

1. STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION: CONCEPT, OBJECTIVES AND CHARACTERISTICS

Strategic communication represents a fundamental concept in managing relations between states, institutions and various public categories in an increasingly complex information environment. In the current context, marked by hybrid threats and information confrontations, the significance of strategic communication cannot be underestimated. It plays an important role in protecting democratic values and promoting national interests, considerably contributing to strengthening information resilience and gaining public support.

In this fact sheet, we will explore the concept of strategic communication, its essential objectives and defining characteristics, with a focus on the importance of its development and implementation in the Republic of Moldova.

The “Strategic Communication. East and South” report, prepared for the European Parliament by the European Union Institute for Security Studies, describes strategic communication as “communication activities with a plan or agenda”¹, which can be assigned various functions, both within the framework of the mechanism for coordinating the Government’s communication actions and of other communication activities. A similar definition is often used by specialists in the field and reflected in a 2011 Chatham House report, which describes the strategic communication as “a systematic series of sustained and coherent activities, carried out at the strategic, operational and tactical levels, that allow understanding the target audience and identify effective channels for promoting and understanding certain types of behaviour”².

Shayna Englin, professor of public relations and corporate communications at Georgetown University, believes that "being strategic means communicating the best message, through the right channels, measured against specific organisational and communication objectives. There is a difference between communicating and communicating correctly"³.

Communication becomes strategic when it includes long-term vision, builds alliances, has a goal- and action-based approach, sets priorities, shows logical consistency in the development of the strategy elements step by step, and carries out systematic management of activities, budgets and human resources⁴.

Strategic communication is assumed, invoked and practiced by states, institutions, organisations and companies that wish to achieve a major, complex, medium and long-term impact on the public categories with which they interact, thus promoting their fundamental and defining values⁵.

¹ Strategic communications East and South. https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Report_30.pdf

² Elena Mârzac, Sanda Sandu, Strategic communication – a tool for strengthening informational resilience. In: Resilience in the context of security. Concepts, processes, needs. Chisinau: USM, 2022, p. 65

³ Anastasia Nanu. The role of strategic communication in making civil society more efficient. In: The importance of strategic communication in democratic development: needs and prospects for Moldova. Chisinau, 2021, p. 50. <https://infocenter.md/lansarea-studiului-importanta-strategic-communications-in-democratic-development-needs-and-perspectives-for-the-republic-of-moldova/>

⁴ Elena Mârzac, Viorica Zaharia. Strategic communication and countering disinformation. Guide to countering disinformation through strategic communication. Chisinau: Bons Office, 2024, p. 23

⁵ About Strategic Communications. https://stratcomcoe.org/about_us/about-strategic-communications/1

The StratCom concept is often misinterpreted or confused with communication strategy, the fight against propaganda and fake news, public relations and information operations. It must become a mechanism and a process for coordinating actions at the national level, within which communication is used with the intention of engaging in meaningful conversations that are in line with national objectives. It is not a one-way communication, as it fosters dialogue that involves engagement and conversation through its dual role: balancing persuasive strategies with participatory and communicative practices to build new realities.

Understood as “a continuous synchronisation of images, actions and words to achieve a desired effect”, strategic communication should not be considered a mere operational tool, restricted to an institutional level or limited to one-way communication. It requires a complex and holistic approach in which the target audience is given the power to act and it is recognised that many external factors compete for influence in a contested information environment⁶.

Characteristics of strategic communication

Predefined and systematic plan

StratCom is carrying out its activity based on a detailed and rigorous plan, which has been established in advance to ensure the coherence and efficiency of the communication process. The plan includes clearly defined steps, specific objectives and precise deadlines to guide actions in an organised and methodical manner, thus avoiding improvisation and ad hoc reactions.

1. Actions on multiple levels

StratCom operates simultaneously on several levels: strategic, operational and tactical. At the strategic level – the general directions and long-term objectives are established; at the operational level – resources are managed and actions are coordinated; and at the tactical level – concrete actions are implemented to achieve immediate objectives, all of which are interconnected to ensure overall success.

2. Competitive environment

StratCom is applied in a dynamic and often hostile environment, where different actors compete to attract attention and influence audiences. In this competitive environment there is a constant struggle for resources and for narrative dominance, which determines rapid adaptation and anticipation of adversaries' movements.

3. Coordination and synchronisation

The success of StratCom is directly proportional to precise coordination and perfect synchronisation between all parties involved. Each action must be aligned with the others, to avoid contradictory messages and to ensure maximum impact. Synchronisation refers not only to internal actors, but also to external partners, to project a unified and coherent voice.

⁶ Neville Bolt, Leonie Haiden, Jente Althuis, Martha Stolze, Understanding Strategic Communications: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence Terminology Working Group Publication No. 3. <https://stratcomcoe.org/publications/understanding-strategic-communications-nato-strategic-communications-centre-of-excellence-terminology-working-group-publication-no-3/285>

4. Target audience

Defining and understanding target audiences is essential to ensuring StratCom's effectiveness. Knowing their demographics, interests, and behaviours makes it easier to personalise messages, achieve desired objectives, and maximise impact.

5. Communication channels

Choosing the right communication channels contributes to StratCom's success. Each channel has its own advantages and disadvantages, and their selection must be consistent with the target audiences and the nature of the message and facilitate the achievement of strategic objectives, whether it is traditional media, social media, direct events or other platforms.

6. Clear definition of strategic communication objectives

StratCom aims to inform, influence or generate behavioural changes among target audiences. These objectives are set according to the strategic context and needs of the organisation, institution or country, and can range from raising awareness to changing attitudes and behaviours, all with the aim of supporting national or organisational interests.

7. Aligning actions with strategic communication objectives

All StratCom actions must be consistent with the overall objectives of the organisation or country. This alignment fosters coherence in communication and strengthens the impact of messages, ensuring that all efforts play a part in achieving a shared vision and supporting long-term strategic interests.

8. Short- and long-term focus

StratCom must juggle between short-term and long-term objectives. In the short term, immediate results can be pursued, such as influencing public opinion in each context. In the long term, the aim is to build trust and legitimacy, as well as create a favourable image that supports strategic objectives over an extended period.

Effective strategic communication includes the goals (objectives), ways (tactics), and means (resources) to achieve measurable changes in behaviour or perception.⁷

Strategic communication is both a process and a mindset, and an important tool for achieving long-term objectives and strengthening national resilience. It requires a comprehensive and holistic approach that integrates all aspects of communication into a coordinated and well-planned effort.

⁷ Strategic Communication: MCOM Function Guide – GCS. <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/publications/strategic-communication-mcom-function-guide/>

Strategic communication is a process, a mindset and a tool

1. Strategic communication as a process

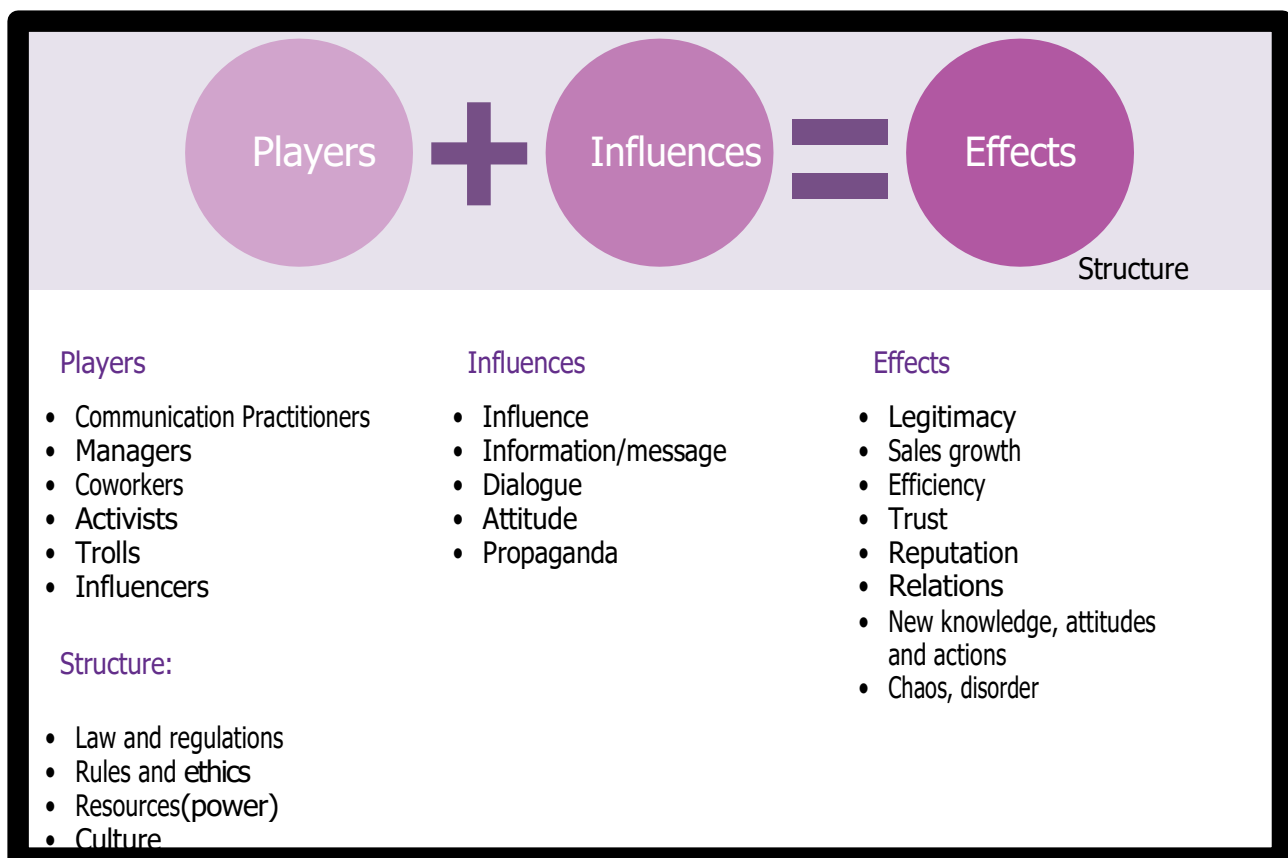
The importance of strategic communication (StratCom) has increased in the context of hybrid threats, information confrontations and the rapid development of the digital environment and social networks. In the face of intensifying attacks on democratic values, strategic communication plays a crucial role in strengthening the information resilience of the Republic of Moldova and in gaining the support of citizens.

Strategic communication involves a series of interdependent steps that must be carried out in a specific order to ensure the effectiveness and coherence of the messages transmitted. The process begins with analysing the current situation and identifying communication objectives. The next step is to define the target audience and develop messages adapted to it. Finally, the most appropriate communication channels are selected to convey these messages. A systematic approach allows not only to convey messages effectively, but also to ensure their alignment with the values, mission and objectives of the organisation or institution.

In the current global context, strategic communication should be a continuous process, oriented towards synchronising images, actions and words to achieve the desired effects.

Strategic communication constitutes a process that can be approached from multiple perspectives, including three process components: actors, influence and effects, and a framework or structure that can be studied using various theories and methods. This formula (see Fig. 1) represents a way of understanding what strategic communication involves and can be used as a reflective tool to study the field of strategic communication, where researchers can analyse different parts of the formula.

Figure 1. Strategic communication formula



Source: Jesper Falkheimer and Mats Heide Introduction: the emergent field of strategic communication <https://www.elgaronline.com/>

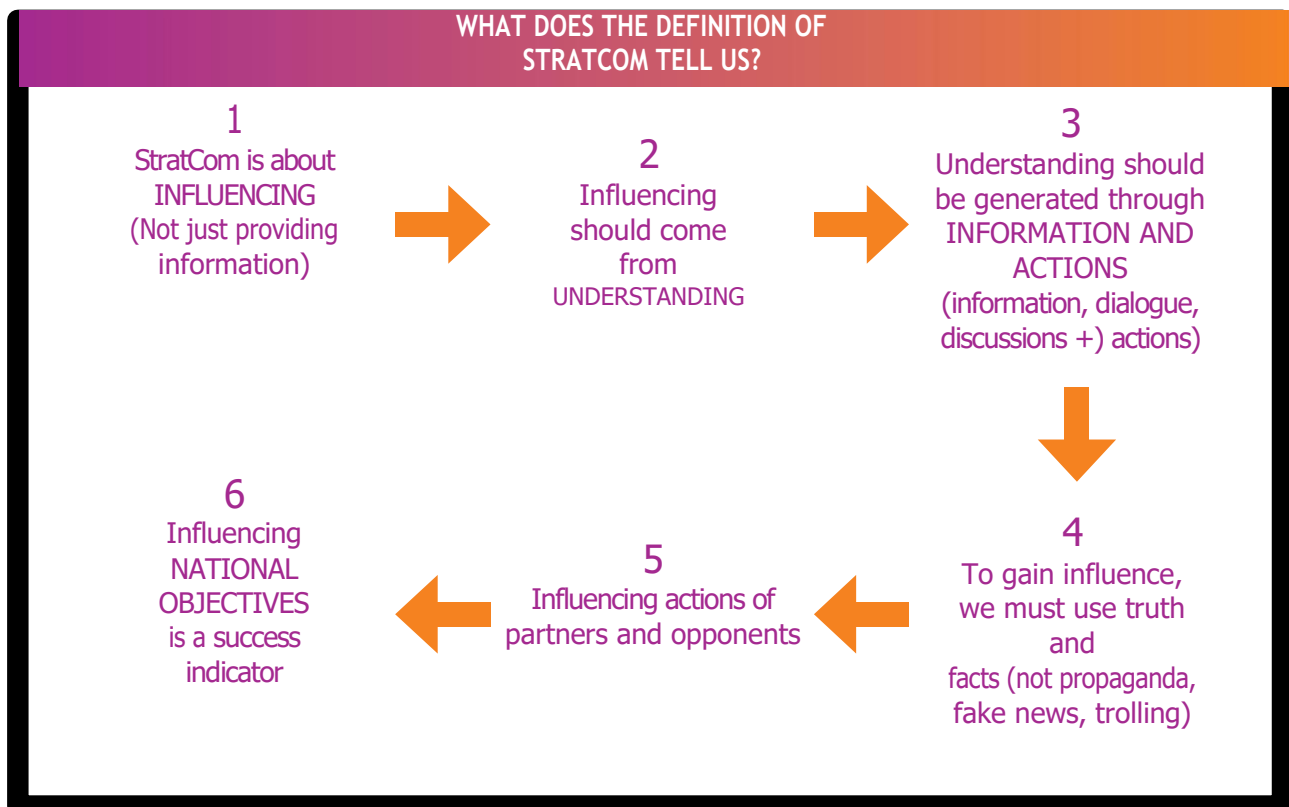
2. Strategic communication - a tool for achieving objectives and influencing public behaviours and attitudes

By using persuasive techniques and well-crafted messages, it can change perceptions and stimulate specific actions from the audience, such as adopting a product, supporting a cause, or changing a behaviour. Strategic communication is also **an essential tool for countering disinformation** and promoting national interests, not limited to external audiences, but also targeting internal audiences, with the aim of strengthening national resilience and increasing security.

