

Chapter 3: Digital Corporate Brand Communication

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Introduction

Whilst it is unquestionably a fact that the corporate brand and corporate communication fields are important, it is also indisputably the case that scholars and managers do not always fully realize the significance of these areas. Moreover, both fields, all-too-often, narrowly conceived because of a tunnel vision approach. This chapter seeks to address this tunnel vision by illuminating the nature and importance of Total Corporate Brand Communication (TCBC). Arguably, this may have hindered an appreciation of the full strategic importance of the territory. Moreover, for scholars of both corporate communication and corporate brand management some critically important perspectives have been overlooked. One of these perspectives is the TCBC domain: a perspective which accommodates, and melds, the increasingly important digital, corporate communication, and corporate branding spheres. Digital corporate brand communication, represents new, and highly significant, vector by which we can more fully discern the critically important corporate communication territory.

However, a commonly held myopia in relation to TCBC, has hindered the full power, and significance, of the corporate brand communication territory to be fully realized. Consequently, this chapter, which has Total Corporate Brand Communication as its focus – and which accords importance to digital corporate brand communication - provides an antidote to this shortsightedness. It is an approach which builds on extant the panoptic Total Corporate Communication perspectives and accommodates new technological/digital viewpoints perspectives as well as the crucially significant corporate brand dimension. It is an approach which highlights, and illuminates, the strategic importance of the broad territory.

The reasons for a TCBC myopia are complex and are varied. They include a failure to appreciate the breadth and depth of the territory; a failure to appreciate the communication impacts of an organisation's corporate identity; a failure to appreciate the importance of organisational-focussed word-of-mouth communication; a failure to appreciate the significance of customer and stakeholder feedback; a failure to appreciate digital, technological, and artificial intelligence perspectives; and, moreover, a failure to accord sufficient significance to an organisation's corporate brand.

Definitions of core concepts

Corporate brands

The corporate brand concept dates to, and was formally introduced, in the mid-1990s (Balmer, 1995). From its inception, some scholars have argued that corporate brands represent the most significant form of branding: a branding mode which is of considerable strategic importance (Balmer, 2001b, 2010; Balmer and Gray, 2003). From the 1990s onwards, a distinct literature on the territory slowly soon materialized on the territory (Balmer, 1995, 2001a, 2001b; Hatch and Schultz, 2001), and it became apparent that an organisation's corporate brand represented a distinct, novel, and important platform on which an organisation, and its customers/ stakeholders, could have mutually durable and profitable exchanges and interactions (Balmer, 2012a).

At its essence, a corporate brand can be viewed as an informal contract (sometimes termed a covenant) which affords bilateral links and relationships between an organisation and its customers and stakeholders (Balmer, 2001a; Balmer and Greyser, 2003). Corporate brands are distinct from product brands because they are multidisciplinary in scope; have a stakeholder focus; and are underpinned by a corporate marketing perspective (Balmer, 1995, 2012a).

Significantly, corporate brands have corporate identities as their foundations. A corporate brand develops out of an organisation's corporate identity (an organisation's distinguishing traits) and accommodates the perception of a corporate identity. Even when a clear corporate brand promise/covenant is established, a corporate identity is critical. This is because it is an entity's corporate identity actualizes, or makes real, the corporate brand promise/covenant (Balmer, 2012a, 2012b).

A strong corporate brand is meaningful since it serves as a powerful cornerstone for organisations (Balmer 2001a). As such, a strong corporate brand both distinguishes and differentiates one organisation from another. Thus, a corporate brand can be highly significant in terms of an organisation's corporate navigation, positioning, and communication (Balmer and Gray, 2003). It also can be invaluable for customers and other stakeholders in distinguishing, and differentiating, one corporate brand from another. Corporate brands are valuable for corporations and stakeholders alike.

For corporations, a strong and consequential corporate brand can enhance the financial worth and value of an organisation and, for instance, can burnish shareholder value. A strong corporate brand can be a flexible and powerful, asset which can be borrowed (through franchising), as well as bought, or sold (Balmer 2005).

Given the above, it is no surprise that a good deal of attention is afforded to corporate brands by scholars and managers alike. And this is for good reason. This is because corporate brands often have considerable financial worth. For many organisations, their corporate brand is their primary corporate resource. A resource that is often prized by customers, employees, shareholders, and other stakeholders.

Total Corporate Communication

Total corporate brand communication melds together, as well as advances, the territories relating to total corporate communication and corporate brand management. It is an approach that is mindful of the digital corporate communication dimension as well. Consequently, this section provides a brief overview of the foundational total corporate communication field and discusses recent developments apropos the total corporate communication which accommodates the critically important digital corporate communication perspective.

