


“The role of company’s top officials in corporate communications”

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ARTICLE INFO

Yevhen Tsymbalenko, Dmytro Oltarzhevskiy, Lesya Horodenko and Olha Oltarzhevskya (2020). The role of company’s top officials in corporate communications. *Problems and Perspectives in Management*, 18(3), 255-267. doi:[10.21511/ppm.18\(3\).2020.22](https://doi.org/10.21511/ppm.18(3).2020.22)

DOI

[http://dx.doi.org/10.21511/ppm.18\(3\).2020.22](http://dx.doi.org/10.21511/ppm.18(3).2020.22)

RELEASED ON

Friday, 18 September 2020

RECEIVED ON

Wednesday, 17 June 2020

ACCEPTED ON

Thursday, 10 September 2020

LICENSE



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JOURNAL

"Problems and Perspectives in Management"

ISSN PRINT

1727-7051

ISSN ONLINE

1810-5467

PUBLISHER

LLC “Consulting Publishing Company “Business Perspectives”

FOUNDER

LLC “Consulting Publishing Company “Business Perspectives”



NUMBER OF REFERENCES

64



NUMBER OF FIGURES

0



NUMBER OF TABLES

1

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BUSINESS PERSPECTIVES



LLC "CPC "Business Perspectives"
Hryhorii Skovoroda lane, 10,
Sumy, 40022, Ukraine
www.businessperspectives.org

Received on: 17th of June, 2020

Accepted on: 10th of September, 2020

Published on: 18th of September, 2020

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Conflict of interest statement:

Author(s) reported no conflict of interest

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THE ROLE OF COMPANY'S TOP OFFICIALS IN CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS

Abstract

In contemporary society, corporate communications are becoming an increasingly important and significant component of management. This field includes not only building an external and internal image of a company but also interacting with stakeholders and achieving business aims. This research aims to define the potential and features of company's top officials (owners, CEOs, presidents, and other top managers) involvement in corporate communications and representing a business. It is based on the content analysis of corporate websites of the first 100 international companies from the Forbes list. The study demonstrated that most (62%) world successful firms involve their owners, CEOs, and top managers in corporate communications as speakers. At the same time, business owners appear on corporate websites less often (only 2%). CEOs engage in such communications in 47% of cases. Most often, other authorized representatives are speakers of companies (51%). A descriptive analysis of topics helped to distinguish the most common types of texts: formal ideological speeches, corporate news, corporate blog texts, and personalized corporate storytelling. Most texts are posted on corporate websites in the News chapter (28%). This suggests that news as a genre may be the most appropriate form of communication on behalf of management. Thus, some recommendations are proposed regarding the participation of top officials as speakers. From a practical point of view, companies can be guided by the outcomes of this research when deciding to engage their leaders in corporate communications.

Keywords

business administration, CEO communications, reputation, corporate website, public relations

JEL Classification

D22, M12, M14, M31

INTRODUCTION

Company's prospects largely depend on business reputation, brand perception, and loyalty of stakeholders, which can be considered valuable intangible assets. Effective administration of these assets is one of the most pressing and complex management tasks throughout the world because it covers various spheres of life. In particular, such activities are closely related to an influencing public opinion and utilizing a range of communication approaches and creative tools. Many companies are now using their top officials as a kind of "contact plate" for communicating with their stakeholders, bringing positive results due to some psychological factors. The marker "he is one of us" plays an important role in consolidating, promoting respect for a business leader, understanding his goals, and sharing his ideas. Personification also becomes an additional factor of people's interest in corporate storytelling, which helps to significantly expand a target audience, gain trust, and make it loyal. All this explains why studying a company's top officials' communication behavior is an actual methodological and applied problem.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Although corporate communications became the researches subject in the first half of the 20th century, significant progress in their studying was achieved by the beginning of the era of globalization and raising public attention to large companies' activities. One of the main challenges was to link this relatively new concept with the already existing theoretical understanding of the business development principles.

