a range of research questions that can collectively benefit future studies and identify how combinatorial ICT use as a perspective uniquely elucidates media choice and use in organizations. Importantly, this paper can serve as a catalyst for ongoing research conversations regarding combinatorial ICT use, while assisting organizational communication researchers in describing, theorizing and researching combinatorial ICT use. Also, we expect this conversation would involve the diverse perspectives of critical scholars, positivists and social constructionists to further explain this increasingly prominent organizational communication phenomenon.

Drawing upon the strategy-driven approach, this paper utilizes the cognitive–affective model of organizational communication (Te’eni, 2001) and MST (Dennis et al., 2008) to explain how different ICTs are used in an organizational setting when employees are faced with an array of ICTs from which to choose, and how the adoption of new ICT is assimilated into individuals’ existing set of media behaviors. Moreover, leveraging the affordance approach, this paper focuses attention not on any particular ICTs and their technical features, but on the dynamics or types of communication practices and social interactions that various ICTs afford. In addition, we connected the aforementioned theoretical approaches with practical suggestions on internal organizational communication. Although we have enhanced several aspects of combinatorial ICT use stated above, we have yet to develop a fully processual communication that encapsulates a testable framework. Research questions raised in this paper should be elaborated or enhanced by further studies that explore alternative angles.
References


Gibson, J.J. (1986), The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception, Erlbaum, Mahwah, NJ.


Further reading


About the author

Yaguang Zhu, PhD, is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Arkansas. His area of expertise is organizational communication and technology, health information technology, data analytics and statistical modeling. Yaguang Zhu can be contacted at: zhuy@uark.edu

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website: www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm
Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com
Treating Ivanka unfairly
Understanding the impact of Presidential Tweeting on publics’ perceptions and intentions to boycot or boycott corporations

Arunima Krishna
Department of Mass Communication, Advertising, and Public Relations, Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts, USA, and
Soojin Kim
School of Communication, University of Technology Sydney, Sydney, Australia

Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore the impact of presidential tweeting about corporations on publics’ perceptions of and behavioral intentions toward those corporations. Specifically, the authors examined publics’ intentions to boycott or buycott (Friedman, 1996) Nordstrom, four months after President Trump’s tweet denouncing the company’s decision to discontinue his daughter’s clothing line.

Design/methodology/approach – An online survey was conducted among 517 American citizens using Qualtrics panels in June 2017. Respondents were compensated for their participation.

Findings – The authors found strong associations between perceived moral inequity and boycott intentions, and perceived business/economic nature of corporate action and buycott intentions. Furthermore, demographic characteristics associated with both types of perceptions were also examined. Younger, more educated respondents tended to accept Nordstrom’s actions as being routine business decisions, whereas conservative participants saw Nordstrom’s actions as being morally iniquitous.

Originality/value – This study is one of the first to explore the impact of presidential tweeting, albeit indirectly, on publics’ perceptions and intentions toward corporations who form the subjects of said tweets. Practitioners may utilize these findings to provide guidance to corporations who may be at the receiving end of presidential tweeting.

Keywords Buycott, Public perceptions, Perceived moral inequity, Presidential tweeting

Paper type Research paper

On February 8, 2017, the president of the USA, Donald J. Trump sent out a tweet in which he called out Nordstrom for being unfair to his daughter, Ivanka Trump. President Trump tweeted, “My daughter Ivanka has been treated so unfairly by @Nordstrom. She is a great person – always pushing me to do the right thing! Terrible!” This tweet, posted on the president’s personal Twitter account and retweeted by his official POTUS account, was sent out by the president in light of Nordstrom’s decision to stop carrying Ivanka Trump’s line of clothing and accessories on their website, purportedly due to poor performance. Sean Spicer, the White House press secretary at the time, characterized Nordstrom’s actions as “targeting Ivanka Trump for political reasons” (Easley, 2017, para. 3), while Nordstrom continued to defend its action as a business decision made based on sales performance (Abrams, 2017). Nordstrom is only one of many corporations that have been mentioned in the president’s tweets, either positively or negatively, since he took office in January 2017.

Nordstrom’s decision came in the wake of the #grabyourwallet movement, a campaign meant to encourage boycotts of products tied to the president, his family and his donors. The timing of the decision, in particular, prompted both President Trump’s supporters and detractors to claim the move to be political. While the president’s supporters cried foul, accusing the company of being politically motivated, his detractors jubilantly claimed victory, with the co-founder of the #grabyourwallet campaign, Shannon Coulter tweeting, “Big news everyone. You did this. I am in awe” along with a link to a news story about
Nordstrom’s decision. Such a framing of corporate action by both supporters and detractors of the president to fit their own political ideologies and interests forced Nordstrom to reiterate their position to various stakeholders. Not only did Nordstrom reiterate on Twitter that the decision was based on sales performance and that they hoped “offering a vendor’s products isn’t misunderstood as us taking a political position,” (Abrams, 2017, para. 5), co-president Pete Nordstrom also sent out a memo to all employees noting that although the subject was “sharply divisive,” “No matter what we do, we are going to end up disappointing some of our customers. Every single brand we offer is evaluated on their results – if people don’t buy it, we won’t sell it” (Bhasin, 2017, para. 10). Nordstrom’s own defense of their actions further underscores the dual framing of the reasons behind the decision, political motivation or sales performance.

As social media continue to become ubiquitous in our daily lives, so too do they in politics. Areas of research on which scholars have focused their attention include politicians’ use of Twitter to garner support to raise campaign funds (Adams and McCorkindale, 2013), as well publics’ sentiment toward candidates (Zhang et al., 2013). However, the new administration under President Donald J. Trump poses new opportunities and challenges for business scholars and practitioners related to social media use: presidential tweeting about corporations. President Trump’s social media use, which he refers to as “modern day presidential,” fittingly in a tweet (Donald Trump, 2017), is characterized by, among other things, expressing support or disdain for corporations that he perceives to be acting for or against him, prompting the Wall Street Journal to create a Trump Target Index, which tracks stocks affected by the president’s tweets. Given the undeniable link between social media and publics’ perceptions of corporations (e.g. Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2016), how President Trump’s tweets impact publics’ perceptions of corporations mentioned in them is a topic that behooves attention from scholars.

Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to unpack the impact of presidential tweeting about corporations on publics’ perceptions of those corporations and their attendant behavioral intentions. Using President Trump’s tweet about Nordstrom’s unfair behavior to his daughter in removing her clothing line from their online stores that served to frame the company’s action as being political and unfair and Nordstrom’s own framing, we explore publics’ intentions to boycott or buycott[1] (Friedman, 1996; John and Klein, 2003; Klein et al., 2004; Neilson, 2010) Nordstrom. Specifically, in this study, we seek to understand publics’ perceptions about Nordstrom’s actions — whether their actions were perceived to be morally iniquitous as framed by the tweet or simply commensurate with business action as framed by Nordstrom, and how these perceptions influence their intention to boycott or buycott Nordstrom. In the next section, we review the literatures upon which our investigation is grounded.

Literature review

Boycott and buycott intentions

The idea of individuals using their purchasing behaviors to punish or reward companies, particularly to force them to behave in ways that the individuals want (Brinkmann, 2004) is certainly not new. People can engage in either direct or indirect revenge behaviors to punish companies (Gregoire et al., 2010) as part of their coping processes to deal with the companies’ (perceived) actions. A large body of literature exists on political consumerism (Neilson, 2010), or publicly motivated consumption, as a form of political participation (e.g. Stolle et al., 2005), social justice (e.g. Micheletti and Stolle, 2008), to drive lifestyle politics (Shah et al., 2007) and to effect social change (Holzer, 2006). Additionally, scholars have investigated issues related to individuals’ motivations behind anti-consumption behavior (John and Klein, 2003; Klein et al., 2004; Sen et al., 2001; Tyran and Engelmann, 2005), and corporations’ public responses to reduce consumers’ intention to forgo or withhold a product
consumption (Yuksel and Mryteza, 2009) to better understand how businesses may deal with such negative consumer behaviors.

Often referred to as “consumers voting at the checkout” (Jacobsen and Dulsrud, 2007, p. 469), political consumerism manifests through two broad consumer behaviors: boycott and buycott (Friedman, 1996; Neilson, 2010). Boycott is a protest strategy that refers to individuals punishing businesses for unfavorable behaviors by deliberately avoiding purchasing from them (Neilson, 2010). Buycotting, on the other hand, is a rewarding strategy where individuals choose to support businesses for exhibiting behaviors that they consider to be desirable and responsible. Originally conceptualized as an activist strategy to reward or punish companies by calling for consumer boycotts or buycotts of certain companies or products from certain countries (e.g. calls to boycott US-based companies’ products in various Islamic-majority countries in the wake of 9/11; Fischer, 2007), other scholarship has examined individual-level boycott and/or buycott behavior, with consumers being seen not as weak accepters of capitalism but as independent, ethical and responsible actors (e.g. Harrison et al., 2005).

In line with scholarship conceptualizing individuals as independent actors who may enact political consumerism by choosing to boycott or buycott companies based on their (the companies’) behaviors and actions, this study seeks to understand individuals’ boycott and buycott intentions by exploring the antecedents of these intentions. However, this study represents a departure from prior scholarship on individual-level political consumerism by exploring not hypothetical, abstract boycott/buycott intentions for political, ethical or environmental reasons (e.g. Braunsberger and Buckler, 2011; Neilson, 2010), nor reporting a case study of a boycott or buycott (e.g. Peretti and Micheletti, 2011). Furthermore, those who are committed to reducing consumption for a simpler life (i.e. simplifiers), or for creating global impact (i.e. global impact anti-consumers; Iyer and Muncy, 2009) are not the focus of this study either. Instead, this study explores individuals’ boycott/buycott intentions against a company the actions of which were criticized by the president of the USA, and in that sense, politicized. In the paragraphs that follow, we provide some theoretical context to the specific instance of presidential tweeting under investigation in this study.

President Trump’s frame vs Nordstrom’s frame

Although the concept of framing has been understood differently by various scholars (e.g. Cappella and Jamieson, 1997; McCombs et al., 1997; Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000), in general, framing is understood to be the selection of “some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text” (Entman, 1993, p. 52) to make them more noticeable and memorable to audiences. For Gamson and Modigliani (1987), a “frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue” (p. 143). While a frame may include and signal the message sender’s intent or motives (Gamson, 1989), the framing of a message is not necessarily indicative of conscious decision making about what to say and how to say it (Entman, 1993).

Frames serve four main purposes in the communication process, as discussed by Entman (1993). Frames help explicate an issue, i.e. problem definition, to determine its costs and benefits. They can also help diagnose problem-creating agents, i.e. provide causal analyses. Some may evaluate the causal agents and their effects and pass a moral judgment. And finally, frames may provide recommendations for ways to remedy the problem.

Gain and loss frames are some of the most common types frames used in scholarship and practice to induce perceptual and behavioral change (see O’Keefe and Jensen, 2006 for a review; Salovey et al., 2002). Gain framing highlights the advantages of compliance with the communicator’s suggestion while loss framing emphasizes the disadvantages of noncompliance (O’Keefe and Jensen, 2007). Several scholars have tested the effectiveness of gain-framed and loss-framed messages in health communication contexts (e.g. Cho and...
Boster, 2008; O’Keefe and Jensen, 2007; Quick and Bates, 2010). Although inconsistent findings have been reported over time, in general, loss frames have been shown to be effective when promoting detection behavior or advocating for a difficult behavior, while gain frames are known to be advantageous when encouraging disease detection (O’Keefe and Jensen, 2006) or promoting a simple action (Kiene et al., 2005).

How news frames influence publics’ understanding and evaluation of issues (e.g. Cappella and Jamieson, 1996; Kinder and Sanders, 1990; Pan and Kosicki, 1993) or public opinion (e.g. Jasperson et al., 1998) has been a key interest to many scholars for decades. While the frame-building process is traditionally thought to involve journalists, it can be also done by politicians and interest groups (Callaghan and Schnell, 2001) or by interactions among political system, publics and the media (Zhou and Moy, 2007) or other types of social actors (Vilegenthart, 2012), including corporations.

This particular case, that of presidential tweeting against Nordstrom, represents an interesting situation as it places the president and company against each other, each presenting differing explanations of the corporate action (i.e. Nordstrom discontinuing Ivanka Trump’s line), and therefore, potentially dividing public perceptions of the corporate behavior. Regardless of Nordstrom’s real reasons behind their decision, the corporate action was characterized and framed by the company and the president very differently. While President Trump framed Nordstrom’s decision to remove Ivanka Trump’s line from its online store as a personal attack on the president’s family and a declaration of opposition against the president and his agenda, Nordstrom has maintained that the decision was based purely on poor sales performance of Ms Trump’s line on their website (Abrams, 2017). This case shows how a politician’s (President Trump) and social actor’s (Nordstrom) frames can play out. We argue that President Trump’s frame corresponds with Entman’s (1993) moral judgment frame while Nordstrom’s frame was defining the nature of the problem as sales related. Such dual (and contradictory) framing of the corporate action presents interesting questions for scholarship to explore. First, how are publics’ perceptions of the corporate action related to their boycott/buycott intentions toward Nordstrom? And second, who is likely to accept one view of the corporate action over another? These two broad questions guide this study and the development of our hypotheses and research questions, which are outlined in the sections that follow.

Publics’ perceptions of corporate action
How publics react to corporate behavior, particularly in times of crisis, has been a focus of much public relations research. From consumer activism stemming from irresponsible corporate action (e.g. Grappi et al., 2013), to publics’ perceptions of corporate transgressions as being ethical violations of social norms (e.g. Lindenmeier et al., 2012), and the impact of perceived corporate action on companies’ trustworthiness (Aqueveque and Encina, 2010) and attendant buying intentions (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006), scholars have examined the outcomes of corporate action in many ways. However, despite publics’ perceptions of various social issues being increasingly central to public relations scholarship, publics’ differentiated perceptions of the nature of corporate action itself is an area that has received little attention. To address this gap in our understanding of how publics understand corporate (mis)conduct, Krishna et al. (2018) proposed the idea of perceived moral inequity of corporate action, defined as individuals’ evaluations of corporate behaviors or actions being unethical, unjust, and/or morally wrong. Such a conceptualization fits with President Trump’s framing of Nordstrom’s actions, when he referred to Nordstrom being “unfair” to his daughter Ivanka, and the then White House press secretary framing Nordstrom’s actions as “targeting Ivanka Trump for political reasons.” (Easley, 2017, para. 3).

Perceived moral inequity of corporate action has been shown to impact consumers’ evaluations of their relationship with the corporation in question (Krishna et al., 2018;
Such transgressions have also been linked to negative affective responses toward the corporation, as well as intentions of engaging in punitive actions against the organization in question (Grappi et al., 2013), including protests and negative word-of-mouth behaviors. Given the punitive nature of boycotts, and the conceptually opposite nature of buycotts as rewarding behavior, it would logically follow that publics’ perception of corporate action being morally iniquitous would be associated with boycott and buycott intentions. The following hypotheses are therefore posited:

H1. Perceived moral inequity of corporate action is positively associated with individuals’ boycott intentions.

H2. Perceived moral inequity of corporate action is negatively associated with individuals’ buycott intentions.

Although the opposite of perceived moral inequity of corporate behavior would conceptually be perceived ethicality or morality of corporate behavior, the dichotomous framing of corporate action as being either morally iniquitous (by the president) or simply a business decision unmotivated by politics (by Nordstrom) make using perceived ethicality as the opposite not entirely appropriate. Instead, in this specific case it would logically follow that individuals who do not perceive Nordstrom’s actions as being morally unjust would simply accept Nordstrom’s framing as the action being a purely business and sales-based decision. The perceived lack of any inequity or unethical behavior on the part of the company would then preclude the need to punish it, and may even motivate individuals to reward it for being an economically responsible business that takes product buying decisions based on sales performance rather than political appeasement. The following hypotheses are therefore posited:

H3. Perceived business/economic nature of corporate action is negatively associated with individuals’ boycott intentions.

H4. Perceived business/economic nature of corporate action is positively associated with individuals’ buycott intentions.

Furthermore, for businesses to be able to identify who among their publics is most likely to be impacted by presidential tweeting against them, it is important to understand the demographic factors to contribute to individuals’ perceptions of either moral inequity of corporate action or business/economic nature of corporate action. Extant literature has indicated that political orientation or political ideology affects people’s knowledge of and perceptions of social issues or causes of such issues (Pandey et al., 1982). Additionally, demographics can be significant factors predicting publics’ communication behavioral outcomes in the context of crisis (Jin et al., 2016). Identifying demographic factors that may lean toward perceiving corporations negatively (or positively) in light of presidential tweeting may help businesses decide how to respond if they are on the receiving end of antagonistic presidential tweeting. Accordingly, the following research question is examined:

RQ1. How are age, political orientation, income, education and gender related to perceived moral inequity of corporate behavior and perceived business/economic nature of corporate action?

Method

Measures

In order to test the hypotheses outlined above and answer the research question, an online survey was constructed using Qualtrics. Measurement items were derived from
existing research. Participants were asked to consider Nordstrom’s actions regarding President Trump when responding to items. Buycott intention was measured by three items adapted from Paek and Nelson (2009), which were found to have strong reliability ($\alpha = 0.947$). Three items adapted from Romani et al. (2013) work measured boycott intention and reported a Cronbach’s $\alpha$ of 0.907. Both perceived moral inequity (Lindenmeier et al., 2012) ($\alpha = 0.961$) and perceived business/economic nature of corporate action ($\alpha = 0.820$) were measured by three items each (e.g. “I consider Nordstrom’s behavior about President Trump to be unethical” for perceived moral inequity, and “I consider Nordstrom behavior to be strategic” for perceived business/economic nature of corporate action), and were also found to be reliable based on Cronbach’s $\alpha$ calculations (see Table I for all measures).

Sample

The data for this study were collected using Qualtrics’ online panels. We used probability quota sampling method based on the US Census Bureau (US Census Bureau, 2015), including quotas for age, gender and political affiliation. The survey was open to individuals who identified as US citizens. Participants were compensated for their responses. Data were collected in June 2017, a few months after President Trump’s tweet. A total of 517 valid responses were collected and analyzed. Of the sample, 257 identified as male (49.71 percent) while 260 identified as female (50.29 percent). The age distribution of the sample is included in Table II. In terms of political affiliation, 165 (31.91 percent) individuals reported being Democrats, 143 (27.66 percent) were Republican, 170 individuals (32.88 percent) reported being Independent, 11 (2.13 percent) reported “other” and 28 people (5.42 percent) declined to answer. Political orientation was measured with a single item, asking participants to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cronbach’s $\alpha$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceived moral inequity</td>
<td>I consider Nordstrom’s behavior to be unethical</td>
<td>0.961</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I consider Nordstrom’s behavior to be unjust</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I consider Nordstrom’s behavior to be morally wrong</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived business purpose</td>
<td>I consider Nordstrom’s behavior to be strategic</td>
<td>0.820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I consider Nordstrom’s behavior to be business-wise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buycott intention</td>
<td>I intend to make a special effort to buy from Nordstrom</td>
<td>0.947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I intend to support Nordstrom by choosing it consciously over other stores</td>
<td>0.907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I intend to participate in collective movements in favor of Nordstrom</td>
<td>0.820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boycott intention</td>
<td>If I can, I intend to boycott Nordstrom to bring about changes in its conduct</td>
<td>0.907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If I can, I intend to participate in collective movements against Nordstrom to change its conduct</td>
<td>0.820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If I can, I intend to participate in demonstrations against Nordstrom to change its conduct</td>
<td>0.907</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table I. Measurement items and Cronbach’s $\alpha$s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age range</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage of sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18–30</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>22.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31–45</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>31.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45–60</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>31.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 and above</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>14.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table II. Age distribution of sample
respond to “I consider myself politically” with responses ranging from “conservative, moderate, liberal, progressive[2].” The income, education and political orientation distribution of the sample is reported in Tables III, IV, and V respectively. Table VI shows a comparison of how participants’ reported political affiliation mapped against their political orientation.

**Data analysis**

All data analyses were conducted using Stata IC/14. First, Cronbach’s $\alpha$ were calculated to ensure reliability of the measures, as reported earlier. Then, the hypotheses were tested and research question examined using structural equation modeling. To assess data fit, Hu and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income bracket</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;$30,000 per year</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>18.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$30,000–49,000</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>19.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000–74,999</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>24.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$75,000–99,999</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>15.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000–149,999</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>12.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;$150,000</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>10.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table III.** Income distribution of sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did not complete high school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school or G.E.D.</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>13.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college (did not complete or completing)</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>23.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 year college</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>13.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 year college (BA or BS)</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>27.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional degree (MD or JD)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some graduate school (did not complete or completing)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>12.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral degree</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table IV.** Education distribution of sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political orientation</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>28.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>39.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>27.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>496</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table V.** Distribution of political orientation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Democrat</th>
<th>Republican</th>
<th>Independent</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>475</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table VI.** Distribution of political orientation by affiliation
Bentler’s (1999) joint-criteria was used, whereby CFI > 0.95, SRMR < 0.10, or RMSEA < 0.06 and SRMR < 0.10 is considered a good model. However, due to missing data, SRMR was not available, and therefore TLI was analyzed instead, the cut-offs for which are the same as CFI. Standardized coefficients are reported.

Results
To test the hypotheses using structural equation modeling, Kline’s (1998) two-step procedure was utilized. First, the measurement model including all studied variables was tested. The measurement model was found to have good fit with CFI = 0.971, TLI = 0.958 and RMSEA = 0.060 ($\chi^2(94) = 249.98, p < 0.001$). The structural model[3] was then tested and was too found to have acceptable fit, with CFI = 0.931, TLI = 0.907, and RMSEA = 0.092 ($\chi^2(92) = 492.43, p < 0.001$). Error covariances were added between the five demographic variables, of which five were found to be significant. Political orientation and age, income and education, income and gender, education and gender, and age and gender were all found to covary.

