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Imprint

Disrupt Adapt: New Ways to Deal with Current Challenges in Media and Communication

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Editorial

Adapting in a Field of Constant Change

**Alexander Godulla,
Leonie Beck, Eva Christiansen, Pauline Anna Johe,
Torben Krüper, Victoria Niemsch, Fabian Saxinger**

The digital transformation is one of the major phenomena identified to constantly change society and business (Parviainen et al., 2017). The increased use of technological advances changes the ways of working in corporations and media companies alike. In the globalized world we live in today, news from all over the world are more accessible than ever before. Thus, it seems that nowadays, the worrying news are piling up: A seemingly never-ending pandemic, an increasingly polarized public, major political conflicts, the existential threats of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and a looming environmental catastrophe. All these developments lead us to see things we used to take for granted with different eyes: Peace, stability, economic and social well-being. Studies support this assessment and show that many people look anxiously into the future and struggle to adjust to the disruptions of their normal way of life. Every year, the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network publishes the World Happiness Report (Helliwell et al., 2022). It measures how people in more than 150 countries across the globe rate their current emotional state and feelings. It is not very surprising that the report found out that sadness, stress, and worry are on the rise almost everywhere (Helliwell et al., 2022). We are living in truly challenging times and have been confronted with rapid and far-reaching changes to our world in the last couple of years.

In light of these developments, the world of communications is also changing. Technological advances and societal challenges have the potential to be obstacles for professionals in both strategic communication and journalism. Adapting to disturbances of known work processes can be difficult – but it is possible. The ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus famously said: “There is nothing permanent except change” (Greek philosopher, c. 535 BCE – c. 475 BCE). So, if change is an unavoidable part of life, why not embrace it?

Instead of feeling intimidated by these developments, why not see them as chances and face them head on? If there is one thing humanity has always been good at, it's adapting to new circumstances and seeing even major crises as opportunities for development.

This mindset of seeing change as an opportunity for growth instead of an insurmountable obstacle is the first step in mastering these challenges. Especially in times of transformations, science points the way in developing new strategies and finding innovative ways to adapt to the changes in our world. Science thus functions as a trusted advisor to society in transition. This is why the publication at hand is titled "Disrupt – Adapt". In a world, where the only constant is change, adapting is the key to shaping the communication of tomorrow.

Each paper in this book deals with a different aspect of the changing field of communications. However, they all focus on how professionals are acclimating to the fast-paced environment of a modern, globalized, and digitalized world, bringing new insights and impulses for theory and practice. The studies were developed by students of the Master's programs Communication Management and Global Mass Communication at Leipzig University over the course of one year. The papers are the result of a profound research process and a deep passion for the examined topics. Working on these projects still under the shadow of the pandemic didn't always prove to be easy, but the dedication of everyone involved made them possible in the end. The results of the studies were already presented in an international conference and are now being published. The issues covered in this publication are very diverse: Some describe the adaptations to polarization, others to digitalization of our world, but all of them have a focus on a timely and relevant topic in common.

Polarization in a Changing World

In their contribution to corporate socio-political positioning, Lina Blenninger, Paula Christoph, Chantal Herrmann, Pauline Anna Johe, Friederike Rummeni, and Sarah Willer deal with a topic very present in today's public discourse. In the light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the respective vaccination debate, discrimination against minorities, or the rights for LGBTQIA+ people, companies increasingly take a stance on socio-political issues. These communicative activities that are not directly related to the actual business of companies are described by the term corporate social advocacy. The paper gives answers to the question whether the public pressure put on companies to position themselves on such issues influences their external corporate communications. By looking at the general perception of an increasing pressure, the criteria, and the strategic planning process of

corporate positioning, the paper sheds light on an under-researched topic. Focus lies on the internal procedures in corporations in communication of a corporate positioning. Conducting qualitative guided interviews with 19 corporate communications professionals in leading roles of internationally operating German B2C companies, the researchers observed three patterns in corporate behavior (skeptics, adapters, and pioneers) describing how companies deal with socio-political issues.