3. Strategic communication as a mindset

In addition to being a process, strategic communication can be considered a mindset. It involves adopting a long-term vision, based on which every communication action is evaluated according to its impact on the organisation's objectives. Strategic communication is not just about sending messages, but also about constantly aligning them with the organisation's values and mission. This approach involves anticipating challenges and opportunities, preparing messages and actions in advance, and influencing and shaping the perceptions and behaviours of the target audience.

Moreover, strategic communication mindset implies an integrated vision, which combines persuasive strategies with participatory practices. Rather than being limited to one-way communication, it promotes dialogue and engagement, recognising the importance of constructing new realities through the active involvement of the public. In a world where many external factors compete for influence in a complex information environment, strategic communication should be flexible, adaptable, and able to respond to challenges in a proactive and creative manner.



In conclusion, in a world marked by hybrid threats, information warfare and the growing influence of social networks, strategic communication becomes fundamental to protect and promote national and institutional/organisational interests. Strategic communication is a complex concept, describing a process, being a tool and representing a mindset at the same time. It is not just about transmitting a message, but about how that message is developed, who it is intended for, how it is delivered and how it aligns with the overall objectives. It is a dynamic process, requiring careful planning, coordination and execution.

Its success depends on the ability to coordinate and synchronise all these elements in a coherent and effective way. Strategic communication must be perceived as a holistic process that combines influence, message synchronisation, and audience engagement in an active dialogue, all of which contribute to strengthening national resilience and long-term credibility.

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2. THE ROLE OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION IN COUNTERING FOREIGN INFORMATION MANIPULATION AND INTERFERENCE (FIMI)

In the current context of an increasingly interconnected world vulnerable to information threats, Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) is becoming a major concern for international security and stability.

The concept of FIMI was developed by the European External Action Service (EEAS) of the European Union (EU) in response to emerging threats, particularly those posed by Russian disinformation campaigns. This concept covers both disinformation and various forms of information manipulation and interference, which can undermine public trust in democratic institutions and affect political and social processes.

Strategic communication (StratCom) plays an important role in countering these threats. Besides informing and raising awareness, StratCom helps build social resilience, encouraging the adoption of positive and sustainable behaviours. Integrating strategic communication into information operations (IO) and intelligent data analysis are ways to develop coordinated and effective responses to information manipulation.

From this fact sheet you will learn about the importance of integrating strategic communication (StratCom) and information operations (IO) in countering foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI). You will also understand, how strategic communication is not limited to informing the public, but plays a crucial role in increasing social resilience, changing behaviours and promoting collaboration between governments, NGOs and local communities to prevent the destructive effects of FIMI. The text emphasises the role of collected and analysed intelligence in developing effective messages and strategies to combat disinformation and information manipulation.

Various approaches to strategic communication

- A process designed to counter the disruptive effects of disinformation and malicious information, targeting not only the external public, to advance national interests, but also the internal public, to increase its resilience to information attacks.
- A process integrated in a large-scale initiative, it encompasses multidisciplinary and social marketing, non-formal education, public participation aimed at innovative and sustainable change in practices, behaviours and lifestyles, it guides communication processes and media interventions among social groups and is a prerequisite and a tool for change at the same time.
- A process that interconnects democratic values, public institutions, supranational institutions, media, and various national and international public categories.

With over five billion internet users globally and an exponential rise in the use of social networks, information manipulation through information warfare, known by the acronym FIMI, is becoming increasingly widespread and sophisticated, having the purpose of undermining public trust in democratic institutions.

The concept of FIMI was developed by the EU institutions — in particular the European External Action Service (EEAS) in response to the threats posed by Russian disinformation campaigns and is integrated into EU policies and doctrines.¹ The EEAS describes Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference as a “pattern of behaviour that, while largely not illegal, threatens or has the potential to negatively affect political values, procedures and processes. This activity is manipulative in nature and is carried out in a deliberate and coordinated manner. The actors involved in such activity can be state or non-state actors, including their agents, either from within or outside their own territory”.²

FIMI is amplifying its influence and impact, being an umbrella term for disinformation, intentional disinformation, unintentional disinformation, and other forms of malicious operations in the information and cognitive domains. FIMI can also undermine public and political support.³

FIMI overlaps with disinformation, but it is a concept that narrowly refers only to EU external actions, and, more broadly, includes manipulative behaviour, not just false information. Thus, disinformation is a key component, but not a necessary condition for FIMI.

This manipulation adds to the polarisation and division of the country or an international organisation (EU, NATO, etc.), affecting their ability to implement policies and escalating situations of conflict and tension. Foreign actors use evolving tactics, techniques and procedures, often combined with cyber and hybrid threats.

¹ Tackling Online Disinformation: a European approach. https://ec.europa.eu/information_society/newsroom/image/document/2018-28/presentationcomm_paolo_cesarini_202D869F-9A13-6D79-FC46C00EAAE3E9AC_53429.pdf

² Tackling Disinformation, Foreign Information Manipulation & Interference. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/tackling-disinformation-tion-foreign-information-manipulation-interference_en

³ Bernard Simon, Countering FIMI: A Critical Imperative for Mission Safety - Egmont Institute. <https://www.egmontinstitute.be/counter-ing-fimi-a-critical-imperative-for-mission-safety/>

Strategic communication plays an important role in effectively addressing the challenges posed by foreign information manipulation and interference, such as FIMI. In addition to helping protect democratic values and strengthen public resilience, StratCom contributes to the achievement of strategic objectives.

In this context, StratCom can:

- Convince decision-makers to adopt new policies and to build constituencies and support at the same time.
- Accelerate and improve human behaviour, for example, farmers' adoption of technology and behaviours that lead to sustainable agriculture and forestry.
- Convince and help people change their behaviour, for example, to adopt environmentally friendly behaviours, such as conserving water, protecting common water sources from contamination, thus keeping green spaces clean.
- Generate emotions in an entire community that lead to behaviour change at the community level, empowering locals to speak up and continue their efforts in the future.
- Raise awareness and support sustainable development issues.
- Strengthen the capacity of local leaders, NGO representatives and community organisations to manage their economic, ecological and social resources.
- Develop partnerships between government, local communities and NGO representatives to encourage people to work together for change, for example, CEOs and engineers from the private sector to adopt cleaner production technologies.

Integrating intelligence collection and analysis into strategic communication (StratCom) and information operations (IO) facilitates the identification of coherent and effective responses to threats generated by foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI). Coordination of these elements allows for the development of strategic messages and the application of effective countermeasures. Informational support for StratCom and IO provides insights into the tactics and motivations of adversaries, allowing the creation of messages that combat disinformation and influence perceptions.

Target audience analysis, conducted through intelligence gathering, helps identify groups vulnerable to FIMI tactics, including the domestic population and decision-makers. Based on this data, StratCom and IO can develop customised messages to address the specific concerns of these groups.

The collected information is used to develop credible and relevant content, while real-time monitoring of FIMI activities allows for rapid adjustment of messages and tactics. The evaluation of the effectiveness of communication campaigns is based on information analysis, allowing StratCom and IO teams to optimise strategies and improve resource allocation, ensuring long-term success in countering information manipulation.⁴

For the Republic of Moldova, strategic communication and combating information manipulation through FIMI are important for several reasons. Our country, which in terms of influence is located between the European Union and the Russian Federation, is vulnerable to disinformation campaigns and information manipulation aimed at destabilising society and undermining trust in democratic institutions.

⁴ FIMI and Cognitive Manipulation. <https://www.360isr.com/fimi-and-cognitive-manipulation>

FIMI intends to provoke political and ethnic tensions in the country, leading to polarisation and difficulties in implementing democratic, economic and security reforms. In the context of national security, disinformation generates confusion and uncertainty, affecting confidence in the state's ability to deal with existing problems.

In addition, the Republic of Moldova, in its desire to integrate with the European Union and maintain stable relations with its neighbours, is subject to information manipulation, which can influence public opinion and hinder pro-European policies. Thus, strengthening strategic communication constitutes an important action in protecting democratic values, maintaining social cohesion and increasing resilience to external threats.

Conclusion

Strategic Communication (StratCom) in the fight against FIMI plays a part in protecting democratic values and increasing social resilience. By integrating data analytics and information operations (IO), StratCom develops coordinated and effective responses to disinformation campaigns, facilitating collaboration between governments, NGOs and local communities. These efforts allow not only to combat information threats, but also to change behaviours and promote social cohesion, essential for long-term democratic stability.

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3. STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION – A TOOL TO COUNTER HYBRID THREATS

Strategic communication plays an important role in countering hybrid threats. Through monitoring, early detection, and rapid and coordinated responses, strategic communication can prevent the spread of disinformation, help strengthen national resilience and build trust in public institutions. By creating collaborative networks and using digital technologies, strategic communication protects national security and supports efforts against hybrid threats.

In this fact sheet, we will define the concept of hybrid threats, explaining the role of strategic communication in countering them, and become familiar with various proactive and reactive deterrence measures.

Hybrid threats are complex and diverse tactics that combine conventional and unconventional elements, including disinformation, cyberattacks, subversive actions, propaganda, political influence, and other forms of informational, economic, and political warfare. These threats are characterised by their multifunctional and adaptable nature, and their purpose may be to destabilise, undermine, and influence states, organisations, or societies in a subversive and unclear manner.

These influencing activities are often conducted in an aggressive manner, and the main actor carrying out the action is responsible for initiating, applying, amplifying and perpetuating hybrid pressure, being directly or indirectly involved in actions related to this communication with negative effects¹.

The fundamental characteristic of a hybrid aggression is that it is intended to exploit weaknesses and vulnerabilities within the political, economic and social systems, as well as critical infrastructures and information environments of the target state.² It is therefore important for each state to know its own vulnerabilities and at the same time to have the capacity to identify any changes in the security, public and information environment, which could constitute elements of a foreign information interference campaign.

¹ Bogdan Țuțuianu. The timeliness and necessity of strategic communication in the context of the expansion and diversification of the hybrid phenomenon. In: Strategic impact, no. 4/2021, p. 47-71

² Viorica Ionela Trincu. Countering hybrid threats at the level of the European Union. In: Romanian Military Thinking, no. 2/2019, p. 44-53.

Achieving national resilience, including informational resilience to face hybrid threats, through the identification of key vulnerabilities and a common risk assessment, requires a common understanding of security threats and a synchronisation of efforts between various state institutions. The war in Ukraine clearly showed the importance of societal resilience, collaboration mechanisms established between the state and society, strategic communication, and efforts to prevent and combat propaganda and disinformation.³

An effective institutional framework for countering hybrid threats must address four interconnected areas of action: (1) countering disinformation; (2) cybersecurity; (3) resilience of critical infrastructure and supply chains; and (4) management and defence in crisis and emergency situations. The first two areas – countering disinformation and cybersecurity – have an impact on all aspects of social life.⁴

A critical aspect of hybrid warfare is the generation of ambiguity, both among the target population and the international community, to mask what is really happening and create an obscure situation. By their very nature, hybrid threats will continue to evolve based on the application of technological progress, changes in adversary developments and vulnerabilities, and the development of countermeasures.

Strategic communication as a tool to counter **hybrid threats** can connect democratic values, public institutions, media, and diverse national and international audiences. It also provides opportunities to halt the evolution of certain trends, enhance public resistance to disinformation campaigns, and further core messages about the state's national interests among the population.

At the same time, as hybrid threats target the integrity of state security, strategic communication becomes an effective tool that leads to strengthening political credibility and increasing confidence in the mentioned institutions. Political communication tools and methodologies can be used to influence the attitudes, opinions and behaviour of key stakeholders and can ensure the political support required for the success of reforms on site.

From *Hybrid Threats. A Strategic Communications Perspective* research work developed by experts from the Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, we can see that the first step in the process of Strategic Communication is to understand the information environment. Considerations regarding human perception and behaviour should be essential in understanding the dynamics of hybrid threats, how they are perceived, interpreted and attributed. Communication, including actions, images, words and policies, should be collective and integrated. Every action, a government takes or does not take, communicates something, so that all personnel in every department and branch are communicators. Actions to address hybrid threats should be guided by a national strategy that has a consensus among the population and is supported from top to bottom by political leadership⁵.

The importance of strategic communication in countering hybrid threats:

- Hybrid threats require coordinated actions in different areas.
- The success of response actions depends largely on the speed of message transmission and its accuracy.