H1–H4 were then examined (see Figure 1). H1 predicted a positive relationship between perceived moral inequity and boycott intentions, and such a relationship was found ($\beta = 0.57, p < 0.001$). H2, which predicted a negative relationship between perceived moral
inequity and boycott intentions too was supported ($\beta = -0.19, p < 0.001$). In H3, a negative relationship between perceived business/economic purpose and boycott intentions was expected. Interestingly, this hypothesis was not supported. In fact, a significant positive relationship was found between perceived business purpose and boycott intentions ($\beta = 0.15, p < 0.01$), a facet of this study that will be discussed in the next section in detail. And finally, H4 predicted a positive relationship between perceived business/economic nature of corporate action and boycott intentions, and a strong positive association was found ($\beta = 0.75, p < 0.001$).

Next, the answer to the research question was sought. Results showed that neither age, income, nor gender were associated with perceived moral inequity. However, political orientation was found to be related to perceived moral inequity. Political orientation, the scale for which went from conservative to progressive, was negatively associated with perceived moral inequity ($\beta = -0.27, p < 0.001$). Income ($\beta = -0.11, p < 0.05$) was negatively associated with perceived moral inequity, indicating that individuals with lower levels of income reported higher levels of perceived moral inequity.

Finally, the reverse patterns were visible for the relationship between demographic variables and perceived business/economic nature of corporate action. Age was negatively associated with perceived business purpose ($\beta = -0.31, p < 0.001$), indicating that younger respondents saw Nordstrom’s actions as being just routine business decision making. Political orientation ($\beta = 0.18, p < 0.01$) was significantly associated with the variable, in that being more liberal was associated with perceiving Nordstrom’s actions as being just routine business. Income ($\beta = 0.15, p < 0.01$) and education ($\beta = 0.25, p < 0.001$) both positively predicted perceived business/economic nature of corporate action. Gender was not significantly related to the variable.

Discussion and implications
The purpose of this study was to unpack the impact of presidential tweeting against a corporation on publics’ perceptions of the corporation, as well as their behavioral intentions regarding the corporation. To do so, we chose the case of Nordstrom’s decision to remove Ivanka Trump’s clothing line from their website, and the subsequent tweet issued by President Trump against Nordstrom and in support of his daughter Ivanka. Condemnation against Nordstrom was then forthcoming from many of the president’s associates. We used the dual framing of Nordstrom’s actions by the president and his associates as being unfair and politically motivated, and by Nordstrom itself as being a sales-driven business decision, to understand whether acceptance of either of these framings contributed to individuals’ intentions to boycott (Klein et al., 2004) or buycott (Paek and Nelson, 2009) Nordstrom.

Furthermore, we investigated the demographic characteristics of individuals who perceived Nordstrom’s actions as being either morally iniquitous or simply a business/economic-driven decision. Results of our surveys conducted among citizens of the USA showed that gender was not associated with either type of perceptions, but income, education and political orientation all predicted perceived moral inequity and perceived business/economic nature of corporate action. Richer, younger, more educated, and more liberal, individuals tended to see Nordstrom’s actions as being business driven in nature rather than politically motivated. Interestingly, age and education were not associated with perceived moral inequity.

Additionally, individuals’ perceived moral inequity of corporate action was positively associated with their boycott intentions and negatively with their buycott intentions. Perceived business nature of corporate action was positively associated with boycott intentions, and counter to our expectations, also with boycott intentions. The implications of this work for research and practice are discussed next.
Understanding the impact of presidential tweeting and framing

This study represents one of the first efforts to understand the impact of presidential framing of corporate action through tweeting against corporations on publics’ perceptions and their attendant behavioral intentions toward the organization. The study of President Trump’s use of Twitter is still in its infancy (Stolee and Caton, 2018), and this present research is an effort in the direction of contributing to such work. Although President Obama is generally acknowledged as the “first internet president” (Greengard, 2009) for his online civic engagement, and for agenda building during his campaigns, President Trump’s usage of Twitter, particularly to reflect on corporations that he believes to be for or against him, represents several opportunities for both public relations research and practice. Through this present study, we sought to present a theoretically grounded explication of individuals’ punitive or rewarding intentions toward a corporation about which President Trump had tweeted.

The results indicated that presidential tweeting about a corporation to frame the latter’s behavior in a certain way certainly may have impacted some individuals’ perceptions about the company, which then led to those individuals’ intentions to boycott it. Although several companies discontinued Ivanka Trump’s brand, Nordstrom was the only one directly targeted by the president, and our results indicate that the president’s involvement may have successfully shaped the perceptions of some individuals who reported Nordstrom’s actions as being morally iniquitous. Future research should seek to understand whether the relationships examined in this study also hold for publics’ perceptions of corporations about which President Trump has tweeted out or mentioned his support. It may also be worth tracking other companies which have discontinued Ivanka Trump’s brand, such as Neiman Marcus, Shoes.com, Belk, ShopStyle and Gilt, all of which used the same justification for their decisions as Nordstrom’s (Peterson and Taylor, 2017), but were not directly targeted by President Trump in his tweets.

Unpacking the dichotomous framing of corporate action

The case of Nordstrom’s decision to discontinue Ivanka Trump’s clothing line from its online business and President Trump’s subsequent tweet against this action lent itself to a dichotomous framing of the nature of the action, and therefore a dichotomization of publics’ perception of the nature of the action. While President Trump characterized Nordstrom’s actions as being unfair and politically motivated, Nordstrom defended its decision as one that was purely motivated by sales performance. Such dichotomous framing of corporate action is also reminiscent of gain–loss frames used in health-related contexts discussed earlier in the manuscript. Individuals who agreed with President Trump’s characterization and perceived Nordstrom as being morally iniquitous also reported intentions to boycott Nordstrom, similar to how loss frames have been shown to discourage cancer screening behaviors (Cox and Cox, 2001). This finding represents an important lesson for any corporation that may be intending to decide whether or not to antagonize the president, and be at risk of criticism from him, for such corporations run the risk of facing boycotts from those who agree with the president.

Furthermore, perceived business/economic nature of corporate action too was found to have a positive association with boycott intentions, contrary to our expectations. Such a finding indicates that our assumption of the dichotomous framing of the corporate action may not actually be dichotomous in the eyes of the publics. Rather, some of those who did accept Nordstrom’s explanation for discontinuing Ivanka Trump’s clothing line may also have agreed with President Trump, and therefore may still want to boycott Nordstrom. Although the effect size for this association was small, it was significant, and companies should pay attention to this finding to understand how they may defend their corporate behavior if their actions are criticized by the president. As these findings show, publics may

Treating Ivanka unfairly

645

Unpacking the dichotomous framing of corporate action

The case of Nordstrom’s decision to discontinue Ivanka Trump’s clothing line from its online business and President Trump’s subsequent tweet against this action lent itself to a dichotomous framing of the nature of the action, and therefore a dichotomization of publics’ perception of the nature of the action. While President Trump characterized Nordstrom’s actions as being unfair and politically motivated, Nordstrom defended its decision as one that was purely motivated by sales performance. Such dichotomous framing of corporate action is also reminiscent of gain–loss frames used in health-related contexts discussed earlier in the manuscript. Individuals who agreed with President Trump’s characterization and perceived Nordstrom as being morally iniquitous also reported intentions to boycott Nordstrom, similar to how loss frames have been shown to discourage cancer screening behaviors (Cox and Cox, 2001). This finding represents an important lesson for any corporation that may be intending to decide whether or not to antagonize the president, and be at risk of criticism from him, for such corporations run the risk of facing boycotts from those who agree with the president.

Furthermore, perceived business/economic nature of corporate action too was found to have a positive association with boycott intentions, contrary to our expectations. Such a finding indicates that our assumption of the dichotomous framing of the corporate action may not actually be dichotomous in the eyes of the publics. Rather, some of those who did accept Nordstrom’s explanation for discontinuing Ivanka Trump’s clothing line may also have agreed with President Trump, and therefore may still want to boycott Nordstrom. Although the effect size for this association was small, it was significant, and companies should pay attention to this finding to understand how they may defend their corporate behavior if their actions are criticized by the president. As these findings show, publics may
not perceive political motivation and business motivation as being mutually exclusive, and while accepting their defense of corporate action as being commensurate with business decision making, may tend to also agree with the president’s framing. Similar to how perceived self-efficacy moderates the effect of gain–loss framing in skin cancer detection intentions (Van’t Riet et al., 2010), factors such as support for the President, or even belief in capitalism may moderate the impact of framing. Though such analyses are beyond the scope of the present study, future research should serve to examine the impact of such and other demographic variables, particularly to understand how framing corporate action as routine business may also be a double-edged sword for corporations.

This particular finding also opens to the doors to discussions of what is truth in today’s polarized political environment, the impact of ideology in believing certain versions of events over others, and whether ideology may even trump belief in or acceptance of certain framing. As discussed in the previous paragraph, both perceived moral inequity and perceived business purpose were associated with boycott intentions. This finding indicates that although some individuals believed Nordstrom’s framing, they still intended to boycott the company, possibly putting ideology and support for President Trump over acceptance of the company’s framing. Perhaps some individuals accepted Nordstrom’s framing but thought it was a cover for their true intentions, thus making assumptions about the company’s intentions that matched their political ideology. Indeed, this may have also been the case for some of President Trump’s detractors who may continue to believe their efforts at punishing companies succeeded, but purportedly believed Nordstrom’s response as being the politically correct response to protect their reputation. Although we do not have data to further investigate these points, they certainly are worth pondering, given the polarized political environment in the USA. Understanding how ideological strength plays into individuals’ behavioral intentions, and how support for President Trump may take precedence over other considerations, regardless of how true or untrue they may, are worthy areas of future investigation.

However, all is not lost for corporations who find themselves under fire from the president on Twitter. Our findings show that individuals who accepted Nordstrom’s defense of their actions and perceived their actions as being commensurate with regular business practice also reported wanting to support the company through boycotting behaviors. The key question for any corporation wrestling with decisions to enact actions that might antagonize the president, or debating how to deal with presidential tweets against them is who their business’s key constituencies are, an aspect that was studied in this research and is discussed next.

Understanding the impact of demographic variables on publics’ perceptions
As noted earlier, a key question answered in this study was what demographic features characterize individuals who accepted the president’s framing of corporate action vs the corporation’s defense of its actions. Our findings clearly show the impact of income, education, political orientation and, in a limited way, age, on publics’ perceptions of corporate action in light of presidential tweeting. These findings underscore the importance of corporations having a clear understanding of their key publics, particularly consumer publics, as corporate actions that are perceived to be for or against the president may result in either punitive or rewarding behaviors from their publics, depending on their demographics.

Results of this study indicate that companies with consumer publics who tend to be less affluent and conservative may want to carefully consider any actions that may be perceived to be against President Trump and his policies, as such perceptions may lead to boycotts from their consumers. On the other hand, companies with consumers who tend to be educated, younger, liberal and more affluent may undertake the risk of antagonizing
the president, as such action, particularly when framed as being a regular business decision rather than a political one, may encourage supportive, boycotting behaviors from their publics.

**Limitations**

Like any research, this study does suffer from a few limitations. First, only one corporation formed the focus of this study, and the findings of this study therefore cannot be generalized for other industries or other companies. Future research should seek to understand the relationships investigated in this study in other industries beyond retail. The news and media industry would particularly be an interesting context to understand the impact of presidential tweeting, considering the president’s regular assertions of media bias against him. Additionally, exploring other brands’ controversies in relation to President Trump, such as Apple, Budweiser, Under Armor, Amazon, Tesla, Google, Uber and Starbucks, may allow researchers to better understand the dynamics of consumer responses toward corporations which are perceived to be either against or for President Trump.

Second, these results are generalizable only to the population of Qualtrics panels, although every effort was made to ensure an equal distribution across age and gender, including quotas for age, gender and political affiliation. Furthermore, the impact of other factors, such as individuals’ moral and ethical orientations, their prior relationship with Nordstrom, prior patronage of Nordstrom, availability of alternative stores, ease of switching patronage and so on should also be investigated when understanding boycott and buycott intentions.

Additionally, information about the president’s tweet was not provided in the survey to avoid priming the participants. Respondents were instead asked to consider Nordstrom’s actions related to President Trump writ large. This strategy was adopted by the team intentionally to avoid priming the participants. Instead, this research strategy allowed participants to think broadly about how they felt about Nordstrom in relation to President Trump. We do acknowledge, however, that adopting this strategy may call into question our assertion about the results being reported in this study reflecting the impact of presidential tweeting. We argue that the results reported in this study reflect the impact of the dual framing of Nordstrom’s actions toward the president, and given that one of the two frames was made public through the president’s tweeting, this study does indeed help understand the impact of presidential tweeting. The framing of Nordstrom’s actions as being unfair and politically motivated came from President Trump’s tweet, and as was evidenced through the results of this study, such a framing was indeed accepted by several participants in the study. Whether these participants were actually exposed to the president tweet or not is not a factor in question; the fact that the contents of the tweet were accepted by some participants, we argue, reflects, albeit indirectly, the impact of presidential tweeting.

Future research may use experimental designs to examine the relationships studied here. Additionally, it may be interesting to explore the effects of the two frames on other types of information behavioral intentions, such as information seeking, selecting and forwarding (Kim and Krishna, 2014), beyond information processing, which has been a focus of previous framing research (Kisicki and McLeod, 1990). Furthermore, political orientation was measured using a single item score, asking respondents to identify as either “conservative,” “moderate,” “liberal” or “progressive.” However, political orientations are far more complex than may be captured through just one item, and may be seemingly paradoxical. For example, one may identify as a being “socially liberal” but “fiscally conservative,” as aspect of political identity not captured by this study.

Finally, even though we drew upon literatures on frame theory and operationalized individuals’ perceptions of corporate behavior using President Trump’s and Nordstrom’s
two frames, this study’s findings should be read with caution and should not be interpreted as a framing analysis. The purpose of this study was to understand consumers’ perceptions of and intentions toward Nordstrom, rather than to test media framing effects. A content analysis measuring media frames as an independent variable may be a future step to take for further research. It may be interesting to see the extent to which the media, and which kinds of media, adopted either President Turmp’s or Nordstrom’s message frames (or both) in their coverage, and how exposure to such media coverage may have impacted individuals’ perceptions. Furthermore, utilizing different frames to design corporate responses to presidential tweets, scholars may use experimental studies examining the impact of various frames on consumers’ perceptions and intentions to provide corporations with theoretically grounded direction on how to respond in such situations.

Despite these limitations, we believe this study to be an important first step in understanding the impact of presidential tweeting, and helping corporations and industries understand and respond to situations where they may be included in presidential tweeting. Specifically, these results of this study can be linked to further discussions on the consequences of corporate activism for or against President Trump and on the strategic actions corporations may take when facing his criticism online. Interestingly, Nordstrom’s performance was not affected by the president’s tweet, despite anti-Nordstrom sentiment appearing in social media conversations in the first two weeks that followed. Business analysts considered the saga to be a temporary noise for Nordstrom’s sales (Bhasin, 2017). The question of how corporations should make or adjust their business decisions and how they should communicate them in response to presidential tweeting requires further research, and the present study represents an important first step in that direction.

Notes
1. Although there are several terms similar to boycott or buycott, such as revenge, retaliation (Zourrig et al., 2009), consumer movement, anti-consumption (Iyer and Muncy, 2009), procott, reverse boycott (Friedman, 1996) and brand avoidance (Lee et al., 2009), this study uses boycott and buycott to avoid confusion.
2. The limitation associated with measuring political orientation/ideology with a single item measure is addressed in the limitations section.
3. Covariance matrices are available from the corresponding author upon request.

References


**Corresponding author**
Arunima Krishna can be contacted at: krishna.arunima@gmail.com

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:
www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm
Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com
Student preferences for slogans of higher-education institutions

Andriy Kovalenko
Faculty of Business and Legal Studies, Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology, Rotorua, New Zealand

Abstract

Purpose – The slogans adopted by higher-education institutions usually target all college stakeholders without differentiation, even though these stakeholders may have quite different connections to the organization. The purpose of this paper is to understand whether there is a relationship between students’ cultural backgrounds and their preferences for slogans of higher-education institutions.

Design/methodology/approach – The study utilized a survey for data collection. In total, 295 participants answered questions about preferences for slogans appealing to purchase or product involvement, and individualistic or collectivist values.

Findings – The results suggest that participants from both collectivist and individualistic societies prefer slogans that appeal to the values pertinent to their respective cultures. Representatives of both groups preferred slogans referring to the benefits of education over slogans describing features of particular institutions.

Practical implications – Slogans with messages appealing to people from collectivist and individualistic messages cultures should be included in promotional materials and distributed among corresponding audiences. Slogans for prospective students should refer to the advantages of studying in a particular institution, while current students should be targeted with slogans that encourage dedicated studying in general.

Originality/value – The findings contribute to the understanding of factors increasing effectiveness of higher-education slogans. It is also one of the first studies of how students from India (Punjab and Kerala states) and the Philippines process promotional materials from western educational institutions.

Keywords Slogans, Collectivist and individualistic values, Marketing for higher education, Product and purchase involvement

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Growing competition in the higher-education sector increases the importance of differentiation through the use of unique propositions (Chapleo et al., 2011), which are frequently presented as slogans. These short phrases can successfully communicate persuasive information about brands (Keller, 2013), influence perception and evaluation of brands (Rosengren and Dahlén, 2006) and facilitate continuity from one marketing campaign to another (Reece et al., 1994). Slogans appear to be valuable enough for Harvard University to have trademarked such catchphrases as “Managing yourself” and “The world’s thinking” (Gomstyn, 2009). Managers of other universities must also see the value in using slogans since there are more than two thousand university slogans (also called taglines and catchphrases) registered in the US alone (Higher Education Tagline Repository, 2018). Quantity, however, does not always transfer into quality. As Drozdowski (2005) suggests, many of these slogans appear to be too generic (e.g. “Excellence in achievement”). Educational institutions may deliberately use such slogans to reach all possible types of stakeholders with one message (Bergh et al., 2007). Appealing to a broad audience reduces expenditure, though it also leads to a lack of distinctiveness across institutions (Bergh et al., 2007).

Most of the past slogan research is focused on studying advertising slogans in general (e.g. Boush, 1993), slogans for tourist destinations (e.g. Lehto et al., 2014) and occasionally on such unique topics as military recruitment slogans (Miller et al., 2007). Despite the popularity of college slogans, few previous studies have attempted to assess the effectiveness of this promotional tool in the context of marketing for higher education. The complexity of college
choice decisions could be one of the possible reasons for such omission. The college choice is affected by many factors including personal characteristics of applicants, college/program characteristics and promotional activities of colleges (Kallio, 1995). Promotion may contribute to the choice of a particular educational institution, but its impact can be difficult to estimate due to the high number of variables involved. College slogans are only one of the possible promotional tools used by colleges. Their ability to affect the college choice decisions can be even more challenging to establish, but it does not imply that they should not be studied. After all, slogans have been found to influence brand equity (Dahlen and Rosengren, 2005) and corporate identity (Anwar, 2015).

Understanding the needs and expectations of students is essential for the development of effective slogans (McKnight and Paugh, 1999). Therefore, the objective of this research is to examine preferences for college slogans by students of different cultures. In particular, the study examines whether the cultural background of participants influences their preference for slogans that appeal to purchase or product involvement, and collectivist or individualistic values. Understanding what influences student preferences for slogans may help slogan writers to develop more effective slogan messages.

Background and hypotheses

One of the earliest studies of advertising slogans defines them as “the tools the advertiser can use to help the consumer recall a product” (Katz and Rose, 1969, p. 21). Most practitioners agree with the above definition by saying that slogans should be memorable (Molian, 1993), which may account for why the study of what makes slogans easier to recall has become a popular research focus. It has been found that slogan recall rates can be improved by the use of wordplay (Reece et al., 1994), rhyme (McGlone and Tofsigahkhsh, 2000) and by reducing complexity and length of slogans (Bradley and Meeds, 2002). Findings of other authors suggest that education (Pratt and Fadeyibi, 1990) and age (Reece et al., 1994) of study participants may also affect recall rates.

Only a few studies, like the one by Miller et al. (2007), focus on the factors influencing preferences for slogans. Their study revealed the existence of relationships between motivation, needs and involvement and the preference for military recruitment slogans (Miller et al., 2007). These findings are in accordance with the framework of Vakratsas and Ambler (1999), which suggests that involvement is one of the key moderators of advertising effects.

Zaichkowsky (1986) conceptualized the idea of involvement as a variable that defines whether an advertisement (a slogan in the context of this study) is relevant to a receiver of the advertising message. There are two types of involvement: “product involvement” that presumes a high level of importance of a product category and “purchase involvement” that refers to the importance of purchase decisions or the actual purchasing (Zaichkowsky, 1986). Product involvement has an enduring effect on consumers, while purchase involvement is a short-lived interest in the purchase of a particular product (Mittal, 1989).

Slogans, as one of the persuasive tactics (Laran et al., 2011), should evoke both product and purchase involvement. Appealing to product involvement appears to be more popular among slogan writers. Many authors agree that slogans are used for building brand awareness and brand image as prerequisites of brand equity (Keller, 2013). To become “a carrier of brand equity” (Rosengren and Dahlén, 2006, p. 265), the same slogan should be used continuously throughout several advertising campaigns (Reece et al., 1994). Long-lasting use of slogans is expected to result in enduring involvement with the brand in general. The anecdotal evidence suggests that developers of slogans for educational institutions also demonstrate preference for product involvement appeal. This is achieved by inducing involvement with education, the core service offered by educational institutions. Such slogans may rely on appeals which emphasize the value of studying in general without the reference to the value of studying in a particular institution (e.g. “Advance your education and your career”
by Sage College of Albany). In turn, purchase involvement slogans are intended to explain to prospective students advantages of studying in a particular institution and make their choice (i.e. a purchase) easier (e.g. “Top 1.2% of universities world-wide” by Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand).