Total corporate communication (TCC) came to the fore in the 1990s (cf. Balmer 1995; Balmer & Gray, 1999). Underpinned by an unequivocal stakeholder orientation TCC is cognizant that: (a) corporate communication is complex and multidimensional; and (b) is informed by the view that everything an organisation says, makes or does (including third party commentary and narratives relating to an organisation), has a corporate communication effect (Balmer, 1995 p. 35).

Thus, the total corporate communication approaches are differentiated from traditional one-way communication models which emphasize controlled communication. Moreover, TCC represents a nexus linking a company's corporate identity (a firm's distinguishing and defining traits) and stakeholder/customer images and reputations (Gray and Balmer 1998). Images and reputations are important since they provide the foundations of stakeholders' identifications and behaviours which can meaningfully support the company's mission and purpose as evinced in its corporate identity (Balmer, 2008).

Originally, Total Corporate Communication (TCC) had an overt corporate identity focus. Corporate identity as used here refers to an organisation's distinctive and defining characteristics. (Importantly, corporate identity should *not* be equated with the visual representation of an organisation which, more properly, should be termed corporate visual identification). Consequently, the TCC notion, to emphasize an earlier point, was underpinned by the perspective that "Everything an organisation does will in some way communicate the organisation's identity" (Balmer, 1995 p. 35).

The original TCC perspective was tripartite in character (Balmer & Gray, 1999). It comprised primary corporate communication (*emanating from the organisation's corporate identity*), secondary corporate communication (*emanating from the organisation's controlled corporate communication*) and tertiary corporate communication (*emanating from word-of-mouth stakeholder communication*).

These can be explained more fully as follows:

- (1) Primary Corporate Communication ('Corporate Identity Based Transmission Communication'). This encompasses the total corporate communication effects of an organisation's corporate identity. This includes an organisation's purposes, activities and behaviours, product and service quality, management style, and employee behaviour, etc.
- (2) Secondary Corporate Communication ('Controlled Communication Based Transmission'). This encompasses the total corporate communication effects of an organisations controlled corporate communication (corporate advertising, corporate design, corporate public relations, public affairs, etc).
- (3) Tertiary Corporate Communication ('Word-of-Mouth Based Transmission'). This encompasses the total corporate communication effects of third party/uncontrolled communication, including narratives and dialogues, emanating from stakeholders, the media, competitors, and others.

Digital Corporate Brand Communication

Mindful of the definition of digital corporate communication as espoused in this handbook (Badham & Luoma-aho, 2023, p. XXX), the following delineation of digital corporate brand communication can be enumerated:

‘Digital corporate brand communication denotes the strategic management of digital technologies in embodying and conveying an organisation’s corporate brand promise/covenant to customers and other stakeholders, whilst also providing accessible digital conduits for feedback from customers and other stakeholder groups’.

What is changing?

Developments in Total Corporate Communication: Accommodating technological and digital perspectives

Developments in digital and artificial intelligence technologies are important dimensions of the new world of corporate communication. Their growth and importance have been inexorable and their use, increasingly, is ubiquitous. Digital technologies represent a new dynamic apropos company-customer/stakeholder interfaces. As such, they have transformed corporate marketing and societal interactions. This is especially the case amongst the post-2000 generations. Unquestionably, the new digital technologies represent new, and significant, corporate communication resources. Additionally, they represent an information resource as evidenced by the increasing utilization of cloud space which enables the collection and analysis of big data. Data which is exchanged among organisations, networks, people, and governments on a regular basis. Big data represents a gold mine of customer insights which allow for more finely homed products and services. Moreover, it provides managers with descriptive, predictive, and prescriptive analytics (Chaturvedi and Verma, 2022). Whilst there can be positive outcomes relating to the above there can also be negative – and even dark - consequences as well.

Developments in the digital and artificial intelligence realms are meaningfully affecting, and shaping, company-customer/stakeholder relationships. As a result, they are molding, and influencing, ways in which individuals – and society at large – live, work, and interact. The new digital environment is important since it provides novel ways in which organisations can reach, inform, and engage with customers in the offering of products and services. and to offer and sell them products and services (Juran et al 2021). Digital technologies can also be efficacious in adding value to and in strengthening brands (Chaffey and Smith, 2017). Moreover, it offers the potential for corporate

brands and their customers to co-create the corporate brand promise more effectively (cf. Lahtinen & Närvänen, 2020; Ramaswamy & Gouillart, 2010). Co-creation activities can lead to the development of 3D printing, the creation of a non-fungible token (NFT); and even the development of a metaverse.