Van Riel (1995, p. 26) considers corporate communications "an instrument of management through which all consciously used forms of internal and external communication are harmonized as effectively and efficiently as possible, to create a favorable basis for relationships with groups upon which the company is dependent". The idiomatic phrase *building a favorable relationship* should be used in this context, which means the symmetrically acceptable and beneficial relationship between a company and the public. Bernays (1947) formulated the principles of such relationships, calling them *the engineering of consent*. Their essence is that we manage public opinion through communication, which, in turn, influences people's behavior and relationships. No wonder scientists call corporate communications *relationship management business* (Argenti & Barnes, 2009, p. 1). Simultaneously, effective communications (external and internal) enable the company to gain the loyalty and support of people it depends on.

In general, corporate communications is one of the most developed and fertile branches of the PR tree. Today the term "*public relations*" is hardly used, replaced by strategic communications or corporate communications (García, 2016). The only thing that remains unchanged is an individual who is at the center of such communications. Research interest is not just a personality, but the figure of a leader who can generate great ideas, inspire, and serve as authority for others.

According to scientists, leadership is more than strategy formulation. Successful leaders also instill values in their organizations that generate commitment and simplify the management task (Campbell, 1989, p. 9). A true leader not only defines an ideology of business but also helps distrib-

ute it in every way. Thereby it should be an individual who is "most involved with both developing the overall strategy for communications and delivering consistent messages to constituencies" (Argenti, 2013, p. 54).

The roles of the company's top officials and their impact on communications and business reputation have long attracted scientists' attention. Most of the research on this topic is related to CEO communication behavior, not only in the field of corporate communications but also marketing and management (e.g., Agle & Sonnenfeld, 1994; Alghawi, Yan, & Wie, 2014; Amernic & Craig, 2006; Conte, Siano, & Voller, 2017; C. Malhotra & A. Malhotra, 2016; Pincus, Rayfield, & Cozzens, 1991, etc.). Even a separate definition of "*CEO communications*" has emerged in the scientific literature (Zerfass, Vercic, & Wiesenberg, 2016). However, in addition to CEOs, other people may speak on behalf of a company: business owners, board members, top executives, etc. Of course, professional communicators, *corporate communications officers (CCOs)* considered entrusted corporate executives should also be included in this list (Gambetti & Biraghi, 2015).

Some scholars study leaders' involvement in corporate communications and corporate positioning (Allert & Chatterjee, 1997; Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014; Hamrefors, 2010; Levinson & Rosenthal, 1984). The influence on the organization's development of personal traits and behavior of top officials was also considered (Ackerman, 1985; Adeymi-Bello, 2001; Zorn, 2001; Yukl, 2012). From a practical point of view, it was important to determine how company speakers act in an information environment, to determine the tone and thematic vectors of their speeches (Park & Berger, 2004). A separate layer of research focuses on how business leaders interact with stakeholders. For example, Zerfass and Sherzada (2015) explored the communicative role of top executives and their interaction with professional communicators in the context of strategic communications. The analysis of CEOs' activities also demonstrated that their communication potential and leadership traits could be utilized in *CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) programs* (Beauchamp & O'Connor, 2012; Ferns, Emelianova, & Sethi, 2008; Waldman, Siegel, & Javidan, 2006).

With the advent of the digital age, scientists have begun to pay attention to the personal communications of business leaders in the online environment (Segars & Kohut, 2001). Some researchers noted that the continuous communication exchange via corporate websites and social media networks between firms and consumers make all types of digital communication an essential tool of corporate communications (Abdullah, Shahrina Nordin, & Abdul Aziz, 2013). In recent years, a group of publications has been published on how public companies use social networking in corporate communications. Some scientists focused on the specifics of building a favorable CEO image through microblogging (Alghawi et al., 2014). Others tried to answer the question of how CEOs can use Twitter to help their companies (C. Malhotra & A. Malhotra, 2016). Due to active searches in this area, the new construct *corporate e-communication* defined as “the digital interaction that an organization has with its stakeholders” has emerged (Foroudi & Montes, 2017, p. 201).

