

**Between Convergence And Power Struggles:
How Public Relations And Marketing Communications Professionals Interact
in Corporate Brand Management**

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Abstract

This paper analyzes new developments in the relationship between marketing communications and public relations in the field of corporate communications with a specific focus on corporate branding. The results presented herein stem from an empirical study conducted in four large German industries (energy, telecommunication, insurance, and chemical industries). In each company, both the head of corporate communications/PR and the head of marketing communications were interviewed (n=104; random sample, CATI telephone interviews). The results draw an interesting albeit contradictory picture. On the one hand, the data showed a strong convergence of stakeholder priorities, goals, and instruments of branding, and a high level of structural collaboration. On the other hand, the data revealed a number of underlying conflicts, discrepancies, and contradictory perceptions. Although integration seems to be rather advanced in day-to-day branding activities, marketing and public relations managers do not share the same mindsets. The perceptions of their roles and functions within the organization vary considerably. In contrast to other publications in the field, this paper does not focus on organizational structures and departmental power struggles, but rather identifies a fundamental turn in the relationship between marketing and corporate communications/PR both in scientific discourse and in corporate practice.

Introduction

Recent years have seen a new dynamic in the confluence of marketing communications and public relations (PR). Trends and developments in the social and technical environment of organizations, such as a growing concern for how businesses affect the natural environment, critical stakeholder movements, and new ways of communication and content production in social media settings, provide both functions with a common challenge.

A complex digital and virtual new world of media and communication, the decline of traditional journalism, and new areas of public conversations (Gillmor, 2006; Beckett & Mansell, 2008; Papacharissi, 2009; Rosenberry & St John, 2010) have led to new organizational challenges. Bold and simple forms of unidirectional marketing communications have come under fire. Customers and other stakeholders increasingly question traditional modes of production and sales. Critical and popular reflections in the forms of movies (e.g. Michael Moore's satiric documentaries), books (e.g. Klein, 2010; Foer, 2010; Chomsky, 1999; Herman & Chomsky, 2002), and blogs (e.g. Huffington Post) attract large audiences. At the same time, scattered individuals can quickly form a critical mass via the Internet. An ever-increasing population questions the legitimization of companies continuing doing business the way they do. The role of companies within modern societies is put to the test stand. Many companies have started to internalize their externalities, i.e. to take responsibility for their products and their impacts on nature and society (Meyer & Kirby, 2010, pp. 39–40). The overall goal of profit maximization has been complemented by the goals of sustainability and responsibility (Argenti, 2009; Lubin & Esty, 2010).

Thus, intangible assets such as corporate image and reputation have gained in importance and have started to function as the basis of trust and credibility (Fombrun & van Riel, 2003; van Riel & Fombrun, 2007). In this context, the PR function has gained importance and broadened its spheres of activity towards classical marketing areas such as branding or corporate advertising (Hutton, 1996, 2010). At the same time, marketing theory and practice have increasingly adopted traditional PR-related approaches and dialogical modes of communication.

However, the revaluation of such society-oriented forms of communication has not necessarily led to an absolute devaluation of market-oriented communication. Instead, we find two broadly equal communication functions in many organizations today: marketing communications and PR. These functions are characterized by increasingly overlapping topics, instruments, spheres of activities, and stakeholders. And although, from a historical point of view, both derive from different paradigms, in today's working environment their scopes of duties are increasingly overlapping and hard to distinguish. Thus, the need for integration and cooperation is becoming greater. This is especially the case in areas where both sides have high stakes, such as corporate branding.

Corporate branding has for several years been a growing field of interest (Schultz, Antorini, & Csaba, 2005; Hatch & Schultz, 2008). Building up a strong corporate brand and an integrated communication strategy with a common core and shared polyphonic instruments (Christensen, Morsing, & Cheney, 2008, Zerfass, 2008) is a preferred solution to master the challenge of increasing homogeneity and the growing interchangeability of products and services. However, the implementation of such strategies is often hindered by a struggle for power and conflicting worldviews between the marketing communications and PR functions. And while, traditionally, brand management, especially product branding, has been located in

the marketing function, because of the all-embracing concept of corporate branding, corporate brand management increasingly penetrates the scope of the PR function and is co-managed from there.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the relationship between marketing communications and PR, taking into consideration the developments of recent years. Therefore, we are not looking for a new approach to integrated communications but rather aiming to reveal fundamental trends in the development of both disciplines and functions. A literature review will provide a short overview of the relationship between the two disciplines since the late 1970s and the debate about integrated communications. It will then reveal the increasing convergence of both disciplines because of developments inside and outside organizations that have led to a change in the conception of both functions. Corporate branding is then introduced as an example where this trend has become especially obvious. To underpin the impression gained from the literature search we present data from an empirical study. An extended discussion of this research with the inclusion of qualitative case studies can be found in Süss, Zerfass, and Dühring (2011).

Literature Review

Marketing and PR: Towards a New Relationship

The academic debate on the relationship between marketing and PR started in the late 1970s (Kotler & Mindak, 1978). As far as marketing communications is concerned, the debate was almost exclusively carried by Schultz, Kitchen, and related scholars under the unspecific buzzword *integrated marketing communication* (IMC) (Schultz, Tannenbaum, & Lauterborn 1993, 1996; Schultz, Kerr, Kim, & Patti, 2007; Kitchen, Kim, & Schultz, 2008; Kitchen & Schultz, 2009). This concept has never been truly accepted by either the marketing community where it was often claimed to be nothing but another management fad (Cornelissen & Lock, 2000b) or the PR community where it was interpreted as an attempted hostile takeover and labeled with catchwords such as *imperialism* and *encroachment* (Lauzen, 1991; Spicer, 1991; Broom, Lauzen, & Tucker, 1991; Varey, 2005). So far, despite a continuous stream of international research and publications covering this theme, the scientific debate has produced few results. Recent studies still paint a chaotic picture concerning the theory and practice of IMC. Scholars criticize the lack of theory building and the inconsistent educational programs (Kerr, 2009; Schultz et al., 2007). So today even the initiators of the concept acknowledge that it has to be revised and adapted to new challenges in the marketplace and changes in the interpretation of the roles and functions of marketing and PR (Kitchen & Schultz, 2009).

While the North American and Australian research landscape is dominated by the IMC approach, the concept is less popular among European marketing and PR scholars. In Europe, the debate is fragmented, characterized by individual approaches and a lack of conceptual clarity. Scandinavian authors often use the term *corporate communication* (Christensen, Cornelissen, & Morsing, 2007; Christensen, Firat, & Cornelissen, 2009; Simic Brønn & Berg, 2005), although they do not necessarily refer to integrated approaches but oftentimes cover meso-level approaches deriving from a PR or organizational communication background. Another term frequently used by European scholars is *integrated communication* (Holm, 2006; Vos & Schoemaker, 2008; Bruhn, 2009), equally encompassing a broad range of approaches from both marketing and PR scholars. The concepts differ depending on the disciplinary background of the respective author and his or

her interpretation of what constitutes and contains the concepts of PR and marketing. They also differ immensely in their depth of analysis; some take integration for granted, some focus simply on organizational matters of integration and coordination, and many concentrate on media-related problems, ignoring the fact that PR and marketing communications have long broadened their fields of activity. Cornelissen and Lock state –a remarkable dearth of critical analysis of the relationship between these two functions as well as of the ways these functions can be most effectively structured within the organizations. In particular, the presuppositions of the various theoretical perspectives of the relationship between both functions have to date not been fully made explicitll (2000a, p. 231).