Unquestionably, the corporate marketing and corporate communication worlds are witnessing a digital and technology tumult (Balmer & Yen, 2017). In this new world, customers are becoming ‘digital savvy’ and the digital sphere represents “the biggest growth opportunity for companies” (Chaturvedi & Verma, 2022 p. 35). As such, the digital transformation is qualitatively different from earlier upheavals. The label ‘the Fourth Industrial Revolution’ has been applied to these developments (Schwab, 2015). The Fourth Industrial Revolution differs from earlier upheavals in several significant respects. Whereas the first industrial revolutions began with the rise of mechanical manufacture in the 18th Century; the second industrial revolution of the 19th Century was triggered by the advent of mass production, the access to electricity, and the division of labour; and the third industrial revolution of the late 20th Century was triggered by automated production, electronics, and information technology (Schwab, 2015); the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which characterizes the early 21st Century and which has is grounded in digital technology and artificial intelligence, is ground-breaking in terms of its analytical, and problem solving qualities which are of a scale, speed, scope, and sophistication that has not, to date, been experienced (Balmer & Yen, 2017).

Thus, the Fourth Industrial Revolution is in marked contrast to earlier revolutions which were transformative how products/services were created, supplied, and consumed. Consequently, this digital/AI revolution is transforming organizational life, consumer expectations and, of course, the domains of corporate communication, corporate marketing, and corporate branding. The Fourth Industrial Revolution holds the prospect of transforming the connectivity of billions of people via mobile and other devices: devices which have access to extraordinary processing capabilities. (Schwab, 2015).

Just as Schwab (2015) identified four industrial revolutions, similar revolutionary developments have characterized marketing (Balmer & Greyser, 2006; Balmer & Yen, 2017). Balmer and Greyser (2006) noted how the First Marketing Revolution was underpinned by beneficial company-customer exchange relationships based on products/product brands; the Second Marketing

Revolution was based on advantageous company-customer exchange relationships based on services/services brands; and the Third Marketing Revolution was grounded on mutually beneficial company-stakeholder exchange relationships based on corporate identities/corporate brands.

However, Balmer and Yen (2017) noted how the Fourth Marketing Revolution Mutually is, founded on beneficial company-stakeholder/stakeholder networks exchange relationship based on digital technology. Exemplarily, over recent decades, the world has witnessed the ascendancy of the digital sphere. For example, the internet has emerged as an increasingly indispensable information gathering, and marketing resource. Significantly, it is also a social resource. With the advent of digital corporate communication, there is the potential for organisations to marshal fined-tuned, and bespoke, corporate communication. The British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) news application, for instance, takes account of an individual's past selection of news stories, and general browsing behaviour, to provide a bespoke news tailored to an individual's interests and tastes. However, whilst corporate communication messages are still very much within the purview of organisations, customers and other stakeholders can exert some control over which digital corporate communication they receive. For instance, by removing an app or by managing how it is used.

Conspicuously, the field of digital corporate communication not only increases the power of organisations and, to some degree, enhances the power of individuals (who can remove or restrict a digital application), it also can enhance the power of intermediaries such as providers of digital platforms. Moreover, digital corporate communication can be part of a company's service offering. For example, companies can send digital-based reminders and prompts to customers in both consumer and industrial markets. Moreover, access to, and the quality of, digital applications ('apps'), smart meters, and the like, can be an important and sometimes critical part of a corporate or product brand offering. For example, consumers use 'smart' meters to check and display energy consumption, comparable usage, and details of real-time costs (Chui et al., 2010). It has also given rise to so called 'conversational agents.' Conversational agents represent a new mode of corporate communication between corporate brands and consumers. As such, corporate brands employ a digital voice to interact with customers. Sometimes also known as 'conversational commerce', a digital assistant often is the point of contact when an individual is engaged in buying activities (Chaturvedi & Verma, 2022).

Of course, some organisations have become ‘fully digitalized’ in terms of their corporate brand offering. News gathering and reporting organisations are cases in point. For example, the prominent ‘newspaper’ *The Independent* is totally digital, whilst the *BBC*, *CNN*, *Financial Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Die Welt* have significant digital arms.

However, there are some downsides to digital corporate brand communication. For instance, an organisation’s corporate brand data, along with those of their customers, can be ‘hacked’ with data being harvested or even manipulated. Such activities also cause considerable distress to individuals (Elhai et al., 2017). Digital corporate brand content can be subject to ‘digital hijacking’ which can result in a warped corporate brand image being communicated. For example, activist groups have been known to be engaged in ‘trolling’ online discussions. Additionally, such groups have created fake profiles enabling them to hijack social media accounts. They have even been able to manipulate digital voting systems (Rone, 2022). Given the above, the same potentially could take place in relation to the digital corporate brand communication space. Furthermore, manipulated media, so-called ‘deepfakes’, allow individuals and group to utilize media technology to change what an individual says on video. The consequence is that what is being said can be perceived to be authentic.

‘Deepfakes’ can be highly persuasive and powerful. To date, ‘deepfakes’ have already influenced political outcomes in certain countries (Pesetski, 2020). Thus, there is the potential for prominent figures, media influencers, and celebrity corporate brand endorsers to have their video material tweaked to say erroneous or disparaging things about a particular corporate brand.