In theoretical concepts, person’s traits are often projected into the image of a brand or organization. As Bromley (2001, p. 317) explains, “we naturally use psychological attributes to describe persons. We also use psychological attributes to describe corporate entities – business firms, educational institutions, and other types of organizations. This has advantages and disadvantages. Such corporate attributes – for example, aggressive, determined, imaginative, responsible, secretive – are used extensively in the media and ordinary conversation”.

The *charismatic concept* that originated in psychology should be mentioned in this context. According to this, leadership is seen as a grace (from the Greek *χάρισμα* (*khárisma*) meaning “favor freely given”, “a gift”, “gift of grace”) sent to outstanding personalities. In other words, some people are born with particular leadership traits that can inspire respect, trust, and affection on the part of others. *Charismatic leadership theory* has been empirically tested and described as a factor of managing an organization in many papers (Aaltio-Marjosola & Takala, 2000; Agle & Sonnenfeld, 1994; Takala, 1997; Tourish & Vatcha, 2005). The place of a company’s charismatic leader in interaction with an external audience was sepa-

rately determined (Fanelli & Misangyi, 2006) and features of CEO communications with internal audiences were (Men, 2012; Pincus et al., 1991).

In recent decades, the *CEO brand* concept has crystallized in the academic world (Bates, 2011; Bendisch, Larsen, & Trueman, 2013). By analogy with the positioning of goods and services, it means a set of traits, impressions, associations formed by the leader’s personality. These seemingly indirect emotional factors play an important role in business. According to Bendisch et al. (2013a), successful CEO branding enhances perceived brand value and creates value for organizations. CEO brands are affected by their personality and their role as managers, and organizations need to constantly monitor CEO brand reputation and communicate their positioning (Bendisch et al., 2013). Other researchers explain the mechanics of this influence through communication: “CEOs personify and represent their organizations through their visibility in media. In this way, their leadership influences perceptions of the organization among stakeholders, and thereby organizational reputation and performance” (Meng & Berger, 2013, p. 307).

In the 2000s, the notion of *celebrity CEO* was highlighted in scholarly writings (Hayward, Rindova, & Pollock, 2004; Koh, 2011; Scheidt, Gelhard, Strotzer, & Henseler, 2018). CEOs, much like celebrities, become idols whose ideas are being listened to. CEOs’ potential to create ideologies and followership makes their message especially important (Amernic & Craig, 2006). Scheidt et al. (2018, p. 214) found that celebrity CEOs and corporate brands could be used as mutual endorsers, depending on specific personality attributes. The co-branding between celebrity CEOs and corporate brands works reciprocally for the brand attributes “professional” and “international”.

Previously scientists have established a strong relationship between reputation and corporate brand (Argenti & Druckenmiller, 2004) and justified the interdependence between personal and corporate reputation (Bromley, 2001). More focused studies examine the impact of CEO reputation on company development (Confetto, Conte, & Covucci, 2018; Murray & White, 2005). According to Gaines-Rose (2000), CEO reputation is important

to company success, estimating that up to 45% of company reputation belongs to the CEO. Francis, Huang, and Zang (2008) have also studied patterns of the company's leader's reputation influence on its financial and economic results.

The relationship between a reputation and an image of a company needs additional attention. According to scientists, a corporate image has two components: *logical* (cognitive belief) and *emotional* (sensory). Both are necessary, and both usually appear simultaneously in mind. They come together to form an overall corporate image (Dowling, 2000, p. 20). Some studies separately address the role of CEOs in shaping and supporting a company's image (e.g., McGrath, 1995).

The academics connect the concepts of leadership, reputation, and communication with a company's mission (Campbell, 1989). The mission is an overall expression of the organization's overriding goal, which ideally meets key stakeholders' values and expectations and relates to the organization's scope and boundaries. It is often called the simple question "What business are we?" (Cornelissen, 2014, p. 48). Moreover, a company's mission is one of the strategic management cornerstones and belongs to corporate ideology. Simultaneously, the mission is the perfect image that a company strives to build its image.