³ Resilience to hybrid threats. A "team sport" in which no one should be left behind. <https://e-arc.ro/2022/06/07/resilience-to-hybrid-threats-a-team-sport-in-which-no-one-must-be-left-behind/>

⁴ Countering hybrid warfare in the Black Sea region. Strengthening institutional frameworks for protection and resilience. https://csd.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/publications_library/files/2024_2/Countering_Hybrid_Warfare_Black_Sea_Region_RO_fin.pdf

⁵ Elena Mârzac, Sanda Sandu, Strategic communication – a tool for strengthening informational resilience. In: Resilience in the context of Security. Concepts, processes, needs. Chisinau: USM, 2022, p. 66.

- In a society full of conflicting information and messages, strategic communication acts as a protective wall against the constant flow of disinformation, misinformation, cyber espionage, leaks of stolen information, digital harassment, manipulation and other forms of information used by promoters of hybrid threats.
- Digital technologies support any communication strategy and represent tools for disseminating strategic communication.

To deter hybrid threats, it is necessary to take a series of proactive and reactive measures that are interdependent. To carry out these measures, specific capabilities are needed that cover all the essential functions required to counter hybridity in a timely manner, as early as possible, such as monitoring, detecting, identifying, disclosing, attributing and rejecting any hybrid actions and activities. These capabilities give significance to the approach and increase the determination to react and retaliate when the renewed competition and the influence sought by hybridity exceed any limit of bearability in the target state. Without these capabilities designed to ensure early detection and timely intervention to counter hybrid threats, regardless of the volume of communication involved, there would most likely not be a sufficient credibility framework.

Beyond the presentation and promotion of these specific capabilities and their general effectiveness, there is another facet of credibility, namely the political determination, the willingness to point out the hybrid aggressor and publicly reveal his hybrid actions. StratCom is involved in this process by transmitting appropriate messages that serve its own purposes. The process must be organised in a synchronised, coherent manner, so that the target audience can anticipate, be prepared, involved and proactive against hybrid actions.

StratCom can be an option for changing people's mindsets, which, in addition to voluntary involvement and unconditional assumption of responsibility, first, includes and continues adaptability and continuous flexibility to keep up with the expansion and diversification of the hybrid phenomenon. Ideally, it would appear at the highest level, at the leadership level of a state/organisation/institution and would be transmitted and deployed exactly down to the lowest tactical level. Its role is to educate and inform the public, and, moreover, the most effective kind of strategic communication changes behaviours⁶.

A successful example of using strategic communication to counter hybrid threats is represented by the public information campaigns carried out by the Baltic States while facing Russian propaganda. These states have developed effective communication strategies that have contributed to increasing the resilience of society and countering disinformation⁷.

Within the European Union, various strategic communication modalities are used to respond to hybrid threats. The EU's strategic communication towards the Eastern Neighbourhood should focus, in particular, on developing positive and effective messages about EU policies towards this region. The messages should enable citizens to easily understand that the political and economic reforms promoted by the EU can, over time, have a positive impact on their lives.⁸

⁶ Derina Holtzhausen, Ansgar Zerfass. *The Routledge Handbook of Strategic Communication*. London: Routledge, 2015.

⁷ Johannes Voltri *Countering Russian information influence in the Baltic states: a comparison of approaches adopted in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania*. <https://www.kvak.ee/files/2023/01/Sojateadlane-19-2022-Johannes-Voltri-COUNTERING-RUSSIAN-INFORMATION-IN-FLUENCE-IN-THE-BALTIC-STATES-A-COMPARISON-OF-APPROACHES-ADOPTED-IN-ESTONIA-LATVIA-AND-LITHUANIA.pdf>

⁸ Viorica Ionela Trincu. *Countering hybrid threats at the level of the European Union*. In: *Romanian military thinking*, no. 2/2019, p. 44-53.

To deter hybrid threats, a series of proactive and reactive measures need to be taken⁹.

PROACTIVE		REACTIVE	
Characteristics	Examples	Characteristics	Examples
<p>Countering false or misleading information before it spreads.</p> <p>Developing relevant content and delivering it through media and social channels.</p>	<p>1. Inoculation.</p> <p>2. Awareness campaigns used to proactively shape public debate on topics vulnerable to disinformation.</p> <p>3. Creating networks, including cross-border networking, for developing links between organisations, allies and experts to collaborate on collective problem solving.</p>	<p>Countering messages or narratives that have already been spread.</p> <p>Actions aimed at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - exposing misinformation - raising awareness - influencing the information environment, to minimise the risk of causing harm to the public. 	<p>1. Strategy that involves responding promptly to circulating disinformation by communicating the truth.</p> <p>2. Campaigns for dismantling false information.</p>

Face-to-face communication can also be used for both proactive and reactive actions to build trust and provide direct information to the public, especially for situations that require personalised communication or when it is important to demonstrate the active presence of the institution. **Social media engagement** is another modern way of communication that allows organisations to reach target audiences and interact with them in real time. Through social networks, institutions can share relevant content and quickly respond to questions or concerns from the public.

Proactive efforts to pre-bunk, raise awareness and shape an information environment

- Immunisation
- Raising awareness
- Campaigns
- Building networks
- Counter-branding
- Strengthening resilience

Reactive efforts to pre-bunk, counteract and restore the information environment

- Debunking
- Counter-narratives
- Crisis communication
- Political response



Source: RESIST 2 Counter-disinformation toolkit. <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/RESIST-2-counter-disin-training-toolkit.pdf>

⁹ Elena Mârzac, Viorica Zaharia. Strategic communication and countering disinformation. Guide to countering disinformation through strategic communication. Chisinau: Bons Office, 2024, p. 16-19.

Strategic communication is key to effectively countering hybrid threats and promoting a safer and more informed society.

Conclusions

Strategic communication is an important tool in countering hybrid threats, contributing to protecting national security and state integrity. In the face of complex and rapidly adapting tactics of hybrid warfare, which combine disinformation, cyberattacks and other forms of subversive influence, strategic communication allows states to anticipate, react and respond effectively. Besides providing the necessary framework for the rapid and accurate transmission of messages, Strategic communication enhances the resilience of society by educating and informing the public. Moreover, by disseminating appropriate messages and using digital technologies, strategic communication can counter propaganda and disinformation, building trust in public institutions and supporting efforts to ensure security.

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4. APPLYING STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AT THE INSTITUTIONAL, INTERNAL, NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS

Strategic communication (StratCom) is an important tool for promoting and protecting national interests, with broad applicability at institutional, internal, national and international levels. Strategic communication should be an integral part of the state's efforts to achieve national political, economic, social, security and defence objectives.

In this fact sheet, we will explore the broad scope of StratCom applicability, argue for the need to apply StratCom at institutional, internal, national and international levels, and explain the benefits of using StratCom.

What does strategic communication refer to?

Within national security and international relations, strategic communication is applied to promote national interests and build a favourable environment for their achievement.

Strategic communication promotes the state's strategic narratives and represents a tool for countering hybrid threats, actions that can be achieved through a joint effort, which require the active involvement of all state institutions.

Strategic communication includes various state communication activities aimed at achieving objectives in various fields: public relations, marketing and financial communication, communication in the field of health, public diplomacy, etc. Organisations and institutions usually bring into play strategic communication to harmonise bureaucratic processes. Accordingly, thanks to strategic communication, policies can be presented in a unified manner and from a consensual perspective to reduce confusion in audiences' minds, adapting the message and supporting the communicator's credibility.

In this scenario, StratCom will need to be sensitive to institutional constraints. In an integrated manner, StratCom should deliver a single, coordinated message, while practitioners should use all resources available to achieve their objectives. That is why the notions "intergovernmental" and "of the entire government" are frequently associated with strategic communication.

StratCom provides synergy to national communication capabilities, such as public diplomacy, public affairs, military diplomacy, intelligence operations, psychological operations, etc., in support of established national objectives.

4. APPLYING STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AT THE INSTITUTIONAL, INTERNAL, NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS

At national level, strategic communication represents efforts aimed at understanding and engaging key audiences to create, strengthen or maintain favourable conditions for promoting their interests, policies and objectives using coordinated programs, plans, themes, messages and products, synchronised with the actions of all state institutions.

This involves the coordination of messages and actions between state and non-state actors, having a central role in security and defence. The main responsibility lies with the Presidency, Parliament, Government and ministries, and externally - with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and diplomatic missions. In the absence of effective communication, national interests are compromised, the population becomes vulnerable to disinformation, and confusion and propaganda affect international relations, facilitating conflicts and incoherence in governance¹.

Stratcom can strengthen the nation through an inspired, sustainable, and strategic common idea as a platform for long-term strategy and national strategic objectives. It can also enhance cooperation and cohesion in achieving strategic goals at the government and societal levels.²

Internally, strategic communication is essential for ensuring effective governance in the Republic of Moldova, as it strengthens the relationship between the state and citizens. In the current context, marked by information manipulation and information warfare, transparent and effective communication becomes crucial for maintaining public confidence in democratic institutions. By facilitating the monitoring of government activities and dialogue with citizens on issues of interest, strategic communication allows influencing political outcomes. Thus, it reinforces trust in the state, providing long-term legitimacy and supporting responsible governance. Establishing a strategic communication process at the national level can contribute to reducing disinformation and increasing the resilience of society in the face of information manipulation.

At the institutional level, strategic communication is essential for organisational development and for clarifying the objectives and missions of different ministries and government agencies. For example, in the field of European integration, strategic communication ensures the synchronisation of statements and actions, the coordination of efforts between the different power tools, and the development of programs and activities aimed at communicating and engaging with the target audience.

StratCom is an organisational development strategy tool that answers the following questions: “How do we ensure a rule of law and compliance with the law?”, “How is border management ensured?”, “Why do we need professional armed forces?”, “What values does the Ministry of Defence grant to society?”, “How is human security ensured by the Ministry of Interior?” etc. - issues related to the fundamental purpose of government organisations.

¹ For details see the sheet - Strategic communication - an indispensable tool in the process of good governance and development of the Republic of Moldova.

² Mârzac Elena. Strategic Communication in the Security and Defence Sector. <https://ipre.md/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/na-tao-pb-nato-marzac-final.pdf>

Why would government institutions need StratCom?

NATIONAL LEVEL	INTERNATIONAL LEVEL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Communication and explaining is the obligation of democratic government institutions ● Increases citizen involvement in the field of politics ● Competence and credibility in establishing the legitimacy of the importance of long-term decisions, overcoming obstacles in the reform process ● Gaining confidence that what is stated does not contradict what is done ● Building civilian consensus and communication based on listening and information ● Strengthening cooperation and cohesion in achieving strategic goals at the government and societal levels (including local) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Strengthening and integrating the effects of statements and actions on international partners ● Contributes to promoting and understanding national values and interests ● Generates partner support for foreign policy and security policy objectives, based on constructivism and understanding ● Influences the behaviour of the opposition, contributes to preventing separatism, terrorism, radicalism, etc.

At the international level, strategic communication is important for promoting the positive image of the Republic of Moldova, its interests and national values, for consolidating partners' support to foreign policy objectives and for ensuring a positive image of the Republic of Moldova in the world. Through effective and coordinated communication, the state can obtain the support of its partners and reinforce international relations for its benefit.

Strategic international communication is essential for promoting the image of the Republic of Moldova and its national interests. Well-coordinated communication can significantly enhance strengthening international relations, attracting support from external partners, and supporting foreign policy objectives. By sending clear and coherent messages about domestic reforms, economic development, and progress in the rule of law, the Republic of Moldova can improve global perception and counter disinformation, thus eliminating negative stereotypes related to political instability or corruption.

Effective communication also helps to consolidate regional and global partnerships, allowing Moldova to play an active role in international organisations such as the European Union, NATO or the UN and to be perceived as a reliable partner. Thus, well-defined strategic messages can attract the political and financial support required to achieve national objectives, including European integration and regional security.

In addition to the political and diplomatic dimension, strategic communication plays an important role in enhancing the country's economic attractiveness. An image of a stable and reliable state can attract foreign investors and trade partners, creating new opportunities for economic development. In conclusion, strategic communication at the international level is a vital tool for achieving the interests of the Republic of Moldova and for increasing its global influence.

Conclusions

Strategic communication contributes to the promotion and protection of national interests, having a wide scope of application within the framework of national security, international relations and institutional development. States use strategic communication to bolster their security, project their values and interests on the international stage. Through an integrated and coordinated approach, strategic communication ensures the coherence and efficiency of the messages conveyed both at the national and international levels, contributing to increasing the resilience of society and building a favourable environment for achieving political, economic and social objectives. Therefore, it is imperative that government institutions adopt and implement strategic communication as an integral part of their efforts to respond to contemporary challenges and encourage long-term stability and prosperity.

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5. STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION – AN INDISPENSABLE TOOL IN THE PROCESS OF GOOD GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

(Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation Concept for 2024-2028)

Strategic communication is indispensable in the process of good governance and development of the Republic of Moldova, as it strengthens the relationship between the state and citizens. In an era marked by manipulation of information through information warfare, effective and transparent communication becomes vital for maintaining public trust in democratic institutions and ensuring accountable governance. The objective of this section is to explore the importance of strategic communication for state governance, to emphasise the need to synchronise governmental and inter-institutional messages.

In this fact sheet, we will explain the concept of good governance and development by raising awareness of the importance of communication, including the exchange of information between citizens and the state, we will explain the actions required for the process of developing strategic communication in the Republic of Moldova and we will highlight the main provisions of the Concept of Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation for 2024-2028.

