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Slyusarenko Kateryna

Candidate of Economic Sciences
Associate Professor of the Department of International Relations
State University of Economics and Technology, Ukraine

Слюсаренко Катерина Володимирівна

кандидат економічних наук
доцент кафедри міжнародних відносин
Державний університет економіки і технологій, Україна
ORCID: 0000-0002-2072-2997

Sheludiakova Nataliia

Candidate of Historical Sciences
Associate Professor of the Department of International Relations
State University of Economics and Technology, Ukraine

Шелудякова Наталія Андріївна

кандидат історичних наук
доцент кафедри міжнародних відносин
Державний університет економіки і технологій, Україна
ORCID: 0000-0002-6721-8077

THE STAKEHOLDER APPROACH IN STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS: INTERNATIONAL AND CORPORATE DIMENSIONS

Abstract. *The article examines the stakeholder approach as a methodological framework for analysing strategic communications in both international and corporate dimensions. The study aims to substantiate the stakeholder approach as a conceptual logic that enables the integration of different levels of communication interaction within a unified analytical framework. The research is based on a combination of stakeholder theory and multi-level analysis of strategic communications. The study employs methods of analysis and synthesis, comparative analysis, and the structural-functional approach. The paper demonstrates that international and corporate dimensions of strategic communications share a common stakeholder foundation but differ in their strategic objectives, temporal horizons, and forms of accountability. In the international context, strategic communications focus primarily on legitimacy, narrative formation, and long-term support from global audiences, while in the corporate sphere they are integrated into systems of reputation management, ESG communication, and crisis response. Particular attention is devoted to the transformation of stakeholder structures under conditions of digitalisation and crisis. The article argues that digital platforms should be considered not only as communication channels but also as independent stakeholders capable of shaping narratives and redistributing communicative power. The study proposes a conceptual interpretation of strategic communications as a multi-level system of stakeholder interaction in which corporate and international dimensions represent analytically distinct but interconnected levels of communication strategy implementation.*

Keywords: *strategic communications, stakeholder approach, international communication, corporate communication, ESG communication, digital platforms, reputation.*

СТЕЙКХОЛДЕРСЬКИЙ ПІДХІД У СТРАТЕГІЧНИХ КОМУНІКАЦІЯХ: МІЖНАРОДНИЙ І КОРПОРАТИВНИЙ ВИМІРИ

Анотація. У статті досліджено можливості застосування стейкхолдерського підходу як методологічної основи аналізу стратегічних комунікацій у міжнародному та корпоративному вимірах. Метою дослідження є обґрунтування стейкхолдерського підходу як концептуальної логіки організації стратегічних комунікацій, що дозволяє інтегрувати різні рівні взаємодії зі стейкхолдерами та пояснити функціонування комунікацій у складному багаторівневому середовищі. Методологічну основу дослідження становить поєднання стейкхолдерської теорії з багаторівневим аналізом



стратегічних комунікацій. У роботі застосовано методи аналізу і синтезу, порівняльний метод, структурно-функціональний підхід та критичний аналіз наукової літератури.

У статті проаналізовано концептуальні засади застосування стейкхолдерського підходу в стратегічних комунікаціях, розкрито особливості взаємодії зі стейкхолдерами в міжнародному комунікаційному середовищі та визначено специфіку корпоративного виміру стратегічних комунікацій. Показано, що міжнародний і корпоративний виміри стратегічних комунікацій формуються на спільній стейкхолдерській основі, однак відрізняються за стратегічними цілями, часовими горизонтами та характером відповідальності перед зацікавленими сторонами. У міжнародному контексті стратегічні комунікації спрямовані передусім на формування легітимності, стратегічних наративів і довгострокової підтримки з боку глобальних аудиторій, тоді як у корпоративному середовищі вони інтегруються у системи управління репутацією, ESG-практики та антикризові комунікації.

