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Developing corporate communications : insights from the Italian scenario

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**DEVELOPING CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS:
Insights from the Italian scenario**

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DEVELOPING CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS: Insights from the Italian scenario

Abstract

Purpose - Based on managerial perceptions from large firms, this paper explores the emergence, growth and importance of corporate communications and how it is evolving and creating competitive advantage for Italian firms.

Design/methodology/approach - A qualitative approach is deployed, comprising depth interviews with senior managers from Italian corporations from a broad spectrum of industries including: energy, telecommunications, automotive, transport, retail chain, appliances, technology and engineering, private shipping, government-owned holdings, marketing consultancy, and construction.

Findings - The paper offers insight into to corporate communications (corpcoms) practices in the sampled companies. The research shows that corpcoms involves a complex range of activities leading to performance - managed and implemented under CEO direction.

Practical implications - Corpcoms is perceived as a strategic concept with effective application relative to managing corporate image and reputation. The findings offer insights for communication professionals who deal with corpcoms, branding, and marketing communications.

Originality/value - Corpcoms can be viewed via the lens of social actors' perspectives, i.e. via practitioners – including brand managers and senior executives as they possess practical knowledge of business practice in specific contextual business settings and have managerial ability and remit to design, implement and evaluate integrated corporate communications.

Keywords - Corporate communications, integrated communications, communications consultants, marketing communications

Paper type - Research paper

Introduction

A growing number of researchers emphasize the importance of corporate communications (hereafter corpcoms) (Gupta et al., 2008; Karaosmanoglu and Melewar, 2006; Siano et al., 2015). Corpcoms is utilized by companies in an attempt to differentiate themselves and their brand(s) in an increasingly competitive world (Dev and Schultz, 2005; Goodman, 2006; Kapferer, 2012). For example, a paper by Invernizzi and Romenti's (2009) illustrated that strategic corpcoms was fundamental in the agendas of business and communication practitioners. Earlier, Van Riel (1995) and Grunig et al. (2002) had focussed upon managing mutually beneficial relationships inside and outside the company as this highlights that a company is a social institution that generates value, in economic and social terms. Cornelissen (2008; 2011) and James and Phillips (2010) indicated that corporate culture can focus on service to different stakeholders as an essential and differentiating organisational characteristic. Previous studies highlighted that companies need to respond to stakeholder expectations and requirements to obtain and maintain competitive advantage (Van Riel and Fombrun, 2007). These views facilitate understanding and renew discussion about the role of corpcoms in organisational behaviour (Bandsuch et al., 2008; Burchell and Cook, 2008).

Argenti (2006) and Cornelissen (2004) demonstrated that communication had become cogent in practice and outlined its role in the development of corporate strategy (see also Argenti, 2006; Kitchen, 1997). Burchell and Cook (2008) noted that communicating well with stakeholders leads to positive consequences such as decreased conflict and risk reduction as well as greater proximity to stakeholders. However, despite these emphases from past research that strategic communication creates commitment and could underpin positive organisational behaviour (Van Riel and Fombrun, 2007), evidence suggests that communication executives need to develop a greater awareness of the nature and strategic role of communication relative to organisational and stakeholder goals (Holm, 2006; Van Riel and Fombrun, 2007; Siano et al., 2013).

As communication managers are potentially involved in strategic decisions within corporations (Goodman, 2006; Grunig et al., 2002), they understand and adapt what they do to 'others' sense of the company. When this happens, it can create bidirectional communication that may lead to dialogic practice in which all parties participate. Over time, this underpins sustainable competitive advantage (Siano, 2014) and lead to a communication-oriented organisation (Bowen, 2009; Johansson and Ottestig, 2011). Nonetheless, controversy still surrounds corpcoms with issues as to its 'newness' and applicability either practically or theoretically, i.e. having always existed, or whether it is more of a managerial fad (Duncan and Everett, 1993; Schultz and Kitchen, 2004).

Based on practice theory (Jarzabkowski, 2005; Schau et al., 2009), this paper explores the emergence, growth and importance of corporate communications; and its implementation and application in Italian firms, an under-researched country in the EU insofar as this subject is concerned. We also consider its implementation and application in selected companies, paying attention to budgetary decisions and decision-making processes. In this way - albeit embryonically - integrated communications actions can be explored.

FOCUSING ON CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS

Conceptualising corpcoms is predicated on considerations that increasing globalisation, changing market environs and media channels impact organisations and *inter alia up* on their imperative to communicate (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998; Kitchen and Eagle, 2002; Schultz, 2004, 2007). Increasing regulation and competitive business settings are also strong pressures for today's business communicators. Therefore, investigating corpcoms in Italy may offer insights of value in how to deal with challenges or assist in solving problems (Foroudi et al., 2016).

Since the 1990s, corpcoms programmes have become increasingly important due multiplied media channels, fragmented audiences, increasingly diverse stakeholders involved in the firm, and technological development (Argenti, 2006; He and Mukherjee, 2009; Invernizzi and Romenti, 2013). In analysing these and other factors and their effect on communication, many authors initiated studies focused upon stakeholder perceptions about the ways a firm may express itself and such communication studies have multiplied ad nauseum (Forman and Argenti, 2005; Foroudi et al., 2016; Schultz and Kitchen, 2004). Unsurprisingly, this has resulted in diverse definitions of corporate communications. For example (Van Riel and Fombrun, 2007) proclaimed that corpcoms was:

“that set of activities involved in managing and orchestrating all internal and external communication aimed at creating favorable starting points with stakeholders on which the company depends. Corporate communications consist of the dissemination of information in [and out with] an organisation, with the common goal of enhancing the organisation's ability to retain its license to operate”.

Not to be outdone, Cornelissen (2008, p. 23) added that

“corporate communications is a management function that offers a framework and vocabulary for the effective co-ordination of communications with the overall purpose of establishing and maintaining favorable reputations with stakeholder groups upon which the organisation is dependent”.

Yet these definitions only offer a limited understanding. For example, corpcoms can influence distinctiveness, in addition to a company's services and brands, and underpin sponsorship, and other corporate communications activities (Foroudi et al., 2014). Further, corpcoms focuses upon organisational image and reputation (Carreras et al., 2013) and, for this reason, requires an integrated approach using a potentially constrained specialist frame of reference including corporate branding, media relations, issues management, investor relations, public affairs, internal and CEO communication.

Such communications aims to establish and maintain favourable relations with company stakeholders (Kitchen, 1997). The general idea is that corporate success and sustainability may depend significantly upon how an organisation is perceived by stakeholders. Thus, an integrated corpcoms approach aims to fulfil several communication needs, each designed to avoid or minimise reputational damage (Schultz and Kitchen, 2004; Van Riel and Fombrun, 2007).