Whilst noting the above problems which require constant vigilance on the part of organisations, given the inexorable use of digital technologies it is imperative for the corporate communication discipline to take account of, as well as accommodate, digital features. Alas, digital technologies have not always been afforded sufficient prominence and significance within the corporate communication territory.

Thus, the original tripartite TCC approach, detailed earlier, was amplified to a quadripartite perspective to accommodate technological advances as manifest apropos the internet of things (cf. Balmer & Yen, 2017). Logically, quaternary communication can be broadened to accommodate a broader technological palette which includes digital corporate communication. It can be seen to

embrace analogous areas such as artificial intelligence (AI). Thus, in addition to corporate identity based (primary), controlled communication (secondary), and tertiary communication, an additional communication vector, *Quaternary ('Digital-Based') Corporate Communication*, was added (Balmer & Yen, 2017).

Quaternary ('Digital-Based') Corporate Communication

Quaternary Communication is based on digital/new technology/artificial intelligence dimensions. It is broad in scope. Whilst it can be considered as a corporate communication vector (as with primary/ 'corporate identity-based', secondary/'controlled', and tertiary/'word-of-mouth' corporate communication), arguably it is more akin to a galaxy of digital corporate communication. This is because corporate digital communication has wide boundaries and can be compared to a network spanning multifarious internet platforms, machines, cloud spaces, technologies, as well as peoples and organisations. Moreover, digital corporate communication serves as an information resource which assists in planning, learning and the analysis of big data. Furthermore, particularly in relation to AI, it is imbued with automation, personalisation, and predicting qualities (Kumar, et al., 2019). It is a conduit by which there can be bi-lateral information exchange between organisations and customers/stakeholders. Furthermore, it can accommodate multi-lateral information exchange between customers and stakeholders. However, quaternary communication, whilst increasing the knowledge and power of organisations, is not absolute. This is because increasingly individuals can exercise control over data usage and, moreover, third party entities such as internet platform providers can be significant players apropos quaternary communication. Increasingly, internet suppliers sit at the intersection of corporate and customer/stakeholder communication. Also significant are the activities of bloggers and social influencers (Casais & Gomes, 2022). It is unquestionably a fact that consumer bloggers are valuable agents of influence marketing (Halvorsen, 2019). This, perhaps, explains why CEOs sometimes write blogs (Hanson, 2006) and why some organisations employ journalists to do the same (Hoffjan & Haidukiewicz, 2020).

However, in accommodating change, the corporate communication field not only needs the growing importance of digital corporate communication, but is also required to take account of the

increased significance of the organisation as a corporate brand. As such, there is a need to revisit and refigure the extant total corporate communication mix.

What remains the same?

In one sense, the territory of digital corporate brand communication is characterized by continuity as well as change. What is clear is that the corporate communication field not only needs the growing importance of digital corporate communication, but is also required to take account of the increased significance of the organisation as a corporate brand.

Thus, certain verities endure, namely the importance of corporate communication, the significance of digital technologies, and the centrality of corporate brands to a good deal of organisational life. Given that TCBC regards an organisation's corporate brand as providing a pivot on which an organisation's corporate communication are centered, at this juncture it is worth recalling a few core corporate brand principles.

The first of these is that corporate brands are characterized by two forms of corporate brand ownership: *emotional ownership* and *legal ownership*. Both are important and both are prerequisites for strong corporate brands. Yet both are not always appreciated.

Emotional ownership is vested in customers and stakeholders who not only associate with but also define themselves in relation to a corporate brand. Consequently, they are predisposed to have an emotional sense of ownership with a corporate brand. The real power of corporate brands come from their emotional ownership by customers/stakeholders.

Legal ownership of a corporate brand is held by an organisation. As such, an entity (or sometimes multiple entities) will have legal rights over a corporate brand name. Legal ownership necessarily entails a sense of responsibility on the part of managers who must demonstrate on-going stewardship of the corporate brand (Balmer, 2010, 2012a). Significantly, the CEO is, de facto, an organisation's corporate brand manager (Balmer, 1995). Thus, managers need to give on-going attention to the corporate brand to ensure it remains relevant, and attractive, for customers/stakeholders whilst ensuring it is valuable and profitable for an organisation.

A second precept of corporate brands is the *importance of employees*. Thus, organisational members are critical in delivering the corporate brand promise (Balmer, 1995, 2001a). Consequently, everyone in an organisation needs to have a sense of responsibility in delivering the corporate brand (Balmer, 2001a, 2012a), and the entire organisation needs to have a corporate brand-focused culture and to be corporate brand-orientated (Balmer, 2013).

For many stakeholders, a strong corporate brand provides a foundation on which a social identity can be shaped; a self-definitional meaning can be established; and where, in part, a stakeholder's identity can be molded. For example, organisational members can have a profound sense of identification with a corporate brand (Balmer, 2013; Balmer & Podnar, 2021). For customers and other shareholders, corporate brands can be invested with emotional and promissory value, as encapsulated in the corporate brand promise/covenant.