Almost unnoticed (but see Hutton, 1996, 2010) from this debate has been another trend in the relationship between both disciplines: that of their increasing convergence in theory and practice. From a historical point of view, marketing and PR derive from different paradigms. While marketing was always designed to serve organizational goals and to contribute to overall organizational value, PR often took a conflicting, boundary-spanning position, serving the organization as well as the general public. What we have seen recently is that, on the one hand, marketing theory is moving towards a PR-related approach, becoming more and more concerned with critical stakeholders in the entire environment of the organization rather than concentrating merely on customers. Approaches and fields of research such as ‘critical marketing’ (Saren, Maclaran, Goulding, Elliot, Shankar, & Caterall, 2007), ‘macromarketing’ (Shapiro, Tadajewski, & Shultz, 2009; Wilkie & Moore, 2006; Maclaran, Saren, Stern, & Tadajewski, 2010), and ‘postmodern marketing’ (Brown 1995, 1998) have broadened the academic field and ushered in a more society-oriented perspective. Research conducted in these areas refers to the relationship between an organization and its environment as well as the responsibility of organizations on behalf of their environments. Scholars, therefore, have to take a critical look at the impact of marketing on society, such as the impact of advertising on children, the promotion of a consumer society, and adiposity as a consequence of the promotion of unhealthy food. It is unsurprising that these fields are currently experiencing a revival. Societal changes, such as the growing concern for the natural environment, stakeholders becoming more and more critical of large organizations and institutions, and the growing criticism of western lifestyle and its consumer society, are the breeding ground for the named fields of scholarly interest.

Up to now, the scope of influence of the everchanging structures, channels, and applications of the Internet on marketing in general and on marketing communications in particular has been uncertain. Nevertheless, it is already clear that marketing will have to continue to change its ways of communicating with customers, consumers, and other stakeholders. Online communication will never again be monological and unidirectional. Organizations have to engage in dialogical, two-way communication, taking into account the views and interests of their stakeholders. While PR scholars have long cherished this idea, even before these ways of communication were made possible on a large scale through technical advancement, many marketing scholars have acknowledged this paradigm shift only recently (Finne & Grönroos, 2009). Instead, marketing practitioners seem to be ahead of the academic discourse. Recently published books in the field of marketing communications (Shiffman, 2008; Pulizzi & Barret, 2009; Scott, 2010) address exactly this challenge.

In PR research, we find the opposite trend. Historically, PR theory and practice has been grounded in the relationships between an organization and its public. Building, fostering, and maintaining good relationships with the public, whether that may be journalists, activists, politicians, or other influential stakeholders, has always been at the heart of PR theory and

thinking. This traditional conceptualization of PR as a 'service to the public' is grounded in the normative concepts of symmetrical communication, trust, balance of interests, and social responsibility. But in the 1990s, starting with the Excellence Study (Grunig, 1992), we saw a significant turn in PR theory and thinking. This time marked the beginning of management thinking in PR research on a broad scale. The research team around James E. Grunig designed its study with the aim to link management thought and theory with PR theory and practice. It took up a current trend and at that time influential school of thought in management that has been established by Peters and Waterman's (1982) famous book *In Search of Excellence*. This strategic turn constituted a more company- and management-focused perspective, conceptualizing PR as a management function that verifiably contributes to organizational and shareholder value.

—Public relations contributes to organizational effectiveness when it helps reconcile the organization's goals with the expectations of its strategic constituencies. This contribution has monetary value to the organization. Public relations contribute to effectiveness by building quality, long-term relationships with strategic constituencies. (Grunig, Grunig, & Ehling, 1992, p. 86)

This perspective continuously gained ground in the discipline. Many approaches, especially those oriented at the Excellence Study, incorporated primarily rationalist models of strategic management (Grunig & Repper, 1992; Verčič & Grunig, 2003; for a critique, see McKie, 2000) to advance communication as a key management function. As Sandhu (2009) observes, the functional/managerial perspective was buttressed by the import of various models based largely on rationalistic strategic management literature such as strategic planning (Smith, 2009), issues management (Ansoff, 1980; Lauzen, 1997), scenario planning (Sung, 2007), or evaluation methods (Watson & Noble, 2007). This managerialization of communication as a strategic function was increased by the proposition of sophisticated measurement systems (Fleisher & Burton, 1995; Fleisher & Mahaffy, 1997). A general societal trend towards accountability (Power, 1997) increased the importance of managing communication processes efficiently and effectively and proving PR's return on investment (Baskin, Hahn, Seaman, & Reines, 2010; Lee & Yoon, 2010). These developments promoted relatively new fields of research such as communication controlling and management accounting, where researchers developed methods to prove communication's return on investment to identify value links between communication strategies and business goals (e.g. Fleisher & Mahaffy, 1997; Watson & Noble, 2007; van Ruler, Tkalac Verčič, & Verčič, 2008; Zerfass, 2010). It also opened the field towards adjacent fields of management and organizational theory. Here, topics such as corporate identity, corporate culture, and corporate branding, which has gained importance in recent years, have been of increasing interest for both marketing and PR.

Corporate Branding: A Concept in Change

Corporate branding has been a growing field of interest for many years (Schultz et al., 2005; Hatch & Schultz, 2008). Several reasons can be identified. Globalization without common legal or ethical boundaries motivates many stakeholders to ask for more transparency and a detailed legitimization of corporate interests: "The move towards greater transparency has generated a more holistic way of communicating who the organization is and what it contributes to its various stakeholders" (Schultz, 2005a, p. 36). Moreover, it becomes more and more difficult and costly to establish individual product brands on a global

scale. Corporate brands have the advantage of being able to brand the whole company, including its unique history and identity (Barney, 2007; Aaker, 2004). In contrast to product branding, which is traditionally anchored in marketing, corporate branding is tangent to all departments and hierarchies of the company. The conception and management of a corporate brand has to be rooted in the heart of the company and goes along with processes of identity and image management (Balmer, 2001; Ind & Schultz, 2010). While product brands are usually focused on customers, corporate brands reach all internal and external stakeholders of the organization, from employees to the general public. Thus, the task to create a consistent image across all stakeholders and via all channels becomes more demanding.