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3 Starting from these considerations, this paper examines Italian managers understanding of corporate
4 communications. The overarching research question is “whether there is a corporate communications
5 definition established from a practitioners’ point of view?” (RQ1).
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8 In order to understand the main features of corpcoms, both corporate and marketing communications’
9 must be compared. Corpcoms goals differ in their nature from marketing goals because they serve a
10 broader variety of stakeholder groups (Foroudi et al., 2016). In general, corpcoms – owing to the
11 strategic use of corporate brands - aims to present, augment, improve, or, in some cases, stabilise a
12 company’s overall image and reputation (Melewar and Jenkins, 2002). Moreover, corporate
13 communications goals are designed for the long-term success of a company and may have little to do
14 with shorter-term or annual tactics such as marketing communications (De Pelsmacker et al., 2007;
15 Kitchen and Schultz, 2001; De Roeck et al., 2013). Table 1 demonstrates relationships and
16 arrangements between the two communication typologies.
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20 **Please place Table 1 about here**
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23 Both typologies are viewed as separate entities. During the 1990s, Markwick and Fill (1997)
24 attempted in a rudimentary manner to integrate marketing, organisational and management
25 communication under the heading of corporate communications. They were not alone in this as
26 earlier for van Riel (1995) marketing communications was a function concerned with promotional
27 mix elements, such as advertising or personal selling, while organisational communication was
28 reified to deal among (different) stakeholders and, therefore, managed public affairs and public
29 relations, as well as investor relations. Van Riel was both right and wrong in essentially seeking to
30 delimit either communication typology and in seeking to exert corporate control over marketing
31 communications. He omitted to mention that marketing communications budgets – then and now-
32 tend to dwarf the budgets allocated for corporate communications purposes.
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36 Through the same rose-tinted spectacles, Van Riel (1995) also saw management communication as
37 the ‘most important function’ within an organisation because it was apparently in control of planning,
38 control, delegation and coordination of employees and programmes for the entire organisation (Jo
39 and Shim, 2005). Thus, management communication should be able to present the strength of the
40 corporation through planned identity, while also augmenting corporate personality and strategy
41 (Gylling and Lindberg-Repo, 2006; Foroudi et al., 2016; Forman and Argenti, 2005). This element
42 aside, van Riel’s (1995) view of marketing communications countermanded that of other researchers,
43 many of whom stated that marketing communications was not merely just concerned with tactical or
44 promotional activities (Kitchen and Schultz, 2003; Schultz, 2004). Marketing communications also
45 serves customers and consumers, thus enabling both short and long-term sales, profit and market
46 share objectives without which there would no business to present to stakeholders. Without pressing
47 the issue further, employees from both domains should be able to work together to increase brand
48 loyalty and value (Gylling and Lindberg-Repo, 2006).
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54 Following this, common starting points can act as facilitators in developing corporate identity and
55 image and product/service brands (Foroudi et al., 2016; Schultz, 2007). Therefore, companies could
56 in theory develop a common communication strategy to ensure that all disciplines and
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3 communication activities work in harmony and support each other's functions (Schultz, 2004; Van
4 Riel, 1997). Thus, there is a need of some rapprochement between corporate and individual brands
5 and their respective managerial teams. These could be used as a gestation point for corporate and
6 marketing communications interactions (Calder and Malthouse, 2005; Garretson and Scot, 2005).
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9 Table 1 highlights that marketing communications is managed by the marketing department in most
10 companies, whereas corporate communications lies firmly in the CEO's domain. In consequence,
11 companies ideally need to have a corporate communications strategy that is integrated at all levels;
12 corporate, strategic business unit and brand (Kitchen and Eagle, 2002; Wightman, 1999). In addition,
13 corpcoms could - potentially - be envisaged as a process in coordinating and creating synergy
14 between departments and functional areas (Cornelissen, 2000; 2011; Kitchen and de Pelsmacker,
15 2004).
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19 Taking these issues into consideration, corpcoms involves features and corporate performance issues
20 that need to be ostensibly managed and implemented by the CEO aided by senior company
21 managers. All these activities and the associated communication strategy can be consolidated into
22 one or few departments thus enabling companies to create and manage the strategic directionality of
23 their communications with various stakeholder groups (Melewar et al., 2016). In all this, corpcoms is
24 a significant function within organisation with the same nascent 'power' of other functions and
25 evidently can be strategically managed. Therefore, in exploring how large companies in Italy manage
26 corporate communications, we derive two research questions from the literature - (RQ2a): How do
27 Italian large companies manage their corporate communications? and (RQ2b): Are corporate
28 communications departments (or their equivalents) both organised and effective in our sample firms?
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33 In addition, taking into consideration new trends and future perspectives, it emerges that, in many
34 companies senior communication managers are becoming members of the corporate dominant
35 coalition (Bowen, 2009; Dozier et al., 1995). These positions in an organisational hierarchy allow
36 managers to direct communication following a strategic organisational approach (Berger, 2005).
37 Frequently large companies place such a department at a high vertical organisational level. Indeed
38 Bowen (2009) asserted that, most global corporations have a communication department strictly
39 linked to the CEO and her/his executive team. This means that corpcoms department may advise
40 senior decision-making teams, and that communications management personnel directly report to the
41 CEO as an active part of the dominant coalition. Thus, we investigate large companies that have
42 developed corporate communications whether - (RQ3) Is the department developing significant
43 interactions at different organisational levels – vertical top-down, bottom-up vertical, or horizontal –
44 an active part of the dominant coalition?, and - (RQ4) Taking into account the important role of
45 corpcoms in large companies, to what extent are our sample companies likely to increase investment
46 in corporate communications over the next three years?
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52 Moreover, it is likely that a dominant coalition, including communication managers, will use several
53 communication tactics to communicate with internal and external stakeholders, and work with
54 communication consultants as needed (Canato and Giangreco, 2011). Considering that several studies
55 focus on the relationships that large companies have with consultants, and especially, on the
56 approach and conduct of companies toward 'their' consultants may also lead to successful
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relationships (Kitchen and Schultz, 2001), we also explore (RQ5): What kind of relationship should be developed between the company (dominant coalition) and the consultant(s)?

RESEARCH METHODS

The preceding literature review afforded little by way of application for Italian-based firms. Limited studies to date comprise mainly descriptive studies in the domain (Foroudi et al., 2014). This scenario allows justification of an explorative qualitative research design to (Veludo-de-Oliveira et al., 2006) to enable understanding of the subject. Thus, our primary purpose is to develop preliminary ideas and move toward refined research questions by focusing on 'what' or 'why' questions (Neuman 2006, p. 33), and exploratory research is used to arrive at a set of assumptions on which to base the research design. Since this research aims to explore the definitions, features, tasks, responsibilities and competencies of corpcoms, a qualitative approach was more appropriate as this method uncovers and explores the way social actors (internal and external communication managers) behave, and why (Collins and Hussey, 2003). Put differently, qualitative methods enable researchers to unpack the processes by which people come to final decisions (White et al., 1999), and provide opportunity for contextual analysis. Therefore, taking into consideration the research questions and the chosen method, a semi-structured instrument was designed which allowed opportunity for empirical inquiry into this contemporary phenomenon within a live context (Yin, 2009). The further advantage of this approach is that it allows preliminary situational understanding, which enables findings to contribute to later research.