Good governance and the development of the Republic of Moldova represent two important desiderata for ensuring a prosperous and stable future for its citizens. Within the framework of these activities, state institutions must be transparent in the decision-making process and accountable for their actions, correctly and impartially implement laws to maintain order and protect citizens' rights, reform the judiciary to ensure the independence of the judiciary and to combat corruption, etc. An indicator of good governance is the active involvement of citizens in political and social processes, both through public consultations, citizen initiatives and by supporting a strong civil society. Without communication structures and processes that allow the exchange of information between the state and citizens, it is difficult to imagine that states can be responsive to the needs and expectations of the public.

Transparent communication allows citizens to monitor state activities, to participate in dialogue with the state on issues that matter to them and influence policy outcomes. This encourages the development of trust between the state and society and represents a basis for the state's long-term legitimacy.



STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION:

- Can help understand the information environment and build relationships that amplify the effect of achieving political, economic, and military objectives.
- May be used to mobilise specific audiences to support major policy initiatives as well as specific objectives. Can influence the attitudes, opinions and behaviour of key stakeholders and ensure political will required for the succes of reforms on site.
- May constitute the opportunity needed to stop the evolution of illiberal currents (populist and/or extremist), to increase the public's resilience to disinformation campaigns and to promote certain core narratives/messages among the population regarding the national interests of the state.

StratCom Objective

To help us in carrying out general tasks: engagement/collaboration with partners.

To ensure that citizens understand what we do.

To demonstrate our success/achievements.

To change perceptions/attitudes where necessary.

Actions required in the process of strategic communication development in the Republic of Moldova:

- Synchronising the Government's messages and actions in the field of national security and defence to advance national security interests and objectives.
- Institutional coordination with other entities for the efficient use of all power tools, such as diplomatic, informational, military and economic, in accordance with the National Security Strategy.
- Integrating a strategic communication framework into policy planning and implementation to ensure the policy success and efficiency¹.

This process includes:

1. Promoting national interests and supporting the implementation of national policies and objectives.

Considering current risks and threats, as well as national interests, strategic communication is an essential informational element for national authorities and represents one of the tools that the state uses to achieve its objectives.

The promotion of national interests depends on the continuous efforts of state and non-state actors to coordinate messages and actions and on how they will be perceived by all stakeholders in the national security and defence sector. While it must involve public authorities, civil society and

¹ Mârzac Elena, Zaharia Viorica. Strategic communication and countering disinformation. Guide to countering disinformation through strategic communication. Chisinau: Bons Office, 2024.

citizens, the main role belongs to the Presidency, Parliament, Government, as well as ministries, agencies and autonomous authorities. Externally, this responsibility belongs to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, diplomatic missions and consular offices of the Republic of Moldova.

In the absence of effective strategic communication, national interests are compromised, political changes lead to deviations, the population becomes vulnerable to disinformation and manipulation, and the lack of a clear international vision generates internal scepticism, facilitating propaganda and confusion among external partners. The absence of StratCom may generate incoherence and chaos in actions and messages, with serious consequences, because strategic communication supports the implementation of national strategies and counteracts conflicts, including hybrid wars, being vital for achieving the political, economic, social, security and defence objectives of the state. Effective communication reflects and supports good governance².

2. Effective coordination and the conveyance of appropriate messages, in accordance with the strategic objectives of the state and its institutions, will contribute to aligning the efforts of various national entities and to cohesion strengthening in different sectors, with a view to countering disinformation.

The need for more effective inter-institutional coordination and with the general public was identified in the process of institutionalising and implementing the StratCom principles. Streamlining this process will enable a real understanding of the position of the Republic of Moldova both at the national and international levels and will establish the connection between communication messages and government policies, actions, challenges and achievements.

The integration of a common strategic communication mindset at all levels of state institutions and national strategy implementation will determine a high strategic culture, which will facilitate the necessary changes in current practice. Basically, this involves the creation of an interactive and self-sustaining system that allows for the exchange of information and experience between various leaders, communicators, agencies and stakeholders. In each case, the focus of strategic communication activity will depend on the nature and focus of a crisis or strategy, on the audience (public) and on the means available to influence or bring about change³.

At the same time, strategic communication constitutes both a supplement to a policy or strategy and a vital component that must align with strategic political objectives. Strategic communication should be integrated into the early stages of policy development, to minimise the need for more aggressive actions later.

To be effective and authentic at the national level, besides representing the government policy, strategic communication must also include **a national narrative understood and accepted by society**.

Thus, strategic communication can become a strong power tool, used to shape attitudes and behaviours, to listen to and understand the public, and to coordinate messages between the government and its partners, ensuring effective integration of information with other national power tools.

The strategic communication process aims to influence, and strategic influence depends entirely on effective coordination, within and outside the Government, of different state institutions, to achieve national strategic objectives. Given the importance of the National Strategy, a strategic communication framework is required to be present in strategic planning and in the preparation and implementation of policies⁴.

² Mârzac E. Strategic Communication in the Security and Defence Sector. In: Analytical Note no. 9 of 2019, <https://ipre.md/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/natao-pb-nato-marzac-final.pdf>

³ Marzac E. Strategic Communication in the Security and Defence Sector. naato-pb-nato-marzac-final.pdf (ipre.md)

⁴ Presentation of the study "National Security Policy of the Republic of Moldova: Prerequisites for a New Strategy" and launch of discussions on the framework for reviewing the strategic security and defence documents of the Republic of Moldova, <https://infocenter.md/prezentar-the-study-of-the-national-security-policy-of-the-republic-of-moldova-prerequisites-for-a-new-strategy-and-launched-discussions-on-the-framework-the-review-of-strategic-documents-of-se/>

In response to the challenges associated with fake news, propaganda, and disinformation campaigns, the Centre for Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation (Centre) was created in July 2023. The Centre's mission resides in intensifying efforts to counter specific actions that pose a threat to national interests.

The Parliament of the Republic of Moldova also approved the Decision on the Concept of Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation for 2024-2028⁵. This document argues for the need for an institutionalised and integrated approach to strategic communication and countering disinformation in the context of external and internal threats faced by the Republic of Moldova, especially from the Russian Federation. The vision consists of “supporting, consolidating and contributing to the achievement of national interests that constitute the foundations for the idea of the Republic of Moldova as a 21st century state, a democratic, European republic, well anchored in the political, economic, social and security network of advanced democracies and developed economies, with a well-defined national identity and a commensurate international prestige”⁶. The concept has the general objective of developing the institutional capacities of the state and society to communicate effectively and combat disinformation. The main thematic areas addressed are: European integration, social cohesion, economic resilience, consolidating the defence sector and strengthening national security in the regional context. This integrated and action-oriented approach aims to consolidate democracy, security and socio-economic development of the Republic of Moldova in the coming years.

Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation Concept for 2024-2028:

- **Institutionalised and integrated approach.**
- **Vision for the Republic of Moldova:** supporting and consolidating national interests, transforming the Republic of Moldova into a modern, democratic, European state, with a well-defined national identity and international prestige.
- **General objectives of the Concept:** developing institutional capacities for efficient communication and countering disinformation, both at the state and societal levels.
- **The main thematic areas addressed:** European integration, social cohesion, economic resilience, defence sector and national security.
- **Integrated and action-oriented approach:** The goal is to strengthen democracy, security and socio-economic development of the Republic of Moldova.

It is worth mentioning that the National Security Strategy and the Strategic Communication Concept are interconnected and complement each other in achieving the security objectives of the Republic of Moldova.

3. Developing programs and activities that deliberately target communication and engagement with the public, including those implemented by professionals in public affairs, public diplomacy, and information operations.

Strategic communication is a two-way process, conveying the reactions and views of the different audiences involved in the communication process. Audience feedback should be used to adjust periodically the policy and strategy.

⁵Decision on the approval of the Concept of Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation, Information Manipulation Actions and Foreign Interference for the years 2024–2028. <https://www.parlament.md/ProcesulLegislativ/Proiectedeactenormative/tabid/61/LegislativId/6751/language/ro-RO/Default.aspx>

⁶ Ibid.

More ambitiously, strategic communication is not limited to media messages, it should play a part in the development of a communication campaign oriented towards *behavioural or social changes in the public*.⁷

The strategic communication of the Republic of Moldova will be effective only when national interests are clearly defined, messages are coherent and supported by concrete actions, audiences are well delineated, and efforts are systematically coordinated, integrating the opinions of those who are targeted by public policies.⁷

It is necessary to identify and coordinate all government tools (political leaders, decision-makers, strategic actors, communicators, implementation actors, official diplomacy, public affairs, media operations, public-private partnership, military diplomacy, internal communication, interdepartmental public relations), as well as societal instruments (mass media, NGOs, private communication entities, academia, cultural institutions, business environment, public figures, influential authors, scientists, diaspora, etc.).

Strategic communication is an indispensable tool in the process of good governance and development of the Republic of Moldova, both for making the act of governance more efficient and for ensuring communication and common understanding between all stakeholders.

Conclusions

Strategic communication represents a fundamental pillar in the process of good governance and development of the Republic of Moldova, contributing to strengthening the bond between the state and citizens. In the context of current information challenges, it is vital that the messages of state institutions are coherent, well-coordinated and aligned with national strategic objectives. Integrating a culture of strategic communication at the institutional and societal levels will facilitate the achievement of a national consensus and strengthen democracy, security and socio-economic development of the country.

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3. Mârzac Elena, Zaharia Viorica. Strategic communication and countering disinformation. Guide to countering disinformation through strategic communication. Chişinău: Bons Office, 2024.

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6. PREPARING THE STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION PROCESS: UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT, AUDIENCES AND COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

The Strategic Communication process consists of several stages that ensure the smooth running of the entire process: preparation, strategic planning, implementation and evaluation of results.

Within this information sheet we will characterise the most important stages in the preparation of strategic communication, emphasising the role of SMART communication objectives, will identify and characterise the key aspects of the information and public environment, will learn the ways to understand the audience, engage the public and will identify effective communication channels.

Preparation stage is the initial phase of the strategic communication process when the state/institution/organisation: (1) establishes **communication objectives**, (2) identifies the **target audience**, (3) develops the **action plan** and (4) determines the **communication channels**. These elements provide answers to the questions *why?*, *who?*, *how?* and *where?* – for effective strategic communication.

During this stage, it is important *to understand the strategic context of the information and public environment, including the factors that can influence the strategic communication process. They can be events, problems, anticipated reactions, socioeconomic conditions, etc. both negative (weaknesses or threats) and positive (strengths or opportunities).*

What does it mean to be strategic in communication?

It involves planning communication in advance, in accordance with the objectives of the institution/government/organization, based on SMART objectives; planning and evaluation; conducting an analysis of the public environment, adapting messages to audiences and taking into account the strategic context.

During this stage we will analyse:

- **The information environment.** In the context of strategic communication, understanding the information environment is crucial, as it helps to adapt messages to audiences, plan and evaluate strategies and consider strategic issues.
- **The public environment.** Audience/audience segments – their attitudes and beliefs, level of awareness and knowledge, motivations and obstacles to behaviour change, as well as their media consumption habits.
- **The political, economic, sociological, technological, legal operating context** to identify possible factors that may have an influence on the institution/organisation. The PEST (politics, economy, society and technology) analysis is a tool that aims to identify developments within these four factors.
- **Evolution of information, feedback and comments from the external environment** to understand perceptions of the government and its policies. SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) is a tool used to analyse internal and external factors that may influence the plan.
- The existing **quantitative and qualitative research** to update communication plans.
- **Experiences from previous communication activities** and applying best practices in industry to shape future activities.

In the context of strategic communication, understanding the information environment paves the way for the efficient adaptation of messages and communication strategies. The information environment, which includes sources, distribution channels and target audiences, influences not only the structure of messages, but also their perceptions, creating an ecosystem of information interaction. This environment is interconnected with the analysis of the public environment, audience and political, economic, social and technological context (PEST), allowing for the accurate assessment of developments relevant to the organisation. Further, external developments and feedback from the information environment provide us with insights into the perceptions and attitudes of the public towards government policies, supporting the SWOT analysis and updating communication plans with quantitative and qualitative data.

Information environment refers to the context or ecosystem in which information is shared, consumed, and interacted with. It encompasses various elements, including the sources of information, the channels through which information is distributed, and the audiences that consume it.¹

¹ The Information Environment and its Effects on Individuals and Groups. <https://royalsociety.org/-/media/policy/projects/online-information-environment/oie-the-information-environment.PDF>

KEY ASPECTS OF AN INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT

ASPECTS	CHARACTERISTICS
Information entities	Various sources of information from the environment
Interactions and processes	How information is shared, consumed and interacted with
Target audience	People or groups that consume information
Technological impact	The role of digital technologies in modelling the information environment
Misinformation	Factors that can distort the information environment and influence the perception of reality

Source: Mârzac Elena, Zaharia Viorica. Strategic communication and countering disinformation. Guide to countering disinformation through strategic communication. Chisinau: Bons Office, 2024. p. 36

While the information environment defines the framework in which information is distributed and consumed, the analysis of the public environment is necessary to understand how this information is perceived and interpreted by various audience segments.²

Public Environment Analysis (PEA) is a comprehensive process of collecting and analysing information from various sources, to gain a clear understanding of an issue or topic at both the macro (general) and micro (audience segments) levels within a given time frame².

Public Environment Analysis (PEA) provides us with information about people's reactions and perceptions of an issue, thus outlining emotional responses and attitudes towards messages transmitted through various information channels. This detailed analysis, which includes monitoring of the media, social networks and parliamentary debates, professional associations, NGOs, academia, key influencers and stakeholder groups, public opinion research and departmental surveys, is fundamental to adapting and adjusting communication strategies based on the feedback received and the specific context in which the public interacts with information. *Thus, the synergy between the analysis of the information environment and that of the public environment ensures well-founded strategic communication, capable of effectively responding to the expectations and needs of the public.*

Public Environment Analysis (PEA) provides insights into how people perceive an issue, which allows the development and implementation of a communication strategy.