The third, and final, corporate brand imperative is *the vital role of senior management and the CEO*. Given the central and strategic importance of corporate brands, corporate brand management is a senior management and, moreover, a CEO concern (Balmer, 1995). In addition, it needs to be a senior management responsibility given that corporate brand management is a complicated task. As such, managers must ensure they coordinate the organisation's many activities and disciplines are aligned with the corporate brand, as demonstrated in the ACID Test of corporate brand management (Balmer 2012a; 2012b). Thus, a corporate brand orientation requires senior managers to see the corporate brand as a significant strategic resource and capability (Balmer, 2022). Moreover, they need to view corporate brand management as a strategic management imperative (Balmer 2012a, 2012b).

Total Corporate Brand Communication Mix

Given the growing importance of corporate brands, and the desirability for organisations to be orientated around their corporate brands, account needs to be accorded to corporate brand communication apropos total corporate communication. Moreover, for corporate brand orientated entities, corporate brand communication can be a key corporate communication dimension. Given that a corporate brand, at its simplest and at its most fundamental, is a promise (or what is sometimes called a covenant) corporate brand focused communication can, usefully, be labelled *Promissory ('Corporate Brand Based') Corporate Communication*. Consequently, promissory corporate

communication needs to encapsulate and exemplify, the corporate brand promise/covenant. Where an organisation has a corporate brand orientated corporate communication, the corporate brand promise/covenant, de facto, underpins all corporate communication endeavours. Thus, corporate brand based represents a common starting point and indeed, template, for an organisation's corporate communication endeavours. Where two or more organisations share a corporate brand (cf Balmer 2012) there should be calibration apropos corporate brand communication.

Thus, just as *Corporate Digital Communication* (Quaternary Communication) has been accommodated within the total corporate communication mix, so should *Corporate Brand Communication* (Promissory Communication) where an entity has an explicit corporate brand orientation.

There is another significant corporate communication dimension which needs to be accommodated in the corporate brand communication mix: '*Feedback-Based Communication*.' This is a corporate communication dimension which accommodates communication feedback from customers and other stakeholders. Feedback has long been recognized as an important facet of communications. Such feedback is of value to organisations in appraising their overall corporate communication endeavours and in comprehending the perceptions held of the corporate brand. Thus, it can be invaluable in adjusting or refiguring those aspects of an organisation's corporate brand communication which it can control as well as understanding, and accommodating, the effects of other corporate brand communication vectors. The 'feedback-based' dimension of corporate brand communication may also be assigned the label *responsory corporate communication*. The origins of the word *responsory* are to be found in the Latin word *responsorium*, which means 'to answer'.

Figure 1 shows the Total Corporate Brand Communication Mix which encompasses both Corporate Brand Based ('Promissory') Corporate Communication and Feedback-Based ('Responsory') Corporate Communication.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

Critical Examination

Undoubtedly, digital corporate brand communication constitutes an important and meaningful advance in the realm of digital corporate communication. Digital corporate brand communication also allows for the communication and delivery of a corporate brand promise to be more finely honed and executed by organisations to better serve customers and other stakeholders. Unquestionably, it opens up both bi-lateral and multi-lateral corporate brand information exchange between organisations and stakeholders as well as between stakeholders and others. This can be empowering.

However, there are some downsides to this territory, and these represent the dark sides of digital corporate brand communication. For instance, digital corporate brand communication has empowered third party organisations who, progressively, have become integral to digital corporate brand communication. Digital platforms such as Google, YouTube and Facebook are cases in point. More worryingly, the digital field has attracted the attention of authoritarian governments who have banned, or have restricted, digital corporate brand communication. Certain governments have employed firewalls to ‘regulate’ digital communication, for instance (Burgers & Robinson, 2016). Notably, too, social media can be the cause of corporate brand crises and can materially impact on reputation (Etter, et al., 2019). All the above has resulted in a loss of control on the part of organisations. The same can be true for individuals. As such, individuals can feel there has been a loss of control. They may also reason that opaqueness, rather than transparency, inhabits corners of the digital sphere of which corners are dark and, sometimes, invisible.

Moreover, some corporate brands do not always demonstrate acceptable levels of digital corporate responsibility. Some company-based digital information systems have been shown to be untrustworthy. Consider ByteDance, which owns the app TikTok, who sold children’s digital data and monetarised this data (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bytedance-tiktok-lawsuit-idUSKBN2AP2O5>). Also consider Meta, which owns Facebook, who was accused of contravening privacy laws after sharing the information of 533 million users online (<https://www.reuters.com/legal/metasp-facebook-agrees-settle-data-privacy-lawsuit-2022-08-26/>).