A sample of 194 large Italian companies were contacted by e-mail and telephone and respondent selection made according to revenues achieved in 2015. Moreover, only large companies headquartered in Italy were selected. Companies that belonged to an international corporate group such as P&G, Henkel, etc. were excluded. Like many exploratory studies, companies and interviewees were selected based on a judgment sample criterion (Gopaldas, 2016). In implementing the judgement sampling criterion - a type of non-probability sampling - the authors' judgement was used for choosing companies and interviewees which were considered to be representative of the population (Supriadi and Pheng, 2018). Actually, judgement sampling is used regularly in conducting qualitative research where the main goal is to develop understand of a phenomenon rather than to generalise to larger populations (Creswell and Creswell, 2017).

Thus, after elimination of firms that did not meet the criteria and others unwilling to participate, eventually 15 large companies were selected whose executives participated in the research. Moreover, it has to be highlighted that, the main aim of researchers was to increase understanding of the explored phenomenon rather than obtain a fully representative sample. For this reason, the sample selection was completed at the point of redundancy, that is, at the point when no new information was approaching (Lincoln and Guba, 2000; Patton, 2002). However, a purposive approach was put into practice to guarantee that the sample contained organisations from a range of different sectors (Gopaldas, 2016). Strauss and Corbin's (1990) theoretical approach was used in the data analysis, selected given that the data is qualitative in nature. Secondary data was also accessed including information from websites and corporate literature in order to overcome the limitations of interviews. To achieve the research objective, the authors conducted 25 face-to-face semi-structured interviews

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3 in 2015 with key informants, marketing and communication consultants responsible for
4 implementation of the companies' corporate communications.
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6 *Field interviews*

7 Italian businesses that were not SMEs and had 250 or more employees were selected (Loecher,
8 2000) from a broad spectrum of industries including four energy companies, one telecommunication,
9 one automotive, one transport, a retail chain, a leading appliance company, two technology and
10 engineering companies, a private shipping company, a government-owned holding, a marketing
11 consultancy and a construction company. This cross-section was chosen as the study explores the
12 emergence, growth and importance of corpcoms and how may be evolving and creating competitive
13 advantage. Therefore, the sample is composed by interviewee selections of executives/managers in
14 Italian companies, functional areas/departments and roles/positions with the proviso that all relate to
15 communication.
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20 An interview protocol was designed (Gruber et al., 2008; Gopaldas, 2016) and after a brief
21 introduction to delineate the research focus, each interviewee discussed subjects relative to the
22 research objectives to obtain insights into corpcoms practice. Each interview lasted approximately
23 one hour. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure reliability (Malhotra and
24 Birks, 2003). Based on the nature of the research topic, where permission was not extended to record,
25 interviews were paused, notes taken and written up immediately afterwards.
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29 A back translation was followed from Italian to English by expert translators. An interview guide
30 helped ensured all areas were covered, though interviewees were allowed to move from concept to
31 concept without following the topic order in the guide. Using open-ended questions improved the
32 validity of the collected answers, as is suitable for exploratory studies (Malhotra and Birks, 2003). In
33 order to structure a comprehensive synthesis of information obtained from the data, NVivo was
34 utilised. This assisted the authors to understand recurrent topics, examine the text, and interrogate the
35 data at different levels and ensure reliability and validity of the research. Using NVivo, the
36 researchers tried to find the research phenomenon inside the data, and indicators of where the
37 phenomenon started and completed (Patton, 2002). Thus, this study is in line with the criteria of
38 trustworthiness for qualitative study by using multiple methods for analysis employed to prove
39 internal validity and credibility, comprehensive description of the research setting, taking into
40 consideration the criteria of ecological validity and transferability, cases and informants
41 confidentiality protected, and verbatim interview transcription, following objectivity and
42 confirmability principles (Lincoln and Guba, 2000).
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47 **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

48 *Definition and Features of Corporate Communications*

49 In these two sections, findings (summarized in Table 2) are preceded by background information and,
50 according to Langley (1999), presented with a narrative approach.
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3 Aiming at answering to whether there is a corpcoms definition established from a practitioners' point
4 of view (RQ1), we commence by exploring the definitions and importance interviewees expressed.
5 An interviewee mentioned that,
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8 *"...it seems effective. However, remember that (...) involves both planning and practice.*
9 *The second part is more difficult than the first. Usually, communication is identified with*
10 *immaterial and speculative activities. In actuality, the most expensive phase in terms of*
11 *time and resources is when "words" become practice" (Corporate Communications*
12 *Manager).*
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15 The majority of respondents indicated that their corporate communications definition was aligned
16 with that of Cornelissen (2008) i.e. focussed upon a strategic corpcoms perspective. Thus,
17 Cornelissen's definition is relevant only if words become facts. In addition, a corporate HRM
18 manager said "we use communication in order to spread information inside and outside the
19 company". This highlights that corpcoms has to reach (and influence) different audiences (internally
20 and externally). Moreover, another opined that in order to manage this properly, several
21 functions/departments must be involved:
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25 *"the definition of corpcoms accords with (...) mine. However, here, several*
26 *functions/departments manage it" (VP - External Relations and Communications).*
27

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29 On the other hand, two interviewees said that they agreed partially with the definition, while another
30 manager stated that corpcoms are not developed in the company where he works. In particular, an
31 interviewee said,
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34 *"...I don't agree with the second part of the definition i.e. "establishing and*
35 *maintaining favorable reputations". Actually, we work in order to reach a coherent*
36 *management of corpcoms using different integrated channels and the internal*
37 *communication department" (Internal communication and training manager).*
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40 This highlights that the company focuses mainly on internal communication. However, this manager
41 does not think that reputation could be a goal which corpcoms should reach. Besides, this interviewee
42 remarkably stated that there is no space for corpcoms in his company,
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45 *"Nowadays, there is no corpcoms department. Such activities are developed with sporadic events*
46 *that the company decides to promote. External communication is mainly based on advertisements*
47 *and offers, while internal communications is managed by a specific manager in charge of*
48 *training staff as well" (Corporate HRM Development Manager).*
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50
51 This perspective takes into consideration primarily the tactical side of communication. In addition, it
52 is linked with discontinuous implementation in order to reach short-term aims or follow a trend,
53 and/or may be related to relative unsophistication as to corporate and marketing communications
54 boundaries. However, most interviewees intimated that corpcoms was a necessary asset for large
55 companies and that played an important role in their business. Based on the data, the key elements
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3 associated with the words ‘corporate communications’ in the Italian scenario are illustrated in Figure
4 1. The selection of elements is based on an association index. In particular, the index was carried out
5 following analysis that allowed understanding of the features of corpcoms approaches. Word
6 association analysis of practitioners’ points of view was done to classify main key words about
7 corpcoms and visualise them in a radial diagram (see Figure 1) with the words ‘corporate
8 communications’ in the centre and other words disseminated around, each at a distance proportional
9 to its degree of association. The statistically significant relations between words are, consequently,
10 univocal and mono-directional.
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13 14 **Place Figure 1 about Here** 15

