

## Editorial: Challenges and Trends for the Communication of Tomorrow

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# IMPRINT

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Communicating with, through, and as the Recipient. Changing the Rules in Strategic Communication and Journalism

Edited by Alexander Godulla, Sabrina Doberts, Carolina Müller and Hannah Ötting

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# EDITORIAL

## Challenges and trends for the communication of tomorrow

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**Alexander Godulla, Sabrina Doberts, Carolina Müller, Hannah Ötting**

What is a rule? A look at the Cambridge Dictionary reveals, it is “an accepted principle or instruction that states the way things are or should be done, and tells you what you are allowed or are not allowed to do”. Put simply, it defines how to behave correctly within a certain system. In everyday life, we are constantly confronted with such rules. Thanks to them, we know when we can cross a street safely, how not to accidentally offend the person we are talking to, what to wear to which occasion and more. In other words, rules are helpers thanks to which we are less at the mercy of stress.

Of course, there are also rules in the context of work, which brings us to the specific topic of this book. Here, we want to discuss some of the problems that companies and media organizations have to solve in their communicative activities. Otherwise, there is a risk of dissatisfied stakeholders, communicative crises or loss of credibility. But what happens when the supposedly safe rules change gradually or rapidly? How should people in communication professions deal with the fact that innovations and crises sometimes require radically new solutions from them? Where is the change particularly pronounced, how can it be countered? In a total of six contributions, we want to analyse particularly urgent areas where the rules of the game are currently being redefined. We devote ourselves to topics such as resilience, dialogue orientation, corporate podcasts and corporate social listening, prosuming or even the use of artificial intelligence. Thereby, all contributions can be divided

into three different perspectives on communication: some demonstrate changes in communication with recipients, while others show new ways of communicating through or even as recipients.

Not only strategic communication and journalism (both of which this book is about) are subjects to constant changes due to digitalisation. Instead, it also applies to teaching and learning at universities. All the research projects presented here are the result of an intensive year of academic work by students of the Leipzig Master's programmes Communication Management and Global Mass Communication. The students networked intensively with each other to search for questions that could significantly shape the communication professions of tomorrow. However, all this was overshadowed by the Covid-19 pandemic, forcing all participants to be very flexible. Only the final session could take place in person at a park in Leipzig. All other seminar sessions took place on Zoom, which demanded a lot of commitment and discipline from all participants.

Together, in the digital learning environment, project ideas were pitched, scientific posters were presented, initial results were discussed, abstracts were reviewed and even an international conference was organised. Working closely alongside and with each other, all participants learned a lot not only about their research projects themselves, but also about the meta-problem of communication in a hitherto unfamiliar and initially also unwanted environment. Last but not least, we talked a lot about how we as a large team cannot only achieve good results in such a situation, but also work on our projects with heart and soul. We would now like to briefly present the results.

The first paper by Hanna Ahrenberg, Michael Bausch, Julian Reitner, Laura Steglich, Eszter Számadó, and Elias Weber focuses on communicating with the recipient and is based on the concept of resilience as a foundation for coping with the demands of today's dynamic and unpredictable VUCA world. Using semi-structured interviews with internal communication experts from international technology companies,

the authors examine the contribution of internal communication as a management function to build and strengthen individual resilience. They argue that internal communication plays a bridging role between the individual and organizational level and can create value as an intangible success factor by supporting core processes. To demonstrate the contribution of internal communication to corporate resilience management, the authors develop a framework and provide insights into the concrete implementation of resilience-promoting potentials in the practice. Finally, they advocate for a realignment of internal communication resulting from the new understanding of employees.