More seriously, British Post Office, which knew that its Fujitsu Horizon computer system was faulty, used the faulty information from the system to accuse several hundred Post Office employees of false accounting, fraud, and theft. This resulted in the managers of Post Office branches being wrongly

charged, and even imprisoned. Many suffered financial ruin and severe ill health

(<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-56718036>)

One un-intended consequence of the rise of digital corporate brand communication is digital poverty and/or disenfranchisement. At one level this can be manifest in small organisations which do not have the wherewithal to fully embrace digital corporate brand communication. It can be a particular problem in business-to-business (B2B) organisations (Setkute & Dibb, 2022). Whilst many of those born after 1980 are likely to be conversant with the digital sphere, many older adults will be less adept. Moreover, many of those of retirement age will not be sufficiently au courant with digital mediums and technology and this can make them digitally disenfranchised. This has attracted little attention to date but warrants particular attention (Nunan & Di Domenico, 2019). A similar picture is likely to characterise younger adults who are less educated and/or are socially disadvantaged. Similarly, large parts of the developing world will be the same. Moreover, for many organisations the socially responsible thing to do is not to be fully digitalized. Thus, digital corporate brand communication managers need to be sensitive to the above. As such, non-digital corporate brand communication can still be important as well as necessary for the reasons delineated above.

Case study: The British Monarchy and Total Corporate Brand Communication

The British Monarchy is one of the most famous, and enduring, corporate brands. British monarchs have a global presence and profile. While attention is often focused on the person of the monarch or on the Royal Family, it is sometimes forgotten that the British Monarchy is an institution. Significantly, it is also a corporate brand. Indeed, the British monarchy is colloquially referred to as ‘the firm’ by members of the Royal Family. As with many corporate heritage brands, it is a family business as well.

The British monarchy is exceptional in that, as a corporate brand, it has entered the sub-conscious of thousands of people both in the UK and overseas over many years. Such is the importance and symbolic meaning of the monarchy to British life that many in Great Britain have dreamt about meeting the Queen or having tea with the Queen (the author is no exception in this regard).

Why can the British Monarchy be deemed to be exceptional in the global context? In part, this is because it is a corporate heritage brand whose roots go back to the 9th Century. Furthermore, it is the most familiar and celebrated of all monarchical brands. Consequently, it is accorded a great deal of attention by the world's media. It is the last of the great 'Imperial' monarchies and is surrounded by a good deal of pomp and ceremony. As such, British Monarchs are the only European monarchs who still wear a crown.

Additionally, the monarchy's high international profile is because until the mid-20th century somewhere between a quarter and a third of the world's population were subjects of the British Monarch. Today many of these historical links endure. By tradition, the British Monarch is titular head of the 'British' Commonwealth which comprises 54 independent nations. For the main, these comprise countries who were once under British rule. Today, the Commonwealth comprises around a third of all mankind (Cannon & Griffiths, 1998, p. 632). Notably, one in three of the world's adults aged between 15 and 29 live in a Commonwealth country (<https://thecommonwealth.org/about/facts>). Of course, there is often considerable interest in the loves, romances, weddings, births, deaths, royal visits, and royal haute couture of 'The Royals'. Equally, the blunders, imperfections, shortcomings, rumours, and scandals, whether real or perceived, also garner considerable public and media interest. Notably, the monthly magazine, *Majesty Magazine*, takes an in-depth look at the British Monarchy.

The insatiable interest in the British Monarchy as corporate brand is evidenced in various TV series and films. Some focus on the reign of Queen Elizabeth II and include the popular Netflix mega series 'The Crown' along with the films 'The Queen' and 'A Royal Night Out'. Also of note is the highly irreverent and satirical Channel 4 fictional sitcom series on the Royal Family entitled 'The Windsors'. Many other films concentrate on earlier monarchs including King George VI ('The King's Speech'); Queen Victoria ('Mrs Brown', 'Victoria and Abdul', and 'The Young Victoria'); King George III ('The Madness of King George') and the 18th century monarch Queen Mary ('The Favourite'). TikTok has a plethora of short videos on the monarchy (as does The Royal Family YouTube channel and the Royal Family Fashion YouTube channel).

Since time immemorial, with the exception of a fleeting period in the 17th Century when England was, de facto, a republic, monarchs have reigned over the British people. However, with the

passage of time, monarchy in Great Britain has undergone several transformations from being a *theocratic*, then an *autocratic* and then a *constitutional* monarchy (Balmer, 2009). Whereas, in the past, the monarchy had political power, today its power is primarily symbolic rather than political. However, the strength and significance of the British Monarchy's symbolic power should not be discounted. Symbolic power is a potent power.

The British monarch is unusual in that in addition to her role as British Head of State, she also wears the crown of other countries including Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Thus, the present British Monarch, HM Queen Elizabeth II, is Queen of Australia, Queen of Canada, Queen of New Zealand etc. Thus, the British monarch wears many crowns rolled into one. Interestingly, Queen Elizabeth is, in her various Realms, Queen of around 100,000,000 people (Bogdanor, 1995). Today, the British Monarchy has become the prototypical model of constitutional monarchy in which the monarch 'reigns but does not rule'. This monarchical form has been emulated by similar constitutional monarchies in Belgium, Denmark, Japan, Malaysia, Norway, the Netherlands, Spain, and Sweden, among others.