It is apparent that generic language is more common in slogans appealing to product, rather than purchase, involvement. Generic messages make it more difficult for prospective students to distinguish one institution from another (Kalsbeek, 2013). It could be the reason why some educational institutions do not use slogans at all, instead preferring specific messages, like “Free university preparation course” (Charles Darwin University, Australia). Even though slogans about the benefits of being educated (product involvement) may be less distinctive than slogans referring to the advantages of studying in a particular place or studying a particular program (purchase involvement), students can find product involvement slogans more meaningful because, as a rule, they appeal to the individual’s desire for personal growth. Personal improvement has been identified as one of the key factors influencing the decision to become a student (Cubillo et al., 2006; Lewison and Hawes, 2007). The preference for slogans about education as a pathway to personal improvement (product involvement) is anticipated in the following hypothesis:

H1. Students will prefer slogans appealing to product involvement over slogans appealing to purchase involvement.

It is necessary to operationalize the concept of product and purchase involvement slogans for testing the above hypothesis. Hirschman and Holbrook’s (1982) framework of utilitarian and hedonic involvement can be used for this purpose. Consumers experience utilitarian involvement if they are interested in product attributes, while hedonic involvement occurs when consumers focus on the symbolic or experiential value of a product (Park and Moon, 2003). If consumers are interested in product attributes, they must be searching for the product that corresponds to their requirements. This type of utilitarian interest is situational and usually fades out after the purchase (Celsi and Olson, 1988). In contrast, the interest in symbolic benefits of owning/consuming the product suggests that consumers are enduringly involved with the product (Michaelidou and Dibb, 2008).

Distinguishing slogans that appeal to product involvement from those appealing to purchase involvement necessitates the identification of most common slogan messages used for inducing each type of involvement. Rothschild (1979) argued that information about product attributes such as price, complexity and distinctiveness across product alternatives contribute to the situational (purchase) involvement. Since prospective students are looking for their place of study, information about selection criteria should be reflected in the purchase involvement slogans. In particular, they can be more interested in slogans about the quality of education provided by a particular institution. This factor was found to be more important than others in the study of the university selection criteria (Spake et al., 2010). Messages about the quality of education typically refer to the features that differentiate one place of study from others (e.g. “Hometown feel […] world-class education!” by Brescia University, the USA). In contrast, product involvement is a function of the strength of values relevant to the product (Rothschild, 1979). Product (enduring) involvement slogans are more likely to refer to the benefits of education and appeal to learners’ desire to expand their general knowledge (e.g. “Aim higher!” by Wayne State University, the USA).

Involvement with the product and purchase decisions depends on a person’s value system ( Zaichkowsky, 1989). Values are referred to as beliefs that define selection and evaluation of behavior in most situations (Schwartz and Bilsky, 1987). In the context of consumer behavior, cultural values play an especially important role (Pizam and Sussmann, 1995). Hofstede et al. (2010) identified six dimensions of cultural values. Some of these dimensions appear to be
more frequently studied than others in the cross-cultural marketing research. In particular, the meta-analysis of 67 studies by Hornikx and O'Keefe (2009) revealed that in more than 60 percent of cases the focus was on the collectivism-individualism dimension. The popularity of this dimension can be attributed to its central role in defining the characteristics of self-concept (Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Oyserman et al., 2002).

Values like independence, self-indulgence and personal success serve predominantly individualistic interests, while conformity to social norms and commitment to tradition constitute collectivist interests (Hofstede et al., 2010). These cultural values are frequently reflected in advertisements (Han and Shavitt, 1994). In individualistic societies, advertisements may refer to individual aspirations (Zarantonello et al., 2013), while marketing practitioners of collectivist societies rely more commonly on messages about the group as a measure of one’s identity (De Mooij and Hofstede, 2010). Slogan writers also adapt their messages to cultural values. Appeals to personal success, as one of the key values of individualistic societies, are common in the slogans of US universities, for example, “Choosing to Be Great” by Boston University. In turn, references to community welfare, as one of the core values of collectivist cultures, can be found in slogans of Japanese educational institutions, for instance, “A beacon of the community” by Ehime University (n.d.).

The above examples prompt an interesting side observation about language. It may be that, perhaps unconsciously, cultural values can also influence the way slogan writers present their ideas. According to Hinkel (1997), the western writing style relies on rhetorical traditions that are different from those used in societies influenced by Confucian and Buddhist philosophies (i.e. collectivist societies).

Consumers generally find advertisements that appeal to cultural values to be more persuasive and better-liked (Hornikx and O'Keefe, 2009). In particular, members of collectivist societies are more persuaded by advertisements appealing to collectivist than individualistic values, and vice versa (Han and Shavitt, 1994). The same preferences are likely to be echoed among students who should, therefore, prefer slogan messages that reflect their cultural values, as expressed in the following hypotheses:

- **H2a.** Students from collectivist societies will prefer slogans reflecting collectivist values.
- **H2b.** Students from individualistic societies will prefer slogans reflecting individualistic values.

Cultural values have also been found to affect reasons for attending a college. Students belonging to collectivist cultures considered the high quality of western education (Abubakar et al., 2010; Wilkins and Huisman, 2011), cost of living and immigration prospects (Bodycott, 2009) to be the most important reasons for studying overseas. Reputation and international standing of institutions are also considered before enrollment, but such factors are not as important as, for example, migration possibilities after graduation (Bodycott, 2009). These findings suggest that students from collectivist societies appear to be more interested in the acquisition of western education in general, rather than in the place where they acquire such education. Therefore, they should find slogans referring to the value of education (i.e. product involvement) more appealing than slogans about the advantages of studying in a particular institution:

- **H3a.** Students from collectivist societies will prefer slogans appealing to a product category (i.e. the importance of being educated) rather than to a particular purchase (i.e. features of an academic institution).

Unlike their collectivist counterparts, students from individualistic societies such as New Zealand were found to be mostly interested in the quality and flexibility of a particular university, accommodation options and the proximity to home (Holdsworth and Nind, 2006). Such pragmatic motivations are likely to mean that students from individualistic societies
respond to slogans that appeal to purchase rather than product involvement. The following hypothesis expresses this argument:

\[ H_{3b} \]. Students from individualistic societies will prefer slogans appealing to a particular purchase (i.e. features of an academic institution) rather than to a product category (i.e. the importance of being educated).

**Methods**

**Research context**

The study was conducted in one of the New Zealand’s institutes of technology/polytechnics (ITPs). These educational institutions deliver technical, vocational and professional education at undergraduate and, in some cases, postgraduate levels (NZQA, 2018a). To some extent, ITPs are similar to US community colleges which also provide vocational-technical education, though at a lower level than ITPs (Cohen and Brawer, 2003).

New Zealand society in general is considered to be strongly individualistic (Goodwin and Goodwin, 1999), while Māori (the indigenous people of New Zealand who make 15 percent of population) culture is collectivist (Tassell et al., 2010). International students studied in this research come predominantly from such collectivist societies as India (Ramamoorthy et al., 2007) and the Philippines (Cukur et al., 2004).

**Slogan selection**

The number of slogans used in slogan research varies from 10 (Miller et al., 2007) to 150 (Kohli et al., 2013). Several studies (Reece et al., 1994; Rosengren and Dahlén, 2006) tested 16 slogans. Using 150 slogans was not feasible because as Reece et al. (1994) suggested, it is desirable to have as few slogans as possible to reduce the respondent’s fatigue and the questionnaire length. Another reason for not using 150 slogans was that there are 16 ITPs in New Zealand (NZQA, 2018b), which use only 22 slogans in total. Under these circumstances, the sample of 14 slogans appeared to be more appropriate for the current study. However, the number of New Zealand slogans was not sufficient to select study slogans that would have all linguistic and thematic characteristics necessary for testing the identified hypotheses. Also, slogans of the studied ITP were excluded from the pool to avoid the bias. A ready solution was the addition of slogans from Australian ITPs, which brought the pool of slogans to 61. The choice of Australian slogans was justified by the fact that there are some similarities between the ITPs of the two countries (Abbott and Doucouliagos, 2000) and because non-Māori New Zealand and non-indigenous Australian populations share several cultural values (Ryan, 2002).

Slogans for the questionnaire were selected from the slogan pool based on whether they could be attributed to the messages appealing to purchase or product involvement, and individualistic or collectivist values. In particular, slogan messages about a specific place of study were attributed to purchase involvement. Messages about the benefits of being educated were considered as appealing to product involvement. Slogans referring to personal success and independence were classified as slogans appealing to individualistic values, while messages emphasizing the value of community were included in the category of collectivist slogans. Tables I and II present slogans selected and classified according to linguistic and thematic characteristics as product or purchase involvement and collectivist and individualistic.

**Questionnaire design and administration**

The self-administered questionnaire consisted of four types of questions. First, the basic demographic data were collected. The next group of questions was used to determine the type of involvement experienced by study participants regarding the value of education (product involvement) and the level of importance of a particular college choice (purchase involvement).
Mittal's (1995) consumer involvement profile measure was considered to be the most appropriate for this purpose as it contains questions about both product and purchase involvement. The third section contained slogans of 14 educational institutions presented in the randomised order across the page instead of listing them one after another. This approach was used as a precaution for reducing the first-listing bias on preferences. Participants were asked to select five slogans and rank them from 1 (the most preferred option) to 5 (the fifth preferred option). In the final section, questions about a sense of accomplishment (individualistic value) and belonging (collectivist value) were asked to determine what values had most impact on participants. The individualism/collectivism scale of Erdem et al. (2006) was used for this purpose.

The participants were recruited from students studying business disciplines in a New Zealand tertiary institution. They were invited to take part in the survey at the end of classes they attended. Large classes (at least 50 students) were selected based on whether there were both domestic and international students enrolled. Study participants were given the questionnaire with the consent form stating the purpose of research as the study of perception of slogans of educational institutions. The questionnaire took approximately 10 min to complete.

**Results**

*Sample information*

Data were collected from 295 students, 221 female and 73 male (one participant did not answer the question about gender), belonging to four major ethnic groups (New Zealanders
of European (NZE) \((n = 52)\) and Māori \((n = 46)\) descent, citizens of India \((n = 113, \text{including Punjabi, } n = 50 \text{ and Malayali, } n = 49)\) and Filipino \((n = 59)\). Representatives of other nationalities and ethnicities \((n = 25)\) were excluded from analysis of culture related hypotheses due to their low numbers. The participants were between the ages 17 and 46, with a mean age of 29.

**Results of hypotheses testing**

Testing \(H1\) with the Wilcoxon signed-rank test showed that most students preferred slogans appealing to product involvement (Mean rank = 159.6) over slogans appealing to purchase involvement (Mean rank = 127.5) with \(Z = -4.96, p < 0.001, r = 0.28\). This finding supports the prediction of \(H1\).

Testing \(H2a-H3b\) required the comparison of slogan preferences of people belonging to collectivist and individualistic cultures. Even though the literature suggests that people from India and the Philippines as well as New Zealand Māori belong to collectivist cultures, the adherence to collectivist cultural values was first tested using the individualism/collectivism scale of Erdem *et al.* (2006) to increase the validity of hypotheses testing. As Table III suggests, most subjects from collectivist societies (Māori, Punjabi and Filipino) considered collectivist values to be more important than representatives of individualistic societies (people of European descent). Only the values of Malayali people from the Indian state of Kerala did not differ significantly from the values of people of European descent.

The study participants were requested to select 5 out of 14 slogans included in the questionnaire and rank them. Table IV shows the total frequencies and corresponding percentages for each slogan being selected as the first choice.
The Mann–Whitney test results confirmed that students from collectivist societies selected more slogans appealing to collectivist values (Mean rank = 154.8) than students with an individualistic cultural background (Mean rank = 121.9) with $U = 8,731.5$, $p = 0.004$, $r = 0.17$. These findings support the prediction of $H2a$.

As Table V suggests, $H2a$ was also supported in the case of particular ethnicities (Punjabi, Filipino and Malayali). Only students of Māori descent did not differ significantly from students of individualistic cultures in terms of their preferences for collectivist slogans.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Mean for being more collectivist</th>
<th>t-statistic</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Māori ($n = 46$)</td>
<td>6.64</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>0.035 (one tailed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZ European ($n = 52$)</td>
<td>6.20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punjabi ($n = 49$)</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZ European ($n = 52$)</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malayali ($n = 49$)</td>
<td>6.32</td>
<td>0.537</td>
<td>0.593 (ns)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZ European ($n = 52$)</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino ($n = 58$)</td>
<td>6.95</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZ European ($n = 52$)</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table IV.
Most preferred slogans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Slogan</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Dream it. Learn it. Be it</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Living, learning, sharing</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Get the skills you need for a career you love</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Real education, Real skills. Real jobs</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Now is your time to help shape a better future</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>The experience you need and the support to succeed</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Your time to learn</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>For everyone a pathway to a better future</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>It’s about you</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Become the next generation of you</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Disturb your universe</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>We make people who make it</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Your people, your place</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>In the bay, for the bay</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>294</td>
<td>99.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>295</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table V.
Preferences for collectivist slogans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Mean rank</th>
<th>$U$-statistic</th>
<th>Significance</th>
<th>$r$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Punjabi ($n = 50$)</td>
<td>59.93</td>
<td>978.5</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZ European ($n = 52$)</td>
<td>45.62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino ($n = 59$)</td>
<td>64.25</td>
<td>1,165</td>
<td>0.009</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZ European ($n = 52$)</td>
<td>49.7</td>
<td>867.5</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malayali ($n = 49$)</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZ European ($n = 52$)</td>
<td>43.56</td>
<td>1,049</td>
<td>0.265 (ns)</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Māori ($n = 46$)</td>
<td>52.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZ European ($n = 52$)</td>
<td>46.67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Similar results were identified in the case of preferences for individualistic slogans. As $H2b$ predicted, students of European descent (an individualistic culture) selected more slogans appealing to individualistic values (Mean rank $= 173.2$) than students from collectivist societies (Mean rank $= 141.4$) with $U = 4,244.5$, $p = 0.005$, $r = 0.16$.

Table VI shows that slogan preferences of representatives of particular ethnicities also support $H2b$. The only exception was the students of Māori descent, whose preferences did not differ significantly from those of students of European descent.

Students from collectivist societies were predicted to prefer slogans appealing to product over purchase involvement ($H3a$). Testing this hypothesis with the Wilcoxon signed-rank test confirmed that representatives of collectivist cultures prefer product involvement slogans (Mean rank $= 126.57$) over purchase involvement slogans (Mean rank $= 100.9$) with $Z = -4.32$, $p < 0.001$, $r = 0.28$. Table VII shows the breakdown of results for each major ethnicity. Only Punjabi students did not show a preference for slogans appealing to a certain type of involvement.

The preference for slogans appealing to product involvement over purchase involvement among students from collectivist societies is in stark contrast to their product and purchase involvement in general (i.e. involvement that was not assessed through slogan preferences). As Table VIII suggests, people from collectivist societies are significantly more involved with selecting a place of study (purchase involvement) than with the value of being educated (product involvement).

Testing $H3b$ with the Wilcoxon signed-rank test revealed the reverse effect: students from individualistic societies generally selected slogans appealing to product (Mean rank $= 33.51$) over purchase involvement (Mean rank $= 27.13$) $Z = -2.21$, $p = 0.02$, $r = 0.28$.

Similar to the finding about representatives of collectivist cultures, purchase involvement ($M = 5.42$) of people from individualist societies was higher than their product involvement ($M = 4.45$) with $t = 6.82$, $p < 0.001$, when their involvement was assessed without considering slogan preferences.

**Discussion**

As predicted by $H1$, most students preferred slogans appealing to product involvement (i.e. the value of education in general) over slogans referring to purchase involvement.

---

**Table VI.** Preferences for individualistic slogans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Mean rank</th>
<th>$U$-statistic</th>
<th>Significance</th>
<th>$r$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Punjabi ($n = 50$)</td>
<td>44.67</td>
<td>958.5</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZ European ($n = 52$)</td>
<td>59.75</td>
<td>1,205.5</td>
<td>0.017</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino ($n = 59$)</td>
<td>50.47</td>
<td>853.5</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZ European ($n = 52$)</td>
<td>64.18</td>
<td>1,049</td>
<td>0.265 (ns)</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maori ($n = 46$)</td>
<td>46.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZ European ($n = 52$)</td>
<td>52.33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table VII.** Preferences for product and purchase involvement slogans among representatives of collectivist cultures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Mean rank for product involvement slogans</th>
<th>Mean rank for purchase involvement slogans</th>
<th>$z$-statistic</th>
<th>Significance</th>
<th>$r$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Punjabi ($n = 50$)</td>
<td>26.36</td>
<td>23.58</td>
<td>$-0.49$</td>
<td>0.623 (ns)</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino ($n = 59$)</td>
<td>31.32</td>
<td>27.62</td>
<td>$-2.4$</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malayali ($n = 49$)</td>
<td>26.19</td>
<td>21.41</td>
<td>$-2.37$</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maori ($n = 46$)</td>
<td>27.03</td>
<td>16.88</td>
<td>$-3.07$</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(i.e. advantages of studying in a specific institution). The higher popularity of slogans about the value of education can be explained by the well-established perception of education as a pathway to gain competences valued by students and by society in general (Wlodkowski, 2011). Competency in a certain field may bring such benefits as getting a good job, becoming more confident in one's ability to succeed and achieving a status valued by others (Ahl, 2006). The study participants may have also preferred slogans about the value of education because it contributes to the satisfaction of their need for self-actualization and provides the opportunity for socialization and establishment of useful social connections (Lewison and Hawes, 2007).

Test results confirmed hypotheses about people from collectivist societies preferring slogans that appeal to collectivist values ($H_{2a}$), and slogans with individualistic appeals being preferred by representatives of individualistic cultures ($H_{2b}$). These findings concur with what was discovered in other cross-cultural studies of advertising. For example, comparison of preferences of American and Chinese consumers for advertisements appealing either to collectivist or individualistic values in the study of Zhang and Gelb (1996), assessment of persuasiveness of advertising messages in terms of whether they correspond to the cultural values prevalent in the US and Korea by Han and Shavitt (1994), and a meta-analysis of 67 studies about the use of cultural appeals in advertising by Hornikx and O'Keefe (2009) convincingly demonstrated that advertisements can be more persuasive and better liked if they appeal to the cultural values that match the cultural background of consumers. Even though Hornikx and O'Keefe (2009) described the idea of adapting advertising messages to audience values as a truism, findings of this study revealed that not only advertisements in general (i.e. a combination of images and text), but also stand-alone textual messages can be perceived more favorably if they reflect the cultural values of the audience.

All collectivist cultures considered in the study apart from Māori expressed different preferences for slogans from NZE descent. It appeared that the collectivist values of Māori culture did not have as significant an effect on preferences for slogans as expected because unlike other collectivist cultures considered in the study, people of Māori descent are always under the influence of individualistic values prevalent in the New Zealand society. Podsiadlowski and Fox (2011) also found similarities in perceptions of collectivist values between Māori and NZE.

Students from both collectivist and individualistic societies showed a preference for slogans referring to product involvement than to purchase involvement. These findings confirm the prediction of $H_{3a}$, while $H_{3b}$ had to be rejected as the opposite effect was discovered. The $H_{3a}$ finding supports the idea that education in collectivist societies is a means to achieving goals. For example, in the Confucian culture, education has traditionally been one of the key requirements to secure a job in the government (Lee, 1996). Although decisions made by representatives of individualistic societies have been found to rely on considerations of perceived costs and benefits (Davidson et al., 1976), the respective study participants selected more slogans referring to the value of education in general than to the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Mean for product involvement</th>
<th>Mean for purchase involvement</th>
<th>t-statistic</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Punjabi ($n = 50$)</td>
<td>4.74</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>8.69</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerala ($n = 49$)</td>
<td>4.85</td>
<td>6.02</td>
<td>8.69</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Māori ($n = 46$)</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>5.67</td>
<td>7.75</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino ($n = 59$)</td>
<td>4.92</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>12.54</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table VIII. Product and purchase involvement of representatives of collectivist cultures (without considering their slogan preferences)
advantages of studying in a particular institution. The apparent contradiction between the $H3b$ finding and Davidson et al.’s (1976) results can be reconciled by an assumption that students may experience both types of involvement at different times. The magnitude of each involvement is likely to depend on a particular situation. For instance, students from both individualistic and collectivist societies may be more focused on purchase attributes when they are trying to choose the place of their study. Therefore, prospective students should be more interested in slogans containing purchase involvement messages. Having enrolled, students of both cultures may find messages about the value of education in general more relevant, which should mean they now prefer slogans appealing to product over purchase involvement.

Unlike students of other ethnicities, Punjabi students had an equal interest in slogans appealing to product and purchase involvement. The lack of difference could be since most people from the state of Punjab follow the Sikh religious beliefs. They are more likely to value material well-being in comparison to the largely Hindu study participants from the state of Kerala, who in accordance with their religious values, are less profit-oriented (Singer, 1966). In addition to this difference, the level of literacy in the state of Punjab is 18 percent lower in comparison to the state of Kerala (India Census, 2011). Therefore, Malayali people living in Kerala appear to be more interested in the acquisition of education which explains their preference for product over purchase involvement slogans (i.e. slogans referring to the value of education in general).

Testing the level of product and purchase involvement without the use of slogans revealed that students of both individualistic and collectivist cultures consider the choice of their place of study to be more important than the value of education. This finding suggests that purchase involvement is more prevalent among students, even though they prefer slogans that rely on product involvement messages. The apparent inconsistency in preferences can be explained by the participants’ status during the survey. For already enrolled students, the slogans inspiring them to study could sound more naturally appealing than the slogans referring to the features of institutions they had no affiliation with.

**Study limitations**

The categorization of study participants as either representatives of collectivist or individualistic culture was largely based on their ethnic descent. Although testing the level of participants’ adherence to either type of culture with the individualism/collectivism scale of Erdem et al. (2006) supported this categorization, there is not always a straightforward connection between ethnicity and cultural values. People placed in a new cultural environment tend to change their original cultural values. The rate of acculturation is higher among younger immigrants (Cheung et al., 2011), and with the majority of students of higher education institutions being in their 20s (this study’s participants are not an exception), it is logical to assume that students from collectivist societies are likely to adjust their values to what they experience in individualistic societies. Cheung et al. (2011) found that a longer exposure increases the level of identification with a new culture among young immigrants. Participants of this study could also have experienced a similar effect, but this was not accounted for by asking a question about the duration of stay in the country of their study.

