

**ENCYCLOPEDIA OF CORPORATE COMMUNICATION
CORPORATE BRAND COMMUNICATION**

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ABSTRACT

Corporate brand communication represents a distinctive approach to corporate communication by focusing on the corporate brand. Adopting a total corporate communication perspective, corporate brand communication comprises, promissory, primary, secondary, tertiary, and quaternary communication. Increasingly, organizations focus on their corporate brand/s and, consequently, corporate brand-based communication is of heightened significance in communicating – as well as realizing - the corporate brand promise/covenant as experienced by customers and other stakeholders.

Keywords: Corporate Brand Communication,

Definitions

Corporate Brand Communication

Corporate brand communication represents a distinct, and holistic, approach to corporate communication focused on the corporate brand (rather than on an organization's corporate identity). The corporate brand communication framework articulated here is sexpartite in character and its properties and encompasses promissory, primary, secondary, tertiary, quaternary, and responsory communications.

Before discussing corporate brand communication, it is expedient to briefly elucidate the corporate brand notion so that corporate brand communication has an appropriate context.

Corporate Brand

The corporate brand notion was formally introduced in the mid-1990s (Balmer 1995) and came with a realization that organizations, and not just products, are brand-like. In successive years, a foundational literature on the corporate brand territory evolved (Balmer 1998, 2001a; 2001b; Balmer & Gray, 2003; Harris & De Chernatony, 2001; Hatch & Schultz 2001; Ind 1997, 1998). Since then, significant developments have taken place in the field and today a distinct literature has emerged on the territory (Balmer 2010).

A corporate brand can be designated as a distinct identity type and relates to any corporate entity where an organization's name and/or marque (logo) is underpinned by a corporate brand promise/covenant. Typically, a corporate brand relates to entire organizations, to subsidiaries, as well intra-organizational bodies. Countries, regions, and cities can also be corporate brands. A corporate brand promise encapsulates, and synthesis, key corporate brand values and is, in effect, a corporate guarantee. By such means, a corporate brand can be distinguished, and differentiated, from other corporate brands. Consequently, when customers and other stakeholders hears a familiar corporate brand name, or sees a corporate marque, and individual may recall a set of expectations relating to the corporate brand. In short, they recall the corporate brand promise. Thus, corporate brands can be compared to a currency, a language, and a navigational tool (Balmer, 2005). As a currency, they have value for both stakeholders and organizations. As a language they are known, understand and have meaning for customers and stakeholders. As a navigational tool they help stakeholders to navigate and differentiate between and among corporate brand brands and their attendant corporate brand promises. Notably, the corporate brand, and attendant corporate brand promise, represents an informal, but powerful, contract connecting an organization (and, sometimes more than one organization) with customers and other stakeholders and, importantly, vice versa. Whilst, not legally binding, the corporate brand promise, serves as a powerful, albeit informal, psychological contract which can underpin bi-lateral organizational/stakeholder relationships which are mutually profitable. However, although the *legal ownership* of a corporate brand resides with an organization, the real strength of a corporate brand is to be found in its *emotional ownership* on the part of customers and other stakeholders (Balmer, 2012).

Key Findings: Particularizing corporate brand communication

Corporate brand communication has evolved out of a distinct line of scholarship that adopts a panoptic stance apropos corporate communication. Consequently, recognition is given to formal, informal, and third-party and, importantly, identity-based communication. Initially, the focus was on Total Corporate Communications (Balmer & Gray 1999). Total Corporate Communications was initially conceived as tripartite in form and comprised consists of *Primary Communications* which takes account of the communication effects of an organisation's corporate identity traits including its corporate mission and purpose, activities, quality levels, behaviours etc; *Secondary Communications* which relates to a firm's a formal corporate communication activities; and *Tertiary Communications* which encompasses third-party communication relating to an organization on the part of stakeholders, the media, and competitors etc.

Elaboration: Quaternary Communication and the Digital Sphere

Subsequently, TCC was expanded to include Quaternary Communications (Balmer & Yen 2017). *Quaternary Communications* recognizes the increased importance of digital corporate communication and accommodates the increasingly important Artificial Intelligence (AI) dimension (Balmer, 2022). Quaternary corporate communication is more than another corporate communication channel since it also an information resource which allows for the analysis of big data resulting in more-effective organizational learning and planning. Although at one level it shares certain similarities with tertiary communication, the digital sphere has metamorphosed corporate communication and represents a resource which allows for more open bi lateral, and sometimes bespoke, corporate communication exchanges between organizations and customers/stakeholders. Such communication can also be personalized. Equally, it facilitates multi-lateral knowledge and communication exchange between customers/stakeholders via digital means. While quaternary communication provides a great degree of control and sophistication apropos corporate communication on the part of organizations it can also be viewed as fostering a loss of corporate control. However, in one aspect there is a loss of corporate control, and this is because digital provider organizations are habitually at the nexus of company-stakeholder relationships. Therefore, digital provider organizations can shape and influence communications, and resultant perceptions, of an organization through their control of digital platforms.

Outlook: Corporate Brand Communication

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More recently, TCC was further developed so that it had an explicit corporate brand focus “Total Corporate Brand Communication” (Balmer, 2022). Consequently, this required the addition of two further corporate communication vectors namely, promissory communication (which encompassed “corporate brand based” communication) and responsory communication (which recognized the importance of customer/stakeholder feedback in communication terms).