How can leaders leverage representing a business?

First, the words of a business owner or a manager always matter because they come from an original source. Authenticity is an essential component of leadership messages attempting to get an entire organization's attention (Hirsch, 2014, p. 67). Besides, top officials are not simply a primary source and carrier of corporate information. As insiders, they can interpret it more accurately and competently. According to Kanter (2001), "leaders in the great companies can tell a different story about the basis for their decisions. In so doing, they can produce new models for action that can restore confidence in business and change the world in which we live".

Second, the company's top official's words have a significant amount of credibility generated by personalizing and exteriorizing a business. The researchers point out the discussion about the uninformed po-

sitioning of CEOs versus "humanization" – personalization of CEO figure, the openness of his personality, or a call for open dialog (Zerfass et al., 2016). In general, openness in corporate communications and personally in building a leader's image are crucial. Conversely, ignoring the public's demand for candor leads to the emergence of the *corporate hypocrisy* that has been reflected in the scientific literature (e.g., Fassin & Buelens, 2011). This concept meaning is very close to *brand hypocrisy*, defined as a "brand perceived as intentionally projecting false or unrealistic appearances, thereby implying the dissimulation or manipulation of attributes, motivations or beliefs" (Guèvremont, 2019, p. 599).

Third, a leader's voice animates a company, makes its activities more attractive, and makes a story of a company more interesting and emotional. It also has a logical explanation. Most people think business is boring, so make it interesting and human. Top officials can use their own and a business's personality "to communicate with impact and colour" (Wheeler, 2001, p. 10).

Of course, a top official's decision to participate in communications depends not only on the needs of the business but also on the willingness of leaders themselves to represent the company to the public. Empirical studies showed that CEOs and executive board members take their roles as corporate speakers and personal communicators very seriously (Zerfass & Sherzada, 2015, p. 8). This, in turn, depends on the speaker's human traits, which hide the risks.

A leader's destructive behavior may be considered a major threat to his or her public activities. The impact of toxic leadership on an organization's development has been examined in several papers (Babiak & Hare, 2006; Boddy, 2015; Goldman, 2006; Marshall, Ashleigh, Baden, Ojiako, & Guidi, 2014; Mehta & Maheshwari, 2014). Studying these issues, Boddy and Croft (2016) identified the *archetype of corporate psychopaths*. They described toxic leaders as those who embody dysfunctional characteristics, show destructive behavior, and have a poisonous effect on the organizations and individuals they lead.

Historical examples show that corporate leaders can be a source of communication and reputational crises through unrestrained behavior, miscon-

duct, or irresponsible public statements. One such famous phrase was “The public be damned”. It was spoken on October 8, 1882, in a conversation with a journalist by William Henry Vanderbilt, president of the New York Central and other railroads (Cutlip, 1995, p. 188). This quote flew through the first pages of hundreds of newspapers. The reputation of one of the richest and most influential families has been devastating. The phrase itself became a symbol of monopolists’ disdainful attitude to citizens (Gordon, 1989).

2. AIM AND HYPOTHESES

The study aims to identify the possibilities and peculiarities of the participation of the company’s top officials in corporate communications and business representation as speakers.

In this regard, there are several hypotheses that require empirical confirmation:

- H1: Successful modern companies worldwide use the communication potential of company’s top officials in different ways to represent their business. This may depend on the country where the business operates.*
- H2: Based on specific tasks and conditions for representing business, the company’s top officials can be not only CEOs or owners but also other key managers.*
- H3: In the company’s top officials’ speeches, some specific thematic vectors are displayed in the same sections of communication channels and are similar to different companies. In this regard, there are certain well-established formats of speeches by top officials that companies use most often and can be taken as a model.*

3. METHODS

At the first stage, it was necessary to determine the authorship and frequency of company’s top officials’ publications in fact to confirm or refute the research hypotheses. For this purpose, content analysis based on corporate websites of the

top 100 largest public companies in the world by Forbes ranking was carried out (Forbes, 2019). In total, the rating lists 2,000 firms from 61 countries. The largest number of such companies is located in the United States (575), China and Hong Kong (309), and Japan (223). This comparative data source was chosen because it identifies the most successful global companies by financial metrics and can be used as a benchmark.