Slogans used in this study were attributed to the categories of product/purchase involvement and collectivist/individualistic values based on how well the words used in slogan messages matched characteristics of each category (e.g. references to personal success were interpreted as a reflection of individualistic values). Although such categorization appears to be logical, it is also a subjective approach.
Future research

If students are considered as consumers (Naidoo et al., 2011), then their needs and expectations must be understood to make marketing efforts successful. Enrolled students, the key focus of this study, represent only one group of stakeholders of academic institutions. There are also prospective students, alumni, college staff and local community members. Among these groups, prospective students appear to play a decisive role in college sustainability and constitute the main target audience for higher education organizations' promotional activities (Favaloro, 2015). The dearth of research about the effectiveness of these activities necessitates studies about how prospective students respond to marketing communication in general and slogans in particular.

In addition to the collectivist–individualistic dimension of culture, Hofstede (1984) identified other aspects in which one culture differs from another. Although there is a certain level of overlap between different cultural dimensions (e.g. collectivist cultures are more likely to rely on restraint than on indulgence), each of them should be accounted for in a study of how cultural values affect perception of slogans.

Slogan writers must understand the importance of language proficiency of slogan readers. Millbern (2012) suggests that the chances for developing an effective slogan are higher if the campus language is reflected in the slogan. However, using the “campus language” may make slogans difficult to understand by students from overseas. It is logical to assume that a lack of appreciation and/or comprehension may increase if the first language of slogan writers and readers is different. A study of how the level of language proficiency affects slogan preferences would help to identify the type of slogan messages that can be easily processed by people from non-English speaking countries.

Implications and conclusion

The finding about students preferring slogans that refer to their cultural values emphasizes the importance of understanding college stakeholders’ backgrounds. This suggests that it is desirable to identify individual segments within the market and develop slogans that reflect the segment’s expectations. Segmentation that is based on cultural values is more meaningful than the one that relies on citizenship. This approach is also more realistic because having dozens of different slogan messages developed for numerous segments would be difficult to support financially and it would create unnecessary confusion among different groups of stakeholders. Slogans with collectivist and individualistic messages should be included in promotional materials and distributed among corresponding audiences. If the majority of international students comes from collectivist societies, collectivist slogans can be posted on webpages for international students. To increase memorability of slogans, colleges should use each type of slogan consistently for several years to target only a specific student group with the help of respective media channels.

The idea about colleges using different slogans for targeting different audiences does not concur with the principle of standardization commonly used in corporate communication. In fact, according to Leitch and Motion (1999), multiplicity in corporate identity strategy should be avoided at all costs. Nevertheless, varying slogan messages depending on individual audiences’ expectations makes sense in the context of educational institutions which, unlike other business organizations, have more than one identity. According to Alessandri et al. (2006), some of these identities rely on perception of colleges as centers of academic knowledge and another one is about social and athletic aspects of studying in higher-education institutions. Each of these identities attracts different categories of stakeholders, and, therefore, requires different type of corporate communication to match the expectations of respective audiences (Alessandri et al., 2006).
Many prospective students are aware of high social and financial risks associated with their decision to enroll in college (Basha et al., 2015). Because of such risks, students are likely to experience a high level of involvement in the college selection process. Participants of this study confirmed this assumption by expressing more interest in college choice (purchase involvement) than in the value of being educated (product involvement) before they were asked to rank slogans. People usually lose some degree of interest in the product after its purchase, though some buyers still retain the interest in the entire product category on an ongoing basis (Richins and Bloch, 1986). Similar transformation has likely happened with participants of this study. When they were asked to indicate whether the choice of a college or the value of education was more important, they must have recalled their experience as prospective students and expressed more purchase than product involvement. But when they were ranking college slogans, they could have been more influenced by their current status of being an enrolled student and selected more slogans with a product involvement message. This finding suggests that slogans for prospective and current students should differ. In the case of prospective students, slogans should refer to advantages of studying in a particular institution. Once enrolled, students should be targeted with slogans that encourage dedicated studying as a prerequisite for a successful career. The latter slogans could be present around the campus and on webpages for current students, while the former slogans should appear in promotional materials targeting external audiences.

Effectiveness of slogan messages can be improved if they match the expectations of the people the slogans appeal to. As the findings of this study suggest, students prefer slogans that reflect their cultural background and their status of being currently enrolled. Tailoring slogan messages in accordance with expectations of a target audience will require a higher creative and financial input, but as a result, colleges may establish a better bond with their stakeholders and, consequently, a better return on investment.

References


Corresponding author
Andriy Kovalenko can be contacted at: andriy.kovalenko@toiohoma.ac.nz

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:
www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm
Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com
The importance of communicating change
Identifying predictors for support and resistance toward organizational change processes

Charlotte Schulz-Knappe, Thomas Koch and Johannes Beckert
Department of Communication, Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz, Germany

Abstract
Purpose – Past research has been concerned with finding reasons for failure of organizational changes and the role of employees in it. Whether employees hinder or support organizational change depends not only on the organizational context, but also on individual predispositions and the change communication employees experience during the process. The purpose of this paper is to test how these three categories affect employees’ attitudes toward the change as well as their tendency to show resistance or to support it.
Design/methodology/approach – An online survey (n = 608) of German employees who were recently subject to a change in their workplace was conducted.
Findings – With respect to individual predispositions and organizational context, the results show that in particular skepticism, openness, engagement and influence on decisions are relevant predictors. Change communication variables (e.g. involvement, participation and appreciation) explain the largest share of variance, indicating that transparent communication and including employees in the process result in positive attitudes toward change and support.
Originality/value – This study adds to the discussion about which factors determine the support or resistance to organizational change by identifying relevant predictors, organizing them along three categories and testing them concurrently.
Keywords Employee behaviour, Internal communications, Communication management, Organizational change, Employee attitudes

Introduction
In a digitalized and globalized world, organizations are continuously confronted with the need to adapt to shifting external conditions. Organizational changes, such as downsizings, restructurings, mergers and acquisitions, have become an everyday occurrence and represent serious challenges for organizations (Kitchen and Daly, 2002). Managing change processes successfully is vital for organizations’ survival. Crucial factors for successful change have shown to be positive attitudes and support among employees (Erwin and Garman, 2009; Oreg et al., 2011). Reasons for failure, on the other hand, are manifold. Communicating insufficient and incomplete information, for example, can lead to resistance among employees, which inhibits the implementation of the change and increases its costs (Christensen, 2014).

Thus, research has been concerned with identifying the reasons for why employees support organizational changes in some cases but try to impede them in others (Burnes, 2011). Previous studies on employee reactions to change identified three types of perspectives that are relevant (Erwin and Garman, 2009; Oreg, 2006): The first line of research identifies various personality traits of employees as determinants of resistance or support to change. For example, individuals who fear the unknown and tend to be more skeptical were found to be more likely to show resistance (Dubrin and Ireland, 1993). In turn, individuals with higher levels of self-efficacy are more likely to support change (Eby et al., 2000; Judge et al., 1999). The second perspective focuses on the relationship between the employee and the organization. Here, scholars have focused on the role of trust in
management or the organizational climate (Schneider et al., 1996; Van den Heuvel et al., 2015). The third perspective concerns the internal communication of change processes. Barrett (2002) refers to internal communication as the “glue” that holds the organization together in times of change. Change communication is an important determinant of how employees perceive the change and thus can contribute to reducing resistance and generating support (Armenakis and Bedeian, 1999; Christensen, 2014; Elving, 2005). If, however, organizations fail to implement the change communication properly, it can become a source for resistance itself (Ford et al., 2008; McClellan, 2011). A well-planned and executed change communication strategy is, therefore, essential for successful change (Allen et al., 2007; Elving, 2005; Lewis, 2011).

Since previous research examined the impact of these three perspectives separately, to date no findings on joint effects on cognitive (i.e. employees’ attitudes toward change) or behavioral (i.e. the likelihood to support or reject change) responses to change exist. In our study, we thus seek to uncover how these three dimensions – individual predispositions, organizational context and the organization’s change communication – affect employees’ attitudes toward the change as well as their willingness to show resistance to the change or to support it. First, a literature review identifies relevant variables that affect reactions to change, which are then categorized to the three dimensions. Second, we conduct a survey with 608 employees of German organizations, who recently faced an organizational change process, to test empirically which factors promote or hinder successful change.

**Literature review**

**Attitudes, resistance and support toward organizational change processes**

Organizational change describes the adaptation of organizational strategies and structures, mainly to shifts in external conditions (Weick and Quinn, 1999). The external forces driving change can be of political, economic, social-cultural and/or technological nature (Senior, 2002). In addition to these external forces, change processes can also be initiated by internal forces, such as a change in leadership, implementation of new equipment or dissatisfaction of employees with the current situation (Senior, 2002). Most organizational changes are implemented “top down,” meaning that the general management imposes the change on the organization. In cases where the employees are the key drivers of change, the process can also be implemented “bottom up” (Lupton, 1991). Further, the pervasiveness of changes can vary largely; technological changes may simply involve the introduction of new technological equipment. Mergers or acquisitions, in turn, can be more far-reaching as they may result in relocation or lay-offs and clashing organizational values (Buono and Bowditch, 1989). Strategic changes, however, can include new work routines or a change of the organizational mission, with which some organizational members may not agree with. Thus, changes can differ based on the personal impact they have on the individual and are often accompanied by uncertainty (Allen et al., 2007; Bordia, Hobman, Jones, Gallois and Callan, 2004).

Therefore, change management represents a challenge to the organization. Failing to achieve the desired results of a change can have multiple reasons. This concerns, for example, its wrong implementation, such as lack of congruence to existing organizational structures, lack of resources, disagreement at the management level or ambiguous goals of the change. Apart from that there are also cases in which the change is simply unnecessary (Armenakis and Harris, 2009; Kotter, 1995). While the introduction of new structures to an organization can happen fast, management often ignores that employees require some time to accept and adapt (Oreg et al., 2011). Rushed implementation and lack of relevant information about the change can cause unnecessary strain to employees, who then may disapprove of the change and show resistance.

According to Diamond (1986), resistance to any kind of change is deeply rooted in human behavior. Many studies on organizational change adopt this view that employees generally...
oppose change and, therefore, take actions to avoid it (Kotter, 1995). Change implies an intrusion to an established balance, forcing individuals to leave their familiar status quo (Strebel, 2009). Thus, change is often accompanied by uncertainty and met with resistance, which involves behaviors that obstruct or terminate the process (Lines, 2004). Dent and Goldberg (1999), however, criticize that resistance to change is commonly assumed without considering the context. Indeed, employees are welcoming change processes, when they perceive the motives as beneficial. An organizational change can represent opportunities to grow and signal employees that their organization is staying up to date (Lewis, 2011). 

Jimmieson et al. (2008) found that individuals actively supported the change process, when they had positive attitudes toward its objectives. In addition, other scholars have argued that employees’ resistance to change can also have positive intentions: For example, when employees see flaws in the change strategy or suspect negative implications for the organization, resistance can be useful and lead to better outcomes (Mabin et al., 2001; Piderit, 2000). In a similar vein, change agents themselves can evoke resistance through their own behavior. Ford et al. (2008) in this context speak of a “self-fulfilling prophecy” that occurs, when change agents anticipate resistance, hence act inappropriately and thus receive resistance in return.

For a successful implementation of the change it is, therefore, crucial to generate a positive perception of the change to garner support and reduce resistance. Besides considering how change itself affects employees’ attitudes and reactions to it, ample research suggests that additional factors external to the change are relevant in this regard. As mentioned, these factors can be categorized into individuals’ predispositions, the employee–organization relationship and the way the change was communicated. We discuss these aspects more detailed in the following sections.

The role of individual predispositions in change processes

One area of the research in the field of organizational change assumes that differences in employees personal characteristics contribute to whether they support organizational change or show resistance (e.g. Erwin and Garman, 2009; Mumford et al., 1993). According to the dispositional resistance to change concept by Oreg (2003), some individuals tend to resist change due to certain predispositions, even though their opinions may align with the change motives. For instance, individuals with more skeptical characters feel the need to be in control of situations to obtain a feeling of safety. In times of organizational change, they perceive a loss of control making them more likely to generate negative attitudes toward change processes and show resistance (Stanley et al., 2005). Related to this is individuals’ inherent need for structure regarding their environment, and a strong inclination to follow routines (Meiser and Machunsky, 2008; Oreg, 2006). Organizational change would disrupt this need and may cause negative reactions. Similar effects can occur for individuals who fear the unknown or future events (Dubrin and Ireland, 1993).

On the contrary, individual predispositions that lead individuals to be generally positive and supportive about change processes exist, too. These predispositions can be described as openness toward change. When confronted with change, employees have to adapt to new situations. Here, an individuals’ general willingness to learn is an important factor for adapting to the change (Szebel, 2015). In line with this is their degree of internal agility, which is defined as the ability to deal with change in specific situations and to respond appropriately to related challenges. Accordingly, Cunningham et al. (2002) found that workers with high job-related problem-solving skills expressed a higher readiness to change. In a similar vein, self-efficacy, as the individuals’ perception of being able to achieve own goals, was also found to affect individuals’ reactions toward change (Bandura, 1982; Judge et al., 1999). Further, Wanberg and Banas (2000) found that personal resilience acts as predictor for an employees’ ability to accept change, even though it was not related to more
positive attitudes about the change. This indicates that employees with higher personal resilience may be able to deal better with change regardless whether they agree with it or judge it as beneficial.

In sum, previous research provides evidence that various personal characteristics affect employees’ attitudes and reactions to organizational change. Our study aims at testing these different personal predispositions simultaneously and to analyze their effects on attitudes toward, resistance against and support of change processes. Hence, our first research question is:

RQ1. How do employees’ personal characteristics affect employees’ attitudes toward the change as well as their likelihood to show resistance to or support the change?

Nevertheless, change always affects individuals in their function as employees or members of an organization. Reactions toward change, consequently, are not shaped by personality-related factors alone, but also by previous experiences in the organizational context, such as the employee–organization relationship.

The role of the organizational context in change processes
The psychological contract approach (Rousseau, 1989) considers the relationship between the organization and its employees as a set of mutual expectations for behavior and actions. Most are implicit and consist of norms like respect and appreciation. Research shows that when employees felt the organization fulfilling the psychological contract during the change, their cognitive and behavioral response was positive (Van den Heuvel et al., 2015). Failure by the organization to fulfill these expectations during the change process, however, can result in resistance and re-negotiation of the contract by employees (Oreg, 2003). When adopting the view that organizations represent complex social systems (Christensen, 2014; Weick and Quinn, 1999), employees’ attitudes toward change emerge from the interplay between the individual and the organization (Burnes, 2015; Choi, 2011). In this context, one overarching concept is the overall organizational climate. When the climate in the organization is perceived as good, employees will likely feel more comfortable and committed to their organization (Guzley, 1992; Schneider et al., 1996), making it a necessary condition for a successful change process.

Another important variable is the trust in management and the change agents implementing the change (Oreg et al., 2011). Several studies found that both the level of trust in management and its competence significantly correlate with the response to change processes (Cunningham et al., 2002; Stanley et al., 2005; Van den Heuvel et al., 2015). In addition, perceived participation in the organization showed to increase readiness for change (Eby et al., 2000). Organizational commitment describes how much employees identify with their employer and how willing they are to engage with the organization. Several studies have shown that employees with higher job satisfaction (Iverson, 1996) and higher commitment have greater willingness to participate in change processes (Madsen et al., 2005). However, van Dam (2005) showed that individuals who had a higher commitment before the change showed greater resistance. This implies that individuals who have high levels of identification and satisfaction with the present state of their organization may be less willing to accept changes. Therefore, Oreg et al. (2011) conclude that both positive and negative effects of these factors on employees’ attitudes and reactions toward change are plausible. This leads us to our second research question:

RQ2. How do organizational context factors affect employees’ attitudes toward the change as well as their likelihood to show resistance to or support the change?

In addition to the previously discussed factors, the implementation of the change creates further challenges that the organization must manage. In this context, the organizational change communication comes into play.
The role of organizational communication in change processes

The third dimension of this study comprises of organizational communication variables during the change process. Change communication aims to promote a change and drive it forward within complex hierarchies of organizations (McClellan, 2011). Communication further has the function of explaining the change to all actors involved. Research emphasizes that a successful change communication strategy needs to address the informational and emotional needs of employees adequately (Allen et al., 2007; Christensen, 2014; Elving, 2005). Begley and Czajka (1993) as well as Schweiger and DeNisi (1991) showed that employees who cannot assess the consequences of change tend to oppose it. In contrast, Lewis et al. (2006) found that the higher employees perceived the quality of information about the change, the lower their resistance. Further research illustrates the mediating role of change communication, as a lack of information about the change favors rumors, reinforces negative feelings and contributes to the formation of resistance (Elving, 2005; Christensen, 2014). Information about motives, measures and goals create acceptance for the change. Another important factor to gain acceptance turned out to be a truthful and complete presentation of change-related information (Allen et al., 2007; Bordia, Hunt, Paulsen, Tourish and DiFonzo, 2004). Communication that is perceived as honest avoids negative feelings such as stress, which decreases enthusiasm and commitment (Armenakis and Bedeian, 1999). At the same time, a study by Oreg (2006) indicates that a larger amount of information may give rise to negative ratings. These contradictory results suggest that, in addition to the amount of information, its clarity is essential to promote positive reactions to change processes.

Russ (2008) distinguishes between a programmatic and a participatory approach to change communication. The programmatic approach describes a highly centralized top–down communication from the management of an organization and is, therefore, characterized by a high degree of organizational control. Here, the organization can select information for specific target groups and frame it for the purpose of the change (Russ, 2008). This approach, however, disregards the views of employees and, therefore, runs the risk of becoming the cause of resistance. Participation and involvement give employees the feeling of being able to act independently, to exercise control and to make an active contribution (Armenakis and Bedeian, 1999). The participatory approach accordingly focuses on dialogical communication and the involvement of employees. The ability to co-create and feel empowered generates greater acceptance of change (Oreg et al., 2011; Russ, 2008). While these findings demonstrate that consultation with employees about the change is important, Lewis (2011) calls for a distinction between implementing symbolic participation and its actual use as a resource. In this context, Lewis and Russ (2012) found that participation is underused in change processes as change agents only accepted restricted input by employees about the change or disregarded negative feedback.

In summary, change communication fulfills two essential tasks: First, it serves to pass on information and second, it integrates all relevant members of the organization in the process (Elving, 2005; Oreg et al., 2011). Good change communication is characterized by providing complete and honest information at an early stage that addresses the concerns of employees and allows for participation (Allen et al., 2007; Bordia, Hunt, Paulsen, Tourish and DiFonzo, 2004; Elving, 2005; Rogiest et al., 2015; Schweiger and DeNisi, 1991). Based on this theoretical background, the third research question is:

RQ3. How do different factors of change communication affect employees’ attitudes toward the change as well as their likelihood to show resistance to or support the change?
Method

Sample and procedure
In order to find answers to our research questions, we conducted an online survey. Participants were recruited via a German online access panel for social science research (SoSci-Panel; Leiner, 2014). Only subjects who were employed in an organization at the time of recruitment and have recently experienced an organizational change were allowed to participate. Subjects who did not fit these criteria were excluded through filter questions at the beginning of the questionnaire. A total of 608 employees (54 percent female, Mage = 44.34 years, SD = 11.40) from a wide range of industries and occupations completed the survey. Among the change processes participants reported, 30.3 percent concerned technological reforms, 10.5 percent strategic realignment, 5.6 percent internal restructuring, 24.8 percent referred to a change in organizational culture, 24.3 percent concerned 0 percent a merger or acquisition. Analysis showed that the results did not differ based on the type of change and the variable was, therefore, left out in further analyses.

Dependent variables

Altitude toward the change process. (M = 3.48, SD = 1.33) measures how the respondents feel about the change in general. We assessed change attitude using a single-item measure “What is your general attitude toward the change?” on a five-point Likert-scale (1 = “very negative” to 5 = “very positive”).

Resistance to change. (M = 1.24, SD = 0.63) regard the employees’ intention to obstruct the change process and was measured by the item “I try to delay or hinder the change at my organization through my work” on a five-point Likert-scale (1 = “never” to 5 = “always”).

Support of change. (M = 4.05, SD = 1.03) concerns the degree of support of the employee toward the change and is measured by the item “I support the change at my organization the best I can” on a five-point Likert-scale (1 = “never” to 5 = “always”).

Independent variables

Individual predispositions. The survey assessed a set of eight personal characteristics consisting of the respondents’ need for structure, skepticism, willingness to learn, resilience, fear of the future, openness to change, internal agility and self-efficacy. We measured these characteristics using single-items on a five-point Likert-scale (1 = “completely disagree” to 5 = “completely agree”). Need for structure (M = 3.66, SD = 0.97) was assessed by the item “Before I start complex activities, I make an overview over the concerning tasks.” Skepticism (M = 2.40, SD = 1.03) was measured by the item “When I am confronted by new facts, I am mostly skeptical.” Fear of the future (M = 2.54, SD = 1.22) was measured by “I often worry about my future.” Willingness to learn (M = 4.17, SD = 0.88) was measured by “I get excited to learn new ways of thinking.” Resilience (M = 3.73, SD = 0.97) was measured by the item “I remain calm in situations in which others usually panic.” Openness to change (M = 3.47, SD = 0.92) was measured by the item “I am usually optimistic when something changes.” Internal agility (M = 3.84, SD = 0.88) was measured by “I am able to deal with difficult and unpredictable events.” Self-efficacy (M = 3.43, SD = 0.83) was measured by the item “When I discover resistance, I find ways to push through.”