As a constitutional monarch, the British monarch has three principal functions. Consequently, the monarch is required to be dutiful, devoted and dedicated (Balmer, 2009). *Dutiful* is the requirement for the monarch to honour the tenets of a constitutional monarch as head of state of a parliamentary democracy where the monarch is a head of state but must be seen to reign but not to rule. *Devoted* requires the monarch to be in the service of the peoples of the realm and to celebrate their achievements; to empathize with them in times of adversity and to highlight the plight of the ill, dispossessed, vulnerable and/or forgotten. The *dedicated* monarchical trait requires a monarch to maintain the dignity, symbolism, and traditions of the institution.

Clearly, digital corporate communication is of crucial importance to the British Monarchy. Mindful of the total corporate brand communication mix outlined in this chapter, it is possible to illustrate how the mix pertains to the British Monarchy as follows:

Corporate Brand Based (Promissory) Corporate Communication of the British Monarchy: A cornerstone of the institution's corporate communication is focused on the associations linked to the British Monarchy as a corporate brand. For the author, this encapsulated in the institution

communicating the key tenets of the monarchy's corporate brand promise in terms of the monarch being *dutiful* to the constitution, *devoted* to the peoples of Great Britain, and *dedicated* to upholding the dignity of the monarchy etc. These three precepts can be viewed as representing the cornerstone of the British Monarchy as a corporate brand. Ideally, the monarchy's corporate brand-based communication should serve as the cornerstone, or what is sometimes called 'common starting points', for the institution's corporate communication endeavours.

Corporate Identity Based (Primary) Corporate Communication of the British Monarchy: This encapsulates the corporate communication effects of the British Monarchy's activities and behaviours in constitutional, social, and societal terms. Corporate identity signifies an organisation's defining and distinguishing traits. Thus, what the British Monarchy does, and how it does it, represents a powerful form of corporate communication in its own terms. Whilst the person of the monarch is the main vehicle and focus, of the above - with the Queen following the dictum, 'to be seen is to be believed' - it can encompass those who serve as the monarch's representatives and may, for instance, include members of the Royal Family. It should be remembered that "Everything an organisation does, will in some way communicate the organisation's identity" (Balmer, 1995, p. 35).

Controlled Based (Secondary) Corporate Communication of the British Monarchy: This comprises the controlled corporate communication of the British Monarchy which will be grounded in various corporate communication conduits under the direct control of the institution. Of course, this communication vector should also be mindful of corporate brand-based communication and its emphasis on being dutiful, devoted, and dedicated. Furthermore, controlled based corporate communication entails a concern for the institution's varied constituencies. As such, there will be targeted corporate communication activities aimed at these groups. Given the unique modus operandi of the monarchy in addition to the more usual controlled communication vectors, importance is accorded to the monarch's visits, receptions, messages of support, occasional broadcasts (such as the Queen's Christmas Message), news stories and press releases, and other activities which would be comparable to corporate public relations. The rituals and ceremonies of the monarchy would also be a part of the institution's corporate communication. The above being noted, paid-for advertising is uncommon.

Word-of-Mouth Based (Tertiary) Corporate Communication of the British Monarchy: The monarchy does not control every aspect of its corporate communication. As such, tertiary communication takes account of communication about the institution from third parties. The most important of these will be the public, but will also encompass commentary from the media, politicians, and other key figures. Although the institution cannot control these narratives and dialogues, it must, all the same, be cognizant of them and take account of them. Word-of-mouth based corporate communication can have a discernable ‘corporate communication effect’.

Digital (Quaternary) Based Corporate Communication of the British Monarchy: Quaternary corporate communication means the British Monarchy needs to take account of new forms of communication as evinced in digital based communication and encompasses innovative technology along with artificial intelligence. It is broad in scope and has wide boundaries. It can also be used as an information resource which assists in planning, learning and the analysis of big data. Among the corporate communication team within the British Monarchy is a head of digital engagement who has responsibility for the British monarchy’s website along with the institution’s social media channels. The monarchy’s YouTube ‘Royal Channel’ was started in October 2007; its first tweet dates back to April 2009, and shared photographs on Flickr commenced in April 2010. (<https://ariherzog.com/blog/about/>). The British Monarchy’s Twitter account, named @RoyalFamily, has about 4.8 million followers (as at 2022). The current head of digital communication understands the importance of digital corporate communication for the monarchy and believes it has promoted the Crown as a corporate brand as “a modern, forward-thinking organisation” (www.com.uk/meet-our-people-emma). However, owing to the worldwide high profile and high public interest in the monarchy’s digital sphere has its challenges:

“One of the great, but also at times nerve-racking things about working in communications for the Royal Family, is that the reaction to our work is always high-profile: announcements make front page news, and Facebook posts reach tens of millions of followers” (www.com.uk/meet-our-people-emma).