Owing to the large scope of areas touched by corporate branding, the field of research has become interdisciplinary and related to areas such as organizational theory, management theory, corporate communications, corporate identity, and so on. Corporate branding represents a blending of parallel developments within different academic disciplines. Each discipline points to the need for a more integrated understanding of how corporations express themselves in situations of complexity and change. In this context, Schultz formulates the following definition of corporate branding:

[...] corporate branding can be conceptualized in the following ways. As alignments between the origin and everyday practices of the organization (organizational culture); where the organization aspires to go (strategic vision); how the organization is perceived by external stakeholders (image); all nested in perceptions of who the organization is (identity). (2005a, p. 24)

Thus, the corporate brand is not a larger product brand, but rather a complex construct, which is created and recreated in mutual relationships with different stakeholders. The shift from classic (product) branding to corporate branding includes a number of dimensions, which are summarized in Table 1.

	Classic Branding	Corporate Branding
Foundation	Individual products are the foundation of most brands	The company or organization is the foundation of the brand
Conceptualization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing • Inside-out and outside-in thinking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-disciplinary • Combines inside-out with outside-in thinking
Stakeholders	Consumers and customers	All stakeholders
Responsible for branding	Marketing and communication functions	All functions driven by top management
Time perspective	Short: product lifecycle	Long: organization lifecycle
Core process	Marketing and communication decide brand promises and marketing/communication mix	Managerial and organizational processes align the company behind brand identity
Key issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand architecture • Brand positioning • Brand identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand as a strategic force • Relations among strategic vision, organizational culture and stakeholder image • Brand alignment
Difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to build and sustain product differentiation • Restricted involvement of employees and use of cultural heritage • Limited involvement of stakeholders in communication efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to align internal and external stakeholders • Difficult to create credible and authentic identity • Difficult to involve different subcultures and shifting stakeholders

Table 1: Differences between classic branding and corporate branding

Source: Schultz, 2005, p. 27

Corporate Brand Management as a Challenge for Integrated Communications

One of the most profound implications of the shift from classic branding to corporate branding is that corporate branding has become a strategic process (Schultz, 2005b, pp. 182–184). The implementation of a corporate brand requires an organization-wide change process

involving multiple internal and external stakeholders and departmental resources. The management of corporate brands places high demands on the integration and involvement of managers and employees from different functions and subcultures in realizing the vision of the corporate brand. The tensions embedded in these processes exceed those of other kinds of brand implementation. In particular, the cross-disciplinary and cross-functional nature of corporate branding makes the implementation process vulnerable to turf issues, such as corporate power struggles and status conflicts. In this context, the two functions in question here ^{EU}marketing communications and PR ^{FD} have to be especially integrated and coordinated. Unfortunately, the literature provides little advice here. Authors state the problem but will not go beyond critical descriptions of the status quo and will not offer clear advice concerning the structuring and coordinating of the departments involved in the corporate branding process. Most marketing authors do not mention the problem at all, and naturally pinpoint the head of corporate branding in marketing while defining PR as a supportive function. However, corporate practice shows that this constellation is not prevalent everywhere. Instead, in an increasing number of companies corporate branding is managed by the corporate communications or PR function.

The paper sets out to address this research gap and tries to give a more sophisticated impression of the relationship between both functions today. Our statements are grounded in the current literature and the results of an empirical study we conducted in four large German industries in 2010.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The study addressed the formal and informal structures of integrated communications and brand management, the quality of collaboration, the leadership in brand management, and the communication manager's role perceptions. It focused on the following main research questions:

RQ1: Which factors influence the structural organization and functional implementation of a company's specific branding strategy?

RQ2: Who has the leading part in the conception and steering of the branding architecture and why?

RQ3: What can be said about the level and quality of integration and cooperation in general and with regard to corporate branding specifically?

RQ4: Do the communication managers share a common understanding of the functions and goals of communication management and branding?

From these questions, the following hypotheses were generated:

H1a: At least two-thirds of PR managers rely on inbound-oriented dimensions of communication.

H1b: About two-thirds of marketing communications pursue outbound-oriented objectives of communication.

H2a: The majority of marketing communication managers identifies customers and shareholders as their most important stakeholders.

H2b: The majority of PR managers focus on policymakers and the general society.

H3: In most companies, collaboration occurs in an ad hoc manner and sporadically and is not based on formal structures.

H4: Marketing communications and PR use different branding instruments:

H4a: Marketing favor classical marketing instruments such as events and advertising.

H4b: PR favor instruments such as press relations and corporate social responsibility.

- H5: Communication managers differ in their assessments of branding objectives:
 H5a: Marketing managers name –differentiation and profiling‖ and –accomplishment of price premium‖ as most important.
 H5b: PR managers rank the –establishment of trust and credibility‖ and the –communication of key messages‖ first.

Conceptual Framework

We developed a multidimensional framework to illustrate the basic factors of influence and their mutual interactions (see Fig. 1). This was based on the assumption that three factors at the micro-, meso-, and macro-level have an influence on the strategy, structures, and understanding of communication management in general and corporate branding in particular:

- The sector/branch of the company with the main characteristics: image, competitive situation, and level of regulation;
- The organization with the main characteristics: structure, corporate culture, strategy, and the understanding of the tasks and functions communication has for the organization; and
- The acting marketing communications and PR managers and their levels of power and influence, personal understandings of their roles and functions, and their individual characteristics.