Organizational context. This concerns the employee–organization relationship, which consists of five constructs, each measured on a five-point semantic differential scale. Job satisfaction (M = 3.74, SD = 1.06) was assessed by the item “Regarding my work, I am […]” (1 = “very unsatisfied” to 5 = “very satisfied”). Influence in decisions (M = 2.94, SD = 1.15) was measured by the item “Regarding important decisions, I am […]” (1 = “never involved” to 5 = “always involved”). Organizational climate (M = 3.57, SD = 1.06) was measured by
the item “The climate at my organization is […]” (1 = “very bad” to 5 = “very good”). Organizational engagement (M = 3.91, SD = 0.99) was measured by “For my organization I engage […]” (1 = “very reluctantly” to 5 = “very willingly”). Trust in management (M = 3.07, SD = 1.17) was measured by the item “Considering the change, my trust toward my employer has […]” (1 = “strongly decreased” to 5 = “strongly improved”).

Change communication. The change communication variables cover how participants perceived their organizations’ general communication and more specifically its way of communicating during the change, such as the transparency of information and involvement of employees in the process.

Evaluation of change communication. (M = 3.01, SD = 1.44) was measured on a five-point Likert-scale (1 = “very bad” to 5 = “very good”) by the item “How do you evaluate the communication of your organization with its employees in the context of the change?” The remaining six items were measured on a five-point Likert-scale (1 = “completely disagree” to 5 = “completely agree”). Honesty of change communication (M = 3.16, SD = 1.32) measures to what extent the organization is perceived as honest and sincere regarding its change communication and is measured by the item “The change is presented in an honest way.” Transparency of the change communication (M = 3.22, SD = 1.28) is assessed by the item “I have a good overview, which measures the change includes.” Appreciation (M = 2.93, SD = 1.30) concerns the employees’ feelings of being valued by its organization during the change and was measured by the item “I feel valued in the context of the change process.” Involvement in the change (M = 3.00, SD = 1.32) concerns how employees feel involved in the change by the organization and was measured by the item “I am well involved in the change.” Last, lack of support (M = 2.77, SD = 1.48) measures whether the employee feels helpless and left alone by its organization in the context of the change and was assessed by the item “I feel powerless regarding the change at my workplace.”

Control variables. Age, gender and education were included in the first block. Additionally, we asked participants whether they held a supervising position as well as for their duration of employment and the size of the organization they are employed at.

Results
To answer our research questions, we conducted three linear regression analyses with either attitude toward change, resistance to change and support of change as dependent variables. Four blocks of independent variables were created for the regression analysis (control variables, personal predispositions, organizational context and change communication). To check the suitability of the data for regression, we checked the zero-order correlations (see Table I) and inspected the VIF values for multicollinearity (all < 3.00). The results of the three regression analyses are presented in Table II.

Explaining attitudes toward change
Regarding employees’ attitude toward change, the overall model explains 45 percent of the variance of this variable. With 20 percent, the largest share derives from the block including the change communication variables, more specifically transparency of change communication (β = −0.11, p < 0.01), appreciation (β = 0.16, p < 0.01), involvement in the change (β = 0.17, p < 0.001) and lack of support in the change process (β = −0.30, p < 0.001). Thus, feeling appreciated and being involved in the change process leads to more positive attitudes of the change, while lack of support and transparency of communication leads to more negative attitudes. Further, the general evaluation of change communication and honesty of the change communication exerted small and marginally significant positive effects. The block of variables referring to the organizational context accounted for 14 percent of the explained variance in attitude toward the change, with influence in
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>44.34 (11.49)</td>
<td>-0.16**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-0.09*</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management position</td>
<td>-0.27**</td>
<td>0.11**</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of organization</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>-0.21**</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>0.09*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of employ</td>
<td>0.41***</td>
<td>-0.16**</td>
<td>-0.10*</td>
<td>-0.23**</td>
<td>0.16**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for structure</td>
<td>3.66 (0.97)</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.08*</td>
<td>-0.12**</td>
<td>-0.09*</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of the future</td>
<td>2.54 (1.23)</td>
<td>-0.15**</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>0.16**</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>-0.12**</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.30**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widening to learn</td>
<td>4.17 (0.88)</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.10*</td>
<td>-0.08*</td>
<td>0.08*</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.11**</td>
<td>0.19**</td>
<td>0.12**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>3.73 (0.97)</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>-0.13**</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.14*</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.10*</td>
<td>-0.25**</td>
<td>-0.16**</td>
<td>-0.17**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness for change</td>
<td>3.47 (0.92)</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.08*</td>
<td>-0.38**</td>
<td>-0.16**</td>
<td>-0.10*</td>
<td>0.25**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal agility</td>
<td>3.84 (0.88)</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>-0.19**</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.18**</td>
<td>-0.29**</td>
<td>-0.21**</td>
<td>-0.12**</td>
<td>0.25**</td>
<td>0.28**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-efficacy</td>
<td>3.33 (0.83)</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>-0.14**</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>-0.11**</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.17**</td>
<td>-0.27**</td>
<td>-0.23**</td>
<td>-0.10*</td>
<td>0.23**</td>
<td>0.24**</td>
<td>0.34**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job satisfaction</td>
<td>3.74 (1.06)</td>
<td>0.12**</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-0.17**</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.15**</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>-0.12**</td>
<td>-0.28**</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>0.10*</td>
<td>0.11**</td>
<td>0.24**</td>
<td>0.16**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence in decisions</td>
<td>2.94 (1.15)</td>
<td>0.15**</td>
<td>-0.10*</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-0.44**</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>0.17**</td>
<td>0.13**</td>
<td>-0.14**</td>
<td>-0.22**</td>
<td>-0.12**</td>
<td>0.14**</td>
<td>0.17**</td>
<td>0.23**</td>
<td>0.20**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Org. climate</td>
<td>3.37 (1.06)</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.11**</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>-0.21**</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.13**</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Org. engagement</td>
<td>3.91 (0.99)</td>
<td>0.11**</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.20**</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.13**</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>-0.11**</td>
<td>-0.14**</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>0.10*</td>
<td>0.22**</td>
<td>0.21**</td>
<td>0.12**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in management</td>
<td>3.07 (1.17)</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.21**</td>
<td>-0.13**</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-0.11**</td>
<td>-0.19**</td>
<td>-0.11**</td>
<td>0.08*</td>
<td>0.15**</td>
<td>0.13**</td>
<td>0.12**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eval. of change comm.</td>
<td>3.01 (1.44)</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.10*</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.12**</td>
<td>-0.18**</td>
<td>-0.08*</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.14**</td>
<td>0.12**</td>
<td>0.08*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty of change comm.</td>
<td>3.16 (1.32)</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.10*</td>
<td>-0.10*</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>-0.16**</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.13**</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.08*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transp. of change comm.</td>
<td>3.22 (1.22)</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.20**</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.12**</td>
<td>-0.12**</td>
<td>-0.18**</td>
<td>0.12**</td>
<td>0.17**</td>
<td>0.18**</td>
<td>0.15**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciation</td>
<td>2.93 (1.30)</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.19**</td>
<td>-0.11**</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.14**</td>
<td>-0.18**</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.20**</td>
<td>0.12**</td>
<td>0.13**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>3.00 (1.32)</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.23**</td>
<td>-0.12**</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>-0.11**</td>
<td>-0.16**</td>
<td>-0.05*</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.19**</td>
<td>0.14**</td>
<td>0.15**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of support</td>
<td>2.77 (1.48)</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.15**</td>
<td>0.09**</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.17**</td>
<td>0.24**</td>
<td>0.12**</td>
<td>-0.12**</td>
<td>-0.20**</td>
<td>-0.18**</td>
<td>-0.15**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>3.48 (1.33)</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.11**</td>
<td>-0.12**</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.18**</td>
<td>-0.14**</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.32**</td>
<td>0.11**</td>
<td>0.11**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance</td>
<td>1.24 (0.63)</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.17**</td>
<td>0.11**</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-0.16**</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>4.03 (0.33)</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>-0.13**</td>
<td>-0.10*</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>-0.19**</td>
<td>-0.11**</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>0.10*</td>
<td>0.33**</td>
<td>0.18**</td>
<td>0.10**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>16</th>
<th>17</th>
<th>18</th>
<th>19</th>
<th>20</th>
<th>21</th>
<th>22</th>
<th>23</th>
<th>24</th>
<th>25</th>
<th>26</th>
<th>27</th>
<th>28</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management position</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of organization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of employ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for structure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skepticism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of the future</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to learn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal agility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-efficacy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence in decisions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Org. climate</td>
<td>0.53**</td>
<td>0.44**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Org. engagement</td>
<td>0.55**</td>
<td>0.50**</td>
<td>0.54**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in management</td>
<td>0.51**</td>
<td>0.50**</td>
<td>0.58**</td>
<td>0.57**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eval. of change comm.</td>
<td>0.40**</td>
<td>0.45**</td>
<td>0.49**</td>
<td>0.43**</td>
<td>0.62**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty of change comm.</td>
<td>0.37**</td>
<td>0.43**</td>
<td>0.46**</td>
<td>0.39**</td>
<td>0.58**</td>
<td>0.68**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transp. of change comm.</td>
<td>0.33**</td>
<td>0.41**</td>
<td>0.31**</td>
<td>0.35**</td>
<td>0.44**</td>
<td>0.53**</td>
<td>0.56**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciation</td>
<td>0.27**</td>
<td>0.31**</td>
<td>0.34**</td>
<td>0.34**</td>
<td>0.44**</td>
<td>0.48**</td>
<td>0.47**</td>
<td>0.59**</td>
<td>0.64**</td>
<td>0.54**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>0.28**</td>
<td>0.34**</td>
<td>0.35**</td>
<td>0.49**</td>
<td>0.52**</td>
<td>0.58**</td>
<td>0.60**</td>
<td>0.58**</td>
<td>0.70**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of support</td>
<td>-0.13**</td>
<td>-0.08**</td>
<td>-0.21**</td>
<td>-0.24**</td>
<td>-0.20**</td>
<td>-0.21**</td>
<td>-0.23**</td>
<td>-0.21**</td>
<td>-0.24**</td>
<td>-0.19**</td>
<td>0.25**</td>
<td>-0.32**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>0.30**</td>
<td>0.38**</td>
<td>0.31**</td>
<td>0.48**</td>
<td>0.40**</td>
<td>0.36**</td>
<td>0.39**</td>
<td>0.37**</td>
<td>0.49**</td>
<td>0.48**</td>
<td>-0.37**</td>
<td>0.52**</td>
<td>0.40**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01
decisions exerting a significant small negative effect ($\beta = -0.09, p < 0.05$). Among the personal characteristics, which explained about 11 percent of variance, openness for change was the only significant factor, exerting a small and positive effect on attitudes toward the change ($\beta = 0.19, p < 0.001$).

Explaining resistance to change

Regarding the dependent variable resistance to change, the overall model explains 14 percent of the variance. Again, the demographic variables did not account for any variance. Regarding personal characteristics, only skepticism ($\beta = 0.13, p < 0.01$) exerted a small significant positive effect, which means that those more skeptical toward new things are more likely to resist change. The largest share of variance is explained by the organizational context, which accounts for 6 percent. Involvement in decisions showed to

**Table II.** Regression models predicting attitudes, resistance, and support of change processes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Control variables</th>
<th>Attitude toward change</th>
<th>Resistance to change</th>
<th>Support of change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$B$ (SE)</td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
<td>$B$ (SE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.04 (0.10)</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.06 (0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.00 (0.01)</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.00 (0.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.13 (0.12)</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.24 (0.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management position</td>
<td>-0.04 (0.10)</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-0.07 (0.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of organization</td>
<td>-0.06 (0.09)</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.03 (0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of employment</td>
<td>-0.09 (0.10)</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.07 (0.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.03***</td>
<td>0.01***</td>
<td>0.03***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual predispositions</th>
<th>Attitude toward change</th>
<th>Resistance to change</th>
<th>Support of change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Need for structure</td>
<td>0.01 (0.04)</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01 (0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skepticism</td>
<td>-0.03 (0.05)</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.08 (0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of the future</td>
<td>0.02 (0.04)</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.04 (0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to learn</td>
<td>0.03 (0.06)</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.01 (0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness for change</td>
<td>0.27 (0.05)</td>
<td>0.19***</td>
<td>-0.04 (0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>-0.01 (0.05)</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.03 (0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal agility</td>
<td>-0.04 (0.06)</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.00 (0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-efficacy</td>
<td>-0.03 (0.06)</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.03 (0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.11***</td>
<td>0.01***</td>
<td>0.12***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational context</th>
<th>Attitude toward change</th>
<th>Resistance to change</th>
<th>Support of change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job satisfaction</td>
<td>-0.01 (0.05)</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.05 (0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence in decisions</td>
<td>-0.11 (0.05)</td>
<td>-0.09*</td>
<td>0.09 (0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational climate</td>
<td>-0.04 (0.05)</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.07 (0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational engagement</td>
<td>0.07 (0.06)</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>-0.11 (0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in management</td>
<td>0.07 (0.06)</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.00 (0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.14***</td>
<td>0.06***</td>
<td>0.19***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change communication</th>
<th>Attitude toward change</th>
<th>Resistance to change</th>
<th>Support of change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of change comm.</td>
<td>0.09 (0.05)</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.03 (0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty of change comm.</td>
<td>0.09 (0.05)</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>-0.03 (0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparency of change comm.</td>
<td>-0.12 (0.04)</td>
<td>-0.11**</td>
<td>-0.04 (0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciation</td>
<td>0.17 (0.05)</td>
<td>0.16**</td>
<td>-0.05 (0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>0.17 (0.05)</td>
<td>0.17***</td>
<td>0.01 (0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of support</td>
<td>-0.27 (0.04)</td>
<td>-0.30***</td>
<td>0.07 (0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.20***</td>
<td>0.04***</td>
<td>0.07***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Notes: *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$ | 679 |
slightly increase the tendency to resist change ($\beta = 0.16, p < 0.01$), while good organizational climate ($\beta = -0.11, p < 0.05$) and higher organizational engagement ($\beta = -0.17, p < 0.01$) decrease resistance. Regarding change communication, only higher levels of feeling powerless exerted a small positive effect ($\beta = 0.15, p < 0.001$), which means that feeling helpless during change processes increases active resistance.

**Explaining support for change**

Last, we analyzed how our model can predict employees’ likelihood to show support for change. Overall, our model explains about 37 percent of variance. Here, education level turned out to be a significant predictor for support for change ($\beta = 0.10, p < 0.05$) and the demographic variables overall account for 3 percent of the variance. Regarding personal characteristics, which accounts for 12 percent of variance, openness to change exerts a positive effect ($\beta = 0.18, p < 0.001$). The largest share of variance is explained by the organizational context, more specifically organizational engagement ($\beta = 0.28, p < 0.001$), which is a moderate predictor to support change. Last, change communication explains about 7 percent of the variance, with both involvement in the change ($\beta = 0.20, p < 0.001$) and appreciation ($\beta = 0.14, p < 0.01$) being small predictors for support for change.

**Discussion and conclusion**

Research on organizational change has identified a wide array of factors that explain employees’ attitudes and account for support or resistance in change processes. In comparison to previous research, our study aimed to provide an overall picture that allows a more differentiated assessment of these factors. Therefore, we categorized predictors along three dimensions and conducted three regression analyses to examine their influence on change reactions. This allows us to gain insights into how employees’ attitudes and behaviors toward a change process are shaped and how organizational change communication can affect them.

The first dimension, personal characteristics, comprises of a set of eight variables about employees’ individual attributes and predispositions, of which two turned out to be significant predictors (RQ1). First, skepticism predicted resistance to change, while at the same time being marginally significant on decreasing the likelihood to support change. This is in line with Kanter and Mirvis (1989) who found that people that are more skeptical tend to be more suspicious of organizational actions and show more resistance. Second, individuals’ openness for change was the sole predictor for a positive attitude toward the change and the main predictor for support of the change in this category. Mainly due to these two variables, the category of personal characteristics explains between 5 and 12 percent of the variance in the outcome variables. All other personal predisposition variables (e.g., self-efficacy and internal agility) did not predict the outcome variables significantly. Overall, personal predispositions explain employees’ attitudes, resistance to or support for change only to a limited extent.

The second dimension included variables concerning the organizational context in which the change takes place (RQ2). This includes variables about the employee–organization relationship and employees’ perception of the organizational climate. Here, neither job satisfaction nor trust in management are significant predictors for employees’ response to change. Our findings in this respect deviate from previous studies, which found that the degree of job satisfaction and trust in management increases employees’ willingness to support the change process (Stanley et al., 2005; Van den Heuvel et al., 2015).

Interestingly, an employees’ influence in decisions serves as a predictor for a negative attitude toward the change and an increased likelihood to resist the change. This is contrary to previous studies, stating that those who are able to contribute and exercise control show readiness for change and less resistance to it (Armenakis and Bedeian, 1999;
Eby et al., 2000). An explanation might be that those who have more influence in decisions occupy a higher standing in the organization and are thus more likely to speak up about problematic issues concerning the change process. However, those who showed more organizational engagement were less likely to resist and more likely to support the change. This can be explained by their increased organizational commitment and their willingness to act according to the organizations’ rules. Organizational climate exerted a negative effect on resisting the change process. This indicates that an organization that promotes a climate in which employees feel comfortable reduces their resistance to change processes. Overall, the organizational context can predict a considerable amount of variance of the employees’ attitude (14 percent) and support of change processes (19 percent).

Change communication (RQ3) is considered essential for managing employees’ expectations and concerns regarding the change, which can hinder resistance and create support for the process (Allen et al., 2007; Christensen, 2014; Elving, 2005). The communication variables account for a large share of variance (20 percent) regarding the attitude toward the change, which is due to most variables acting as (marginally) significant predictors. In line with existing theory, the perceived transparency, appreciation and participation in the change process results in a more positive attitude toward the change (Armenakis and Bedeian, 1999; Russ, 2008; Oreg et al., 2011). However, those feeling helpless showed more negative attitudes and resistance to the change. This underlines the importance of dialogue between the organization and its employees, instead of top–down ordering of the change (Russ, 2008). Employees need to feel valued by the organization and participate in the process, so they show support, which is necessary for the success of the change.

Overall, it should be emphasized that, albeit to different extents, all of our three identified dimensions proved to be relevant for how employees assess and react to organizational changes. This further underlines the challenges an organization has to face when implementing a change within complex organizational systems. Not only the organizational context is relevant, but also the individual predispositions of employees can affect the change outcome.

**Practical implications**

Our findings provide important implications for organizations undergoing change processes. First, organizations should not underestimate the importance of the employee–organization relationship, such as by promoting a good organizational climate, which can facilitate employees’ cooperation in change situations. The organizational management should work hand in hand with the communication department to create a positive climate and working environment, so that employees feel comfortable at work. This will likely strengthen employees’ commitment to their organization, which increases their support in change processes.

Second, skeptical people showed to be more likely to hinder successful change, while open people proved to be supportive. While it is beyond question that organizations cannot control their employees’ characters, they can try to identify distinct characters in their workforce and engage in an open dialogue with them. In this respect, change communication should be targeted toward the individual needs of the employees to persuade them of the necessity and advantages of the change.

Last, our findings show the importance of change communication in organizations, especially the way the change is expressed and enacted in the organization. Those in charge should ensure that they are transparent and clear about the steps of the change process and further engage in dialogue with the workforce. This way, employees feel appreciated and participate actively in the change, which increases the likelihood of their support. If this is neglected, employees will likely feel left alone by the organization in the change process. This in turn can result in resistance, which increases the chance that a change process fails.
Limitations and suggestions for future research

First, the findings of our study are limited due to our methodologic approach. Results are based on employees’ self-reported perceptions of the organizational change process. Since we do not know how much time had passed between the change process participants referred to and our survey, answers could be biased. For example, participants could have judged the change differently in retrospective. In addition, every change situation per respondent is unique. Changes can vary extensively based on their way of implementation, extend and personal impact on the employee, aspects that were not assessed in detail in our survey, but may influence individuals’ attitudes and behavior toward the change. Future research should, therefore, replicate our study within a single organization, where the change context can be controlled and comprehensive insights about the change process can be gained by incorporating additional data about the change, the organization and its communication activities. Another aspect concerns the representativeness of our sample, as the proportion of highly educated respondents is relatively high. This is also reflected in the ratio of leading position to subordinate employees which is one to two. However, our study assessed whether the respondents held supervising responsibilities, which also includes having a secretary or supervising interns, thus representing a broad definition of leading position. A further issue concerns the fact that all variables were assessed using single-item measures. This was done to avoid an extensive questionnaire. Future research could focus on fewer factors and assess those using multi-item measures. A last point is consequence of our cross-sectional design: Our data only captures the attitudes at one point in time, thus not allowing for comparison between the assessment before the change, during the process and after the change has taken place. Future research should, therefore, employ a longitudinal design for validation of our results.

Overall, our study shows that each of the three dimensions – individual predispositions, organizational context and change communication – affects the way employees perceive organizational change processes and react to them. However, analyzing how the three dimensions affect each other was beyond the scope of this study. Further research should, therefore, aim at shedding light on the relationship between the three dimensions as this could provide interesting insights into the interrelations between the different dimensions at the individual and organizational level.

References


Corresponding author
Charlotte Schulz-Knappe can be contacted at: schulz-knappe@uni-mainz.de

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website: www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm
Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com
Analyzing the corporate social responsibility disclosures of selected companies in India

Amritjot Kaur Sekhon and Lalit Mohan Kathuria
School of Business Studies, Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana, India

Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to analyze the extent, quantity and quality of corporate social responsibility (CSR) disclosures made by the top Indian companies in their annual reports.

Design/methodology/approach – This study analyzes the annual reports of the top 137 companies from CNX-500, over ten years, from 2008 to 2017. The technique of content analysis has been employed manually to examine the number of CSR activities disclosed, quantity and quality of CSR disclosures made by the selected companies in their annual reports. Also mean, percentages, trend analysis and analysis of variance have been employed to analyze the disclosures.