A separate explanation is required for choosing the source of primary research data and the object of content analysis. Corporate websites were selected for the study as they are considered one of an organization’s key communication channels. They can also be considered a main official online representative of a company that formalizes its mission and philosophy and builds a conducive corporate image. From this point of view, company’s websites help generate and distribute news that serves a source of actual objective corporate information for customers, partners, potential employees, media, and other stakeholders that influence business development. Moreover, a corporate website can reflect the general company approaches in attracting top officials in representing a business and thematic vectors, stylistics, and ways of their communications with society. On the other hand, this online platform is good for being a research example of fixed results of communications presented in the form of texts of publications, illustrations, titles, headings, names of authors, etc. An analyzed material of company websites is ordered and structured in categories, providing reliable outcomes and increasing evaluation efficiency. An additional advantage of the selected source of primary research data is that it is publicly available and can be checked at any time.

The subject of this content analysis is the texts published on the first pages of the main sections of the top 100 Forbes companies’ corporate websites. Since one of the main requirements for content analysis is the measurability of the frequency of occurrence of elements, the basic units of analysis and their semantic indicators presented in the texts were determined before the start of the study. The content analysis of corporate website texts allowed primarily spotting the company’s top officials’ quantitative manifestation. An analysis of text arrays was carried out, and special attention

Table 1. The content analysis classifier

1	2	3	4	5		6			7	8
No.	Company	Country	Website	Q1. Are the texts presented on the website on behalf of the company's top officials?		Q2. Which of the company's top officials is the most often on the website?			Q3. What chapter of the website contains the company's top official's appearances?	Q4. What subjects of the company's top official's texts?
				Yes	No	CEO	Founder	Others		

was paid to authorship (signature of the author's name and position below or at the beginning of the text) and references to top officials texts as direct and indirect quotes. Succeeding quantification of the obtained data and a meaningful interpretation of the revealed numerical patterns confirmed the study's working hypotheses.

Columns 1-3 contain the serial number, the company's name, and the country of its origin in the form in which the Forbes ranking presents this data. The corporate website address of each company (shown in column 4) was found using the Google search engine with the company's names as keywords. Besides, when choosing, attention was paid to the textual and graphic imperatives, indicating the corporate websites' official status.

Column 5 contains the Question Q1 "Are the texts presented on the website on behalf of the company's top officials?" and two answers (Yes/No). This Question aimed to determine the total percentage of those firms that involve top officials as speakers on corporate websites. The data obtained are associated with the confirmation or refutation of hypothesis H1. In fact, this may be the answer to another question: "Does the majority of successful companies use their top officials to present a business or not?" For Question Q1, the analysis unit is the total number of company's websites containing publications on behalf of these firms' top officials. Each positive and negative answer is denoted by one unit and is separately summed.

Question Q2 "Which of company's top officials are the most often on the website?" and three possible answers to it (CEO/Founder/Others) is presented in column 6. This Question is intended to specify who particular among the company's first persons most often appeared on the corporate website? As in the previous column, the results should demon-

strate the total percentage of firms and be associated with the hypothesis H2. The analysis unit for Question Q2 is the number of company's websites containing different top officials' publications. Three answer options were formed based on a preliminary study of corporate websites texts, theoretical knowledge, and intuitive assumptions. First, two of the most common types of company's top officials, *CEO* and *Founder*, were identified with its help. Then an attempt was made to distinguish several other types. However, their number was so large that we had to abandon this research plan and combine them into a general category *Others*. Despite this, it was decided to fix all other types of company's top officials in a separate place and use this data in the qualitative descriptive analysis and quantitative content-analytical results.