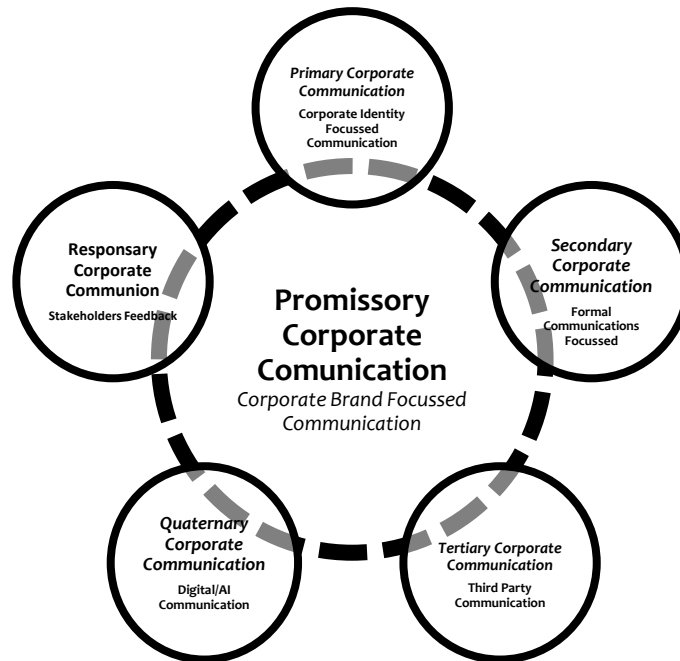
Whereas TCC has corporate identity at its centre, Corporate Brand Communications has the corporate brand promise/covenant at its heart. Moreover, while TCC has an organization’s corporate identity as its common starting point, corporate brand communication has the corporate brand as its starting point. The corporate brand communication dimension was given the designation of *Promissory Communication* (reflecting the sense that for many organizations their corporate brand promise is the cornerstone of their corporate communication).

Figure 1 shows the sexpartite corporate brand communication mix. It should be noted that there can be a degree of overlap between some dimensions. The elements constituting this sexpartite model can be explained as follows:

- *Promissory Communication*: Corporate brand-based corporate communication is at the heart of the corporate brand communication mix with promissory communication both encapsulating and communicating the corporate brand promise.
- *Primary Communication*: Corporate identity-based corporate communication focusses on the communication effects in terms of what an organization does, behaves, produces, product performance etc. This is important since primary communication, de facto, delivers (or not) the corporate brand promise and, therefore, should be in dynamic alignment with promissory communication.

- *Secondary Communication:* Controlled corporate communication (customer and stakeholder focussed-based, corporate advertising, corporate public relations etc) transmits formal communication messages regarding an organization's corporate identity traits as well as the transmission of information apropos corporate mission and purpose, activities, quality levels, behaviours etc.
- *Tertiary Communication:* Word-of-mouth corporate encompasses corporate-focussed communication between customers, stakeholders, and others (including the media) relating to the organization/corporate brand. Just as organizations can shape corporate image/corporate brand image, so can stakeholders.
- *Quaternary Communication:* Digital corporate communication (including Artificial Intelligence) encapsulates corporate communication-based activities within the digital sphere. Increasingly prevalent and pervasive it not only fosters bi-lateral corporate-customer/stakeholder communication but multi-lateral communication between stakeholders and others. It can also serve as an information resource for organization. However, digital corporate communication also entails a loss of corporate control since intermediary digital organizations (internet platforms) can have a role as corporate communication adjudicators/censors and therefore can shape corporate communication and resultant corporate image/corporate brand images.
- *Responsory Communication:* Feedback-based corporate communication recognizes the importance of customer/stakeholder feedback apropos the perceptions of the corporate brand including its promise, performance, and value. Such feedback can be elicited by the organization and can be initiated by customers and stakeholders. Responsory corporate communication as a communication accommodates orthodox responsory corporate communication approaches as well as adherents of the co-creation perspective.

FIGURE 1: CORPORATE BRAND COMMUNICATION



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Biography

Professor John M. T. Balmer holds a personal chair as Professor of Corporate Marketing at Brunel University Business School, Brunel University London and is quondam Professor of Corporate Brand/Identity Management at Bradford School of Management (UK). In a study of more than 100.000 scholars undertaken by Stanford University, he was Recognized as one of the world's top 2% of influential scholars. Sometimes regarded as the 'Father' of the corporate brand concept (1995), he also pioneered the corporate marketing, total corporate communications and monarchical marketing notions, and penned cornerstone articles in these areas. He co-conceived the corporate heritage brand notion (2006) and is leading proponent of corporate identity. In 1999 he was elected to the first chair in corporate identity. His subsequent appointments to personal chairs in corporate brand management and corporate marketing are also believed to be the first of their kind anywhere in the world. Professor Balmer has published in many leading journals including California Management Review, Journal of Business Research, British Journal of Management, European Journal of Marketing, Long Range Planning, Journal of Business Ethics etc. He is Chairman of the Board of Senior Consultant Editors of the Journal of Brand Management.

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