Findings – This study highlights that there is a continuous increase in the quantity of disclosures and the number of CSR activities disclosed by Indian companies over the selected period. It also observed that among the selected themes, most disclosed CSR activities are from “customer theme” and “community development theme.” Findings regarding the quality of CSR disclosures revealed that the “qualitative disclosures with specific information” are preferred most by the companies within India. Also, there is a significant variation in the quantity of CSR disclosures across the selected eight themes.

Originality/value – As most of the prior literature on CSR disclosures focused on developed countries in comparison to developing ones, this study contributes to the existing literature by carrying out an extensive investigation of this concept among the Indian companies. Moreover, there are very few studies addressing such a scientific inquiry in the Indian context, especially after the introduction of amendments in the Companies Act, 2013. Furthermore, this study utilizes a comprehensive research instrument consisting of a total of 178 CSR activities, divided across eight themes for collecting data on disclosures from the annual reports. This instrument can be used in the future studies on CSR disclosures in other developing countries as well.

Keywords Stakeholders, Corporate social responsibility, Content analysis, Disclosures, Annual reports, Indian companies

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction
Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has gained a lot of attention and popularity as a new concept among all the stakeholders (Kiliç et al., 2015). Recently in an interview, Paul Polman, the CEO of Unilever, asserted that in this world of increasing inequalities, poverty and climate change, a strong and successful business can no longer sustain; therefore, it is the responsibility of business to serve the society first (Harvard Business Review, 2017). Several previous studies have realized the importance of communication of CSR philosophy by the companies to their stakeholders (Slapničar, 2006; Yongvanich and Guthrie, 2006; Mathis, 2007; Camara et al., 2009; Carnevale et al., 2012). CSR reporting, as corporate communication and a marketing instrument, is used by companies to make their stakeholders judge them as legitimate (Nielsen and Thomsen, 2007; Podnar and Golob, 2007). Hence, the extent of CSR disclosures by firms can be assumed to convey their intentions to engage in CSR initiatives toward the society (Lone et al., 2016).

Over the years, the number of firms reporting their CSR initiatives have increased considerably (Fitka, 2013; Cho et al., 2015; Laidroo and Sokolova, 2015; Wang et al., 2018). With an increase in the adoption of socially responsible practices by firms, this concept has become quite popular in the emerging markets (Visser, 2008; Amini and Bianco, 2017).
Still, most of the studies on CSR have focused on developed economies only (Brown and Deegan, 1998; Orlitzky et al., 2003; Bird et al., 2007; Jamali, 2009), with comparatively fewer studies on emerging economies (Belal, 2001; Rashid and Ibrahim, 2002; Ahmad and Sulaiman, 2004; Thompson and Zakaria, 2004). Despite its growing popularity, CSR reporting is still voluntary in most of the countries of the world (Ortas et al., 2015). However, the Government of India took a major leap in this direction in 2013, by making it mandatory for the firms in India. India, designated as a business economy consisting of several state-owned firms (Arrive and Feng, 2018), introduced amendments in the Companies Act, 2013 [1], making it compulsory for companies to spend a fixed percentage of their profits on CSR activities while disclosing the same in their annual reports.

In the light of various changes observed in the landscape of CSR reporting within India over the past few years, this study, by analyzing the content, trends, quality and quantity of CSR disclosures made by Indian firms, contributes to the existing literature in several ways. First, acknowledging the dearth of literature regarding this scientific inquiry in emerging economies, this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by analyzing CSR disclosures in the Indian context. Second, not many studies have analyzed disclosures within India post-amendments in the Companies Act, 2013. This study, with the selected period from 2008 to 2017, takes into consideration CSR disclosures by companies from both periods, before reforms as well as after reforms, which adds to its originality. Third, this study analyzes annual reports of 137 companies for the last ten years (with 1,370 company years of sample size), to understand CSR disclosures, which proves to be an extensive investigation. Fourth, the study investigates the extent, quality and quantity of disclosures in annual reports across eight broad themes of CSR, which presents an in-depth and detailed picture of the concept. Fifth, this study employs a research instrument, consisting of a total of 178 CSR activities divided across eight themes, for collecting data on CSR disclosures from annual reports of the company. This enormous scoring instrument, built for this study, is based on several national and international standards prevalent on the topic of CSR throughout the world.

The paper is organized as follows: in the next section, the prior literature on the CSR disclosures and practices is presented. After which, methodology and data utilized for the study are described, followed by the presentation and discussion of the results. Finally, the study concludes with a summary of the findings, and implications are presented, followed by research limitations at the end.

2. Prior literature
Though the concept of CSR is quite popular, there is no single definition appropriate enough to explain it (Dahlsrud, 2008; Braendle and Rahdari, 2016). Over the years, several theories have evolved to develop a better understanding of CSR (Arthur et al., 2017). Several prior studies rely on agency theory, stakeholder theory and legitimacy theory to explain the motivation behind social responsibility reporting by companies (Hamid and Atan, 2011). According to the agency theory, companies make CSR disclosures in their annual reports to reduce future agency costs which may arise in the form of regulation (Trotman and Bradley, 1981; Belkouai and Karpik, 1989). Subsequently, stakeholder theory states that business has a responsibility to create as much value as possible for all its stakeholders which include shareholders, employees, customers, suppliers, financial institutions, community, government, political parties, etc. by managing their individual interests (Freeman, 1984). By making CSR disclosures companies show their sensitivity to the needs of society (Kansal and Singh, 2012). Hence, companies shall make disclosures on different CSR indicators to meet the requirements of all their stakeholders (Patten, 1991; Donaldson and Preston, 1995; Mitchell et al., 1997; Deegan et al., 2000; Idowu and Papasolomou, 2007). Furthermore, legitimacy theory supports the perspective that companies by disclosing this information in
their annual reports signal their legitimacy to the society (Suchman, 1995; Deegan et al., 2002; Campbell et al., 2003). However, both legitimacy theory and stakeholder theory share overlapping viewpoints, which are neither separate nor competing with each other (Gray et al., 1995, 2001). Also, stakeholder theory is the most popular theory for CSR studies and has served as the basis for several research studies in the past (Roberts, 1992; Clarkson, 1995; Waddock and Graves, 1997; Barnett, 2005; Saleh et al., 2010). Hence, this study by using the stakeholder theory as its basis analyzes the CSR disclosures made by Indian companies.

In the context of developing economies, research study by Singh and Ahuja (1983) was the first to examine CSR disclosures by companies in an emerging market economy (Belal, 2001). This study analyzed annual reports of 40 public Indian companies to examine the extent of their CSR disclosures across 33 activities. The study found that almost 40 percent of the total sample companies reported more than 30 percent of the selected CSR activities. Similarly, Tsang (1998) analyzed CSR disclosures, categorized across four themes, by 33 firms in Singapore, for over ten years, from 1986 to 1995. It observed that the disclosures have increased over the selected time with a total of 52 percent of the selected companies making disclosures. Later, Abu-Baker and Naser (2000) analyzed CSR practices by 143 firms in Jordan. It examined the disclosures categorized across five themes, namely, environment, energy, human resources, products and community involvement. Among these selected themes, human resources and community involvement themes were observed to be the most disclosed. It was also found that CSR reporting overall was receiving very modest attention by the companies in Jordan.

For Malaysian firms, Thompson and Zakaria (2004) observed CSR disclosures to be very low. However, in contrast, Ratanajongkol et al. (2006) observed an increase in CSR disclosures among companies in Thailand over its study period. Also, human resources theme was observed to be the most disclosed among selected five themes of disclosures. In the Indian banking sector, Hossain et al. (2006) examined the extent of CSR disclosures by 38 listed companies. The selected companies were observed to be making a considerable amount of voluntary disclosures. Later, Kansal and Singh (2012), with the addition of customer theme, emission of carbon and harmful gases theme and other CSR activities theme to the previously discussed five themes, analyzed CSR disclosures across total eight themes by Indian companies. Community development theme and human resources theme were observed to be the most disclosed themes by companies in India.

Haji (2013) examined the CSR disclosures made by Malaysian companies at the time of financial crises and regulatory changes. The study found a significantly increasing trend in CSR disclosures following the changes in the market place. Also, in the study by Bhatia and Chander (2014), examining the extent of CSR disclosures by companies in India, a steady increase in disclosures among companies was found. The study observed that the most disclosed themes were community involvement theme and environment theme. Therefore, based on these past investigations, the present study also analyses CSR disclosures by Indian companies across eight themes. This study examines the extent, quality and quantity of these CSR disclosures in the annual reports of the selected companies.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data

The initial sample to analyze CSR disclosures consisted of top 150 companies listed on CNX 500. CNX 500 is the first broad-based stock market index in the Indian stock market. In consistence with prior studies (Guthrie and Parker, 1990; Hackston and Milne, 1996; Thompson and Zakaria, 2004; Saleh et al., 2010), companies were selected on the basis of
their higher market capitalization ranking. The study covered a period of ten years, from 2008 to 2017. For this study, annual reports were downloaded either from websites of the individual company or from the database Report Junction, which is an exhaustive database for the annual reports of the companies. Hence, annual reports of the top 150 companies of CNX-500 were downloaded for 10 years from the financial year 2008–2009 to 2016–2017. However, a total of 36 annual reports were neither available on company websites nor in Report Junction. As these missing reports do not form a part of the total sample size, the final sample size was reduced to 137 companies.

3.2 Content analysis

In this study, the technique of content analysis was employed manually for collecting data from annual reports of the selected companies. Previously, content analysis has been widely employed to analyze the annual reports of the companies in several studies (Ng, 1985; Guthrie and Parker, 1990; Gray et al., 1995, 2001; Hackston and Milne, 1996; Milne and Adler, 1999; Williams and Pei, 1999; Newson and Deegan, 2002; Hamid and Atan, 2011). Content analysis is an objective procedure (Cochran and Wood, 1984; Odera et al., 2016) for codifying text (or content) of a piece of writing into various groups (or categories) depending on the selection criteria (Weber, 1990). In the previous studies, an essential three-step process proposed by Krippendorff (1980) was employed (Hall, 2002; Raman, 2006; Azim et al., 2009). These three steps are discussed in subsequent paragraphs.

The first step is selecting an appropriate document to conduct the analysis. The main premise of legitimacy theory is that companies signal their legitimacy to society by disclosing information in their annual reports (Gray et al., 1995). So, annual report serves as the major source of communication for company stakeholders, as information published in annual reports has been recognized to possess high credibility (Abbott and Monsen, 1979; Singh and Ahuja, 1983; Belkaoui and Karpik, 1989; Tilt, 1994; Belal, 2001; Sobhani et al., 2009). Also, annual report being the main official document of a company, is published regularly and is the most accessible source of information (Christopher et al., 1991; Sumiani et al., 2007; Hamid and Atan, 2011). Several previous research studies have used annual reports of companies for content analysis (Azim et al., 2009; Saleh et al., 2010; Rouf, 2011; Bhatia and Chander, 2014; Yapa et al., 2018). Moreover, there is non-availability of a CSR index or database in India, and the sustainability reports are not much popular among Indian companies (Mishra and Suar, 2010). Also, the Government of India made it mandatory for companies to disclose information on CSR expenditure and activities in their annual reports. Hence, in this study, annual reports of companies have been used as a source for collecting data on CSR disclosures.

The second step is determining the unit of measurement of the content. In the previous literature, three types of measurement methods have been employed, namely, word count (Zeghal and Ahmed, 1990; Deegan and Gordon, 1996; Rashid and Lodh, 2008; Kimbro and Cao, 2011), sentence count (Hackston and Milne, 1996; Milne and Adler, 1999; Tsang, 1998; Deegan et al., 2000; Chatterjee and Mir, 2008; Aras et al., 2010; Saleh et al., 2010) and page count (Patten, 1991; Gray et al., 1995; Belal, 2001; Newson and Deegan, 2002). There is a lot of debate about the appropriate method for the measurement of disclosures (Gray et al., 1995; Tilt, 1994). It is doubtful to use words as a unit of measurement, as individual words convey no meaning in the absence of a sentence to provide the context (Tilt, 1994; Milne and Adler, 1999). Using the number of pages for measurement is also criticized as annual reports of the companies vary widely in terms of quality and format due to different font size, margin and graphics (Ng, 1985; Tilt, 1994; Hackston and Milne, 1996). As most of the previous studies, employed sentence count for measuring the quantity of disclosures (Hackston and Milne, 1996; Milne and Adler, 1999; Tsang, 1998; Deegan et al., 2000; Chatterjee and Mir, 2008; Aras et al., 2010; Saleh et al., 2010), in this study also “sentences” is used as a unit of measurement.
The third and final step is identifying the categories into which the analyzed content can be classified. Most of the prior studies on CSR disclosures analyzed only the nature and extent of disclosures (Sobhani et al., 2009). However, some studies examined both the extent and quality of CSR disclosures by companies (Jaffar et al., 2007; Haji, 2013). Some studies analyzed only the quantity of CSR disclosures in the annual reports (Tsang, 1998; Milne and Adler, 1999; Belal, 2001; Boesso and Kumar, 2007). Furthermore, some studies analyzed all three, i.e., extent, quality and quantity of CSR disclosures made by firms (Guthrie and Parker, 1990). Hence, this study classifies the information into three categories: theme or content, form or quality, and volume or quantity.

3.3 Research instrument and scoring methodology

A Corporate Social Responsibility Disclosure Index (CSRDI) was developed to serve as the main research instrument for collecting data from the annual reports of the selected companies manually, using the technique of content analysis. The Index developed by Kansal et al. (2014) was used as the base instrument with minor changes by including CSR activities mentioned in Schedule VII of Companies Act, 2013 and Business Responsibility Report by Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), to make it more suitable for Indian environment. Further, this index was refined on the basis of global standards which include Sustainable Development Goals, ten principles of United Nations Global Compact and Global Reporting Initiatives for sustainability reporting. Thus, the final index covered eight broader themes, namely, “community development theme,” “human resources theme,” “energy theme,” “environment theme,” “product, services-safety and innovation theme,” “customers theme,” “emission of carbon and harmful gases theme” and “other CSR activities theme.” These broader themes were further divided into 178 activities.

In consistence with prior studies (Hughes et al., 2001; Al-Tuwaijri et al., 2004; Saleh et al., 2010), an un-weighted disclosure scoring approach was employed in this study. To analyze the extent of disclosures across selected themes and years, a two-point scale system was adopted. On the index, CSR activities for which disclosures were made in the annual report were given score 1 and the CSR activities for which no disclosures were made were given score 0. For analyzing the quantity of disclosures, the number of sentences on each CSR activity disclosed in annual reports of companies were counted. To investigate the quality of CSR, each disclosure in the annual report was classified as either “qualitative” or “qualitative with specific information” or “quantitative” in nature and was assigned weights accordingly. The greatest weight of 3 was assigned to “quantitative disclosure(s),” the next highest weight of 2 was assigned to “qualitative disclosure(s) but with specific information,” weight of 1 was assigned to “qualitative disclosure(s) which were described in general with no specific information,” and weight of 0 was given in case of “no disclosure(s).”

The statistical techniques, namely, mean, percentages, trend analysis and analysis of variance (ANOVA) have been employed to analyze the extent, quality and quantity of disclosures. The descriptive statistics on the number and percentage of companies making CSR disclosures, number of CSR activities disclosed, quality of disclosures and the amount of disclosures have been calculated and analyzed by using Microsoft Excel. However, trend analysis and ANOVA test have been conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

4. Results and discussion

Table I presents the descriptive statistics for the number of CSR activities disclosed by selected 137 companies over ten years from 2008 to 2017, in their annual reports. The results show that out of total 178 CSR activities included in the research instrument, in 2008, minimum activities disclosed were only 17 (9.5 percent), which gradually increased to 51 (28.6 percent) in 2017. The maximum number of CSR activities reported in 2008 were 114
### Table I.
Descriptive statistics of CSR activities disclosed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minimum number of activities disclosed</td>
<td>17 (9.5)</td>
<td>28 (15.7)</td>
<td>31 (17.4)</td>
<td>31 (17.4)</td>
<td>38 (21.3)</td>
<td>33 (18.5)</td>
<td>39 (21.9)</td>
<td>39 (21.9)</td>
<td>50 (28.1)</td>
<td>51 (28.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum number of activities disclosed</td>
<td>114 (64)</td>
<td>121 (68)</td>
<td>124 (69.7)</td>
<td>130 (73)</td>
<td>133 (74.7)</td>
<td>135 (75.8)</td>
<td>148 (83.1)</td>
<td>159 (89.3)</td>
<td>162 (91)</td>
<td>160 (89.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of activities disclosed</td>
<td>71 (39.9)</td>
<td>73 (41.2)</td>
<td>78 (43.9)</td>
<td>84 (47.4)</td>
<td>87 (48.7)</td>
<td>90 (50.5)</td>
<td>101 (56.9)</td>
<td>124 (69.6)</td>
<td>126 (71)</td>
<td>124 (69.7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** The numbers denote the number of disclosed CSR activities and numbers within brackets denote their percentage.
(64 percent), which increased to 160 (89.9 percent) by 2017. The average number of activities disclosed by the selected companies were 71 (39.9 percent) in 2008, which increased to 124 (69.7 percent) in 2017.

Table II reports the descriptive statistics of a number of companies making CSR disclosures in their annual reports across each selected year and theme. The table shows that out of the selected sample, number of companies making disclosures has been high throughout the study with 136 companies (99.3 percent) in 2008, 134 companies (97.8 percent) in 2011 and all 137 companies (100 percent) in other years of study. The activities from “customer theme” were observed to be most reported by companies within the sample. Other themes with most disclosed activities by selected companies were “community development theme,” “human resources theme,” and “product, services-safety and innovation theme,” respectively. The activities from the “emission of carbon and harmful gases theme” were least reported by companies in their annual reports.

As demonstrated in Table III on quality of disclosures across years, the percentage of “qualitative disclosures with no specific information” has consistently decreased over the years from 67.8 percent in 2008 to 22.3 percent in 2017, while the percentage of “qualitative disclosures with specific information” has increased persistently from 17.3 percent in 2008 to 52.1 percent in 2017. And, the percentage of “quantitative disclosures” has gradually and continuously increased from 14.9 percent in 2008 to 25.6 percent in 2017. In the year 2008, maximum disclosures being made were “qualitative with no specific information” (67.8 percent) with “quantitative disclosures” being lowest (14.9 percent). However, by the end of the study period in 2017, the maximum disclosures were of “qualitative nature with specific information” (52.1 percent) followed by “quantitative disclosures” (25.6 percent) with “qualitative disclosures with no information” (22.3 percent) becoming the lowest. Hence, it can be inferred that over the selected years, the proportion of “qualitative disclosures” by companies has increased while “qualitative disclosures with no specific information” has decreased. However, “qualitative disclosures with specific information” were the most preferred form of disclosures by the companies in India.

As observed in Table IV, the maximum proportion of “quantitative disclosures” was from “energy theme” (41.9 percent) while the lowest in this category was from “customers theme” (3.2 percent). No “quantitative disclosures” related to “other CSR activities theme” were made during the selected time period. In “qualitative disclosures with particular information,” maximum contribution was made by “customers theme” (53.7 percent) and lowest by “energy theme” (12 percent). In terms of “qualitative disclosures with no special information,” “emission of carbon and harmful gases theme” contributed the maximum (72.5 percent) and “product, services-safety and innovation theme” (23.9 percent) shared the lowest.

Table V demonstrates a consistent increase in the average number of sentences aggregated over all themes from 214.1 sentences in 2008 to 448.9 sentences in 2017. The maximum quantity of disclosures in annual reports was observed to be made for activities from “community development theme” and “human resource theme”.

The activities from “other CSR activities theme” and “emission of carbon and harmful gases theme” were found to share the lowest quantity of disclosures over the selected time period. The results of trend analysis indicate the existence of a positive and highly significant trend during the period of study across all the themes of CSR and the trend coefficient is found to be significantly different from zero across each theme.

ANOVA was applied using SPSS software, to investigate variation across the quantity of CSR disclosures made by selected companies in their annual reports across the selected themes. Table VI reveals that the mean value is highest for “human resources theme” (92.06) and “community development theme” (90.15). Hence, these two themes are the most disclosed themes of CSR with the maximum quantity of disclosures. The mean value came out to be the lowest for “other CSR activities theme” (12.94) and “emission of carbon and
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total CSR disclosing companies</th>
<th>Community development</th>
<th>Human resource</th>
<th>Energy</th>
<th>Environment</th>
<th>Product, services-safety and innovation</th>
<th>Customers</th>
<th>Emission of carbon and harmful gases</th>
<th>Other CSR activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>136 (99.3)</td>
<td>117 (85.4)</td>
<td>105 (76.6)</td>
<td>95 (69.3)</td>
<td>97 (70.8)</td>
<td>121 (88.3)</td>
<td>136 (99.3)</td>
<td>41 (29.9)</td>
<td>52 (38.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>137 (100.0)</td>
<td>123 (89.8)</td>
<td>104 (75.9)</td>
<td>96 (71.5)</td>
<td>95 (69.3)</td>
<td>122 (89.0)</td>
<td>137 (100.0)</td>
<td>52 (38.0)</td>
<td>55 (40.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>137 (100.0)</td>
<td>127 (92.7)</td>
<td>117 (85.4)</td>
<td>108 (78.8)</td>
<td>98 (71.5)</td>
<td>125 (91.2)</td>
<td>137 (100.0)</td>
<td>47 (34.3)</td>
<td>78 (56.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>134 (97.8)</td>
<td>121 (90.5)</td>
<td>110 (80.3)</td>
<td>106 (77.4)</td>
<td>101 (73.7)</td>
<td>125 (91.2)</td>
<td>134 (97.8)</td>
<td>50 (36.5)</td>
<td>98 (71.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>137 (100.0)</td>
<td>135 (92.0)</td>
<td>112 (81.7)</td>
<td>109 (78.6)</td>
<td>101 (73.7)</td>
<td>129 (94.2)</td>
<td>137 (100.0)</td>
<td>61 (44.5)</td>
<td>119 (86.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>137 (100.0)</td>
<td>130 (94.9)</td>
<td>120 (87.6)</td>
<td>114 (83.2)</td>
<td>107 (78.1)</td>
<td>124 (90.5)</td>
<td>137 (100.0)</td>
<td>82 (59.8)</td>
<td>127 (92.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>137 (100.0)</td>
<td>133 (97.1)</td>
<td>125 (91.2)</td>
<td>117 (85.4)</td>
<td>115 (83.9)</td>
<td>131 (95.6)</td>
<td>137 (100.0)</td>
<td>102 (74.4)</td>
<td>132 (96.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>137 (100.0)</td>
<td>134 (97.8)</td>
<td>134 (97.8)</td>
<td>126 (92.0)</td>
<td>121 (88.3)</td>
<td>134 (97.8)</td>
<td>137 (100.0)</td>
<td>103 (75.2)</td>
<td>133 (97.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>137 (100.0)</td>
<td>135 (98.5)</td>
<td>135 (98.5)</td>
<td>126 (92.0)</td>
<td>129 (84.2)</td>
<td>137 (100.0)</td>
<td>137 (100.0)</td>
<td>105 (76.6)</td>
<td>134 (97.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>137 (100.0)</td>
<td>133 (97.1)</td>
<td>135 (98.5)</td>
<td>122 (89.0)</td>
<td>126 (92.0)</td>
<td>134 (97.8)</td>
<td>137 (100.0)</td>
<td>105 (76.6)</td>
<td>135 (98.3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The numbers denote the number of companies making disclosures and numbers within brackets denote the percentage of such companies.
harmful gases theme” (15.8). The calculated F-value came out to be 60.957, with p-value 0.000 which indicates that there is a significant variation in the quantity of disclosures across all selected themes of CSRD at 1 percent level of significance.