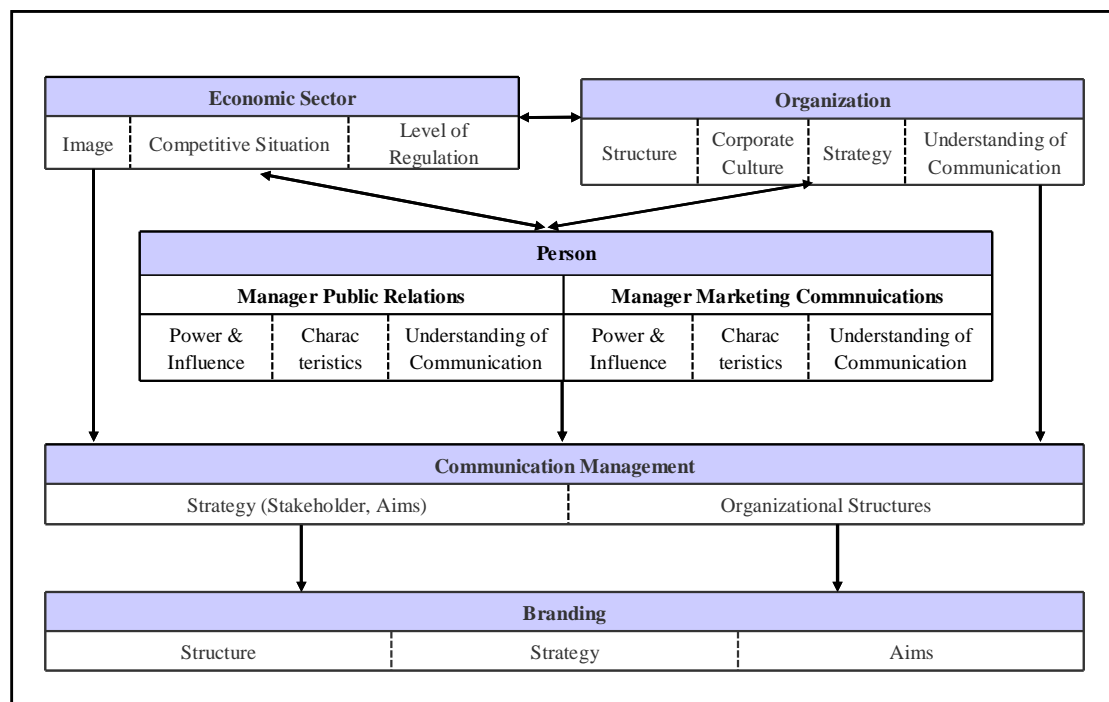


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

These factors form the structural framework for the conception and implementation of the corporate branding strategy. The factors influence each other as well. We assume that the economic sector and the respective competitive situation as well as organizational culture and structure influence marketing and PR managers. They have to align their work to the demands posed on them by their business environments. They act in certain structures and their scopes of action are enlarged or reduced depending on how important their work is perceived by

superiors and the organization at large. The more important the role of marketing communications or PR is perceived, the more power, influence, and resources these managers will gain. This attribution of significance and the preference of marketing- or PR-related forms of communication depend on the challenges imposed on the respective communication functions. Companies such as energy suppliers and those in the chemical industry whose politics and products are under constant critical public surveillance have a different focus to those who do not have significant problems with their public images and reputations. The importance of different communication functions will shift accordingly. Likewise, the communication managers themselves are able to influence their positions and significance to the organization by their behavior and role assessment. Managers that think innovatively and future-oriented might be able to question obsolete structures and processes.

Methodology

To analyze the relationship between both functions in the context of communication management in general and in the processes of corporate branding specifically, we conducted an empirical study in four major industries in Germany. We investigated companies in the energy industry (32.7% of the respondents), telecommunication industry (17.3%), insurance industry (25%), and chemical industry (25%). In a random sample, 52 companies were contacted. In each company, both the head of corporate communications/PR as well as the head of marketing communications were interviewed. Overall, 104 communication managers participated. The gender distribution was 57.7 per cent female and 42.3 per cent male. Most managers were between 40 and 49 years old (50.5%); almost one-fifth (19.4%) were 50 years or older, whereas 4.9 per cent were younger than 30 years. The average work experience was 17.3 years. The survey was conducted via computer assisted telephone interviews by a professional market research institution in February 2010. We used descriptive and analytical statistics with SPSS to analyze the data.

Owing to the fact that in each company both the head of PR and the head of marketing communications were interviewed, we were able to directly compare their answers to detect underlying conflicts, discrepancies, and contradictory perceptions.

Selected Results and Findings

High overlap concerning the assessment of goals and task of communication

The study showed a strong convergence concerning the goals and tasks of both communication functions (Fig. 2). It was expected that marketing would favor outbound-oriented goals (hypothesis H1b), while PR would value more inbound-oriented goals (hypothesis H1a). But only hypothesis H1b could be verified. Both functions name the *–facilitation of business processes* as the number one goal (90.4% each). It was expected that marketing communicators would favor the *–adjustment of corporate strategies* according to expectations from the markets and customers. But corporate communications professionals took this perspective, as well. By contrast, marketing communications seem to have realized the importance of reputation for corporate success. A total of 44.2 per cent of the respondents from this function think that the avoidance of reputational risks is important. These data confirm our approach that the inclusion of topics and opinions from the social environment into the business and branding strategy is now estimated highly by marketing professionals, too. By contrast, we see a trend towards the managerialization of PR having assigned itself the task of value contribution. We found a new kind of self-confidence when we asked PR

professionals about their assessments of PR's contribution to corporate success. Over half (59.6%) think that they have a very high or high share in the company's success.

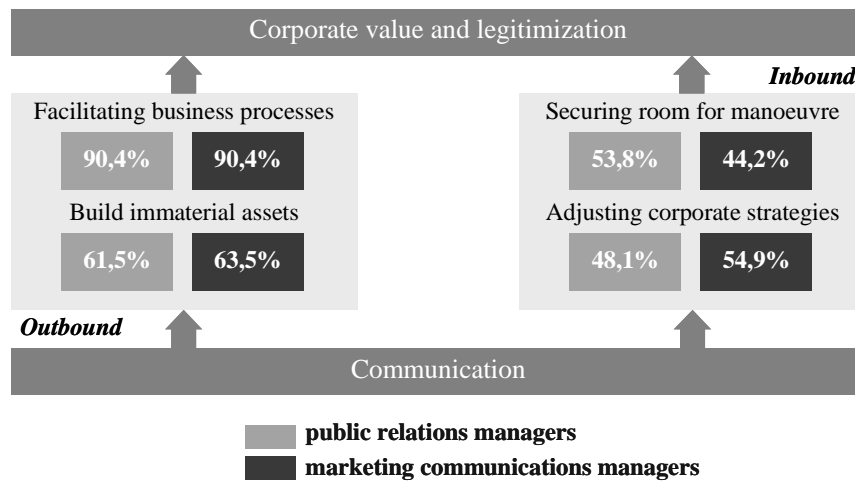


Figure 2: Assessment of objectives of communication
 n = 104; perception of the goals and functions of communication (scale 1–6; goal accomplished = scale points 5 and 6)

Overlapping Stakeholder Maps

The stakeholder map in Fig. 3 shows that marketing and PR managers prioritize the same set of stakeholders. Both ranked customers first. This is not surprising on behalf of the marketing function, but rather surprising for PR. Here, we expected a preference for the social environment/public sphere and policymakers. The analysis shows that the interests and demands of both functions can no longer be separated. Customers do not only expect high-quality products with fair prices but sustainable and responsible behavior, as well. Thus, stakeholder groups are increasingly overlapping. Hypotheses H2a and H2b could only partly be verified. We were right in our assumption that marketing communications stress the importance of customers, but they do not take responsibility for shareholders. PR managers surely take into consideration the perspective of the society at large but do not feel responsible for policymakers.

Structure and Quality of Cooperation

PR can be considered an independent organizational function today. The perspective of PR being part of the marketing function, which is still perpetuated in marketing literature, is obsolete. In 86.5 per cent of the companies participating in our study, the PR department is organized as an independent function; only 13.5 per cent of PR departments are subordinated to marketing. This independent structure can be rated positively because it shows the value of PR in most companies today. By contrast, it can lead to functional silos. The functional structure of many companies is often referred to as an obstacle for integration. The focus on one's own department and inflexible hierarchies are a hindrance for better cooperation. The success of integrated communications, therefore, often depends on the actual formal and informal modes of cooperation beyond functional structures. These can be more or less institutionalized. In our study, the degree of institutionalization was about two-thirds, taking

into consideration common departmental or staff structures and management guidelines (Fig. 4). In more than one-third of the companies, the impulse to cooperate stems from individual efforts.

