Editorial: Toward an EDI agenda in corporate communications

Issue 4 for 2022 marks two years of my editorship and it seemed like an appropriate time to start writing editorials and reviewing works published by the CCIJ. This editorial summarises works produced in 2021 and 2022. Future editorials will briefly analyse each issue and contribution to knowledge each issue made and/or comment on something that the published issue raises.

CCIJ has always published outstanding public relations and communications work, including issues such as crisis communication and issues management, internal communication, trust and corporate social responsibility (CSR). These issues have been on the scholarly agenda for decades and CSR, for example, presents a much-researched topic. The CSR field has been generally researched from multiple perspectives, including stakeholder, shareholder and CSR communication, as well as critical works arguing CSR is a capitalist concept meant to preserve the status quo (Topić, 2021b; Fleming and Jones, 2013; Ireland and Pillay, 2009; Sheehy, 2014). The works analysing CSR continue to be published in CCIJ and over the last two years, we looked at CSR from the point of external relations such as for example, company websites (Ertem-Eray, 2021), social media communication of CSR (Schroder, 2021), CSR in the fashion industry (Kwon and Lee, 2021), CSR–CSI relationship (O'Connor et al., 2021), sports and women's soccer (Painter et al., 2022), CSA (Zhou and Dong, 2022), CSR in non-profit organisations (Harrison et al., 2022), CSR in the SME industry (Kim and Bhala, 2022), consumer perceptions of CSR in the apparel industry (Lee and Lin, 2022), corporate statements on racial inequality and LGBTQ rights (Sterbenk et al., 2022), etc. This snapshot of CSR works CCIJ published shows not just diversity in scholarship but also a contribution to knowledge that CCIJ makes to an issue that is often studied in the context of business schools and CSR policies generally. These papers tackle CSR from communication and organisational perspectives, which contributes to the communication scholarship and is slowly introducing CSR communication as an integrative part of CSR scholarship given the volume, depth and thematic diversity of research.

CCIJ, in 2021, which was the first year of my editorship, also published a special issue on trust and reputation [1] (commissioned by the previous editor, Dr W. Timothy Coombs) and guest edited by Verčič et al. (2021), which analysed issues such as social listening, trust and mistrust in corporate communications, trust in public sector communication, internal communication, etc. This much-read special issue, stemming from the Bled Com 2019 conference, discussed an important issue of trust at the time of the rise of misinformation and fake news, providing a scholarly analysis, using multiple methods, of how could organisations increase trust in times of uncertainty and crisis. The next issue of the 2021 edition, Vol 26 No 2, was another issue commissioned by the previous editor, on family enterprises and communication research (Botero and Fediuk, 2021), linking communication with small and medium-sized businesses, which are seen as a backbone for global economies (UK Government, 2018), thus proving relevance for communications research, also because some statistics showed that 90% of global businesses are small and medium-sized, and many of those are family owned (Astrachan and Shanker, 2003; Klein et al., 2005). Articles in this issue tackled a variety of issues including crisis communication, views of young consumers towards businesses, etc.

However, in the past two years, we also expanded the scholarship to include more works on socially relevant topics such as equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) and environmental affairs. Starting from Vol 26 No 3, regular issue articles were published and in further three issues, a total of 22 articles were published tackling a diverse pool of topics and extending knowledge in the field of corporate communication including expanding research to include issues such as gender, race and environmental and sustainability communication (Figure 1).

In 2022, so far three issues have been published, with 33 articles (Figure 2) and articles again include environmental communication as well as gender and LGBTQ issues, the latter two are present in CSR studies.

Therefore, over the last two years, CCIJ published regularly in the fields of CSR, internal and external communication as well as crisis communication and social media engagement, with these topics being prominent in the journal showing that CCIJ continues to be a venue for original and innovative scholarship in these areas. However, we also published articles in new areas not traditionally covered by the journal, such as gender, environmental and sustainability communication, which are increasing in the number of publications, thus providing a venue for scholars in these areas to publish in the journal and turning towards EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion) agenda, which is not sufficiently covered in the corporate communications scholarship.