5. Conclusion and implications

This study examines the extent, quality and quantity of CSR disclosures made by Indian companies in their annual reports. The study highlights that there is a continuous increase in the number of CSR activities disclosed by Indian companies over the selected time period, indicating an increasing interest within them toward their social responsibilities. The results reveal that the extent of CSR disclosures among Indian companies is quite high with each company in the sample making CSR disclosures in its annual reports. It was found that among the selected themes, most disclosed CSR activities were from “customer theme” and “community development theme.” Findings on the quality of CSR disclosures reveal that “qualitative disclosures with specific information” are most preferred by the companies within India. Also, it was observed that the proportion of “quantitative disclosures” has increased continuously while that of “qualitative disclosures with no information” has decreased over the selected time period. Within selected themes, maximum percentage of “quantitative disclosures” were observed to be from “energy theme” (41.9 percent), maximum “qualitative disclosures with no special information” were from “emission of carbon and harmful gases theme” (72.5 percent) and maximum “qualitative disclosures with specific information” were from “customers theme” (53.7 percent).

The study also indicates a continuous increase in the quantity of CSR disclosures made in annual reports over the selected period of study. The “community development theme” is the theme with the maximum volume of disclosures, which conveys the notion of increasing interest among the Indian corporates toward the social and community development projects. Also, as activities from “human resources theme” are ranked second in terms of quantity of disclosures, so this conveys the importance of employee wellbeing in the Indian industry.
The quantity of disclosures on “other CSR activities theme” was found to be the lowest. The results of trend analysis indicate the existence of a positive and highly significant trend during the study period of ten years across all the themes of CSR. ANOVA test reveals that there is a significant variation in the quantity of disclosures across selected themes of CSR disclosures. These results further support the acceptance of new CSR policies under Companies Act, 2013.

### Table V. Quantity and trend of disclosures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Community development</th>
<th>Human resource</th>
<th>Energy</th>
<th>Environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>48.78</td>
<td>62.41</td>
<td>11.05</td>
<td>23.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>57.33</td>
<td>68.12</td>
<td>13.14</td>
<td>25.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>70.02</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>14.68</td>
<td>28.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>79.87</td>
<td>82.52</td>
<td>16.27</td>
<td>30.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>86.38</td>
<td>87.52</td>
<td>18.44</td>
<td>32.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>97.69</td>
<td>95.88</td>
<td>20.89</td>
<td>35.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>112.17</td>
<td>104.93</td>
<td>24.34</td>
<td>39.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>114.66</td>
<td>111.22</td>
<td>22.93</td>
<td>43.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>115.71</td>
<td>114.08</td>
<td>23.02</td>
<td>44.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>118.82</td>
<td>115.9</td>
<td>23.33</td>
<td>45.63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Trend equation**

- Community development: $TE = 44.46 + 8.3T, R^2 = 0.96, t = 13.76 (p = 0.000)$
- Human resource: $TE = 57.22 + 6.3T, R^2 = 0.98, t = 22.15 (p = 0.000)$
- Energy: $TE = 10.55 + 1.5T, R^2 = 0.90, t = 8.56 (p = 0.000)$
- Environment: $TE = 20.16 + 2.68T, R^2 = 0.98, t = 21.44 (p = 0.000)$

### Table VI. Significance of variations across all themes of CSRD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>F-value (p-value)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community development</td>
<td>90.15</td>
<td>25.67</td>
<td>60.957 (0.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human resources</td>
<td>92.06</td>
<td>19.331</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy</td>
<td>18.81</td>
<td>4.786</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>34.90</td>
<td>8.184</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product, services-safety and innovation</td>
<td>51.36</td>
<td>8.646</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customers</td>
<td>32.87</td>
<td>7.669</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emission of carbon and harmful gases</td>
<td>15.80</td>
<td>6.238</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other CSR activities</td>
<td>12.94</td>
<td>6.567</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>43.61</td>
<td>32.394</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Significant at 1 percent level of significance.
by companies within India. As the Government of India recommended activities covered under “community development theme” in this study for CSR expenditure, so an increase in CSR disclosures from this theme indicates that Indian companies are abiding by the law.

As previously discussed that most of the prior literature on CSR disclosures focused on developed countries compared to developing countries, this study contributes to the existing literature by carrying out an extensive investigation of this concept among Indian companies. Also, the comprehensive framework consisting of 178 CSR activities, developed for the purpose of this study, can be utilized in future studies in the developing countries. For company management, this study offers major implications. Primarily, it suggests that by CSR communication, companies can connect suppliers, customers, communities, employees and government together, creating a synergy and opportunities for future partnerships. Moreover, by disclosing social responsibility information to all the stakeholders, companies can improve their brand image within society and boost the employee morale. This could indirectly benefit the company’s profitability and organizational culture, leading to a better performance in the long run. Furthermore, by CSR reporting, companies can prove their value system to be in consistence with the value system of society and environment, thus legitimizing their corporate actions. From the perspective of policy-makers, this study showcases that as the community development projects are gaining the most attention, which is proving to be very helpful for development of local communities. Moreover, it also suggests that by including more activities and projects related to the “environment theme” and “emission of carbon and harmful gases theme” in the list of mandatory CSR activities under Annexure-VII of the Companies Act, 2013, the Government of India can take a major leap in tackling environmental and pollution related problems of the country.

6. Limitations and future research suggestions
Though the present study provides useful implications for both theory and practice, but, several limitations exist in terms of the generalizability and interpretation of the results. First, the study focused only on annual reports, which presents an incomplete picture of CSR practices by the companies. There are several other sources of information on CSR like sustainability reports, websites, newspapers and magazines which have been ignored in the study. Future studies may include these additional resources for a better understanding of the disclosure practices being followed in India. Second, there may have been some errors in analyzing the content of annual reports manually, although steps were taken to minimize the possible errors. Third, though the activities included in the index were selected on the basis of an extensive review of the existing literature, still there is a possibility that some important items might have been left out. Fourth, the universe for the present study was CNX 500, which includes major companies in terms of market capitalization. As no small company has been included in the sample, it may have affected the generalizability of results. Hence, future studies may consider taking a larger sample size by including medium-sized and small companies for analysis.

Note
1. Companies Act 2013 is an Act of the Indian Parliament on Indian company law which regulates incorporation, responsibilities, directors and dissolution of companies in India.

References


**Further reading**


**About the authors**

Dr Amritjot Kaur Sekhon completed her PhD in Business Administration from Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana, India. She completed her MBA from Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar with distinction. She is also Junior Research Fellowship (JRF) holder under University Grants Commission (UGC) of India and worked as Senior Research Fellow. Her current research interests include sustainability, corporate social responsibility and corporate political responsibility. Dr Amritjot Kaur Sekhon is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: amritjotkaursekhon@gmail.com

Dr Lalit Mohan Kathuria is Professor in the School of Business Studies at Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana, India, and has 25 years of teaching and corporate experience. He has published several research papers in reputed international and national journals like *Food Quality and Preference*, *British Food Journal*, *Journal of Food Products Marketing*, *Competitiveness Review*, *South Asian Journal of Management*, *International Journal of Indian Culture and Business Management*, *Global Business Review*, etc. and also co-authored two books. He has successfully completed two Government of India sponsored research projects as principal investigator/co-principal investigator. He remained Member of the Editorial Board of the journal published by one of the local chapters of the All India Management Association. His current research interests include analyzing bottom-of-the-pyramid consumers’ food purchase behavior, food marketing, brand management and sector-specific competitiveness.
Employees as ambassadors: embracing new role expectations and coping with identity-tensions

Rickard Andersson
Department of Strategic Communication, Lund University, Helsingborg, Sweden

Abstract

Purpose – To provide an employee perspective on ambassadorship in the context of corporate communication, the purpose of this paper is to explore how employees relate to and experience ambassadorship.

Design/methodology/approach – The study has a qualitative approach, and the empirical material consists of semi-structured interviews with, and focus groups of, employees of seven organizations in both the public and private sectors. The paper draws on a contemporary understanding of identity where identity is perceived as an ongoing reflexive process in which employees negotiate and construct of their selves through relating to role expectations and interacting with others. Therefore, ambassadorship is understood as a social-identity, or persona, that is referenced by employees in their identity work.

Findings – The findings indicate that employees embrace this persona as they imagine that external stakeholders, colleagues and managers expect it of them. However, the ambassador persona also gives rise to identity-tensions both during work and off work.

Research limitations/implications – The paper contributes a novel way to understand ambassadorship as well as highlighting some of the more problematic aspects of it and furthering the understanding of the concept.

Practical implications – The findings highlight that ambassadorship can have problematic consequences that needs to be addressed. They suggest that the employee perspective should be taken into consideration in internal communication education and training.

Originality/value – The paper contributes a novel employee perspective on ambassadorship.

Keywords Employee communication, Ambassadorship, Identity, Identity work, Identity-tensions

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

There is a growing consensus within corporate communication that employees are important communicators, as “interactions between organizational members and external stakeholders is of vital importance” for intangible assets such as the brand and reputation (Heide et al., 2018, p. 462). One of the most frequently used concepts for describing employees’ active role as communicators is the concept of ambassadorship (e.g. Frandsen and Johansen, 2011; Heide and Simonsson, 2011; Heide et al., 2018; Opitz et al., 2018). Its frequent use within corporate communication is perhaps best understood by how it enables researchers to address employees’ communication behavior in relation to two central concepts in the field of corporate communication – value creation and alignment (see Volk and Zerfass, 2018; Zerfass and Viertmann, 2017). At present, the perspective on employees as active communicators and ambassadors is starting to extend beyond academic debate and enter internal communication management, as it is taken into consideration by managers (Andersson, 2019).

However, while the idea that employees should be conceived as ambassadors has been popularized in recent years, few have actually explored ambassadorship more closely (Opitz et al., 2018). Those researchers who have contributed to the idea that employees should
be conceived of as ambassadors most often depart from a managerial perspective, where ambassadorship is described as a normative ideal where employees deliver a communicative behavior in interactions with external stakeholders that is aligned with how managers want the organization to be perceived, thereby creating intangible value (Heide et al., 2018). However, due to how ambassadorship has been approached so far, little is known about how employees themselves relate to and experience this role expectation.

In relation to the lack of an employee perspective, it is also surprising that no studies have taken an interest in how employees relate to ambassadorship when constructing and negotiating their identity. Contemporary management research argues that organizational members, “structure and reconstruct their identities in the light of pressures and organizational changes” (Pullen, 2006, p. 25), and as employees increasingly are encouraged to think of themselves as communicators and ambassadors, it is reasonable to expect that employees to a greater extent relate to this role expectation, as such expectations are important to their identity work through which they construct and negotiate their identity (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003; Watson, 2008). So far, identity has only been addressed explicitly by corporate communication researchers suggesting that the tendency of employees to act as ambassadors derives from the fact that organizational identity forms part of their personal identity (Frandsen and Johansen, 2011; Opitz et al., 2018), and implicitly by those who argue that employees embody their organization (Dreher, 2014), and potentially can “live the brand” (Heide and Simonsson, 2011).

If we are to gain a better understanding of employees’ role as ambassadors and active communicators, greater attention must be placed upon how employees themselves relate to and experience these role expectations. Therefore, the aim of this study is to analyze how employees relate to and experience ambassadorship. This study focuses on identity to analyze how employees relate to and experience ambassadorship, and uses identity work as an analytical lens. Identity work was deemed appropriate in relation to the employee perspective, as this lens is attentive to how employees reference and experience role expectations, such as ambassadorship, when constructing and negotiating their self-identity. Building on especially Watson’s (2008) idea of social-identities, or personas, ambassadorship is in this study perceived as a persona available in the socially available discourses that employees reference in their identity work, and that employees especially are expected to enact when interacting with external stakeholders.

Ambassadorship, branding and communicative capitalism
The conception of employees as ambassadors, or brand ambassadors, has its roots in research strands that are more management-oriented. The concept was originally introduced in brand management for describing and conceptualizing employees’ contribution to brand equity (e.g. Gelb and Rangarajan, 2014; Harris and De Chernatony, 2001; Ind, 2001). As ambassadors, employees are understood to internalize the organizational/brand identity and values, and deliver them as part of their own identity in interactions with stakeholders (Harris and De Chernatony, 2001; Karmark, 2005). Advocates of this view conceive it as a necessary perspective-shift on employees, following the shift in power over the brand from the inside to the outside of the organization – to customers and stakeholders (Ind, 2017). As brands become increasingly hard to control, managers should “empower” employees to take responsibility for the brand, as employees, if they understand the brand, can “create relevant value for other stakeholders” (Ind, 2017, p. 7) – and, consequently, value the organization.

However, Müller (2018) argued that while a metaphor such as ambassadorship on the one hand signals “empowerment” and encourages employees to take control of the brand, it simultaneously signals that they are expected to deliver it in a particular way, and thus, these types of encouragements also have a control-dimension. In a recent study, Müller (2017) found that internal branding efforts in training employees to internalize the
brand made them constantly aware that they are brand representatives. Thus, by explicating the ambassador role expectation, organizations manage to regulate employees from the inside (cf. Alvesson and Willmott, 2002).

To understand why the perspective of employees as ambassadors has become increasingly common in organizations, it is necessary to view it in relation to the growing influence of branding as a central organizing principle, both in contemporary society and in organizations (Arvidsson, 2006; Kornberger, 2010; Muminby, 2016). Contemporary society has been described by more critically oriented researchers as a “communicative capitalism” (Dean, 2009, 2014), in which it is communication rather than labor that is exploited by organizations to create surplus value. In this modern form of capitalism, value creation has therefore moved from the factory to processes of communication as organizations increasingly rely on how convincingly they communicatively create meaningful worlds through ongoing branding processes, rather than producing and exchanging products and services (Muminby, 2016).

It is in relation to this development that the role of employees has become increasingly central, as they have the possibility to deliver and co-construct the brand meaning in interaction with stakeholders. Muminby (2016) refers to the contribution of employees and consumers in these branding processes as “communicative labor” (see also Carlone, 2008) – an immaterial form of labor “in which everyday communication and social interaction is ‘put to work’ in order to create economic value” (p. 889).

Ambassadorship in corporate communication: employees as active communicators

The importance of communication and interaction between employees and stakeholders is thus increasingly acknowledged to be central for the communication processes in which the organization is ongoingly constituted and negotiated. Within corporate communication, ambassadorship has become a popular concept for describing this communicative importance of employees. Employees are nowadays perceived as active communicators both in general (Heide and Simonsson, 2011; Kim and Rhee, 2011; Mazzei, 2010, 2014; Mazzei et al., 2012), and in the context of social media in particular (Dreher, 2014; Madsen, 2016; Madsen and Verhoeven, 2016). Additionally, as the organizational brand and reputation increasingly are perceived as key organizational assets, Heide et al. (2018) suggested that employees must be understood as vital for enhancing these intangible assets as they, through their interaction with external stakeholders, both can create or destroy this type of intangible value. While there also exist earlier more skeptical accounts within corporate branding and corporate communication questioning how realistic and beneficial it is to attempt to align employees with the corporate brand (e.g. Christensen and Cheney, 2000; Christensen et al., 2008; Morsing, 2006), advocates of the idea have been the most vocal in recent years.

However, while it has become popular to talk about employees as ambassadors, few researchers have studied ambassadorship more closely (Opitz et al., 2018), or what is really meant with catchy phrases such as “living the brand” (Karmark, 2005). Within corporate communication, ambassadorship is predominately used as a normative concept to describe how employees should behave when interacting with external stakeholders, and most studies which encourage managers and communication practitioners to think of employees as ambassadors have done so from a management perspective, where the aim has been to inform managers of the benefits of perceiving employees as ambassadors (e.g. Frandsen and Johansen, 2011; Heide and Simonsson, 2011). While this approach has contributed several important insights, and has placed employees’ role as active communicators on the agenda, its increasingly widespread use both in theory and practice increases the relevancy to take an employee perspective on the matter and explore how employees relate to and experience
this role expectation. Additionally, an employee perspective complements more normative approaches by enabling a focus on more problematic dimensions of ambassadorship that tend to be overlooked or neglected from the management perspective.

As there exists no clear definition of ambassadorship within corporate communication, there is a need to clearly define how this study conceives it. Based on how employees have been referred to as embodiments of the organization’s character (Dreher, 2014), and as potential “living brands” (Falkheimer and Heide, 2018; Heide and Simonsson, 2011), the concept of identity seems to be central to the idea of employees as ambassadors. While Heide and Simonsson (2018) more recently provided a more skeptical view of the idea of employees “living the brand” by questioning how realistic it is to assume that employees can embody their organization, others have suggested that the organizational identity is a part of employees’ personal identity (Frandsen and Johansen, 2011), and that employees act as ambassadors, as their work is part of their identity (Opitz et al., 2018). There thus seems to be a tendency within corporate communication to more or less implicitly draw on identity theory when discussing ambassadorship.

On the basis of this, it is here argued that the understanding of ambassadorship could benefit from being explored from the perspective of identity. However, while corporate communication increasingly acknowledges that organizations are constituted in and through communication (e.g. Heide and Simonsson, 2011; Heide et al., 2018), few have acknowledged the importance of communication and interaction for the constitution of individual identity. Within the broad stream of research within management and organizations interested in identity, there is an emergent consensus that “identity refers to the meanings that individuals attach reflexively to themselves, and is developed and sustained through processes of social interaction” (Brown, 2015, p. 23). This way of perceiving identity goes well with the employee perspective in this study, as it provides an analytical lens attentive to how employees relate to and experience ambassadorship in relation to the ongoing process of “storying” their selves (Sims, 2003).

Therefore, as briefly mentioned in the introduction, this study draws on identity work and Watson’s (2008) idea of social-identities, or personas, to define ambassadorship as a socially available persona among others, which employees reference in their identity work to make sense of “who they are” in different situations and contexts. The next section will develop the analytical lens further.

The ambassador persona: understanding ambassadorship through the lens of identity work

To understand the identity work of employees in the organizational context, and this study’s conceptualization of ambassadorship as a persona, it is important to briefly describe and clarify how this study conceives the relationship between organizational discourses and the identity work of organizational members.

Due to the growing influence of branding and corporate communication in intra-organizational managerial discourses, employees are increasingly expected to act as active communicators and ambassadors. Constructionist researchers often argue that personal identities draw on discourses about “who one can be and how one should act” (Alvesson et al., 2008). In organizations, various role demands contribute to prescribing how employees should think and feel about themselves and their work (Kunda, 2006/1992). These role demands are defined in a less deterministic way by Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) as “generalized expectations of behavior communicated in the environment” (p. 1169), which is how they are understood in the context of this study. However, employees are not just passive in the face of these discourses. As pointed out by Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003), organizational members actively draw on various discourses in creating a sense of self, and to answer the question “who am I,” for example, in the context of work.
However, the relationship between abstract organizational discourses and the ongoing identity work of individuals is not straightforward, and it is therefore necessary to clarify how the relationship between managerial discourses and employees’ identity work is understood in this study. This study draws upon Watson’s (2008) idea of a three-step relationship between discourse → social-identities → self-identity, where he suggests that organizational members reference various social-identities, or personas, available in the discourses, in their identity work to produce and negotiate their self-identity in various situations. Watson himself is inspired by symbolic interactionists such as Cooley (1922/1902), and the notion that individual identity is a product of interaction.

Drawing upon Watson’s conceptualization, ambassadorship is in this study conceived as a persona. This way of conceiving ambassadorship is useful as it provides a way to analytically approach ambassadorship in a nuanced way as it acknowledges that ambassadorship is but one of many potential personas that employees might reference in their identity work, and because it enables an exploration as this lens is attentive to how, when and why employees relate to it, as well as how they experience it.

Method
The aim of this study is to analyze how employees relate to and experience ambassadorship, to gain knowledge of ambassadorship from an employee perspective. Therefore, a qualitative and interpretive approach was considered appropriate as this often is used in studies interested in understanding and interpreting meanings and experiences of individuals (Spiggle, 1994).

The empirical material on which this study is based comes from a four-year (2014–2018) research project titled [Anonymized] which focused on how communication contributes to value creation and goal attainment. The project included 11 [Anonymized] organizations active in both the public and the private sectors. The main benefit of a cross-case approach compared to a single case study is that it provides a larger and more varied material from different contexts, at the expense of depth. However, a larger and more varied material was considered appropriate for this study as few attempts have been made to study ambassadorship from an employee perspective.