- shapes reactions to "What, How, Where and When" something is said.
- helps identify the emotional response of an audience to the developed material.

² Strategic thinking in communications, <https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/topics/government-communications/communications-community-office/communications-101-boot-camp-canadian-public-servants/strategic-thinking-communications.html>

Important! Assess information to detect disinformation, as that information can significantly affect the public environment and the success of the communication plan.

Public environment analysis is important in strategic communication planning because it helps to understand public's perceptions of an issue and anticipate potential reactions. This understanding can then be used to shape the communication strategy and ensure that it effectively addresses the public's concerns and expectations.

The purpose of a PEA is to understand how people perceive a particular issue, which can influence the development and launch of a communication strategy.

Understanding the audience allows messages to be adapted to the needs, values and motivations of each audience segment. This understanding results from Public Environment Analysis, which collects relevant data about the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of the audience through surveys, questionnaires and media monitoring. Through audience segmentation, a process that places audiences into distinct categories based on common traits, communicators can create personalised messages that better meet the expectations of each audience. This increases the likelihood that messages will be understood and generate positive responses.

Thus, *public environment analysis and audience understanding are closely linked*. A correct understanding of the public offers communicators the opportunity to formulate accessible and relevant messages, adapted to the needs and motivations of each audience segment, contributing, as a result, to more effective communication and the achievement of strategic objectives.

Why is audience understanding important in communication?

- **Understanding the needs and motivations of an audience** through sociological surveys and questionnaires is the purpose of a Public Environment Analysis. Understanding allows for accessible and adapted wording of the message, increasing the chances that the message will be understood.
- **Audience segmentation/placement** into various categories based on shared common traits should be an integral part of the communication process. By segmenting the audience, communicators can develop profiles or characters that make communication more effective in achieving their goals, as messages are tailored for each audience segment.

Effective public engagement through communication requires understanding audiences and stakeholders by identifying values, such as safety, freedom, or fairness. These values can guide the formulation of effective messages. Consulting stakeholders about their communication preferences helps select the right channels, facilitating a valuable dialogue. It is also important to understand the relationships between individuals and trusted influencers, as they can amplify the message and increase the impact of engagement efforts. Effective communication is based on adapting messages to the needs of the audience.

Remember: Understanding your audience and tailoring your messages for each audience segment are essential to the success of your communication strategy.

Effective public engagement through strategic communication is closely linked to **the development of a well-defined action plan**. Understanding audiences, identifying their values, and selecting appropriate communication channels are essential steps to ensure that messages are aligned with the organisation's strategic objectives. A clear action plan helps coordinate the actors involved and define their roles, avoiding confusion and incoherence of messages. By integrating measurable objectives and strategies for risk management, the plan provides the flexibility needed to respond to challenges and new threats in the information environment. A well-defined action plan ensures that all communication activities are aligned with the strategic objectives of the organisation or state. Without a plan, messages risk being incoherent or contradictory, which can lead to confusion among the target audience and diminish the desired impact.

The action plan includes the following elements:

1. **Well-defined roles and responsibilities** for each actor, which facilitates coordination between them and prevents role overlap.
2. **A clear direction of adaptation to changes** that may appear in the information environment and for responding to new emerging threats, as well as scenarios and options to reply flexibly to unforeseen challenges.
3. **Financial, human and material resources.**
4. **Measurable objectives and performance indicators** to monitor progress and evaluate effectiveness of actions taken, facilitating the necessary adjustments for the continuous improvement of communication.
5. **Strategies for identifying and managing risks**, thus reducing the likelihood that they negatively affect the results.

Identifying effective communication channels in an organisation/institution is an important step in the development of an action plan. Once the needs and interests of the audiences are understood, selecting the appropriate channels for internal and external communication is the action that ensures the success of initiatives. Focus groups, audits and SWOT analysis lead to determining the most effective communication methods, ensuring the alignment of activities with strategic objectives. Thus, the action plan can integrate the identified effective communication channels, optimising the conveyance of messages and facilitating the engagement of stakeholders. This coordinated approach prevents incoherence and improves the impact of communication.

This process involves considering the results of activities such as internal and external focus groups/interviews, audits and SWOT analysis. The aim is to make a list of suitable channels for communicating strategic objectives. These channels can be used internally, for communication within the organisation, as well as externally, to reach stakeholders.

The process involves:

1. Identifying the channels currently used within the organisation for internal and external communication.

2. Analysis and discussions about the channels that have been most effective so far and which have not worked well enough³.

The team should choose five most effective and five least effective channels, providing specific examples of success and failures. After this discussion, the team can identify potential new channels that might be more effective for different communication needs:

- *for internal communication*– includes face-to-face interviews, emails, meetings, calls, newsletters, evaluations, intranet, internal messaging service, management meetings, all-staff meetings, press review, weekly news, presentations, etc.
- *for external communication* –press releases, website, emails, social media, face-to-face interviews, emails, meetings, media, calls, newsletters, advertising, mail, publications (printed and electronic), events, press spokesperson training, videos, blogs, webinars, etc.

External channels of communication:

Press releases –	Official statements delivered to media representatives for the purpose of providing information.
Website –	A set of related web pages located under a single domain name, usually maintained by an organisation or individual.
Social Media –	Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc., used to foster dialogue and share information with a wide audience.
Media –	Communication channels such as television, radio, newspapers and magazines used to reach a wide audience.
Newsletters –	Regularly distributed publications, generally on a single main topic that is of interest for its subscribers.
Advertising/Ads –	Activity of producing advertisements for commercial products or services.
Event –	Organised occasions, such as meetings, conferences or fairs.
Videos –	Useful for demonstrating activities, results, products or sharing dynamic content.
Blogs –	Regularly updated websites or web pages, usually managed by an individual or small group, written in an informal or conversational style.
Webinars –	Online interactive meetings conducted via the internet.

!!!!These channels can be used when identifying activities to implement the strategy's objectives. They can also be useful when considering how to reach stakeholders effectively.

³ Paris 21. Handbook for developing a communication strategy. https://paris21.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/Communications_Strategy_Handbook.pdf

Identifying effective communication channels and developing SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound) objectives is a necessary step in the process of developing an effective action plan. Once the right channels have been identified through focus groups, audits and SWOT analysis, these channels must be integrated into SMART objectives to ensure coherent and impactful communication.

SMART goals help to clearly establish the goals and how the identified channels will be used to achieve them. For example, a specific objective could be to improve communication with ethnic minorities to gain their support for the European integration process by 20% in the next year. This objective is measurable by tracking the degree of support, achievable through available resources, relevant to the need for engagement with the target audience and has a clear deadline.

Thus, integrating effective communication channels into an action plan based on SMART objectives ensures the alignment of communication efforts with the strategic objectives of the organisation/institution, allows for progress monitoring, and facilitates the necessary adjustments for continuous communication improvement.

SMART GOALS:

Specific	Audience, messages, desired response, calendar.	It is useful to establish from the beginning the objectives and their relationship with the target audiences – the public from the Republic of Moldova. What should accomplish this strategy? Am I trying to inform? educate? change values? change behaviours? get immediate action – get someone to do something?
Measurable	Awareness, understanding, support.	Objectives should be measurable so that you can demonstrate the results of the communication. Use baseline data where possible and set objectives in terms of: "Raise awareness from x% to y%". If baseline data does not exist, specify in terms of: "Produce x number of media requests", or "Achieve a level of understanding of y%."
Achievable	Possible given the public environment, timing, and available resources.	It is important to ensure that your objectives are achievable given the current situation. Also ensure that the achievements can be attributed to the communication strategy. Do not assume the achievement of objectives that are beyond your control. If they are not achievable, identify what additional activities could be carried out if specific additional resources were available.
Relevant	For the organisation's mandate.	Can I sell these objectives to my clients – policies, programs- my boss, others? Do they support the objectives of [the program and department]? Do my objectives fit with the Government's overall agenda/messages?
Timely	They can be achieved in a timely manner to contribute to overall objectives.	How much time do I have to get results? 1 month? 1 year? 3 years? The strategy implementation period ⁴ .

Source: Mârzac Elena, Zaharia Viorica. Strategic communication and countering disinformation. Guide to countering disinformation through strategic communication. Chisinau: Bons Office, 2024, p. 35

⁴ Strategic thinking in communications - Privy Council Office - Canada.ca. <https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/top-ics/government-communications/communications-community-office/communications-101-boot-camp-canadian-public-servants/strategic-thinking-communications.html>

Conclusions

The steps in the communication process ensure coherence and effectiveness of communication. Each step contributes to the development of a clear and well-targeted strategy, starting from preparation, which includes setting objectives and identifying the target audience, to planning, implementation and impact evaluation.

To anticipate and manage the challenges in the preparation stage it is necessary to understand the strategic context and the information environment. Identifying SMART objectives creates certainty that communication activities are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timely. Implementing a well-structured action plan guarantees the alignment of communication activities with the organisation's objectives and ensures effective coordination between all parties involved, while determining the appropriate communication channels allows the achievement of the communication objectives.

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1. Botan Karl. The handbook of Strategic Communication. <https://content.e-bookshelf.de/media/reading/L-16372765-25b24aed38.pdf>
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7. STRATCOM STRATEGIC PLANNING

Strategic communication constitutes an important tool in achieving the objectives of the state and organisations, being a well-structured process that involves the preparation, planning, implementation and evaluation of communication actions. In a context marked by rapid changes and hybrid threats, a strategic approach ensures the transmission of the right messages to the relevant audiences, influencing their opinions and behaviours.

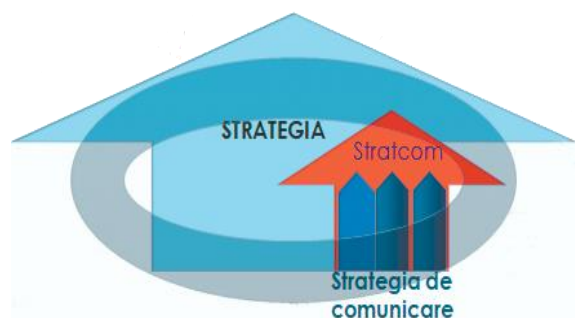
The Strategic Communication process consists of several stages that ensure the smooth running of the entire process.
p: 1. preparation, 2. strategic planning, 3. implementation and 4. evaluation of results.

If the preparation stage of the strategic communication process lays the foundations of the entire strategy, involving the analysis of the current situation and identifying target audiences, as well as assessing risks and opportunities, then at the strategic planning stage the information obtained during the preparation phase is used to develop detailed action plans. In this phase, specific objectives are established and communication channels are identified, resources are allocated and activities are planned to ensure coherence and the desired impact of the messages.

In this fact sheet, we will characterise the strategic communication process, *identify and analyse the actions and strategic planning stage, including explaining how to formulate strategic communication objectives.*

Strategic planning is the stage where professionals will develop strategic plans to guide decisions regarding what and when to communicate, manage risks, and seize opportunities to maximise impact and ensure effective communication execution.

During this stage, **the communication strategy** will also be developed, which will ensure the conveyance of narratives, information and messages to different target groups, with the help of which behaviour change is desired. The communication strategy, but also the general process of implementing the strategy should contain planning elements, quality criteria, indicators of results and expectations, performance, monitoring (including independent) and feedback.



The strategic communication planning process, both in the short, medium and long term, must include the following actions: identifying and updating a list of communication activities and announcements, sharing information with other communication teams, communicators' collaboration with colleagues from other departments, identifying and addressing emerging threats and opportunities, managing risks, problems and dependencies effectively, prioritising requests for communication support for new or emerging needs¹.

The strategic approach to planning and communication requires answers to the following questions:

Where are we now? (the current situation of the institution is assessed by identifying and understanding the internal and external factors that could affect the state/institution/organisation.)

Where do we want to go? (the strategic objectives are established following consultations with the departments in charge of policies and programs.)

How will we get there? (it is the planning stage at which the most appropriate communication products and activities are identified to support the objectives.)

Strategic planning steps

1. Developing a plan that contains each step of the strategy implementation. The strategic communication plan represents a reference framework for developing an effective and structured communication policy that requires an in-depth analysis of the existing situation and a clear description of the desired situation:

- Where are we?
- Where do we want to go?
- How do we want to achieve our goal?
- Did we achieve our goal?

Official support from the institution/organisation's leadership is essential for the development and successful execution of a strategic communication plan².

During this stage, various meetings are regularly organised with the people who will be involved in the execution of the plan, communication channels are identified that each team member can use, such as emails. Effective communication is necessary to ensure that each team member understands what is required at each stage. It is difficult to implement a communication strategy if it is not known by all stakeholders and, especially, by its internal audience. Good internal communication of the strategic communication plan represents therefore a crucial element of its implementation. The dissemination of the communication plan can take various forms depending on the communication subject itself (are we communicating the entire plan or only part of it?) and on the target audience (management, trade unions, all employees, etc.). In general, wide dissemination within the organisation increases the legitimacy and credibility of the strategic communication plan and reinforces the idea that communication is important to each team member.