16 It is useful to consider statements that focus on the importance of corpcoms. For example, a corporate
17 communications manager said,
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20 *“Communications is essential for a company that would like to be successful. Our*
21 *company was among the first in Italy to understand the importance of innovation in*
22 *putting into practice communication strategies. We love innovation since the company*
23 *was born in the sixties. In those days, the president hired American firm Booz Allen &*
24 *Hamilton as their marketing and communication consultant. Our company was the first*
25 *to hire an American consultant. However, instead of passively accepting a foreign*
26 *model, we integrated it into our corporate culture and thus we changed how corpcoms*
27 *is developed in Italy” (Corporate Communications Manager).*
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31 This implies that corpcoms not only plays a significant role in the company but that it has done so for
32 decades. It also reveals the ambivalent nature of the relations between marketing and corporate
33 communications. For example, Booz, Allen and Hamilton had at that time very little experience of
34 corpcoms *per se*. Another interviewee also mentioned corporate social responsibility, indicating its
35 fundamentality:
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39 *“among the principles and values that inspire corporate performances are*
40 *transparency and fairness. These can be reached giving to stakeholders clear and*
41 *sustainable communications about strategies, activities, results and decisions. All these*
42 *actions and relations together create internal and external value, which guarantees*
43 *trust and credibility, creates profit for the company and helps in changing strategic*
44 *choices. Due to this, our company was honoured to receive numerous awards for*
45 *outstanding corporate communications in areas such: good reporting and financial*
46 *communications, online financial communications, web ranking, corporate governance,*
47 *and an award for the most innovative intranet in Europe” (Corpcoms and External*
48 *Relations Manager).*
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52 About main influences exerted, several interviewees noted that corporate communications is
53 responsible for emphasising corporate values, (of more importance to stakeholders, and latterly upon
54 sustainability). In this respect, a manager said:
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“All communication projects starts from analysis of the stakeholder system. This helps us to constantly strengthen reputation and focus responsibly on different publics. This is followed by a regular interest in sustainability, a further element that can become the basis for strengthening intangible corporate assets. This is an essential value that helps give more consideration to people, environment, communities, technological innovations and to all employees in the company. The activity dedicated to maintain relationships can be considered strategic. In fact, it represents an added value for us. Creating and sustaining value depends on the quality of stakeholder relationships. For this reason, strategies cannot be developed without strong and open dialogue with all legitimate organisations in contact with the company” (External Relations Manager).

Thus, corpcoms is seen to be both tactical and strategic simultaneously. Taking into consideration all interviewee views, the most meaningful aspect that affects corpcoms – especially, in terms of budget and organisation – is company size especially in response to stakeholder issues. For example, an interviewee from an energy company stated:

“the most important thing in a company that influences... is that it is necessary to answer to stakeholder pressure. Once managers use corpcoms then corporate problems [may] become easier to solve. Corpcoms helps underpin relations among different SBUs”.

For the majority of interviewees – corpcoms is influenced by resource and information exchange among different areas of communication and new technologies. So, it can be said that any corpcoms definition established from a corporate perspective should take into consideration all the elements, issues and features highlighted heretofore. Actually, it was found that when comparing the theoretical definitions of corpcoms with those of practitioners, it was noticeable that interviewed managers did not have a holistic definition of the topic and perhaps this is not needed so much in practice, as in the constant welter of academic opinion.

Moreover, in the data analysis on corpcoms’ definitions and features, three keywords were extracted from interviews, i.e. stakeholders, image and relations (see Figure 2). Moreover, further important keywords were identified related to the main subject: responsibility, transparency, positive behaviour, staff/employees relations, public relations, marketing and external communications.

Place Figure 2 about Here

Corporate Communications Tasks, Responsibilities, Competencies

Aiming at finding out how Italian large companies manage their corpcoms (RQ2a) and if corporate communications departments are both organised and effective (RQ2b), this second part of the findings illustrates the main features of the Italian communication unit/function in terms of tasks, responsibilities and competencies. According to interviewees, in each company there is a single organisation unit/function (mainly titled the PR department) in charge of managing corpcoms. The business manager responsible for planning is head of the Communication Department or the Public Relations/External relation manager while the business manager responsible for implementation is

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3 the communication manager (in other companies the person responsible was external relations
4 manager - or PR manager, Marketing manager, or Sales manager). The number of employees
5 working in such units is restricted – in no case was there more than fifteen. Departments involved in
6 managing corpcoms usually interact through meetings. Moreover, it seems that the External
7 Relations manager is the person responsible for coordinating activities developed by corporate and
8 the marketing communication department, and he was also charged with directing a permanent cross-
9 functional team coordinating communication activities. An interviewee speaking of activities by
10 cross-functional teams said:
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14 *“they manage strategically and tactically national and international communication*
15 *projects; support media relations; reinforce corporate reputations thanks to strategic*
16 *and tactical management of CSR projects; manage press releases in Italy and other*
17 *countries; create communication and PR plans; support event management; media*
18 *monitoring (press releases, monitor press agencies, online, in TV and on radio); write*
19 *and review texts and materials for different journals; and measure media results”*
20 *(Managing Partner).*
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24 In terms of whether the corpcoms department is developing significant interactions at different
25 organisational levels (RQ3), it was noted that relations and coordination among different departments
26 were quite well developed in this sample of companies. However, vertical top-down interaction (from
27 executives to employees) appears dominant in all firms. The approach utilised to arrive at the
28 communications budget in the companies is that of tasks and objectives though this is usually
29 associated with marketing. In terms of investment in communication budgeted for the next three
30 years (RQ4), 50% of the companies stated their budgets would increase by 10% on corpcoms – still
31 however with 90% allocated to marketing, while others were not planning to change their
32 communication budget. Notably, a distinction between corpcoms and marcoms budgets was not
33 specified in any of the sampled companies. The main reason for those increasing budget was to
34 renovate and refresh the corporate image. Thus, as noted earlier, interviewees seem to place more
35 importance on image than upon reputation though this requires further research.
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40 In addition, as regards the relationship between the company and external consultants, according to
41 the majority of interviewed managers, usually external communication agencies are employed to
42 manage advertising plans and website design. This relationship seems to involve long-lasting
43 cooperation; in fact, managers said that they collaborate with external consultants for periods from 5
44 to 10 years. Moreover, when managers decide to substitute their partners they do it mainly because
45 they need to manage communication in a market divided into geographic areas (regional, national
46 and international). Hence, they usually employ different consultants for different geographical areas.
47 There are many reasons for the employment of communication consultants, such as (i) lack of
48 expertise inside the company, (ii) presence of qualified staff but not expert in the communication
49 department, (iii) efficient contacts with differential media, (iv) worthwhile investment, and (v)
50 development of communication strategy.
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55 However, the main tasks that communications consultants perform are to create logos/trademarks,
56 and develop textual and graphical messages as most interviewees stated. In addition, four managers
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3 said that “the external communication consultants are usually involved in creating a new corporate
4 brand”. Others suggested that:

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6 *“it could be useful to hire a consultant to create packaging, create new product brands,*
7 *develop the corporate house style, recommend investment advertising, sponsorships,*
8 *sales promotions, or MPR., and/or recommend which media communication channels*
9 *are appropriate”.*
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12 To summarise, the majority of interviewees stated that when an external communication consultant
13 worked for a large company, he/she usually receives briefing and guidance direct from the CEO.
14 However, an interviewee from an engineering company suggested that, “communication decisions
15 are taken by the CEO together with the external consultant”. Another manager from a construction
16 company said “communication decisions are exclusively taken by the CEO”. These data allowed a
17 glimpse into the complexities of the relations between a company (dominant coalition) and
18 consultant(s) (RQ5).
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22 **DISCUSSION**

23 This paper explores the emergence, growth and importance of corpcoms and how it is evolving and
24 creating competitive advantage via qualitative research into the perceptions of business managers in
25 large Italian based firms. Besides, enhancing previous understanding and contributing to literatures
26 on corporate communications, the study re-defines the concept as (RQ1):
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30 *“corporate communications is a management function that effectively and transparently*
31 *co-ordinates all means of communications in practice, in order to responsibly create*
32 *and support a positive image with different stakeholders”.*
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35 This means, according to the findings, although scholars highlight the fact that the main benefit
36 reached through corpcoms to establish and maintain a favorable reputation with [all] company
37 stakeholders, large Italian companies - in this sample - seem to be interested in creating and
38 supporting a positive corporate image. However, one may well be perceived to lead to the other.
39 Actually, Italian organisations have put significant effort into creating and sustaining corporate image
40 by aligning and managing communication campaigns with different publics. However, they seem to
41 pay more attention to company’s visibility and awareness at the time of this research.
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45 Several interviewees considered image and reputation as overlapping, although authors (Foroudi et
46 al., 2016; Melewar et al., 2016) mentioned that it is important to keep them separate. In fact, they
47 advise that to achieve a strong reputation, companies need a strong image. Nevertheless, interviewees
48 seemed unclear as to whether or not corporate reputation was better than a positive image or vice
49 versa. Image is more variable for the reason that it is built upon beliefs and opinions while corporate
50 reputation, built on values, usually does not vary in the short-term. In addition, reputation is more
51 stable in the presence of negative publicity. This is due to the fact that “it is value-based and not
52 belief-based” thus, “negative information about the company will have a much more difficult time
53 altering the association in memory” (Percy 2008, p. 64). It is likely that image in Italy is preferred to
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3 reputation due to cultural habits and social pressures companies face, especially in the aftershocks of
4 the global economic crisis which has impacted the ways corpcoms is managed.
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7 Considering RQ2 it is clear that there are signals highlighting that a corporate communications
8 department is assuming greater importance in these Italian companies. Managers were well aware of
9 the importance of managing corporate communications (RQ2a). In all the sampled firms there is a
10 single department/function for corpcoms albeit under a different title such as 'External Relations' or
11 'Public Relations'. This emphasizes that while corpcoms has taken and is considered significant
12 inside companies, the use of the term "corporate communications" is not fully realisable ... despite
13 academic advocacy! External relations and PR are well-used recognisable labels. However, the
14 current existent departments – follow the rule of efficacy and efficiency while seeking to create and
15 support positive corporate image with different publics (RQ2b).
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19 The rise of relevance of this topic via organisational structures is in line with other findings exploring
20 the role played by the corporate communications officer (CCO). Over the past years, the literature
21 has highlighted the increasing importance of the CCO in firms, by showing different "predominant
22 role types" involved into CCO's main duties and tasks (Invernizzi and Romenti, 2013) and by
23 investigating the fact that CCO has been progressively taking on a leadership role (Beurer-Züellig et
24 al., 2009; Holtzhausen and Zerfass, 2011). If the spotlight is on the 'leader', the same is happening
25 also for departments as they are (Simoes et al., 2005), the function that helps companies gain
26 competitive advantage, integrating communications between internal and external stakeholders.
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30 From the theoretical point of view, in a company that develops an integrated corpcoms approach, the
31 department should develop different significant interactions at different levels within the company -
32 top-down vertical, bottom-up vertical, and horizontal, as an active part of the dominant coalition. We
33 find some support for this (RQ3). Results show that inside most of our sampled firms, relations and
34 coordination among different departments are well developed in Italy.
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38 However, communication managers pay more attention in developing vertical top-down interactions.
39 This aligns with the fact that large companies often position the communication department at a high
40 vertical level organisationally. This means that top down vertical interactions are necessary in order
41 to allow managers that are located in the higher position to direct tasks to other employees. Thus, the
42 location of the department close to senior management also means that this department often interacts
43 directly with the CEO as it develops several tasks relevant for senior managers such as (1) text-based
44 productions; (2) managing content and production of internal and external web sites; (3) consultation
45 about means and media of communication; (4) coordination of communication projects; and (5)
46 monitoring communication quality in accordance with Lurati and Eppler (2006); Mahoney (2011)
47 and Moreno et al. (2010).
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51 In terms of budget, the analysis highlighted that 50% of the sampled firms will increase investment in
52 communications in the next 3 years (RQ4). However, budget increases average just 3% per year. The
53 economic crisis is affecting the communication budget according to interviewees. Moreover, the fact
54 that companies put into practice the task and objective method seems to indicate that managers are
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3 interested in achieving long-term objectives, despite the fact that this method is more often utilised in
4 the marketing communication domain.
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7 The trend in terms of investment in communications is only partially validated by access to a public
8 database with information about advertising and promotional expenditure made since 2009 (see
9 Fondazione Accademia di Comunicazione). These data reveal a substantial decline in advertising and
10 a move to below-the-line promotion and online materials especially in the period from 2012-2015.
11 This leads to less expenditure on corpcoms evidences shifts and changes over time. Information
12 from the public database reveals that, in Italy, most investment is made in advertising (78% of total
13 expenditure goes into above-the-line media) made just by very few companies (less than 2.5% of the
14 total number of existing companies, i.e. 400 organisations).
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18 Moreover, among the circumscribed amount of companies that still invest in traditional
19 communication, the budget set for promotion is more close to “15-50 million Euros” than to “over 50
20 million Euros”, actually, in 2013, this kind of investment was even more restricted. Bearing in mind
21 RQ5, exploring the relationship between the company (dominant coalition) and external consultants,
22 this tends to be a long term relationship. Such approach creates a collective understanding about
23 corpcoms among communication practitioners – internally and externally. In fact, it allows managers
24 and consultants to take part and institutionalise the processes of integration (see Kitchen and Schultz
25 2001 for an early slant on this). A question must arise as to the types of skills, qualifications and
26 experiences of the consultants which may stem primarily from marketing.
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31 **IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY**