This is followed by a contribution by Gina Flemming, Hanna Jonas, Wibke Kroll, Josephine Michl, and Milo Hannah Tetzl, who examine the extent to which the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, as a non-self-inflicted crisis, are changing the external social media communication of the German mobility companies Lufthansa, Deutsche Bahn, and Flixbus on Facebook and Twitter. As a theoretical basis for their work, the authors address findings on crisis communication, issue management, social media communication, and dialogue communication to investigate how communication with recipients has changed. In addition to the change in tone, form and content of the companies' posts, the paper also looks at the changes in dialog communication with customers. To do so, the authors use a content analysis to compare corporate communications before and during the pandemic and outline several key aspects related to dealing with external crises and the general use of social media platforms to strengthen symmetric communication.

The following paper by Sabrina Doberts, Carolina Müller, Lea Rostek, Ann-Kathrin Scheper, Pia Widulle and Neele Penelope Zettl also investigates how companies communicate with recipients. The authors focus on corporate podcasts, meaning audio files published by companies. Arguing that a strategic approach enables companies to use podcasts as a tool to strengthen stakeholder relations, they examine the extent to which corporate podcasts are implemented strategically in the external

corporate communication of Germany's highest-revenue companies. To this end, the authors transfer the four phases of the management process, namely situation analysis, planning, implementation, and control, to the podcast production process, so-called podcasting. The results of the qualitative expert interviews reveal that the medium's implementation along the lines of strategic communication management still needs to be developed further. Experience is still being gathered due to the novelty of using the medium for organizational purposes.

Journalism communicates information on developments within societies to recipients. As Artificial Intelligence (AI) is playing an increasingly important role in journalism, Laila Granderath, Julia Grobb, Marleen Heimann, Fabian Klapproth, and Hannah Ötting investigate the opportunities and risks of said AI-implementation in political journalism. The focus is placed on the implementation in Germany and the U.S., as the countries have emerged as forerunners in the use of AI in several sub-sectors of reporting. By conducting eleven interviews with experts working in the journalistic field, the authors are able to evaluate scopes, contexts, opportunities as well as risks of the technologies and identify varying strategies of AI implementation. Based on the finding that AI can free journalists from routine tasks, which could in turn increase the qualitative standard of political journalism, the authors suggest directions for future research and journalism practice. However, they emphasize that all of this needs to be done while keeping the ethical concerns arising in the context of AI-implementation in mind.

In the subsequent paper, the emphasis is on communication through the recipient. Niklas Feierabend, Anna Fischer, Sara Fuchs, Christine Krakau, Hannah Kurtze, and Robin Wassermann strive to identify the potential of internal corporate Social Listening (CSL) as a form of listening on internal social networks for corporate communications. By conducting qualitative, semi-structured interviews, the authors focus specifically on the internal CSL of corporate groups and affiliated subsidiaries with a branch office in Germany. Based on the interviews, they explore how the

concept is used in corporate communication, to what extent it is integrated into the respective communication strategy and which strengths and weaknesses it offers for corporate communication. The authors were able to find that internal CSL seems to be able to contribute to corporate value creation. Since this potential has not yet been fully exploited, the authors conclude with recommendations for future practice in order to create the basis for a trusting and dialogic internal communication culture.

The book concludes with a contribution by Larissa Benz, Björn Borchardt, Tim Klute, Johanna Mirea, Tabea Sickert, and Caroline Siegel who analyze how to communicate with and as recipients by examining the extent to which communication experts of shared mobility companies use prosumers for strategic corporate communication. Prosumers are a group of stakeholders who not only consume a product or service, but are actively involved in the value chain. Using guided expert interviews, the authors are able to generate insights into the utilized tools and channels, requirements as well as existing standardized processes with regard to communication with and via prosumers. According to the results, prosumers are being used in the strategic communication of shared mobility companies, however, their potential has not yet been sufficiently exploited. Thus far, the measures used in dealing with prosumers do not differ from those used for other multipliers. Finally, the authors conclude that greater professionalization of the practice would strengthen stakeholder loyalty and thus ensure long-term corporate success.

We are excited to see how the challenges and trends we identified will continue to play a role in the future and how our findings and implications might contribute to shaping the communication of tomorrow.