¹ Mârzac Elena, Zaharia Viorica. Strategic communication and countering disinformation. Guide to countering disinformation through strategic communication. Chisinau: Bons Office, 2024, p. 45-46

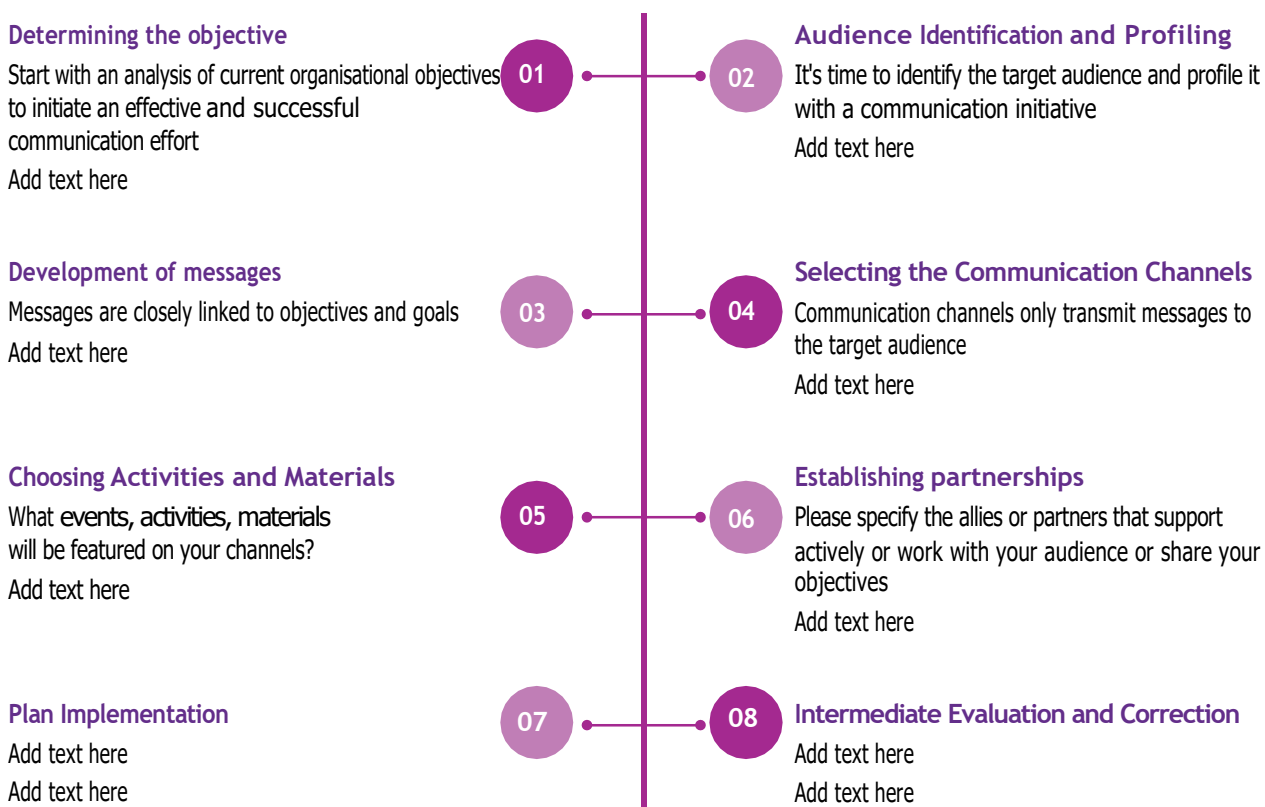
²Elaborer un plan de communication stratégique pour une organization publique.<https://www.scribd.com/document/451226919/broch-commcollection19-plan-com-strategique-fr-pdf>

The internal dissemination of the strategic communication plan is accompanied by communication regarding:

- its reason for being (why a communication plan?)
- its terms of use (how will the plan be implemented?)
- calendar of achievements (when will the plan be implemented?)
- the expected contribution of different stakeholders (what does the plan mean for the internal audience?).

The credibility and correct implementation of the communication plan are fostered by the existence of a monitoring procedure and regular reporting to the management of the institution/organisation.

ELEMENTS OF A STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION PLAN



Source: <https://images.app.goo.gl/v79siZqW59UrLjAY7>

Managers/communicators will provide support to improve the team's communication skills to help convey clear and precise messages.

2. Formulating the strategic communication objectives

A strategic communication objective is a communication goal to be achieved, often defined in the medium or long term. The objective is formulated as an ideal we want to achieve, which pertains to the communication area: communication can only influence people's opinions, perceptions, attitudes and behaviours. Any objective that pursues another goal cannot be a communication objective. For example: "that all staff have access to a computer and the Internet" is not a communication objective, but an objective relating to operational means.

7. STRATCOM STRATEGIC PLANNING

The communication objective is formulated in the medium or long term, aims to maintain or change opinions, perceptions, attitudes or behaviours, and these results cannot be achieved in the short term.

To determine communication objectives, three steps are required:

a. Knowledge of the strategic objectives of the organisation/institution.

For example: I strive for an open and transparent organisation that listens to citizens.

b. Determine exhaustively all the conditions required to achieve these objectives (infrastructure, financial means, necessary skills, expected public behaviour, etc.). For example: accessible and welcoming infrastructure, competent agents, organisation positively perceived by citizens, etc.

c. Formulating objectives that fall within the area of communication and that achieve the organisation's strategic objective.

For example: creating a positive image of the organisation among citizens to move towards an open and transparent organisation³.

!!!Do not confuse a strategic objective with an operational objective. A strategic objective is an objective that must be achieved in the medium or long term. An operational objective is the most concrete formulation of a strategic objective. It can be immediately translated into a series of short-term actions or activities.

A few examples of strategic communication objectives:

- Areas of expertise of the organization/institution are known by all customers/citizens
- Citizens are informed about their rights regarding compensation.

3. Setting tasks to achieve objectives and using task organising and monitoring tools

At this stage, for each strategic communication objective, one or more operational objectives are formulated. Then, for each operational objective, communication actions are defined and for each of them, the messages, target audience, means, calendar, budget and measurement indicators are determined.

Unlike strategic communication objectives which are formulated as a goal to be achieved, operational objectives must be written in a "SMART" manner, meaning:

- Specific: objectives must be clear, understandable, precise, and rigorously defined.
- Measurable: the achievement of objectives must be verifiable and controlled a posteriori using previously defined indicators.
- Acceptable: objectives must be unifying, constructive, and accessible to those who need to achieve them using methods and means at their disposal.

³Elaborer un plan de communication stratégique pour une organisation publique. <https://www.scribd.com/document/451226919/broch-commcollection19-plan-com-strategique-fr-pdf>

- Realistic: objectives must consider existing limitations.
- Temporal: objectives must be determined over time.

To achieve each operational objective, we shall plan one or more communication actions. We should then establish a communication plan for each action, specifying the audience it is addressed to, the message it conveys, the means it uses to achieve its target, the budget needed, the timetable for developing indicators that will make it possible to measure its effectiveness.

4. Developing messages in the format of strategic stories/narratives, necessary for conveying relevant information and motivating the desired actions.

5. Identifying/developing communication methods. Whether unidirectional or bidirectional, they must be adapted to meet the preferences and needs of the audiences. All available technical means, both traditional and online, will be used, as digital technologies play an increasingly important role in strategic communication and offer new ways of interaction and access to information.

Conclusions

StratCom strategic planning is the second stage of the strategic communication process that ensures the achievement of organisational objectives and the effective transmission of relevant messages to the target audience. During this stage, the current situation is analysed, communication objectives are established and action plans are formulated. In addition to guiding the organisation's actions in the current context, the communication strategy manages emerging risks and opportunities, thus contributing to the adaptation of messages to the needs and expectations of the audience.

Effective planning requires a clear implementation framework, adequate dissemination of information and continuous monitoring to ensure that objectives are met. Successful implementation of a communication strategy involves interdepartmental and interinstitutional collaboration if it is a strategic communication strategy at the national level, the diversified use of communication channels and the adjustment of actions according to the evolution of the internal and external environment of the organisation/institutions/state.

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1. Botan Karl. The handbook of Strategic Communication. <https://content.e-bookshelf.de/media/reading/L-16372765-25b24aed38.pdf>
2. Elaborer un plan de communication stratégique pour une organization publique. <https://www.scribd.com/document/451226919/broch-commcollection19-plan-com-strategique-fr-pdf>
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8. STRATEGIC NARRATIVE. NARRATIVES ALIGNED WITH POLICIES AND STRATEGIES AT THE INSTITUTIONAL AND NATIONAL LEVELS

Strategic narratives are an integral part of the communication policies of states and organisations, responding to the dynamics of the current information environment. They not only convey messages but also shape collective perceptions and behaviours according to political and strategic objectives. They support a specific social and political reality, serving long-term interests, consolidating national identity and promoting the fundamental values of a state.

In this section we will explore the concept of strategic narrative, analyse its essential components, and discuss the role that these narratives play within strategic communication activities.

Strategic narratives have emerged and are increasingly used in strategic communication, because of the evolution of the information environment and the need to adapt to changes in the current international context. The objectives of narratives involve changing the behaviour of the masses, based on their own interests and influencing them to respect certain values. These are just a few of the objectives that are considered when using narrative strategies.

A narrative, with the meaning of storytelling¹, represents a way in which an institution, organisation or country communicates strategically, using storytelling and visual symbolism to convey controlled and targeted messages. These elements make storytelling a powerful strategic communication tool that can motivate, emotionally engage and direct behaviours within an organisation.

"A narrative becomes strategic when it prescribes a type of order that serves particular interests. It must be said that any strategic narrative is made up of two major ingredients: power and communication. The junction between the two components builds truths, that is, it imposes on domestic and international events the meanings desired by the establishment, which means that strategic narratives generate perceptions, emotions, conduct, that is, social reality².

¹ Ciornei Anca. Narrative strategies in action – text, form and context. In: Bulletin of "Carol I" National Defence University, no. 1/2024, p. 87-99.

² Dumitrescu, Lucian Strategic narratives: security and legitimacy in international relations. Bucharest: Publishing House of "Ion I.C. Brătianu" Institute of Political Sciences and International Relations, 2020.

A strategic narrative is a story designed to provide an emotional justification for a political goal, and, in many cases, for how that goal is to be achieved¹. It requires well-defined content, including a description of the current situation, the desired future state, the path to get there, and the justification for changing the situation.

The more well-structured and patterned these narratives are, the more important tools they can become in countering hybrid threats. Therefore, the concept of strategic narratives will differ from the concept of narrative strategies, as the former refers to the act of communication and the elements involved in this entire process, while the latter follows the communicative behaviour, the techniques used by those who initiate the process, with the aim of achieving previously established objectives⁴.

A strategic narrative can be used in a variety of contexts – from political campaigns to business strategies or government actions. By providing a coherent and compelling story, strategic narrative can mobilise and inspire the audience, helping to create support and legitimacy for the goals and actions promoted.

To be effective, the strategic narrative must be tailored to the target audience and delivered through the right communication media. This can include both traditional channels, such as television and print media, and online platforms, such as social media or websites.

Components of strategic narratives:⁵

- a) are future-oriented. Although a strategic narrative can refer to the past and/or present, its applicability is connected to shaping policy in the future;
- b) are closely related to identity. They articulate a distinct (national/regional) position on a specific issue, on a policy area, or, more generally, on the state's place in world politics or the international system;
- c) the content is not fixed, but is a dynamic and constantly negotiated social product, based on the interactions of states with both their societies and other external actors relevant to their sphere of influence;
- d) can derive from historical experiences, making use of previous actions, previous experiences and historical reputation, acquired over time;
- e) their audience is both internal and external. They can be employed to build internal audience loyalty, on the one hand, and on the other hand, to use it to define and communicate collective perceptions in the international area.⁶

³ Defence Strategic Communication: an Approach to Formulating and Executing Strategy. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/804319/20190523-dcdc_doctrine_uk_Defence_Strategic_Communication_jdn_2_19.pdf

⁴ Ciomei Anca. Narrative strategies in action – text, form and context. In: Bulletin of "Carol I" National Defence University, no. 1/2024, p. 87-99.

⁵ Miskimmon Alister, Ben O'Loughlin and Laura Roselle. Strategic narratives: Communication power and the new world order. Routledge, 2014.

⁶ *Ibid*

Strategic narratives are most often developed by the governing parties and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and are subsequently made public through the speeches of political leaders, to be finally received by the target audience. Those who formulate the narratives must respond to the audience's interpretations and their behaviour towards the messages that are conveyed to them, implicitly adjusting the content to achieve maximum effects and be convincing.

Accordingly, in developing narratives, not only the rational side of the target audience is considered, but also its emotions, and the elements that can be shaped, using the affective and sensory side, aspects with a much greater and longer-lasting complexity of decoding and interpretation.⁷

ROLE OF NARRATIVES/STORIES:

- Create a shared culture and pass on values
- Strengthen the identity of the group by sharing and interpretation of common experiences
- Offer stability, adapting to changes periodically
- Provide a reference framework for interpretation of events
- Strengthen identity and stigmatise others
- Offer a persuasive tool – people are drawn to stories
- Provide an organizational framework and objectives for future actions

Elements of an effective narrative:

- **Strategic texts.** These texts are used for internal communication, where the sender and the recipient are the same entity, thus reinforcing the coherence of the internal message.
- **Narrative and visual symbolism.** Narration uses storytelling and visual symbols to control and direct the strategic message, ensuring that the message is clear and well understood.
- **Encouraging actions.** Narratives are future-oriented, being used to motivate members of the organisation/institution to act towards strategic objectives. Stimulating commitment and participation, strengthening emotional bonds and defining behaviours foster controlling the narrative message.
- **Common stories and anecdotes** are used to strengthen emotional ties with the organisation/the institution/state, creating a sense of belonging and loyalty.
- **Specific lexical formulas and grammatical forms** chosen are used to clearly define the desired actions and behaviours within the organisation/institution/state.
- **Storytelling/narration** is used to engage employees/citizens and co-create a brighter future, thus supporting strategic objectives.

⁷ Ciornei Anca. Narrative strategies in action – text, form and context. In: Bulletin of "Carol I" National Defence University, no. 1/2024, p. 87-99.

- **Balancing persuasive communication** with participatory communication to ensure that both strategic and participatory elements are addressed⁸.