Why is this relevant? In gender and women studies, for example, scholars have been demonstrating since the 1980s that women face discrimination in the communications industries. At first, women faced issues such as bias, covert discrimination, stereotypes and chauvinism in the 1980s, in the period from 2010 to 2019, they face issues such as women being seen through stereotypical communication skills, which then preserves them in technical positions and obstructs career progression, leading some authors to argue that the discrimination of women has reached a full circle because the issue of bias and stereotypes seems to be returning (Topić *et al.*, 2019; Topić *et al.*, 2020; Dubrowski *et al.*, 2019; Aldoory and Toth, 2002; Toth and Grunig, 1993). Some authors also argued that when one issue gets resolved for women, new ones emerge, thus arguing women go in circles in communications industries always facing one issue or the other (Tench *et al.*, 2017) and that women also face masculine culture in public relations organisations, thus having to be masculine or blokish
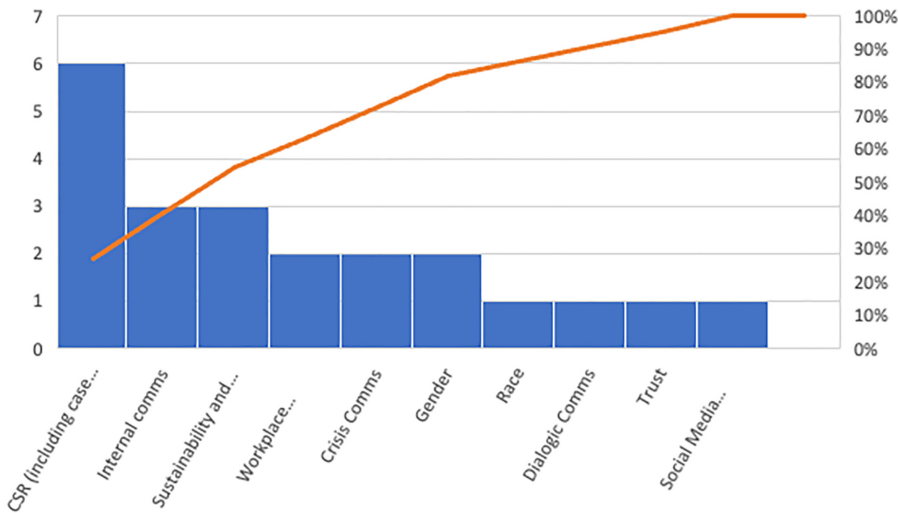

Figure 1.
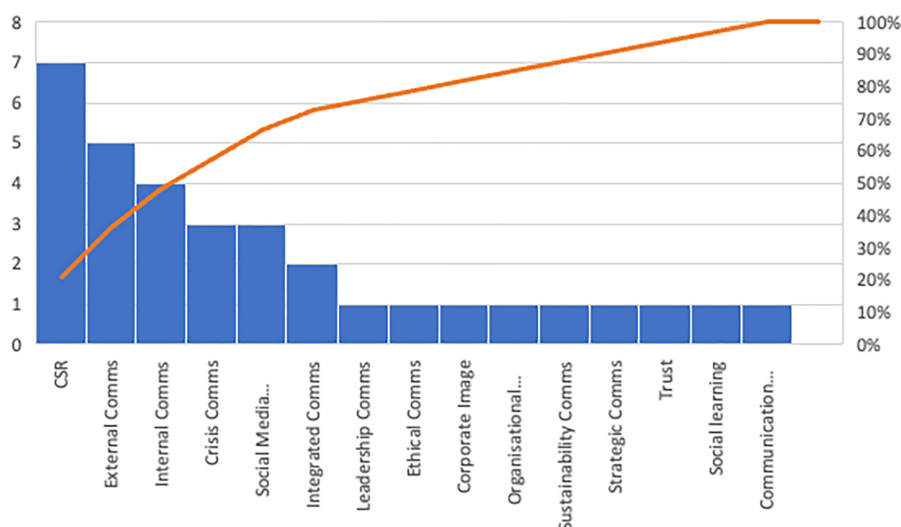Articles 2021 (Vol. 26, No. 3–5)