The questions displayed in columns 7 and 8 are aimed at a quantitative and qualitative study of the formats and thematic vectors of speeches by company's top executives and are used to test hypothesis H3.

Question Q3 "What chapter of the website contains company's top officials' appearances?" aims to determine the frequency of use of certain thematic sections in percentage. For Question Q3, the analysis unit is top officials publications placed in certain corporate websites sections. During the preliminary analysis, five main categories with the highest frequency of occurrence were identified, and the rest were combined into the general category *Others*. The answers to this Question reflect not only the thematic focus of the company's top official's speeches but also, in a certain way, the priorities in their communication.

Question Q4 "What subjects of company's top officials' texts?" was originally planned as a tool for obtaining quantitative data reflecting the topics

of top officials' speeches. Since a sufficiently wide range of specific topics of publications could blur the research focus, it was decided to apply a qualitative analysis to them. The analysis unit for this Question is thematic vectors of texts. On the one hand, this made it possible to explore as a whole the thematic field that represents a business. On the other hand, this approach can serve as a starting point for subsequent extended quantitative studies of the issue.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The content analysis defined that 62% of firms involve top officials in corporate communications. This indicates that many successful global companies are aware of the importance of personification in dialogue with stakeholders and consider them an effective communication approach. Comparing the results of content analysis with the conclusions of other researchers (Confetto et al., 2018; Zeffass et al., 2016), it suggests that large corporations with established business philosophy, a system of values, corporate culture tend to be open, share their worldview, and build trusting relationships with the public. The involvement of company's top officials in corporate communications contributes to fulfilling these tasks due to personifying a firm, increasing the credibility of its messages through humanizing dialogue, and enhancing emotional and psychological interaction with the audience. This progressive approach fully coincides with the basic principles of public relations applied to the business field. Thus, such a model of communication behavior can be a certain reference point for inheritance by other business organizations.

Simultaneously, the marker of top officials' participation in corporate communications varies for firms from different countries. For example, only 3 of 15 (20%) China's largest companies involve their leaders as speakers, although they top the Forbes list. This figure is 44% for Japanese firms, for US – 74%, for European – 76%. Based on this, it can be assumed that a political system, historical factors, and national traditions can influence corporate communications models. In general, the experience of large European and US companies confirms the correctness of the research assumptions. However, the specificity of eastern social and communication

models should be considered during the development of communication strategies and their tactical implementation in actual practice, and become an object of further research.

The next complicated question is who of the top officials should interact with stakeholders, speaking on behalf of a company. Undoubtedly, the communicator factor has great importance in communication management as it designates a pattern and content of messages and their influencing to an audience. In the research, the definition *top officials* were used to unite all possible types of corporate speakers, expand the boundaries, and further develop the CEO-communications concept. The need for such a revision is caused by changes in the practice of corporate communications induced by total digitalization, the emergence of new media, an increase in the speed of information exchange, etc. At the same time, it should be noted transformations in moral and informational requests of society. Here, a humanization of business, human-centeredness (that is, focus on human needs), and a new level of relations based on transparency, empathy, and mutual respect, come to the fore. Obviously, this requires companies to place more than just brands at the center of business philosophy and trust people.

The content analysis proved that CEOs speak on behalf of a company quite often (47%), but they are not the leaders in terms of frequency. Now they are being replaced by other authorized persons (51%) appearing most often on corporate websites as speakers. This category includes representatives from various company top managers: vice presidents, directors, and even specific executives such as corporate strategist, head of risk management, chairman of the responsible business committee, and cyber-threat intelligence coordinator. It indicates that corporate communications tend to be more and more specialized, targeted, and precise. Priority is given to speakers who can outline not only a company's mission and its positions in general but also highlight specific themes in detail, to answer thorny consumers' questions professionally and competently. Thereby, top officials belonging to the *Others* category and specializing in narrow business, production, distribution, and promotion issues enrich a public dialogue with facts and details that increase the credibility of speakers and a firm as a whole. Besides, this approach allows divid-

ing the roles and company's top officials' communication responsibilities in covering corporate topics of different levels of importance and thematic focus. For example, a CEO should concentrate on messages about important changes in organizational life that can affect the majority of stakeholders (a quarantine lockdown, a drop in shares, a necessity to cut staff, or, conversely, emergence of new global sales markets, launch of innovative products and services). At the same time, a COO (Chief Operating Officer) can inform about important, but smaller-scale corporate events, such as modernization of a production line or purchasing new equipment.