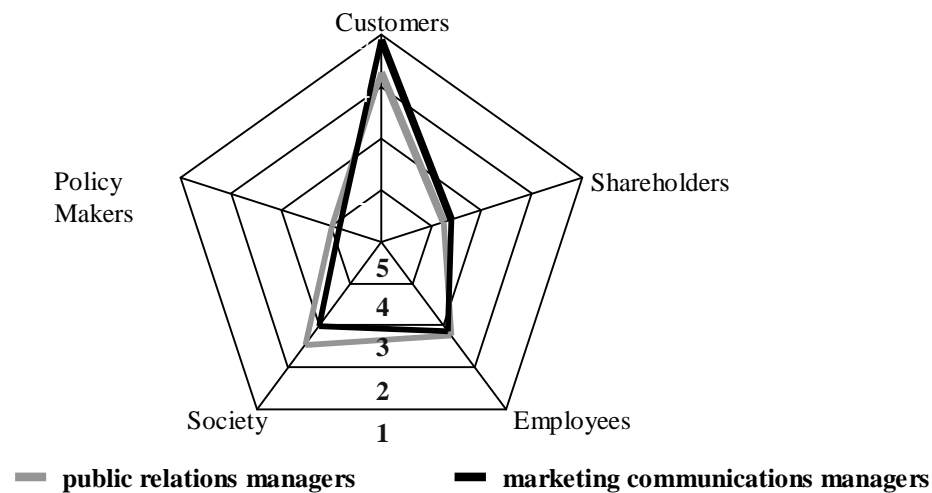


Figure 3: Convergent stakeholder prioritization
 n = 104; importance of stakeholders in accordance to communication strategy; scale 1–6;
 important stakeholder = scale points 5 and 6.

We found some contradictions in the statements concerning the depth and quality of cooperation. To analyze whether the perceptions of both marketing and PR managers within the same company corresponded, we compared their answers to different questions. There was an 82.7 per cent correspondence regarding the first statement –In project teams representatives of both departments work together. The second statement –We have regular meetings and exchange news about current projects showed only 69.2 per cent correspondence; in 28.8 per cent of the companies involved, the communication professionals answered differently and 1.9 per cent said that this is not the case. Concerning the statement –We develop a communication strategy for the company, 30.8 per cent gave contradictory answers. This confirms that cooperation occurs in an ad hoc manner and that it is not institutionalized in many companies. Thus, we consider hypothesis H3 as verified. But the respondents do not question this deficit critically.

Collaboration arises as a result from

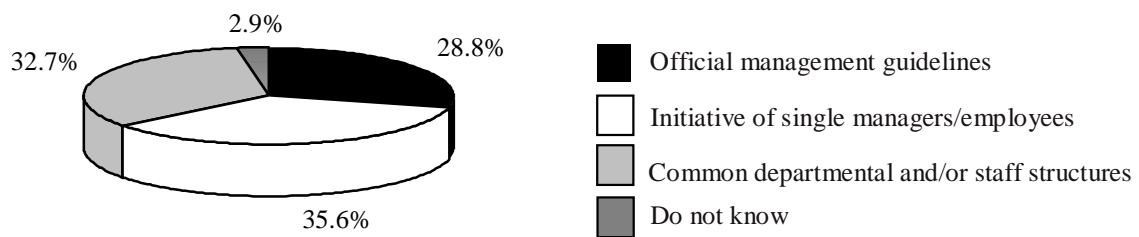


Figure 4: Initiators of cooperation

n = 104; who takes the initiative in collaboration and integration?

Instead, cooperation in general is estimated to be positive. In 82.7 per cent of the companies, both parties estimate cooperation as positive.

Who manages the corporate brand?

The data presented up to now analyzed the relationship between marketing and PR in general. In a next step, we took a more specific look at the relationship in the field of corporate branding. First, we were interested in the participation of both functions in the conception of the branding strategy. The study confirmed our expectations that the responsibility for the branding strategy is foremost in the hands of the marketing function. Altogether, 90.4 per cent of the marketing communicators, but just 73.1 per cent of the PR managers, stated that they were involved. In the majority of the companies (69.2%), marketing and PR share this task, in 21.2 per cent, just marketing is involved, and in 3.8 per cent just PR. Nevertheless, the final decisions on the conception and implementation of branding strategies are made by marketing communications professionals. In total, 62.5 per cent of this group state that they have the management responsibility. Only 25 per cent of the PR managers claim this role for themselves.

	PR	Marketing communications
We have the same objectives	54.1%	50.0%
Our scopes of functions are well separated	43.2%	42.5%
Our standpoints are always taken seriously and into consideration	32.4%	47.5%
We have a good and regular cooperation	59.5%	52.5%

Table 2: Assessment of cooperation in the context of corporate branding

n = 77; evaluation of the quality of cooperation in the context of the conception and implementation of branding strategy; scale 1–6; Agreement = scale points 5 and 6.

When asked for the degree of satisfaction with cooperation in the field of corporate branding, the respondents were more critical than before (Table 2). Only 43.2 per cent think that the spheres of responsibility are well defined. On average, just 51.9 per cent say that both functions have the same objectives. Furthermore, just 55.8 per cent of the respondents state that both work well together. In addition, only 32.4 per cent of the PR managers have the impression that their points of view are seriously taken into consideration.

Despite these results, we find clear traces of convergence in the field of branding as well. We received interesting results when we asked the respondents for the importance of different instruments they use for branding activities. As can be seen in Fig. 6, marketing and PR practitioners ranked the instruments in the same order. It was assumed that PR managers prioritized press and media relations, but it was a surprise to see that marketing communications professionals in those industries do the same. They also stressed the importance of corporate social responsibility and were even more definite than were their PR colleagues. This shows that both functions are closer than they think they are. Hypotheses H4a and H4b were therefore falsified.