As one blogger on the British Monarchy has presciently observed:

“The Monarchy wants to be where the people are, and the people - you and me - love it ...

The role of the British Monarchy today: not so much pomp and circumstance but socialization.

Who doesn't want to socialize on the internet with Queens, Princes, and Duchesses? Granted they may not be tweeting or Facebooking individually, but I'll wager a bet they are very aware of what is written on their behalf and what people are writing in response.”

(<https://ariherzog.com/blog/about/>).

During the coronavirus pandemic in the years following 2019, the monarchy was heavily reliant on digital corporate communication owing to the need to keep social distancing. As such, virtually all the monarch's activities and communication went digital.

Feedback (Responsory) Based Corporate Communication of the British Monarchy: Direct communication from individuals and groups to the British Monarchy represent an important dimension of the British Monarchy's corporate communication. It can come in a variety of digital forms, such as social media and email, and by traditional forms such as postal correspondence. Feedback can also be solicited by the Crown from the public in terms of opinion surveys and can also be instigated by the Queen's personal representatives through Great Britain (e.g., the lord-lieutenants who can filter feedback to the institution).

Conclusion and future directions

This chapter has explained the nature and significance of Total Corporate Brand Communication (TCBC) and outlined a sextuple framework. Broad in scope, the TCBC perspective accommodates several corporate communication perspectives which are not always accorded importance, such as digital corporate communication and corporate brand communication. Both are important and both need to be taken account of. Importantly, an increasing number of organisations are according increased importance to their corporate brands and to their corporate brand promise. This is not only because corporate brands can be of significant strategic value for organisations, but also because corporate brands can be highly attractive to customers and other stakeholders. In terms of digital corporate communication, whilst it has increased the breadth and power of the corporate communication field for organisations, it has also greatly empowered stakeholders. Thus, it can be

seen, in part, to have ‘democratized’ corporate communication - however, only in part. This is, in part, because digital corporate communication has increased the influence of ‘third party’ organisations and these organisations can also be seen to be part of the corporate communication process in a way that was not previously the case. What is apparent is that the corporate brand and digital spheres requires a radical rethinking of corporate communication and its management.

Looking ahead, the digital world is pregnant with possibilities. One facet of this is the use of AI to augment the real world via extended reality (Chaturvedi & Verma, 2022). *Extended Reality* encompass a variety of forms including Augmented Reality, Virtual Reality and Mixed Reality. Thus, focusing on the British Monarchy, *Augmented Reality* (AR) will enhance a person’s experience of the institution. Consequently, digital corporate communicators employing the services of designers and others to amplify a person’s interaction with the institution through visuals, sound, and graphics. In the future, a person attending the changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace would be able to overlay their encounter with this ritual through digital means through the utilization of enhanced sensory effects. These enhanced digital sensory effects might include the smell of leather saddles and the scent of horses.

Virtual Reality (VR) allows for the monarch’s digital corporate communication team to permit an individual to experience the monarchy from anywhere in the world. As such, through VR, it will be possible for an individual to have a virtual presence at real time events and ceremonies where the monarch is present. This might include ‘witnessing’ the more mundane, but important, visits by the monarch to hospitals, hospices, charities, and schools. It could include ‘selected eavesdropping’ on meetings between the monarch and the British Prime Minister and overseas Ambassadors and High Commissioners. It most certainly would include ‘experiencing’ the great royal occasions such as coronations, the state opening of parliament, the trooping of the colour, and so on.

Finally, through *Mixed Reality* (MR) the monarch’s digital corporate communication experts can allow individuals to suffuse their real-world experience with a virtual world experience. Thus, a person standing outside Buckingham Palace might be granted digital accesses to enter the palace gates and, eventually, find themselves wearing formal evening attire and seated opposite a princess at a state banquet for the President of Finland or the Emperor of Japan. One problem of Extended Reality

(ER) is that the real thing might seem lackluster in comparison. However, for those with disabilities or sensory impairments, ER might prove to be a boon.

In bringing this chapter to a close, it is evident that the corporate communication landscape has increasingly morphed not only into a digital landscape but also a corporate brand landscape. Thus, the necessity to take account of both the corporate brand and digital realms and the necessity for them to be integrated. This chapter has shed light on the importance of these dimensions. Given the inexorable rise of digital technologies and the relentless recognition of the importance of corporate brands, the new area of digital corporate brand communication will increase in importance. Today, we have reached a ‘tipping point’ where digital channels of corporate brand communication will grow in importance whilst some traditional corporate communication components will wane. As such, whilst this chapter has highlighted the nature and significance of Digital Corporate Brand Communication, this overview should be seen as not so much as the end but, rather, as the end of the beginning.

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