32 This research offers managerial contributions for decision-makers who wish to understand and apply
33 corpcoms from the communication managers’ perspective. Managers should understand that
34 corpcoms are complex in nature as it is determined by multiple factors. The paper, in fact, suggests
35 that managers should be cautious in implementation while at the same time using a strategic, long-
36 term approach: corpcoms is perceived to be a constructive strategic tool that can be successfully
37 applied to managing corporate image and reputation. That said, this paper offers implications for
38 managers/decision-makers on what should and could shape their approaches to corpcoms
39 management and its key elements (features, tasks, responsibilities, competencies). In order to
40 formulate and execute corpcoms strategy, practitioners will have to become more conversant with the
41 meaning of ‘strategy’ in a corporate communications context. They also need to understand the
42 environmental issues the organisation is facing and be or become expert in utilizing communication
43 with stakeholders to help alleviate or remove barriers to success.
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49 In this perspective, this exploratory qualitative study may lay the groundwork for future research
50 along three dimensions (i) quantitative research across different organisations using the present
51 study’s interview instrument in order to generate findings from a large number of firms; (ii) studies
52 with firms that represent industries not considered here, such as multinational companies with
53 headquarters outside Italy, but characterised by similar cultural aspects; and (iii) a bottom-up
54 exploration of those who are the receivers of corporate communications strategy. Such a study could
55 address the following themes: a) how effective is the corpcoms function in building ‘strategy’ and
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3 reputation; and/or b) research focused on outcomes, not just single corpcoms activities. Usually,
4 corporate communications departments assess their work measuring implemented actions - for
5 example, how many campaigns they create - rather than their results, which might include effect on
6 corporate image or reputation, brand cognisance, overall sales, brand image, awareness, share value;
7 and c) research on the relations between the corpcoms group and other departments or functions with
8 emphasis on effect in terms of overall strategy.
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11 Despite the contributions achieved by this explorative study, we acknowledge some several
12 limitations. First, we recognize these results cannot be extended to other markets as cultural variants
13 which linked to the Italian perspective – do seem to play an important role in this study. However,
14 this investigation may facilitate other researchers to propose an inclusive instrument appropriate to
15 structure empirical investigation from a cross-country context. Furthermore, this research used semi-
16 structured interviews with communication managers to explore respondent experiences and
17 understanding. Thus, a choice of a different research instrument may be considered for subsequent
18 research. In addition, the study was restricted to communication managers, so did not consider other
19 members of staff perspective. Hence, care should be taken in interpreting these findings, as other
20 corporate employees could express different perceptions about both communication and strategy.
21 Finally, there is always a concern about the representativeness of the specific data being studied, and
22 whether the findings could be applied to other similar cases. The short answer is no as the data is not
23 representative of all Italian large firms, and generalization is not possible. Nonetheless, the insights
24 are interesting and serve to indicate general themes and issues across the firms sampled.
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30 CONCLUSIONS

31 This exploratory paper adds a new context to the study of corpcoms. The study explored the
32 emergence, growth and importance of corpcoms within large consumer companies in the Italian
33 context. This objective enabled better understanding of the importance that corporate
34 communications has in these companies. Then, the paper analysed implementation and application
35 within the selected companies, paying attention also to budget decisions and who made these
36 decisions, including external communication consultants.
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40 About the way in which communications is still practised and planned in many of the selected
41 organisations, the paper contributes in this field highlighting the need for professional development
42 and changes. The main idea is to have an across-the-board developmental shift from a craft
43 orientation to communications, represented by functions or units performing tactical communication
44 procedures, to a strategic management department. When corpcoms is seen as a management
45 function, communications practitioners would then carry out managerial tasks by taking part in the
46 dominant coalition and by being involved in management and decision-making oriented duties
47 including the preparation of corporate communications objectives, the formulation of long and short-
48 term values/philosophies, and interacting with senior management.
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52 This suggested shift clearly creates a number of challenges in the core part of communications: each
53 of these challenges needs to be met by practitioners with suitable competencies in order to enhance
54 communications as a strategic management function. In order to face these issues, it was also
55 highlighted that the sampled companies are attempting to follow a new direction in planning and
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3 implementing corpcoms, though it may seem like copying activities from elsewhere. Actually, the
4 most interesting change that emerges from the data concerns the role played by corporate
5 communications which is not only considered to be an operational tool, which deals with 'how' to
6 communicate, but also as a managerial activity that highlights 'what' to communicate. In fact,
7 interviewees described corpcoms as both strategic and tactical at the same time. Moreover, according
8 to the interviewees, the communication activities aim at building corporate image, although there are
9 signs of a new approach to reputation management.
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12 Another positive factor of change is the attention paid to CSR and communication to all stakeholders.
13 Hence, this may show that the direct or indirect impact of corpcoms in Italian firms is gaining
14 ground. However, the most involved departments are still under the heading of PR or External
15 Relations. This means that there is not a full understanding of 'what' corpcoms means or indeed
16 'who' should manage it. Finally, cooperation of company/external consultants seems to be
17 consolidated in these firms over time. In fact, communication activities are carried out, mainly, by
18 external consultants in accordance with instructions from CEOs. With no attempt at decrying
19 consultants work, the evidence of skills, competencies and qualifications must be challengeable and
20 hence further research is necessitated.
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25 Due to the open-ended features of the exploration, the paper identifies these companies' attempts in
26 clarifying both the current and future trends of communication relative to their specific domain.
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29 As the research agenda proposes, this exploratory qualitative study poses many subsequent questions.
30 The expectation is that other academics will undertake further work in this area and create a
31 communication viewpoint to address issues that are identifiable but under-researched in business
32 management, marketing and strategy.
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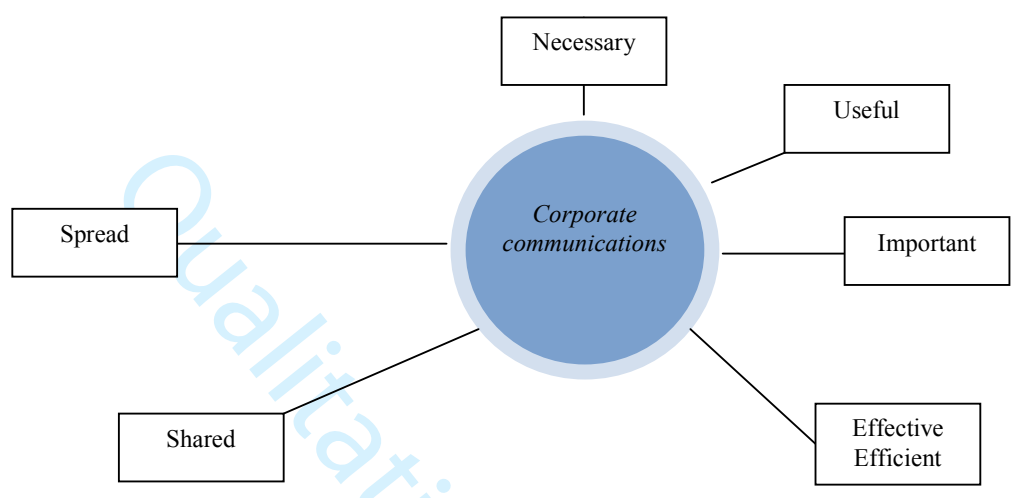
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Fig 1: Thematic elements most associated with the word ‘corporate communications’ in the Italian scenario extract from the interviews’ transcript with NVivo