The organizations were self-selected based on their interest to contribute to furthering knowledge of how communication contributes to value creation and goal fulfillment of organizations. One potential drawback related to the self-selection strategy is that this type of strategy increases the risk that the organizations volunteering to participate are those that perceive themselves to have a good reputation among external and internal stakeholders. Therefore, the study risks neglecting cases with less positive reputations that could provide valuable insights on ambassadorship. However, although the 11 organizations were self-selected, most of the participating organizations have experienced both extensive negative media attention and internal discontent in the past – some even in close proximity to the study. Additionally, this was reflected in the accounts given by the interviewees, as there was great variation in every organization, both regarding the extent to which the interviewees expressed that they identified with their organization, as well as how stressful they experienced the ambassador persona to be. Therefore, because of the history of the organizations and the varying accounts given by the interviewees, self-selection was not considered to have major implications for the study.

The interviews concerning ambassadorship were conducted in those organizations which had, at the time and in various ways, worked purposively with increasing the communicative awareness and competence of employees. As the interviews concerning ambassadorship were gathered in a research project covering multiple topics related to how communication contributes to value creation and goal fulfillment of organizations, it is necessary to briefly mention some of the potential drawbacks and benefits of the study design. One drawback is
that covering a number of topics with each interviewee limits the possibilities to delve deeper into aspects that arise during the interviews. Another is that the questions about ambassadorship were constructed with the overall topic of the research project in mind rather than the particular aim of this study. However, this is also a benefit as having the pre-conception that identity is central when designing the study might result in questions which take for granted that employees have the capacity to reflexively discuss their identity work. With the current design in which employees talk more openly about ambassadorship, it is up to the researcher to interpret this in relation to identity work.

Collecting material
In total, 28 semi-structured interviews with employees and four focus groups of two to six employees addressed ambassadorship. The interviews took place between August 2016 and March 2017. To select interview candidates, a purposeful sampling method assisted by an organizational representative was deemed appropriate for gathering relevant, information-rich material. Potential individuals to interview were selected based on criteria such as profession, experience, age and gender to ensure that a mix of voices was heard. Most of the interviews were conducted face-to-face. However, due to practical circumstances, a small number were conducted in groups and by telephone. The average interview lasted for an hour, and all interviews were recorded and transcribed for later analysis.

The purpose of the interviews was to get a deeper understanding of, and explore, various communication processes and practices. However, there is no “one-way” to address ambassadorship in the organizations studied. Some organizations have been more influenced by discourses of branding, in which the ambassadorship concept is more frequent. Others instead emphasize communication or service logics, and talk more about stakeholder treatment, reception and the external communication responsibility of employees. To enable an open exploration of the concept, these nuances in organizational discourses were taken into consideration when developing interview themes and questions, and during the interviews. The questions related to ambassadorship were adapted somewhat depending on how the organizations framed employees’ role as ambassadors, and themes such as branding, coworkership, stakeholder treatment and employee communication therefore provided different contexts to the questions about ambassadorship. These themes were however closely related, as they all focused on employee–stakeholder interaction. Two examples of questions were: “Is it important to be a good ambassador for your organization? Why/Why not?” and “Can you give an example of when you experience that you act as an ambassador.”

Analytical procedure
The initial phase of the analysis followed the analytical procedure of categorization which involves identifying fragments in the data that exemplify a more general phenomenon (Spiggle, 1994). During this phase, the interview transcripts were coded into initial themes that enabled the researcher to gain an initial understanding and overview of how the interviewees talked about ambassadorship. Some of the initial categories created during this phase suggested that identity was important for understanding how employees made sense of and experienced ambassadorship. Because of this, theories of identity and identity work were consulted, and were considered relevant as an analytical frame to enable a more in-depth interpretation of the empirical material.

Following the choice to use identity and identity work as analytical lens, the sections of the empirical material that seemed to revolve around identity and ambassadorship were interpreted and re-coded using the analytical lens. Category zooming is an analytical strategy suitable when the ambition is to go into depth with particular aspects of the empirical material (Halkier, 2011). Therefore, the aim with this second phase was to end up with a number of analytical categories that could highlight how the interviewees related to...
and experienced the ambassador persona in their ongoing identity work. The analytical lens of identity and identity work facilitated the interpretation and resulted in a number of categories highlighting how employees related to and experienced ambassadorship. In the following presentation of the analysis, the interviewees have been given fictive names.

Analysis
As the aim of the study is to analyze how employees relate to and experience ambassadorship, the analysis in this section will initially focus on how employees relate to the ambassador persona they are expected to enact, and then on how employees experience the ambassador persona.

Embracing the ambassador persona
The way most of the interviewees elaborated upon ambassadorship suggests that they embraced it. This was reflected in how several of them emphasized the importance of delivering "good service," "good treatment," a "professional demeanor" and "talking favorably about the organization," as not doing so would have a negative impact on how the organization is perceived by external others. One interviewee, Noah, explained that if you behave badly, it is not you, but 

"[...] the brand that takes the beating in the end."

For several of the interviewees, this embracement seemed to be motivated either by their interpretation of how they think external stakeholders perceive them, or how their colleagues or managers perceive them. Those who considered how external stakeholders perceive them seemed to motivate their embracement by explaining that stakeholders perceive them as ambassadors regardless of what they think of themselves. This can be illustrated through how Daniel motivated why he embraced the idea of being an ambassador:

Just as I mentioned, people see us as representatives for the organization. We are representatives of the organization. And to provide a negative image will give ripples on the water. They [stakeholders] see the entire organization like that. And I personally think that you have more to win by being positive and to try to be service-minded and helpful.

Similarly, those who motivated their embracement by referring to how colleagues and managers perceive them tended to describe ambassadorship as a responsibility of a "professional employee," that is, professional toward both colleagues and their employer. For example, Eddie explained that it is important that stakeholders "get a professional impression of you," as this will spill over on their perception of your organization. Similarly, Jenny explained that:

I consider that I represent my organization. And then I have to, if I hear complaints or that an external person claims something, it is important, while not exactly to defend, I must say that I stand for this organization. [...] it feels important that we are perceived as professional.

These variations in how the interviewees motivated their embracement of the ambassador persona both point toward an important social dimension in their identity work. According to Cooley (1922/1902), our imagination of how we appear to others is important when we create an idea of our self. Comparably, the way the interviewees motivated why they embrace the idea of being ambassadors, either by referring to how they are perceived by external others (stakeholders) or internal others (colleagues and managers), indicates that their imagination of the expectations of others is important for their embracement of the ambassador persona. Kreiner et al. (2006) similarly point to the importance of others’ expectations (real or imagined) for identity enactment. The social dimension, and especially the interviewees’ imagination of what persona others expect them to enact, is therefore based on how the interviewees seemingly draw upon it, interpreted as an important reason
as to why the ambassador persona seems to be understood by the interviewees as the most “situationally relevant” (Ashforth and Johnson, 2001) persona to enact when interacting with external stakeholders.

There were, however, those who pointed out that it is easy to embrace the idea of yourself as an ambassador that always should represent the organization, but harder to live up to this ideal. As Ted explained, “[…] it [ambassadorship] is about always having a professional attitude toward visitors, and not bring a bad attitude with you. But then it can be hard if you get a bad attitude from the visitor.” Thus, although embracing the ambassador persona constructively helps the interviewees to reconstruct their work identity and respond to the new role expectations and situational demands, the interviews also indicate that embracing the ambassador persona in their identity work, and enacting it when interacting with stakeholders, do not necessarily go hand in hand.

The ambassador persona as an undesired persona

On the basis of how several of the interviewees experienced delivering the ambassador persona, it became evident that in certain circumstances, in addition to being productive for their identity work, it can also be experienced as stressful. This seems to originate from the identity-tension several of the interviewees experience when enacting the ambassador persona in interactions with stakeholders, as Lina describes:

As an administrator, you cannot say anything other than, “Sorry, we are dealing with the issues sequentially. We cannot work faster than we do right now.” […] You must be factual and say that it will be your turn soon. […] And I cannot put my employer to shame when someone calls. We have to say how it is without being too negative even though we boil inside. So, you hang up the phone and have a very bad conscience for the customer that called, but you must let it go to save your health.

Another interviewee, Hanna, explained that while she thinks of herself as an ambassador, and “lives the issues” she works with and that, “It is principally important to me that we live as we preach,” the nature of her work and the large number of angry stakeholders she needs to interact with seems to be detrimental for her self-perception, as at times she perceives herself as “just a naysayer” as a result of enacting the ambassador persona. At times, therefore, when the interviewees experience that there is a gap between how they want to be perceived (their self-identity), and the identity they have to deliver (their work identity), the ambassador persona seems to be experienced as a form of “undesired persona.” This interpretation builds on Elsbach and Dukerich’s (2016) idea of the “undesired self,” or what employees “hope never to be,” and, in this context, can be understood as the interviewees expressing that they have to enact a persona that makes external stakeholders perceive them in a way they “hope never to be perceived.” One interviewee, Chris, explained this stressful experience in the following way: “[…] you don’t feel proud when you walk around in clothes [that have the organization’s brand on them]; […] you have the name on your back and if the company has been in the news it feels as if people are looking at you.”

The interviewees especially seemed to experience the ambassador persona as an undesired persona at times when their organization has been involved in a scandal or crisis, or when they experience that the persona they have to deliver when interacting with stakeholders is very incongruent with how they want their “private self” to be perceived. Cooley (1922/1902) argues that people need to express themselves, feel appreciated by others, and feel that they are not in the mercy of others’ “will” to maintain a “healthy” self-identity. Based on how the interviewees seem to experience the ambassador persona during difficult circumstances, one interpretation is that these identity-needs are not fulfilled in the enactment of the ambassador persona during these circumstances. While it is seldom the case that all are fulfilled at once (Cooley, 1922/1902), experiencing having to express a
persona that is incongruent with the “private” identity, and that stakeholders dislike, and that is experienced as “forced” upon you by management, becomes very stressful. Some of the interviewees talk about finding this identity-stress too demanding at times. For example, one interviewee explained that while she has been told by her manager that she should act as a representative at all times, and she has tactics to do so, she sometimes fails:

Sometimes it is hard, of course. But then I think, “It has nothing to do with me.” […] But it has of course happened that I have failed and said, “Sure, that was not very good” [to the stakeholder]. And you can, in a way, we have been told, “you have to be loyal, and you cannot say what you think.” Our manager has told us that.

However, while there were interviewees who, for example, explained that they refrain from saying who they work for due to scandals their employer had been involved in, there were also several that seemed to think that coping with this identity-tension was part of embracing the responsibility to enact the ambassador persona. For example, Hanna explained that, when interacting with people during work, “Then I think that you are the organization. You are not […] you have to represent the organization. And then you just have to do that. Even though you might not always agree.” Thus, although the ambassador persona is experienced as an undesired persona at times, delivering it seems to be understood by several of the interviewees as part of their job.

**The ambassador persona as a private-identity intrusion outside work**

While most of the interviewees seemed to perceive the ambassador persona as a responsibility during work, even at times when it was experienced as an undesired persona incongruent with how they want to be perceived as a “private person,” it seemed that the persona was something that several of the interviewees experienced that they had to relate to outside work as well. For example, Simon experienced that he felt obliged to enact the ambassador persona outside work as well:

[…] sometimes it can be difficult, I mean in your private capacity when you are off duty. As a private person you do not need to agree with all the political decision. But this transition from when I am a public officer to when I am myself as a citizen. How I converse with those who are close and dear to me. You try to be loyal and explain why decisions are made in this or that way, even though you might not agree, you say, “this is how it works.”

Simon talks about the difficult transition between the differing personas or roles he relates to in his identity work. Interestingly, in a private context where he could relate more to private personas such as “father,” “partner” or “friend,” his interpretation is that it is expected of him to enact the ambassador persona and remain loyal even though he “might not agree” himself. Lisa similarly experienced that it is expected of her to enact the ambassador persona outside work in situations where people, for example, ask her about issues involving her organization they read about in the news. She states that “[…] of course you must answer. But you’d rather not talk about it on a Saturday night,” emphasizing that she remains, albeit reluctantly, loyal to her organization and enacts the ambassador persona outside work as well. This highlights some of the confusion this role expectation seemingly gives rise to. Although researchers have noted that employees act as ambassadors outside work as well, and that this should be facilitated (Heide and Simonsson, 2011), the interviewees rather seem to experience the enactment of the ambassador persona in interactions outside work as more of what Kreiner et al. (2006) refers to as an identity intrusion, that the ambassador persona makes them experience that the work identity intrudes on their various private personas that they prefer to enact outside work. However, while several of the interviewees seemingly interpret that it is expected of them to enact the ambassador persona, it seems that many of them enact it, even though it is experienced as stressful. There were, of course, some interviewees
who ignored or resisted the social expectations to enact the ambassador persona. Mark, for example, explained that being an ambassador is very important during work, but that, “At four o’clock I stop work. Then I have a daughter and a partner and a dog that are my number one priority. […] Now, it [the reputation] is your [the organization’s] problem after four o’ clock.”

Some interviewees seemed to experience that social media contributes to intensify identity-tensions as it becomes increasingly difficult to make sense of who you are outside work. In one of the focus groups, Peter elaborated upon this saying that:

I agree that that the dimension has changed. Because it is very easy for me to be in the work-role when I arrive here [at work] and introduce myself as Peter, the political coordinator. Then I am in my work-role. But on Facebook – am I there in my work-role or am I the private person? […] there have been those discussions within the organization as well. When an employee expresses him or herself in a political way that might go against the current view. Then it becomes problematic, because where do you draw the line between the private person and the employee?

This can be understood in relation to the increasing blurring of the boundary between work and leisure time. Employees are increasingly expected to bring their “true” selves to work and break the work/non-work boundary (Fleming and Sturdy, 2009). Conversely, the growing attention on intangible assets such as brands has resulted in that much work has moved outside of traditional work-hours (Land and Taylor, 2010). Based on how some of the interviewees talk about social media, it seems that in relation to ambassador expectations, social media contributes to accentuate this blurring of work and leisure time. As social media seemingly contributes to making it more difficult for employees to separate their work-personas and private personas, and their work identity and private identity, this tendency casts light on one of the more problematic sides of the ambassador expectation. Researchers interested in employees’ role as ambassadors have noted that social media amplifies employees’ role and power as ambassadors (Dreher, 2014; Opitz et al., 2018). However, while the idea of ambassadorship on one side can be understood as an increasingly important role where employees produce value through their “communicative labor” (Mumby, 2016), the amplification of identity-tensions in social media highlights the fact that the conception of employees as ambassadors also has more problematic consequences that need to be taken into consideration.

Concluding discussion
In the following sections, the theoretical and managerial implications of the findings will be discussed. First, the study conceptualizes ambassadorship as a persona that employees reference in their identity work, thereby contributing a new way of understanding ambassadorship. While the ambassador concept has become popular within corporate communication as a way for researchers to discuss employees’ active role as communicators in general and during crises (e.g. Frandsen and Johansen, 2011; Heide and Simonsson, 2011; Opitz et al., 2018), and how employees create value in interactions with stakeholders (Heide et al., 2018), few have attempted to provide a definition of ambassadorship. Conceiving ambassadorship as a persona provides a concrete way to understand ambassadorship that is rooted in contemporary perspectives as an identity that is dynamic and “relational” (Watson, 2008). Understood in this way, the ambassador persona is concretely understood as one role expectation among many that employees have to relate to in their identity work as they try to make sense of “who they are” at work. Thus, it provides a lens to study ambassadorship that is attentive to how employees relate to it and experience it, which complements more normative ambitions of informing managers about the importance of educating and training employees to realize their potential as active communicators and ambassadors (e.g. Heide and Simonsson, 2011, 2014; Zerfass and Franke, 2013).
Second, the finding that the ambassador persona at times gives rise to identity-tensions casts light on some of the more problematic sides of ambassadorship. As the employee perspective is absent in previous conceptualizations of ambassadorship, and previous research has mainly focused on what managers and organizations gain from turning employees into ambassadors, this furthers our understanding of ambassadorship. The identity-tensions seem to intensify during particular circumstances such as organizational scandals or crises, or if employees have a tough work situation in which enacting the ambassadors’ persona entails that they have to represent their organization to angry and upset stakeholders. Studying ambassadorship during these circumstances could provide interesting insights about ambassadorship.

The finding that employees relate to the ambassador persona outside of work as well is in line with previous research showing that internal branding efforts make employees consider their brand responsibility outside of work as well (Müller, 2017), and further stress that the tendency within corporate communication research to promote the ambassador perspective needs to be balanced with a more critical discussion that puts the spotlight on the more problematic consequences. While this study highlights identity-tensions experienced by employees on and off work, there is also a need to start discussing how responsibilities for intangible assets, such as the brand and reputation, tend to blur the boundaries between work and leisure time, as one can create and destroy this type of value outside work as well. From the management perspective, employees have been described as a “threat” to the organization (Opitz et al., 2018). However, from an employee perspective, expectations to take responsibility for intangible assets such as the brand and reputation might be perceived as a “threat” to the individual employee, as this type of responsibility implies that employees lend their identity at the organization’s disposal. There is a moral issue embedded into ambassadorship and other role expectations that becomes increasingly important to discuss as branding and communication logics become increasingly influential in contemporary organization.

Additionally, there is a need to discuss the appropriateness of the ambassador concept as a generic perspective on employees. With their origin in brand management, the ideas of employees as ambassadors derive from a for-profit context, where the talk about employees’ importance for the brand and value creation is reasonable to discuss. While corporate communication often has for-profit corporations as its role model (Fredriksson and Pallas, 2016), there is a need to study the communicator role and responsibilities of employees in different sectors to broaden the understanding of what it entails in other sectors and organizations than for-profit ones. While employees working in private organizations answer to their top management, employees working in public organizations serve the public as well and thus have a much more complex communication responsibility that cannot be explained or understood from monetary and managerial logics, but from additional logics such as a democratic logic. These alternative logics need to be acknowledged more in research on employees’ communicator role.

While the aim of the study has been to explore how employees relate to and experience ambassadorship, there is also a need to discuss the findings in relation to previous research on internal communication in order to highlight certain aspects relevant for organizations to consider when aiming to encourage employees to embrace the role. The findings indicate that employees consider their immediate superiors and top management when assessing whether to embrace or reject the ambassador persona. This is in accordance with Men’s (2014) study on internal communication, which found that managers play an important role in fostering employee advocacy, a concept similar to ambassadorship. Furthermore, the findings indicate that employees more often refrain from enacting the ambassador persona at times when they experience the ambassador persona as an “undesired persona.” This strengthens Ruck and Welch’s (2012) notion that managers responsible for internal
communication should aim to increase the employee’s identification with their organization, as identification influences employee engagement, and engaged employees are more likely to act as advocates for their organization. To increase employee identification, Henderson et al. (2014) argue that it is important to reject the idea of univocal external and internal corporate communication, and to instead acknowledge and represent the multiple values and identities that internal stakeholder groups hold, as this reduces the likelihood that individual organizational members deviates from the standpoint of the organization. 

Lastly, other researchers have stressed that managers should develop internal communication strategies to enable employees’ active communication behavior (Mazzei, 2010, 2014), and should initiate internal discussions about the values, strategies, goals and brands of the organization to increase employees’ awareness of what they are supposed to represent (Heide and Simonsson, 2011). The findings of this study add to these suggestions by highlighting the importance to also address the more problematic sides of ambassadorship, such as identity-tensions and potential private life-intrusion, when creating and initiating such strategies and internal discussions.

Practical implications
The findings of this study show managers that, when communicating expectations, educating and training employees to make them more conscious of their communicator and ambassador role, it is important to acknowledge the identity-tensions employees experience. Including discussions of the circumstances that intensify identity-tensions is a first step toward a more nuanced, bottom-up approach toward ambassadorship and communication responsibility rooted in the experience of employees rather than managerial ideals of employees “living the brand.”

Encouraging employees to participate in the creation of more communicative role expectations also increases the likelihood that the concerns and experiences of employees are taken into consideration when employees’ responsibility for intangible assets is specified. Here, discussions between management and employees regarding the more problematic aspects of ambassadorship enactment, such as on-work and off-work identity-tensions, can increase the likelihood that the expectations regarding active communication and ambassadorship are more reasonable and grounded in the organization-specific context and circumstances in which the interactions between employees and external stakeholders take place.

Future research
More empirically grounded research, and especially observations of everyday interactions between employees and external stakeholders, could provide useful material to theorize employees’ role as communicators from a bottom-up approach. While the ambassador concept has been in focus in this study due to its prominence in theorization about employees’ role as communicators, more empirically grounded research could enable a more profound understanding of employees’ communicative role in general.

Additionally, to further the understanding of employees’ role as ambassadors and active communicators, a case study, or a comparative case study between two extreme cases, could provide interesting knowledge.

References


Dean, J. (2009), Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics, Duke University Press, Durham, NC.


Employees as ambassadors

Corresponding author
Rickard Andersson can be contacted at: rickard.andersson@isk.lu.se

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website: www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm
Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com
Corporate Communications
An International Journal

Number 4

593 Buying on rumors: how financial news flows affect the share price of Tesla
Nadine Strauss and Christopher Holmes Smith

608 Typology of contemporary corporate communication channels
Dmytro Olehoven Oltarzhevskyi

623 Combinatorial use of communication technologies in organizations
Yaguang Zhu

636 Treating Ivanka unfairly: understanding the impact of Presidential Tweeting on
publics’ perceptions and intentions to boycott or boycott corporations
Arunima Krishna and Soojin Kim

653 Student preferences for slogans of higher-education institutions
Andriy Kovalenko

670 The importance of communicating change: identifying predictors for support and
resistance toward organizational change processes
Charlotte Schulz-Krappe, Thomas Koch and Johannes Beckett

686 Analyzing the corporate social responsibility disclosures of selected companies in India
Amritjot Kaur Sekhon and Lalit Mohan Kathuria

702 Employees as ambassadors: embracing new role expectations and coping with
identity-tensions
Rickard Andersson

www.emeraldinsight.com/loi/ccij