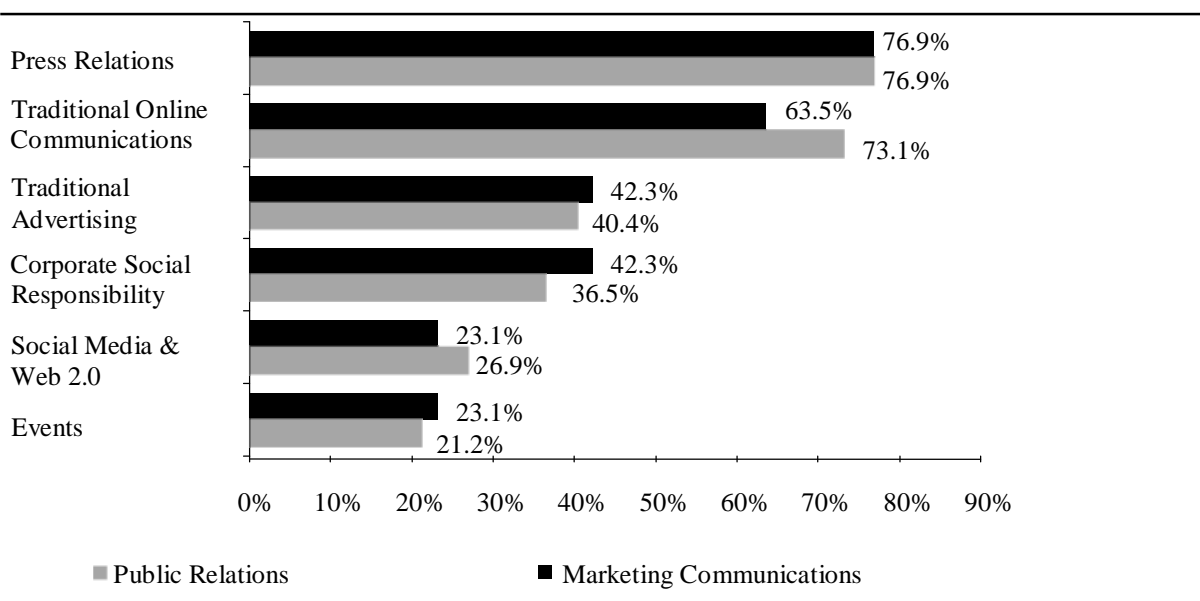


Figure 5: Importance of branding instruments
n = 104; scale 1–6; method used = scale points 5 and 6.

This impression was confirmed by the statements concerning the objectives of branding (Fig. 6). Establishment of trust and credibility is a typical PR objective and is ranked in first place by marketing communications, too. By contrast, differentiation and profiling or increase in customer loyalty are classical marketing objectives and are also ranked very high by PR managers. Finally, the accomplishment of price premium, a rather traditional branding goal, is ranked last by both marketing and PR managers – just another hint that traditional approaches towards corporate branding are under change. Therefore, hypotheses H5a and H5b were falsified.

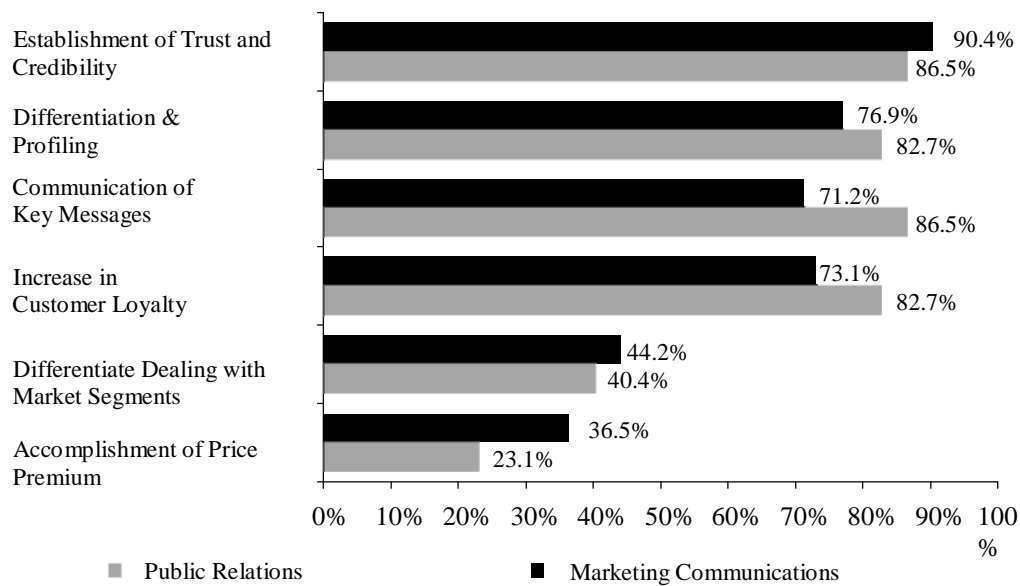


Figure 6: Importance of branding objectives
 n = 104; scale 1–6; Importance = scale points 5 and 6.

In-depth Analysis via Typologies

In the descriptive analysis of the study, we illuminated different aspects in the field of tension between marketing communications and PR. To deepen the analysis, we constructed a typology of the participating organizations and communication professionals to identify distinct types of organizations and managers, apart from functional affiliations. Those types offer a deeper insight into the quality of integrated brand management and a look at the mindsets of respondents. Some conclusions can be drawn from these typologies on behalf of factors contributing to the success or failure of integrated brand management.

The basis of the organizational typology was the assumption that the participating organizations differ in their ways of planning and realizing a branding strategy and in their understandings of the roles and functions of branding. Thus, we took the following questions as a basis for our matrix construction.

On the vertical y-axis were the characteristics of the variable –development of branding strategyll, which refers to the question –Are you involved into the conception and implementation of the branding strategy?ll, which in turn covers the structural integration of marketing and PR. When both parties are involved, the organization is classified as bilateral, whereas when just one party is involved, the organization is classified as unilateral. On the horizontal x-axis were the characteristics of the variable –understanding of the branding of the communication managersll. To analyze the congruent or differing understandings of branding of the managers working within the same organizations, we constructed an index based on the four questions concerning the objectives of branding, branding instruments, importance of

sustainability, and conditions for a successful implementation of branding strategy. We were able to identify four different types of organizations (see also Fig. 7):

**F0
B1** *Fragmented organizations*: Fragmented organizations constitute the majority of the companies (40.8%). In these companies, marketing communications and PR work together but do not share the same understanding of the contents and objectives of their work.

Therefore, there is no foundation for a truly integrated brand management.

**F0
B1** *Champion organizations*: In about one-third of the companies (32.7%), we find both shared structures and a shared understanding. We named these –championsll despite the fact that there is still room for improvement. These companies have a good foundation as they have both integrated structures and a common understanding.

**F0
B1** *Isolated organizations*: In 14.3 per cent of the companies, we find no common structures, modes of collaboration, or shared visions about the functions and objectives of branding activities.

**F0
B1** *Focused organizations*: This group shows a lot of wasted potential. In 12.2 per cent of the companies questioned, marketing communications and PR have the same vision and understanding about the role and importance of corporate branding. But they do not collaborate at a structural level, so there is no chance to profit from synergies.

The most important findings of this typology were:

1. *High level of structural integration*. Overall, in 73.5 per cent of the companies in our sample marketing communications and PR work together during the planning and implementation of corporate branding strategies.

2. *Strong variations in the basic understanding of objectives and purposes of branding*. Organizational structures are often identified as the main hurdle for integration. But the evaluation of this typology hints at other reasons. The cause for the manifold problems of integration seems to be grounded in the mindsets of the responsible managers, too. In 55.1 per cent of the companies, communication managers do not share the same understanding of the objectives and purposes of corporate branding, of relevant stakeholders, and of branding instruments.