Exploring the sphere of political communication in the digital age, Katharina Cremers, Laura Goyn, Torben Krüper, Christina Lehmann, and Adrian Liehr are focusing on social media in the context of the 2021 federal election in Germany. Starting with a synopsis of the theoretical concepts of political communication, social media, mediatization, and disintermediation, the paper identifies a research gap with regard to the relatively small number of German projects on social media in political communication. Conducting interviews with officials of all parties represented in the German Bundestag, this paper aims at shrinking this gap. It provides an overview of the understanding and significance of social media within German political parties and an outlook into the future of social media usage within these parties.

The impact of the increasing violence against journalists on editorial work in Germany and the USA is examined in the study by Eva Christiansen, Sophia Heintl, Jakob Irlner, Stefanie Lörch, and Victoria Niemsch. Using guided qualitative interviews with journalists from Germany and the United States, they provide an overview over journalists' experiences of violence and the resulting consequences on a personal and professional level. According to the theory of the chilling effect, pressure and threats of violence can influence the work of journalists and bring about changes in the content and style of reporting. However, journalism and press freedom are important pillars of democracy, and the consequences of increasing violence against journalists is therefore a highly relevant social issue. Consequently, journalists must balance self-protection and professional obligations. In doing so, they experience stress and psychological problems due to the increasing dangers, but fulfill their journalistic duties despite the risks involved.

Digitalization in a Modern World

The authors Sophia Blau, Agapi Giagozidou, Jule Klausmeyer, Fabian Saxinger, Laura Wettengel, and Catherine Danielle Winkel conducted a qualitative study to investigate how the use of digital storytelling in sustainability communication can influence strategic corporate success. There are hardly as many votes raised for a topic as for sustainability. Environmental catastrophes, human rights abuses, and resource shortages are just a few

exemplary reasons why sustainability has become a social megatrend. Therefore, it is not surprising that companies are facing increasing pressure to take responsibility for people and the environment. Consequently, sustainability communication is becoming progressively more important within corporate communication and has a strategic significance for corporate success. Thus, communication formats are needed that are suitable for transmitting the sustainability commitment of companies transparently, appealingly, and authentically to the outside world. Digital storytelling has already proven to be a promising communication format in other fields and will finally be examined more closely in this context.

Digitization is increasing the variety of potential communication channels for businesses. The generally growing popularity of podcasts means that they are also an increasingly relevant on-demand medium for corporations as well. In their paper, the authors Leonie Beck, Sophie Dietrich, Tanja Graf, Xenia Grohmann, Kathleen Lehmann, and Sabrina Zierer deal with the rather unexplored research field of corporate podcasts. Nowadays, corporate podcasts are not only found more frequently in the communication mix of companies – the format also offers great potential as a branding tool. In this way, corporate branding can contribute to the beneficial coordination of all communication channels. In the course of a qualitative interview study, the authors interviewed experts from large companies and, on the basis of this, investigated the extent to which corporate podcasts are currently seen, used and evaluated as a branding tool. This results in interesting suggestions for practice and research.

Finally, the book concludes with a paper by Amelie Baryal, Julia Burghaus, Felix Gasteyer, Nick Hoffmann, and Leonard Landau focusing on remote work. In the ongoing New Work debate, the flexibilization of the world of work is playing an increasingly important role in terms of improving the compatibility of family and career. Working parents are increasingly demanding the option of working remotely as a measure to overcome work-family conflicts. The authors examine the extent to which remote work is seen as a suitable measure by employers in this context, and highlight the scope to which German companies communicate about this as part of their strategic planning and implementation of employer branding. The research team therefore uses the theoretical concepts of strategic communication, employer branding, and terms related to family orientation and remote work. Based on semi-structured guided interviews with communications and HR professionals from various industries, this study outlines the solutions practiced by employers and how these can be expanded to meet their demands.

Now, without much further ado, we want to dive into the topic and are excited to see how our studies can make an impact and contribute to the future of communications.

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