Source: Authors' elaboration

Qualitative Market Research

Fig 2: Word cloud extract from the interviews' transcript with NVivo



Source: Authors' elaboration

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Table 1: Comparing Marketing and Corporate Communications

	Marketing Communications	Corporate Communications
Focus	Affects behaviour through communication.	Institutional focus. Takes into account everything: what a company says what it makes and/or communicates.
Different features	Starts with the customer or prospect and work backwards to the marketing communicator.	Has a clear stakeholder focus. Recognises the importance of personnel. Extends importance of CSR.
	Uses all forms of communication and all sources of brand or company contacts as prospective message delivery channels.	Provides managers with tools, allowing them to take strategic decisions relating to the organisation potential multiple identities.
	Uses synergy in order to achieve a strong brand image.	Assigns importance to corporate identity. Allows the identification of gaps between corporate personality, identity, and image.
	Aims to build relations between brands and customers.	Focuses on communication and behaviour, reducing gaps between them. Considers different ways in which corpcoms are deployed.
Tools	Marketing communications involves pre-eminently the promotional mix.	Corpcoms involves pre-eminently the corporate communication mix.
Management responsibility	Marketing/communications management.	CEO, other corporate personnel.
Functional responsibility	Brand/Marketing.	Most departments
General responsibility	Marketing personnel.	Corporate personnel.
Disciplinary roots	Brand/Marketing.	Multidisciplinary.
Brand gestation	Short.	Medium/long.
Stakeholder focus	Consumers.	Stakeholders.
Values	Contrived.	Real (also contrived).
Communications domain	Promotional mix.	Corporate communications mix.
Dimensions requiring alignment	Brand values/ product performance.	Brand values, identity, strategy, vision.
	Image and reputation, consumer commitment.	Identity, image and reputation, stakeholder involvement, dialogues, relationships.
	Environment (PESTEL).	Environment (PESTEL).

Table 2: An Overview of Corporate Communications in Italian Firms extract from the interviews' transcript with NVivo

	Corpcoms in the Italian scenario
Focus	Plays an important role in the company's life and influences corporate performances.
Different features	Helps create and maintain a positive image with stakeholders.
	Consists of strategies and tactics.
	Is important, widespread, shared, necessary, useful, effective, and efficient.
	Its influence generates change, enhancing and strengthening the relations between firm and stakeholders.
	Several impactful factors: corporate dimensions, new technologies, environmental issues, etc.
Tools	Different channels are used in order to integrate departments in a corpcoms perspective: i.e. meetings, conferences, workshops, intranet, etc.
	There is a cross-functional team which helps development
	The main duty of the cross-functional team is to coordinate.
Management responsibility	CEO.
Functional responsibility	It is preferable to have a single SBU in charge of managing.
	The manager responsible for developing strategically and practically corpcoms is the communication manager.
	The number of employees who work in the communication department varies according to firm size and budget.
General responsibility	There is a manager in charge of coordinating both departments of marketing and corporate communications.
	Consultants: Companies employ different kind of external consultants of communications, who have to develop communication activities.
	Companies employ communication consultants if: they do not have specific competencies, they have skilful members of the staff but they are not experts.
	Communication consultants are employed to: create new logos/brands, develop and manage text and graphical messages.
	Before being able to work in terms of communication, consultants "learn" about companies' needs.
	The CEO gives the main communication guidelines to consultants.
	The relationship between consultant and company is usually long term .
Brand gestation	Medium to long.
Stakeholder focus	All Stakeholders.
Dimensions requiring alignment	Brand
	Budget: In order to set the communication budget, companies follow an inclusive approach.
	Many reasons can push a company to change its mind about the communication budget.
	The communication budget will be marginally increased for half the sampled firms over the next three years.

DEVELOPING CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS: An Exploratory Study

Dear reviewers,

We would like to thank you the editor and reviewers for providing detailed constructive comments and enabling us to revise the manuscript. We have addressed all the issues and comments carefully and hope the responses appropriately deal with the concerns raised. We feel the paper has effectively benefited from your input, thus presenting a clearer contribution to knowledge regarding the issues stated in the paper. Below, we provide our detailed responses to each issue raised.

Reviewer 1

The **implications** seem to be well founded but some of them are generic, for example:

“Managers should understand that corpcoms complex as it determines and is determined by multiple factors. It suggests that managers should be cautious about communication using a strategic, long term approach.”
Pag. 14

It could be useful to explain this sentence.

We thank the reviewer for this comment.
This is addressed as follows:

Implications were strengthened and several sentences were better explained:

“This research offers managerial contributions for decision-makers who wish to understand and apply corpcoms from the communication managers’ perspective”.

Managers should understand that corpcoms is complex in nature and is determined by multiple factors. The paper suggests that managers should be cautious about communication using a standard strategic, long-term approach: corpcoms need to be seen as a constructive strategic tool that can be successfully applied to managing corporate image and reputation. Having said that, this paper offers implications for managers/decision-makers on what should and could shape their approaches to corpcoms management and its key elements (features, tasks, responsibilities, competencies).

In order to formulate corpcoms strategy, practitioners will have to become conversant with the meaning of ‘strategy’ in a corporate communications context. They will also need to understand the business and societal issues that the organisation is facing and be expert in using communication with all stakeholders to help remove barriers to success.

In this perspective, this exploratory qualitative study may lay the groundwork for future research along several dimensions:

- quantitative research across different organisations using the present study’s interview instrument in order to generate findings from a large number of firms;
- studies with firms that represent industries not considered here, such as a multinational organisation with headquarters outside Italy, but characterised by similar cultural aspects;
- a bottom-up exploration of those who are the receivers of corporate communications strategy. Such a study could address the following themes: a) how effective is the corpcoms function in building ‘strategy’ and reputation b) research focused on outcomes, not just single corpcoms activities. Usually, corporate communications departments assess their work measuring implemented actions - for example, how many campaigns they create - rather than their results, which might include effect on brand recall, sales, brand image, awareness, etc. c) research on the relationship