The role of professional corporate communicators in company representation also deserves a separate discussion. Sharing the opinion of Gambetti and Biraghi (2015) about leadership nature in general and undeniable conversational and decision-making opportunities of CCOs (Corporate Communications Officers), it needs to come to terms with that today they have lost the status of a permanent company speaker. According to the research results, no one CCO's speech was revealed among other top officials on corporate websites. This can be explained by the assumption requiring additional confirmation that PR-man texts are perceived with less enthusiasm and faith due to a prejudgment towards their professional field of activity. This may also be due to that the role and functions of corporate communications experts are being transformed in today's dynamic world. They reserve rights to form a company's general communication policy, its reputation portrait, control the content of messages but depart from the speaker's duties, passing them on to other team members. Such changes in professional corporate communicators' role can be illustrated by the example of the position *vice president of global affairs and communications* at Facebook Company. This means that large companies pay attention not only to the effective management of information flows but also to their global positioning, defining a social mission and place in the spiritual and material world around them.

Another category of company speakers is its owners. As a content analysis showed, they are less likely to appear on corporate websites (only 2% of total). These results and their interpretation in the context of practical communication activities also need discussion. First, in today's big business, both capital

and people (or groups of people) who stand behind them, as a rule, are rather blurred. The only exception is family firms, in which assets are inherited, and the main investors are members of the same family. In some companies, a business owner is also its CEO, which also makes it difficult to reliably identify a corporate speaker's role. Second, a business owner does not always have an opportunity and a need to represent his business when he moves away from a daily control of an enterprise's operational activities and partially leaves its information field. Thus, he does not have a complete picture of what is happening in a company and cannot always see a business development in detail. For these reasons, it is more effective to involve a business owner in corporate communications as a traditions keeper, a bearer of the company's history and its corporate cultural code, rather than a commentator on operational events and routine information.

Although the presented content analysis results cannot objectively consider the factor of personal readiness of the company's top officials to be involved in business representation, it can be assumed that this is possible only under certain conditions. First of all, it is a properly formed personal image based on the best human qualities, understanding his or her role and the role of his or her business in society development. When deciding to involve a company leader in corporate communications, one must soberly evaluate their potential. If these abilities are not enough, efforts to create an artificial image will not justify themselves and will have many future risks. Psychological factors also play an important role in this. To effectively represent a business, top officials should be consistent in their thoughts and statements, control emotions, and have stable behavior, regardless of external factors.

One of the research tasks is determining the main subjects of the company's top official's speeches. The overwhelming majority of such texts were posted on corporate websites in the *News* chapter (28%). 18% of the speeches appeared in the *News* chapter. 10% of such publications were presented on the main pages of corporate websites. The same number of texts was published under the heading *Media*, which once again confirms the importance of cooperation of company's speakers with journalists. 8% of top officials appeared in the *Blog* chapter. This format is quite a modern and acceptable

way of communicating with stakeholders. It allows for an informal conversation on various topics that can sometimes go beyond the firm's activities. Other parts of websites (26%) have different specific sections related to news, containing company mentions, and dedicated to forums, conferences, etc.

In addition to the content analysis, descriptive analysis was carried out, which allowed examining in detail the subject matter of company's top officials' speeches. Although a thematic palette of such publications is broad and specific as it relates to each company's concrete problems, four groups of texts were conditionally distinguished.

First are various formal *ideological speeches* of top officials. They mainly contain an official point of view on company or market events, summing up of work, acknowledgments to employees, greetings on an occasion of significant dates, stories about peculiarities of the profession, and so on.