to succeed in their careers, which opened a question of organisational masculinities (Topić, 2020a, 2021c; Polić and Holy, 2021; Fuentes Lara *et al.*, 2021; Clayton *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, studying women and gender issues in public relations and corporate communications has relevance as despite all positive initiatives, progress and normative policies, equality is far from happening. However, this is not the only issue in terms of EDI. Race and ethnicity remain perhaps an even larger issue with communications industries in the West remaining white and male and some scholars and professional reports demonstrated how practitioners of diverse origins suffer from discrimination because of their race, or in the case of women it can be both race and gender and racism generally seems to be present in the industry and academia (CIPR, 2020; Munshi and Edwards, 2021; Sha, 2021; Topić, 2021a). Meng and Neill (2021) argued that everyone needs to be treated equally and with respect as well as have their voices heard calling for inclusive leadership because practitioners of diverse origins feel unheard, unsupported and unappreciated, thus calling for more diversity in communications.

The environmental scholarship which we started to publish increasingly is also another contribution of CCIJ, which we aim to develop further. The topic of environmentalism and sustainability does not need a special introduction or an outline; it is enough to read about natural disasters and climate change in the mainstream media, as well as observe how life is changing around us, to know this is a relevant and an emerging topic. In CCIJ, topics covered so far include an analysis of UN sustainable goals (van de Broek, 2021), sustainability disclosure (Correia *et al.*, 2021), environmental communication (Visconti, 2021) and sustainability advertising (Lee and Lin, 2022). We will continue to publish papers tackling environmental affairs and calling for a change in the way organisations do business and communicate, to make our contribution towards a more sustainable world. Scholars working in these areas are particularly welcome to send their papers and contribute to the debate.

In the current issue, Vol. 27, No. 4, we continue in the same manner by both supporting existing scholarships and opening doors to new perspectives. Articles in this issue thus include research on workplace behaviour (Fulmore *et al.*), CSR studies focussing on somewhat unexplored areas of corporate social advocacy (Overton and Xiao; Georgiadou) and corporate-NGO partnerships (Wang and O'Connor), public responses to volunteer

programme communication (Shi), ethical leadership and communication behaviour (Seth *et al.*), public relations reputation (Barlik), gender (Hamplova *et al.*), environmental communication (Kim and Chon), environmental messages and behaviour (Andreu) and framing of corporate pollution messaging (Ravazzani).

Authors come from several countries and continents and provide diverse methodological and epistemological perspectives on issues that matter to communications industries, both theory and practice, and this issue again supports environmental research and contributes to the most relevant issue we face today.

What is central to CCIJ, is the view on what constitutes EDI. CCIJ has already increased academic production on equality and environmental affairs whilst preserving impartiality in the process and continuing to publish mainstream works. This means that the journal remained open to all scholars and all perspectives, topical, methodological and epistemological and will continue to do so as no editor should have the power to affect academic careers and progressions by refusing to recognise all works as valid. We hear far too often about frustrations with journals, editors and reviewers who are unsupportive, biased, aggressive, racist, sexist, Orwellian, etc. Neither of these behavioural patterns has a place in CCIJ, and it never will, at least not whilst I am the editor. Therefore, the journal does not just publish EDI works but lives these values of EDI in practice, and we invite scholars studying organisational communication from any perspective to consider CCIJ as a venue for their work. In other words, whilst I am most interested in EDI and environmental affairs, all other works will be published and treated equally. Academia, at least in the UK, distinguishes itself from the corporate world through its camaraderie and solidarity as opposed to a more competitive culture of a corporation, and this needs to be visible in journals and what they publish, as well as how editorial processes are handled. CCIJ, therefore, remains a place of collaboration and inclusion where all perspectives and all authors are welcome.

As of 2023, the journal will have six issues per year and this will include at least two special issues every year, thus providing a venue for focused debates on issues that are relevant to the journal whilst also providing an opportunity for personal and career development to scholars who will be editing special issues. These special issues will largely focus on underrepresented areas of research such as gender, race, and media organisations, but we will also continue to preserve our status at the front of scholarship in CSR and internal communication, which will also have special issues in the forthcoming years. What is more, we are interested in further diversifying the journal and thus invite marketing communications scholars as well as sociologists and psychologists to submit their work and further diversify corporate communications scholarship.

Leeds, UK, 18th of August 2022.

Martina Topic

Note

1. https://www.emerald.com/insight/publication/issn/1356-3289/vol/26/iss/1

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