Strategic narratives can be disseminated at the international, national and problem levels. At the international level, narratives are used to describe how the world is structured, what the international interests are and, why not, what the world order is. At the national level, they highlight the status of the state actor, what its objectives and values are and how it seeks to be perceived by other state players. At the problem level, narratives create the framework for the use of certain government policies and, at the same time, explain why certain policies are necessary and how they will be implemented effectively. The three levels are, most of the time, interdependent. They interfere so that the initially established goal is achieved within the estimated time frame⁹.

The succinct and clear formulation of the message will be based on the following variables:

- Why is this topic important to the community?
- Explain how the decision might affect the important things/values of different people.
- The action that the institution wants the audience to take.
- For example, depending on your goal of informing people, do you want to help them analyse and evaluate different solutions to a problem or take any specific action?
- Consider the choice of messenger/communicator and analyse whether this may affect how people will perceive the message.
- Identify and support community champions who can speak authentically and powerfully about the problem or need addressed.
- Analyse the opportunity to develop a working group to expand the institution's capacity to reach different audiences in the community.
- Empower community members to become your partners in promoting your messages. Personal opinion on a policy or project can be convincing to the general public and the media.
- What are the decision-making milestones for the policy or project?
- How will the institution communicate progress in achieving key decision-making milestones?
- How will the institution communicate about the way in which public input influenced the results of the decision-making process?¹⁰.

⁸ Strategy Texts as Auto-Communication: How Narrative, Language, and Visual Symbolism Exercise Discursive Control, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1553118X.2024.2388087>. p. 9

⁹ Miskimmon Alister, Ben O'Loughlin, Laura Roselle. Strategic narrative: A new means to understand soft power." Media, War & Conflict, 2014, Oxford: University of Oxford, pp. 70-84

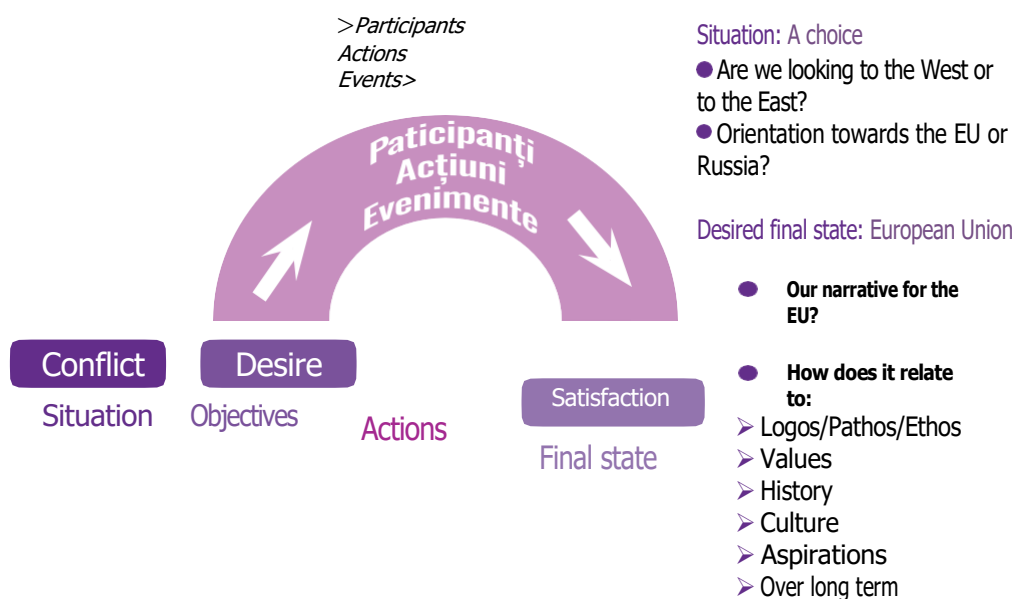
¹⁰ Effective Public Engagement through Strategic Communication, https://www.ca-ilg.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/effective_public_engagement_thru_strategic_communication_march_2015.pdf?1497551966

STRATEGIC NARRATIVE - THE FOUNDATION OF RESILIENCE AND COHERENCE

- A narrative that can be aligned with the leader's overall strategy
- A popular narrative, adapted to the audience, resilient and able to withstand negative news from daily events
- A means of expressing the intentions of StratCom leadership, to interpret and explain daily and minor events within the overall narrative
- Provides a "core" or foundation which allows for a sustainable message over a long term

DEVELOPMENT OF A STRATEGIC NARRATIVE

NARRATIVE ARC SITUATION



Example: The security narrative for the Republic of Moldova could focus on the commitment to ensuring the stability, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country in the face of various threats and challenges. This narrative could include the following elements:

- "The Republic of Moldova strongly affirms its sovereignty and territorial integrity, recognising its borders as inviolable and not subject to any form of threat or external influence".
- "The commitment to maintaining internal stability and security, ensuring the protection of the population against any threats, including terrorism, organised crime and other forms of violence".
- "The Republic of Moldova has expressed a firm aspiration for European integration and adherence to Western values and standards. Accession to the European Union and cooperation with NATO are seen as essential elements for strengthening security and stability in the region."
- "Investments in the modernisation and professionalisation of the armed forces and law enforcement structures are imperative to ensure an adequate and effective defence capacity when confronted with potential threats."

Evaluation and continuous adjustment of the strategic narrative are also important to ensure its effectiveness and relevance. By monitoring audience reactions, strategic narrative promoters can identify strengths and weaknesses and adapt the message to achieve optimal results.

Conclusions

Strategic narrative is a powerful communication tool that can influence audience perceptions, attitudes and behaviours, contributing to achieving political, commercial or governmental objectives. A well-constructed and impactful strategic narrative can be a key element in the success of a communication strategy.

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9. IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AND PLANS

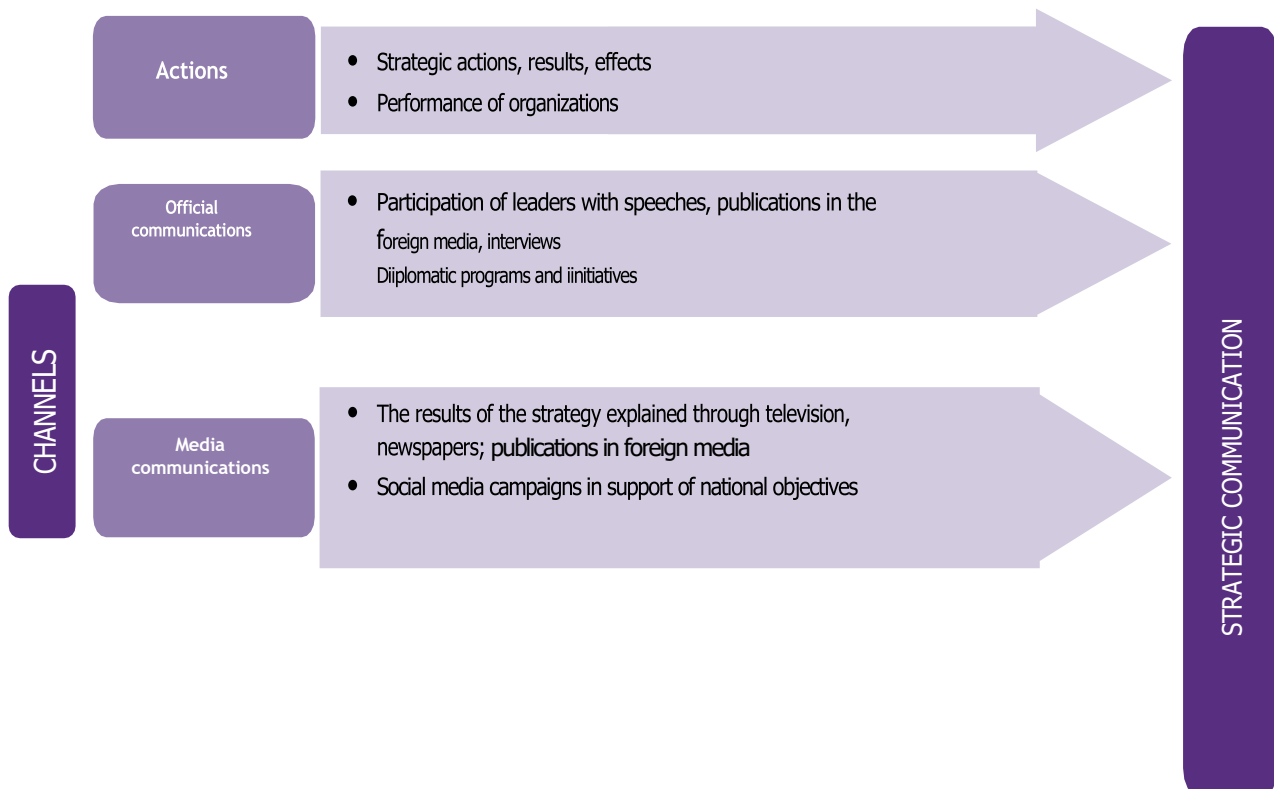
Implementing strategic communication strategies and plans constitutes the 3rd stage in the strategic communication process. Without effective implementation, even the best-designed plans risk not generating the desired results. This stage envisages strategic oversight of the process, constant monitoring and adaptation of plans according to developments in the external environment and feedback received.

In this fact sheet we will analyse the importance of implementing strategic communication strategies and plans, which is essential for the success of any organisation. We will see the importance of strategic oversight, constant monitoring and adapting plans based on feedback and changes in the external environment. We will also learn how effective team coordination and motivation of institutional communicators contribute to the consolidation of a coherent and credible image.

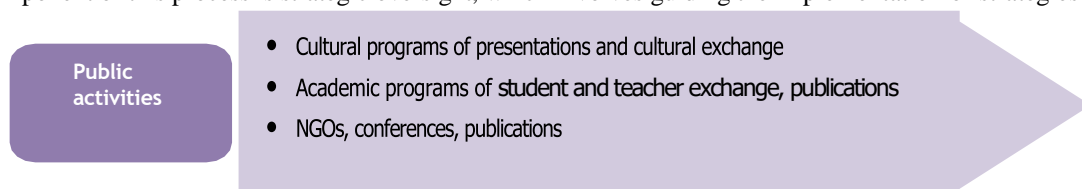
Implementing communication strategies and plans requires strategic oversight, constant monitoring, and continuous adjustments. Once plans are developed, they must be carefully guided to ensure that they remain aligned with the overall objectives of the organisation. Strategic oversight is not limited to implementing initial plans, it also involves progress monitoring and constant performance evaluation. Identifying deviations from established objectives, taking corrective action, and adapting plans to changes in the information environment are essential to maintaining the effectiveness of strategies. In addition, the active involvement of all stakeholders and effective communication between teams are critical factors that ensure long-term success. As the situation evolves, rapid and appropriate adjustments based on feedback and external trends become fundamental to maintaining the relevance and effectiveness of plans.

The process of implementing communication strategies and plans includes:

- **Ensuring strategic oversight.** It involves guiding the implementation of strategies and plans to ensure they are aligned with overall objectives.



- The implementation of communication strategies and plans is vital to the success of an institution. An important component of this process is strategic oversight, which involves guiding the implementation of strategies and plans, to



ensure that they are consistent with the organisation's overall objectives.

8. STRATEGIC NARRATIVE. NARRATIVES ALIGNED WITH POLICIES AND STRATEGIES AT THE INSTITUTIONAL AND NATIONAL LEVELS

- Constant monitoring and evaluation of progress in the implementation of communication plans and strategies.
- Identifying any deviations from established objectives and taking corrective action in a timely manner.
- Analysing the information environment and communication trends to ensure continuous adaptation of strategies and plans to external changes.
- The involvement of all stakeholders and constant communication between the teams involved is necessary **to ensure a common understanding and continuous support for communication actions.**
- Quick adjustment of actions based on the feedback received and the evolution of the situation.

In addition to continuously monitoring and adjusting communication strategies, a deep understanding of audiences plays an important role in the success of the implementation process. Before starting any communication action, it is necessary to understand who the audience is, what their needs and expectations are, and how the message can be adapted to be as relevant and effective as possible. This involves creating a well-integrated media plan that combines both traditional channels (such as the press, radio and television) and online ones.

During implementation, the focus should be on maintaining constant communication and expanding opportunities for media interaction, to maximise the impact of communication and encourage active engagement of the public.

Once campaigns have been launched, it is equally important to measure and evaluate audience engagement, to identify possible improvements and to ensure ongoing communication, reinforcing relations with stakeholders.

As the implementation of communication strategies progresses, it is necessary to adopt a dynamic approach based on continuous testing and learning. Once audiences have been identified and engaged through appropriate channels, the communication process should be constantly monitored and adjusted to remain effective. Regular progress reviews, conducted at monthly and quarterly intervals, become crucial to ensure alignment with established objectives.

These reviews allow *the identification of strengths and weaknesses in the applied strategies*, providing the opportunity to adjust tactics, messages and communication channels to optimise effectiveness. By collecting and analysing relevant data, the organisation can make informed decisions and implement prompt corrective measures to maintain progress according to initial expectations. Tools such as progress reports, meetings with target groups and specialised software are essential in this process.

Public engagement process requires creating opportunities for sustained communication. To ensure success, communicators/spokespeople should consider the context, content, and commitment to target audiences. It is recommended to organise events both inside and outside the public institution/agency and offer multiple communication channels, such as surveys, online forums, and meetings. Progress and new information must be communicated quickly and effectively, and commitments made shall be honoured.

It is important to expand interactions with the media to maximise strategic communication. Spokespeople should be trained to collaborate effectively with media representatives, meeting deadlines and providing relevant information. Good relations with journalists should be maintained by providing news ideas that meet the public's interests. Requests for review of quotes should be avoided, and corrections should only be asked for in the case of serious factual errors.