Second, it is a more operational, concise, *corporate news* genre used on behalf of top officials or contains their comments or quotes. These can be presentations of new products and services, newcomers' introducing, speeches at conferences.

Third, these are *corporate blog texts* that feature top officials' reflections on global topics such as climate change, health care, and social inclusion. With the help of such speeches, companies can informally convey their mission and outlook.

Fourth, it is also an informal genre that can be called *personalized corporate storytelling*. For example, in such texts, the company's chief strategist portrays his childhood and unconscious desire to care for nature, and another manager discusses why LGBT community members should not be ashamed of their preferences and suffer from complexes. It is also an effective expression form of top officials' philosophy that is the face of a business and represents its values.

The above genres of corporate publications grounded on the effect of novelty, personification, storytelling, and emotional impact on an audience can be used by companies to communicate with stakeholders through websites and social networks, corporate videos, and other media channels.

In general, modern corporate communications are based on three pillars. The first is communication itself and dialog with a society that allows you to exchange information with the general public. The second is management, participation in company operation, and interaction with groups of people whereon business development directly depends. The third component is reputation management used in advanced organizations, primarily as a decision-making system. According to this, all business opportunities and risks should be viewed through a reputation lens. In this way, corporate communications are considered a substantial part of a company's strategy, providing consistent, logical, and systematic promotion to intended business goals. And top officials as speakers play the role of catalyst in the dissemination of corporate ideas, as well as in building corporate image.

Based on the discussion, some recommendations can be made regarding the *roles of company's top officials in corporate communications*:

1. To generate ideas, those make sense of a company and become a basis for production, marketing, financial, and other goals achievement. These ideas have to help form a favorable public opinion about a company and its brands and understand with stakeholders.
2. To create communication content on behalf of a company, substantiate the essence of its activities and social mission. It is related not just with information interpretation methods. At times this work requires adjusting the semantic context in which a company and its brands are developing.
3. To influence personally on important company decisions that may affect its reputation and need public approval.
4. To provide a speaker and public person communications with a society based on openness, truthfulness, tolerance, and empathy. It also means that top officials' behavior, tone, and communication methods influence the business image, confirm or deny its corporate values' weight.

CONCLUSION

Engaging of company's top officials in corporate communications is additional powerful leverage in business management. The study results demonstrate that most successful world firms are actively using their potential, which should be a reason for other companies to reconsider their communication policies. The content analysis confirmed that the list of company speakers is not limited to CEOs, but rather expanded to include representatives of various management levels. It can also be concluded that top executives take part in representing a business and corporate experts in various fields regardless of career hierarchy according to specific communication tasks.

Involving top officials in corporate communications is an organic way to convince clients, partners, employees, journalists, and a general public that a company is run by a competent professional and a comprehensively developed charismatic human. In turn, this helps create a supportive emotional environment around the organization, show its human face, and build trust in it. In this way, personification promotes to attract more stakeholders' attention to a company and its brands and form their positive image more efficiently.

One of the key methods of top officials' communications is the news format. Along with traditional formal speeches, business leaders often use easy-to-understand genres such as comments and blogs. It can also be informal motivational stories, biography, family stories that help revive the "corporate icon" and make communications more alive and influential. As global ideas, desire to change the world expressed by a leader and his evocative personal life philosophy is also of particular value. It is important to be aware that business reflects the individuality of a top official, is an extension of its character, outlook, and principles. Therefore, there is a mutual responsibility of a leader for company reputation and vice versa.

The next step in improving corporate communications is to develop clear personal positioning of top officials that will match the overall positioning of a company. This helps to emphasize the best features of a leader's personality and stand out from competitors. A mix of positive personal traits may not always be sufficient to build an attractive image, so a leader must be ready for self-improvement, working on himself, personal training, etc. The same applies to corporate communications knowledge and a set of basic communication skills that a public person has to possess. The scope of communication coaching for corporate speakers and effective methods of their interaction with an audience should become objects of further research in this field.

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