3. *Low level of satisfaction with cooperation, especially in champion organizations*. The results of the study revealed that high integration within formal or informal structures and the level of satisfaction with integration are not objective criteria for the actual quality and success of the branding strategy. An analysis of the four types concerning statements of general cooperation within the context of branding confirmed this assumption. Therefore, isolated organizations are even more content with integration and have stronger opinions about sharing the same mindsets with their partners in the other departments than are the champions. A possible explanation would be that the champions reflect on their situations more critically and realistically, whereas the isolated do not.

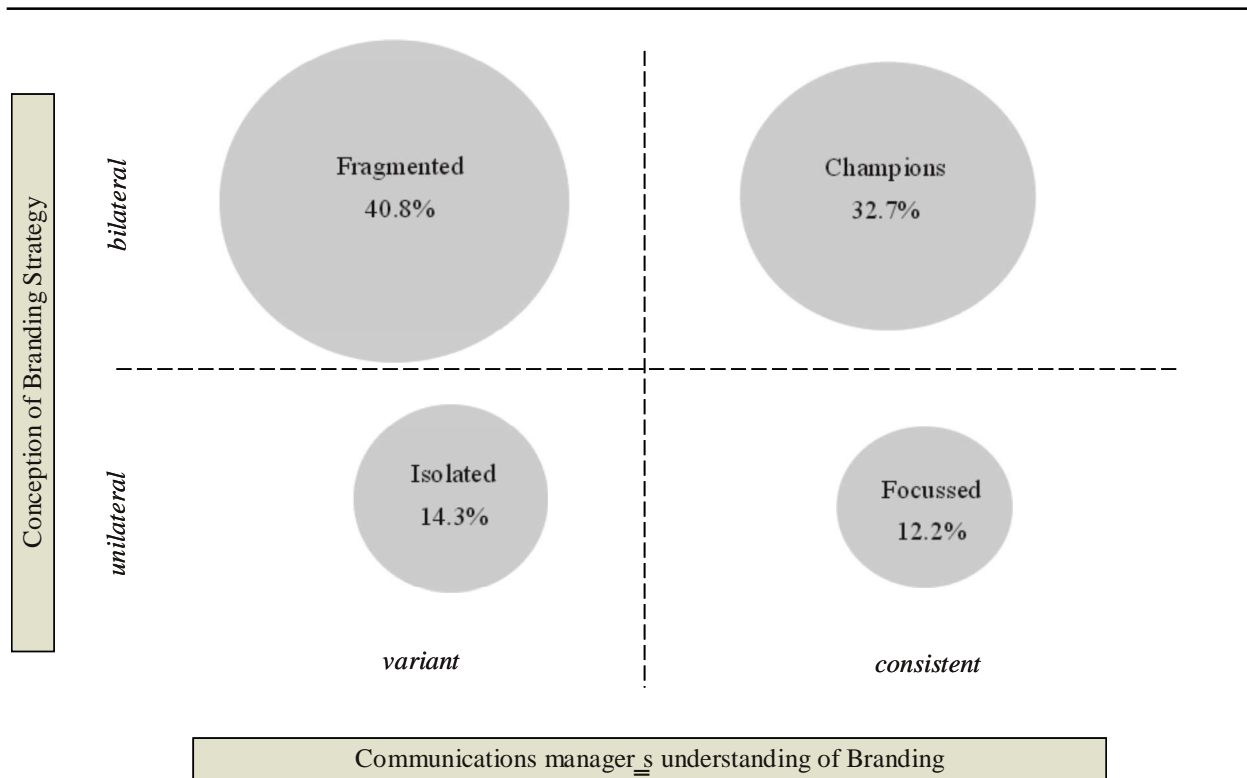


Figure 7: Typology of organizations

$n = 98$; y-axis deriving from the level of cooperation in the conception of branding strategy (structural level); x-axis formed by index deriving from discrepancies in the four answers of PR and marketing communications managers within the same company (the objectives of branding, branding instruments, importance of sustainability, and conditions for a successful implementation of branding strategy).

Typology of communication managers

As confirmed by the organizational typology, important hurdles of integration are based on the communication managers themselves. This is why another typology would provide deeper knowledge about the mindsets of the communication managers involved in the branding process. The construction of the matrix was again based on two relevant variables from the study. The y-axis was formed by a question concerning the basic understanding of the objectives and purposes of communication for the organization (see also Fig. 2). Communication managers that value all four dimensions high or very high were grouped as *holistic*, whereas those that just stress a selection of these dimensions were classified *partial*. The x-axis was defined by the assessment of value contribution to corporate success. In the category *high* were those respondents that assess their own contributions as high or very high and get the same assessment by their peers. In the category *low* were those who did not and those that were not esteemed by their colleagues.

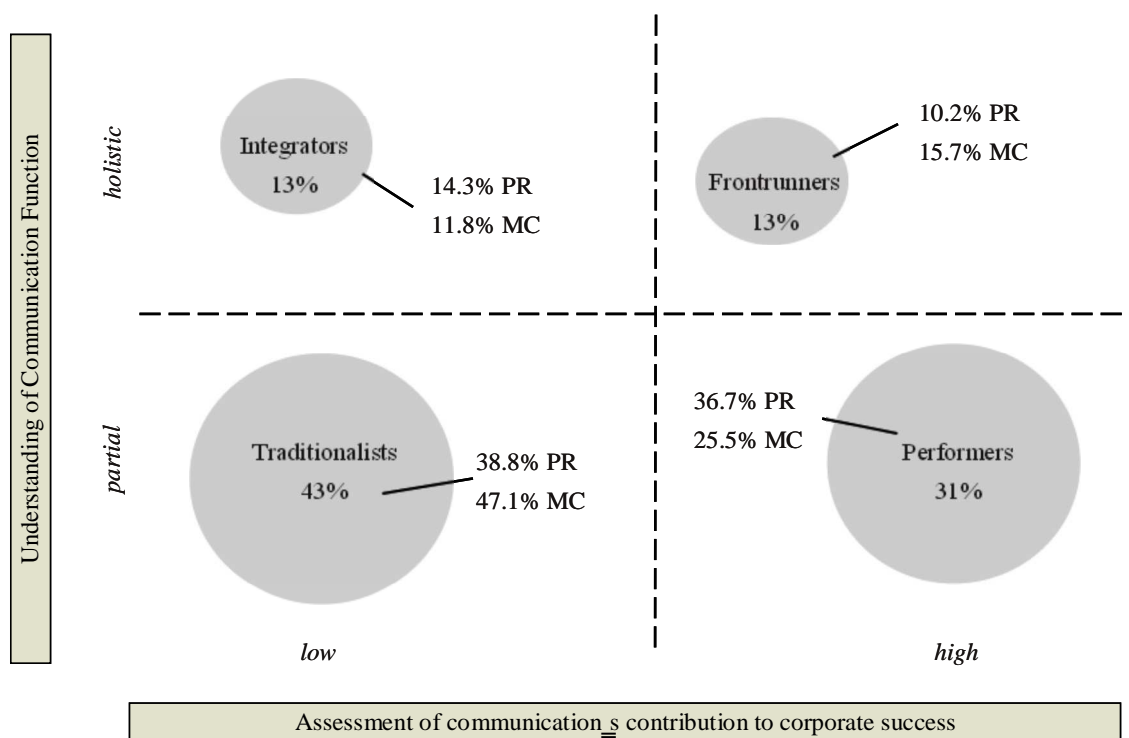


Figure 8: Typology of communication managers
 n = 100; x-axis: self-assessment of communication managers' value creation; y-axis: partial: inbound- or outbound-oriented understanding of communication function. Holistic: inbound- and outbound-oriented understanding of communication function.