The agency can also send opinion pieces and organise educational meetings with local media. Sharing key points and lessons learned is vital to support community dialogue and demonstrate that it influences decision-making. Media should be invited to all community meetings, and spokespersons/communicators should be available for interviews.¹

Regular progress review is closely linked to the success of major events, because these moments require careful and efficient coordination of all the teams involved. Whether it's launching a new policy or organising a major campaign, every detail counts – from setting the location and schedule to clearly assigning responsibilities to each team member.

Constant monitoring and rigorous evaluation of progress provides the needed framework to quickly adjust tactics and respond to unforeseen challenges. Early identification of potential risks and devising contingency plans are indispensable to ensure the smooth running of events. After each event, analysing performance against set objectives and producing detailed reports help improve future organisation and optimise results.

This integrated approach, which includes continuous review and careful coordination of major events, allows for maintaining an efficient and coherent course in the implementation of strategic communication plans.

The coordination of communication activities in the strategic communication process may be the responsibility of a strategic communication specialist or a communication manager within the institution. This person oversees and directs communication plans to achieve organisational objectives.

Depending on the size and structure of the institution, coordination responsibilities may be assigned to a communication team, where the communication manager or communication director assumes the main role in managing communication activities.

An important component is the motivation of institutional communicators to adopt and pass on the overall narrative of the organisation/state, thus contributing to the consolidation of a coherent and credible image in front of the public. By monitoring progress and constantly evaluating performance, organisations can quickly identify deviations from the established objectives and take corrective measures in a timely manner. As implementation progresses, continuous adjustment of actions to changes in the information environment and communication trends ensures the relevance and effectiveness of strategies in the long term. Implementation is therefore the basis for achieving strategic objectives and maintaining effective and transparent communication.

Conclusions

The implementation of strategic communication strategies and plans is fundamental to the success of an organisation. This phase is not only about implementing the established plans, but also involves careful supervision, continuous monitoring and constant adaptation based on feedback and external developments. Success in communication requires effective team coordination, a deep understanding of audiences and rapid adaptability to changes.

Also, the active involvement of all stakeholders and the maintenance of constant communication are essential for enhancing a coherent and credible image. Periodic review of progress and necessary adjustments play a part in maintaining the relevance and effectiveness of communication strategies. Thus, the effective implementation of strategic communication strategies is imperative for achieving organisational/national objectives and for maintaining a transparent and successful relationship with the public and partners.

¹ [effective_public_engagement_thru_strategic_communication_march_2015.pdf](#) (ca-ilg.org)

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10. IMPACT EVALUATION IN THE STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION PROCESS

Impact evaluation in the strategic communication process is the final stage in ensuring the success of a strategic communication plan. This stage allows determining to what extent the initially established objectives have been achieved, whether the key messages have reached the target audience and whether they have had the desired effect. By carefully monitoring the results and collecting relevant data, the evaluation provides a clear picture of communication effectiveness and allows for continuous adjustment of strategies with a view to improving performance.

Evaluation measures the success of communication; furthermore, it helps identify potential problems or unexpected consequences, thus allowing adjustments in real time or at the end of a campaign. Leadership changes, new policies or structural changes within an organisation may influence the need to adapt communication plans, while continuous evaluation ensures that these changes are effectively integrated.

In this fact sheet, we will highlight the role of impact assessment in a strategic communication campaign and will identify different methods and indicators (quantitative and qualitative) used to measure the impact of a communication strategy.

The final step in the strategic communication process is the impact evaluation that verifies the extent to which the strategic objectives have been achieved through the actions taken (in other words: have the results been achieved?).

The evaluation can be carried out: 1. before the development of a communication plan; 2. during the implementation of a communication plan; 3. at the end of the implementation of a communication plan (a posteriori analysis or evaluation itself).

Finally, the evaluation must be tailored to each organisation/institution. Any change or modification (e.g.: a new minister, a new general policy note, new missions, a new organisational chart, etc.) may require an adaptation of the organisation/institution's strategic communication plan and communication actions.

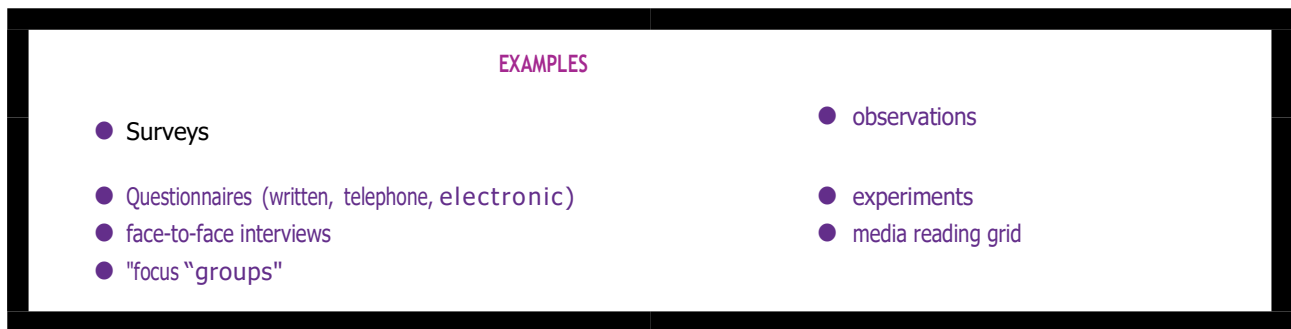
In general, evaluation is carried out based on indicators defined in advance for each communication objective. It is therefore appropriate to determine, in advance, quantitative and/or qualitative indicators, with a reference measurement (or "zero" measurement). The results or effects of the communication actions undertaken will then be compared with this reference measurement.

For example: to evaluate the communication objective "increase in the knowledge of a specific audience

on a given topic by the end of year x”, it will be appropriate to measure the effect of the actions taken in relation to previously defined indicators, such as the number of visitors to an exhibition, the website attendance rate, the page(s) in question, the audience's knowledge of the issues related to the topic¹, etc.

The communication plan evaluation tools (a posteriori analysis) are like those used in the preliminary communication analysis phase. The only difference is that the a posteriori analysis is done more from the perspective of the evolution of perceptions and behaviours, based on previously defined indicators.

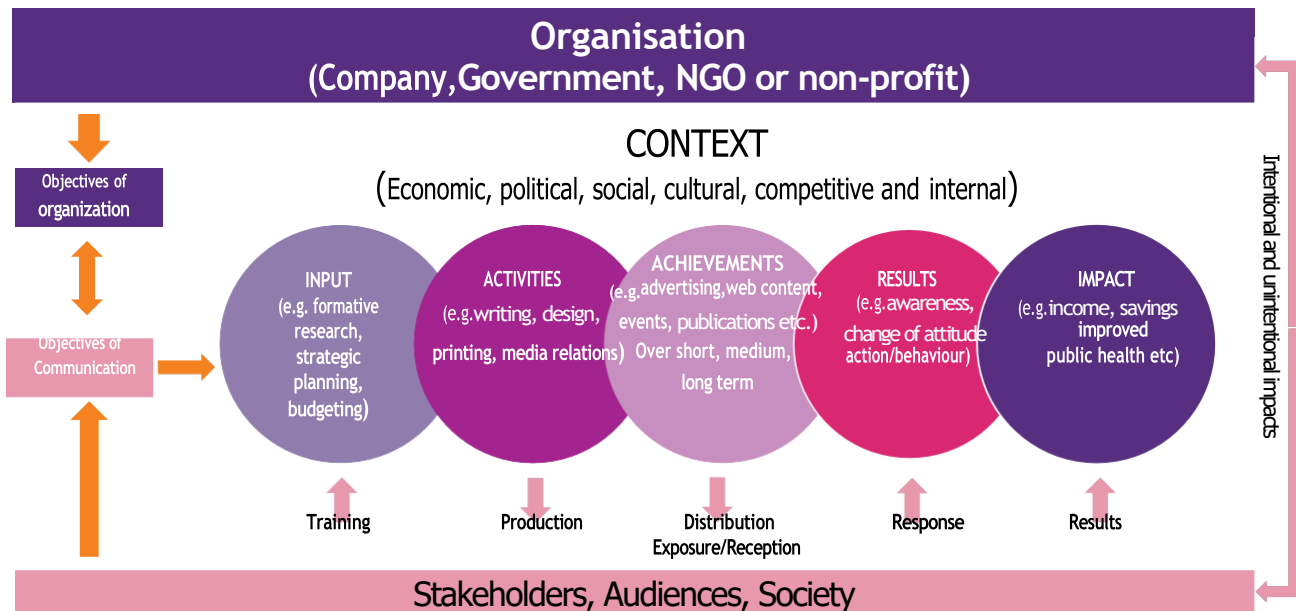
Regarding evaluation tools, we distinguish between quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods (combining the two approaches).



Depending on the tools and methods used, it is possible to collect quantitative data, to establish the level of satisfaction of certain audiences. After the evaluation, it is necessary to return to the initial points of the strategic communication plan and act where necessary.

Performance indicators are used to measure the success of the strategy and determine where adjustments can be made. Feedback from the team/stakeholders/beneficiaries should also be considered to provide insights into the completion of tasks, workflows, processes and objectives.

EVALUATION MODEL



Source: Expanding evaluation to progress strategic communication: Beyond message tracking to open listening. <https://opus.lib.uts.edu.au/bitstream/10453/122481/1/Expanding%20Evaluation%20Models%20to%20Progress%20Strategic%20Communication.pdf>

¹Elaborer un plan de communication stratégique pour une organisation publique. <https://www.scribd.com/document/451226919/broch-commcollection19-plan-com-strategique-fr-pdf>

Incorporating feedback. Strategies are not universally applicable. Every organisation wants to continue learning about better operational practices and more effective ways of communicating. Therefore, incorporating feedback is a very relevant part of strategic communication.

Impact evaluation is an essential element of strategic communication, allowing the identification of whether the messages conveyed have achieved the established objectives and whether they have had unexpected consequences. Based on this evaluation, the communication strategy can be adjusted to ensure the achievement of the initial objectives.

Basic elements of impact evaluation

1. **Oversight of communication activities.** It involves monitoring and evaluating communication activities during implementation, by collecting and analysing data.

Use numerical indicators to evaluate what you have done:

- distributed materials
- promotional activities carried out
- the media involved and
- staff, partners and other people reached by your messages.

Use result indicators:

- Did you achieve your goals?
- How many new people did the message reach?
- Was there positive coverage in the media?
- Who used the key messages?
- Did you get any recommendations?
- Who was involved and what did they do?
- Ask for feedback and advice from stakeholders.
- Identify whether you have achieved the objective: informing, persuading, educating, changing perceptions.

While communication objectives must necessarily be designed to support organisational goals, they should also consider the needs, expectations, and interests of stakeholders, the public, and society. This can be accomplished through formative evaluation using environmental scanning, including desk research, surveys, pre-testing, consultation, direct stakeholder engagement, as management research suggests².

2. **Coordination of communication evaluation with policy evaluation.** When appropriate, evaluation of communication activities should be synchronised with policy evaluation, to determine the communication contribution, in order to fully understand the impact of communication actions on policy objectives and outcomes. When these two processes are synchronised, the links between communication efforts and policy achievements, or lack thereof, can be more clearly highlighted.

² Expanding evaluation to progress strategic communication: Beyond message tracking to open listening, <https://opus.lib.uts.edu.au/bitstream/10453/122481/1/Expanding%20Evaluation%20Models%20to%20Progress%20Strategic%20Communication.pdf>

Communication evaluation should be aligned with policy evaluation, to determine to what extent communication actions have contributed to achieving the established policy objectives.

This involves:

- identifying relevant performance indicators that can be measured in both contexts;
- analysing how communication strategies have influenced public's perceptions, attitudes and behaviours;
- can serve as a solid basis for improving future strategies and more informed political decision-making;
- is an approach that promotes transparency, accountability and efficiency in the policy development and government communication process.

For example, performance indicators for communication could include the level of public awareness of a particular policy or the degree of citizen engagement in the decision-making process. For policies, indicators could include the level of political support, the impact on solving a social or economic problem etc.

Examples of evaluation methods:

- opinion polls → provide direct and representative information about public attitudes and behaviours;
- network analyses → explore the interactions and connections between various stakeholders, providing insight into the influence of communication on relationships and collaborations in the political process;
- media analyses → provide insights into how the subject is presented and perceived by the media and the public;
- case studies → provide a detailed analysis of the impact of policies or communication on community or other interest groups.

3. **Evaluation reports, which include key findings, should be distributed to decision-makers.** These reports should summarise the key conclusions of the evaluation and be distributed to senior officials and relevant decision-makers, including ministers and other decision-makers, ensuring that decision-makers have access to essential information for assessing the impact of communication and policies. Reports should provide a clear and concise presentation of the evaluation results, highlighting key issues and providing relevant recommendations for improving future strategies.
4. **The information obtained from the evaluation should be shared to improve future communication plans.** Meetings with decision-makers and presentations could be organised to discuss the results and implications of the evaluation, thus facilitating their understanding and use for improving future policies. These actions ensure an appropriate evaluation of communication strategies and plans and measure the impact of communication activities at different stages.

Conclusions

Impact evaluation within the strategic communication process represents the final stage that ensures the success of implementing an effective communication strategy. This process allows not only to measure the results and impact of the conveyed messages, but also to continuously adjust the strategies based on feedback received from the team, stakeholders and beneficiaries. A constant update of the communication plan based on the evaluation and feedback provided ensures rapid adaptation to organisational and contextual changes. Thus, by integrating feedback and performance monitoring, workflows, processes as well as objectives can be optimised, contributing to more efficient communication and the achievement of organisational/institutional/national objectives.

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