<p>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32</p>	<p>between corpcoms departments and other departments, focussing on the effect in terms of strategy.</p> <p>Despite the contributions achieved by this explorative study, the paper shows several limitations. First of all, we recognize these results cannot be extended for other markets as we suggest that cultural variants – linked to Italian perspective - play an important role in the study. However, this investigation may facilitate other researchers to propose an inclusive instrument appropriate to structure empirical investigation from a cross-country context. Furthermore, this research conducted semi-structured interviews with communication managers to explore interviewees' experiences and understanding. Thus, the choice of semi-structured interviews as basis of the research design could be considered another limitation of this study.</p> <p>In addition, the study was restricted to communication managers, this entails that the research did not consider other members of staff perspective. Hence, care should be taken in interpreting these findings, as other members of the organisation could express a different perception about communication and strategy.</p> <p>Finally, the main limitation of this study is that there is always a concern about the representativeness of the particular data being studied, and thus whether the findings can be applied to other similar cases. The short answer is no, the data is not representative of all Italian large firms, and generalization is not possible. Nonetheless, the insights are interesting and serve to indicate general themes and issues across the firms sampled”.</p>
<p>33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60</p> <p>Implications seem to be consistent with the findings of the paper, in fact, the issues identified in the paper, as well as the results in general, can be utilised in practice. There are also opportunities identified for further research.</p> <p>However, as said before, these sections need to be strengthened.</p> <p>In addition, the future research agenda should be linked with discussions and implications provided.</p>	<p>We thank the reviewer for these recommendations. Thus, the future research agenda was linked with discussions and implications provided.</p> <p>Please see below:</p> <p>“In this perspective, this exploratory qualitative study may lay the groundwork for future research along several dimensions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - quantitative research across a spectrum of organisations using the present study's interview instrument in order to generate findings across a large number of firms; - studies with firms that represent industries not considered here, such as a multinational organization with headquarters outside of Italy but characterised by similar cultural aspects; - a bottom-up exploration of those who are the receivers of corporate communications. Such a study could address the following themes: a) how effective is the corpcoms function in building 'strategy' and reputation b) research focused on outcomes, not just single corpcoms activities. Usually, corporate communications departments assess their actions - for example, how many campaigns they create - rather than their results, which might include effect on

	brand recall, sales, brand image, awareness, etc. c) research on the relationship between corpcoms departments and other departments, focussing on the effect in terms of strategy”.
Reviewer: 2	
Comments: - There is a typo in p.5 lines 27-29. You write R2a and R2b for the Research Questions 2 a and b. It should be RQ2a, and RQ2b.	This has been corrected. Thank you.
- The sample is quite small, and the authors poorly justify the selection of the final companies. I think that it is just a convenience sample , but I’d be happy to see a different justification.	In implementing the judgement sampling criterion - a type of non-probability sampling - the authors’ judgement was used for choosing companies and interviewees which were considered to be representative of the population (Supriadi and Pheng, 2018). Actually, judgement sampling is used regularly in conducting qualitative research where the main goal is to develop understand of a phenomenon rather than to generalise to larger populations (Creswell and Creswell, 2017).
- On p.7 the authors mention that they take into account the criteria of external validity, which is hard to cover with small samples. I’d rather focus on ecological validity of the study and would avoid including population validity , which is tough to defend in this particular research.	Thus has been corrected. Thank you.
The authors should clarify the implications of the study, as the section on “Implications” looks very generic at the moment.	This has been done. The implications have been strengthened and several sentences are revised to facilitate reader understanding more ably.
Reviewer: 3	
1. While the title suggests a “global” approach to corporate communications I would add (to the title and the abstract) that the study involved Italian companies. Maybe, instead of “An exploratory study” the author/s could use the “Insights from Italy/Italian businesses/the Italian scenario/the Italian arena”.	Thus has been corrected. Thank you.
2. Regarding the definition, instead of “with different stakeholders”, would not it be better to say “among (different) stakeholders”?	This has been done. Thank you.
3. In the “implications of the study” section, instead of posing the implication as a “possibility” (i.e. “the research outcomes may provide...”), I would opt for more direct statements (i.e. “the research outcomes PROVIDE”)	Thank you. This has been done.
4. I find the “conclusions” section too concise, plus I think the author/s could clarify this by highlighting the key contributions of the study to the literature instead of repeating the research purposes. In addition, the final part of this section seems to overlap the implications section. Please, check this.	Thank you for these comments. The “conclusions” section has been enriched thus clarifying the key contributions of the study to the literature instead of repeating the research purposes. In addition, the final part of this section was checked and amended. Please see below: “This exploratory paper adds a new context to the study of corpcoms. The study explored the emergence, growth and importance of corpcoms within large consumer companies in the Italian context. This objective enabled better understanding of the importance that corporate

communications has in these companies. Then, the paper analysed the implementation and the application within the selected companies of corpcoms, paying attention also to budget decisions and who made these decisions, including external communication consultants.

About the way in which communications is still practised and planned in many of the selected organisations, the paper contributes in this field highlighting the need for professional development and changes. The main idea is to have an across-the-board developmental shift from a craft orientation to communications, represented by functions or units performing tactical communication procedures, to a strategic management department. When corpcoms is seen as a management function, communications practitioners would then carry out managerial tasks by taking part in the dominant coalition and by being involved in management and decision-making oriented duties including the preparation of corporate communications objectives, the formulation of long and short term values/philosophies, and interacting with senior management.

This suggested shift clearly creates a number of challenges in the core part of communications: each of these challenges needs to be met by practitioners with suitable competencies in order to enhance communications as a strategic management function.

In order to face these issues, it was also highlighted that the sampled companies are attempting to follow a new direction in planning and implementing corpcoms, though it may seem like copying activities from elsewhere. Actually, the most interesting change that emerges from the data concerns the role played by corporate communications which is not only considered to be an operational tool, which deals with 'how' to communicate, but also as a managerial activity that highlights 'what' to communicate. In fact, interviewees described corpcoms as both strategic and tactical at the same time. Moreover, according to the interviewees, the communication activities aim at building corporate image, although there are signs of a new approach to reputation management.

Another positive factor of change is the attention paid to CSR and communication to all stakeholders. Hence, this may show that the direct or indirect impact of corpcoms in Italian firms is gaining ground. However, the most involved departments are still under the heading of PR or External Relations. This means that there is not a full understanding of 'what' corpcoms means or indeed 'who' should manage it.

Finally, cooperation of company/external consultants seems to be consolidated in these firms over time. In fact, communication activities are carried out, mainly, by external consultants in accordance with instructions from CEOs. With no attempt at decrying consultants work, the evidence of skills, competencies and qualifications must be challengeable and hence further research is

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	<p>necessitated.</p> <p>Due to the open-ended features of the exploration, the paper was also able to identify these companies' attempts in clarifying both the state of the art and future trends of communication.</p> <p>As the research agenda proposes, this exploratory qualitative study poses many more questions than it responses. The expectation is that other academics will start to find new space in this area and create a communication viewpoint to address a set of issues that have been in part faced by other researchers in business management, marketing and strategy”.</p>
Editor	
<p>Proof read, preferably by a native English speaker, correct typos and improve readability where appropriate</p>	<p>We appreciate this comment.</p> <p>The paper has been proofread and copy edited by a native English speaker.</p> <p>Typos have been corrected and overall readability enhanced.</p>