In the matrix in Fig. 8, four different types of communication managers are located, independent of departmental affiliations:

Traditionalists: The largest group (43%) consists of rather traditional thinking and acting communication managers who stick to old role models.

Integrators: This type is more integrated, at least in its role understanding. These communication managers, which provide just 13 per cent of all respondents, are inbound- and outbound-oriented and have an extensive understanding of their roles and functions. But they assess their value contributions as low, which is either a sign of a lack of confidence or a restriction by organizational structures and hierarchies. The assessment might be grounded in the fact that they do not have access to top management and, therefore, the impression that their voices are not heard.

Performers: The performers (31%) are just the contrary. They do not have an integrated, holistic understanding of the communication function but nonetheless assess their value contributions as high. It is hard to draw conclusions from an outside perspective as to whether this can be explained by hubris or better access to higher management levels.

Frontrunners: The small group of frontrunners (13%) provides the best combination: a mixture of holistic understanding and a high value contribution to corporate success.

The most important findings from the further analysis of the types are below:

1. *Lacking holistic approach.* A holistic approach towards their roles and functions seems to be the weak point of many communication managers. Overall, just 26 per cent share this kind of approach towards their jobs.

2. *Trend towards professionalization and feminization.* An analysis of the personal characteristics of the respondents confirms the assumption that the new generation of communication managers acts and thinks differently to their predecessors. Data revealed that the frontrunners are the youngest and least experienced group. It seems as if they were educated and trained differently. Younger managers seem to assess their tasks more professionally and acknowledge the advantages of an integrated approach. Moreover, there is another trend expressed in this typology ^{FB}the feminization of communication management. More than half of the frontrunners (61.5%) are female.

3. *Widespread traditional structures and mindsets.* This typology shows that some of the fundamental problems of integration have their origins in the mindsets of the communication managers themselves. A total of 43 per cent remain in obsolete structures and ways of thinking. Their own value contributions are judged rather low, and they act tactically rather than strategically. The devaluation of their own functions results in little motivation to change the current structures or to think in an interconnected and strategic manner. Thus, many communication managers engage in a rulebook slowdown without thinking about the possible ways to improve their own situations and that of communication management in general.

Discussion and Perspectives for Future Research

The different perspectives on the tension between marketing communications and PR showed that this field has to be considered differentiated and needs to be rerated. Instead of an irreconcilable opposition, we found different levels of convergence. We found evidence in the academic discourse as well as in corporate practice that the relationship between both disciplines is changing. This is especially true in areas where both are highly involved, such as in corporate branding. The study revealed no significant differences in the assessment of communication channels and instruments between both functions. Thus, arguments for a strict separation of the two departments and separate spheres of action become shaky. PR has outgrown its roots in press relations and acts in many fields considered the traditional areas of marketing. Taking over the responsibility for corporate values is at the heart of the professional identity of modern PR. By contrast, ~~concepts such as "license to operate", "intangible assets", "social responsibility" and "trust" are no longer dominated by the PR function but have become part of many marketing concepts.~~

Of course, traditional structures coined by historic development are still prevalent in many organizations. But there are more and more communication managers who think and act ahead of these structures. Young PR professionals with a profound education and training in communication science and economics enter organizations with new role models and job descriptions in their minds. In the long run, these managers and the actual challenges placed on communication management today might result in a structural transformation of the field. It has become obvious ^{FB}and this can no longer be ignored by science and practice ^{FB}that marketing communications and PR both contribute a great deal to corporate success. It is also clear that their impact depends on the level and quality of their coordination and integration. Many managers at the board level understand that the successful management of social capital (reputation, image, stakeholders) is as important as a good performance of real capital

(production, sales) to reach advanced levels of performance. This offers great chances for communication management, but places it under pressure as well. Efficient organizations do not duplicate functions. Whether the increasing convergence of these concepts will result in organizational consolidation remains open. But certainly the demand for a clear allocation of responsibilities, structural collaboration, and coordination will increase. Today, unfortunately, neither marketing nor PR have truly overcome their departmental silos and turf wars. The latent pursuit of hegemony on both sides is one of the main reasons for the tensions and a loss in value creation. Thinking ahead, we will close by naming important challenges that have to be addressed by top management, communication managers, and academic research and teaching.

Challenges for top management

The orchestration of marketing communications and PR is a major management challenge. It is the task of top management to provide the adequate organizational frame and to openly discuss structures, processes, responsibilities, and hierarchies. Top management should encourage horizontal cooperation with mutual acknowledgement and respect. A holistic, all-embracing approach of corporate branding is only possible when all parties involved act in concert.

Challenges for communication managers


The study revealed that the main obstacles of integrated communications and brand management are not grounded in organizational structures. The mindsets of the communication managers in charge are a major issue. Any sustainable change has to start in the hearts and minds of the professionals. Only when they accept and live new structures and processes does integration have a chance to succeed. A basic prerequisite is to remove existing prejudices about the functions and contents of other departments and to aim for common goals and values. In particular, the data showed that younger employees might act as forerunners.

Challenges for academic research and teaching

The new constellation of a still problematic relationship offers diverse topics for further scientific consideration. First, focus should be placed less on structures and more on the communication managers that actually work in and with these structures ^{FO}or against them. Educational background, job experience, and overlapping or contradictory role perceptions in PR and marketing (Holtzhausen & Tindall, 2011) are important issues to be analyzed. Organizations that train these managers ^{FO}including universities and private institutes for further education ^{FO}should rethink their missions. Courses for training and studies in marketing communications and PR still proceed more or less parallel without intersections. Thus, marketing and PR managers enter companies with different mindsets. It is up to each company to invest in a reintegration of both functions. This would be a worthy goal and would help establish new forms of mutual knowledge exchange. For instance, marketing science, because of its position in business schools, possesses a more elaborate understanding of corporate processes and acts in a more market-oriented manner. PR, by contrast, has its roots in communication studies, possessing sophisticated approaches to (interpersonal) communication and social change. Interdisciplinary dialogue can be promoted via common research projects.

In fact, it is one of the missions of university courses to prepare students for today's working environment. Part of this is to teach a holistic understanding of communication management and to follow the developments in business practice in order to integrate them into research and teaching. This means that both disciplines should rethink their own concepts and topics and reassess their images of other functions. Respect and appreciation for other disciplines should start during times of education.

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