Особливу увагу приділено трансформації структури стейкхолдерів у сучасному комунікаційному середовищі, зокрема зростанню ролі недержавних акторів, цифрових платформ і мережесих спільнот. На прикладі російсько-української війни показано, що в умовах кризи стратегічні комунікації трансформуються у багаторівневу систему взаємодії, у межах якої державні, корпоративні та громадянські актори формують спільний комунікаційний простір. Обґрунтовано доцільність розгляду цифрових платформ не лише як каналів комунікації, а як самостійних стейкхолдерів, здатних впливати на формування міжнародного порядку денного, наративів і розподіл комунікаційної влади.

Узагальнюючи результати дослідження, стратегічні комунікації запропоновано інтерпретувати як багаторівневу систему взаємодії зі стейкхолдерами, у межах якої міжнародний і корпоративний виміри виступають аналітично відмінними, але взаємопов'язаними рівнями реалізації комунікаційної стратегії.

Ключові слова: стратегічні комунікації, стейкхолдерський підхід, міжнародні комунікації, корпоративні комунікації, ESG-комунікації, цифрові платформи, репутація

Formulation of the problem. The contemporary communication environment is characterised by a high level of complexity and dynamism, driven by processes of globalisation, digitalisation, and the transformation of socio-economic relations. Under these conditions, both commercial and public organisations increasingly operate within an international environment, interacting with a wide range of actors—from governmental institutions and international organisations to business partners, media outlets, and global audiences. As a result, communication can no longer be viewed merely as a supporting function; instead, it has become a strategic resource that shapes organisational competitiveness, legitimacy, and reputational resilience.

Strategic communications play a crucial role in building trust, managing reputation, establishing long-term partnerships, and responding to crisis situations. The increasing complexity of the stakeholder environment, the growing number of stakeholders, and the diversification of their interests limit the effectiveness of traditional communication models oriented toward the linear transmission of messages. In this context, the stakeholder approach can be considered a methodological foundation for strategic communications, as it enables the analysis of communication processes while taking into account the mutual influence, expectations, and roles of different stakeholder groups.

The interconnection between the corporate and international dimensions of strategic communications becomes particularly significant in the context of the growing transnationalisation of organisational activities. Contemporary corporations increasingly act as independent actors within the international communication space, implementing communication strategies in multicultural, multilateral, and politically sensitive environments. Under such conditions, corporate communications extend beyond the internal organisational level and become integrated into broader international communication processes, in which engagement with stakeholders occurs across multiple levels—from local to global [1; 2].

Analysis of recent research and publications. Recent scholarship demonstrates that the stakeholder approach has become one of the central analytical frameworks for examining strategic communication and organisational interaction with external environments. The conceptual foundations of stakeholder theory were formulated by R. Freeman, who defined organisations as systems of relationships with groups that can affect or are affected by the achievement of organisational objectives [3]. Further theoretical development was provided by T. Donaldson and L. Preston, who systematised stakeholder theory into normative, instrumental, and descriptive dimensions, thereby strengthening its analytical capacity for studying organisational behaviour and decision-making processes [4]. In the field of corporate communication, scholars such as C. van Riel, C. Fombrun, and J. Cornelissen emphasise that communication should be understood as a strategic management function aimed at coordinating relationships with stakeholders and shaping organisational identity and reputation [1; 2]. At the same time, studies of strategic communication and crisis communication, particularly those by J. Grunig and

W. Coombs, highlight the importance of dialogue, trust-building, and reputation management in stakeholder interaction [5; 6]. In the sphere of international communication and public diplomacy, the works of J. Nye, N. Cull, and E. Gilboa demonstrate that communication processes increasingly involve multiple state and non-state actors and function within complex media and digital environments [7; 8; 9]. Despite this growing body of research, the literature still tends to analyse corporate and international dimensions of communication separately, which creates a need for integrative approaches capable of explaining strategic communications as a multi-level system of stakeholder interaction.

The academic literature demonstrates a certain fragmentation in approaches to the analysis of strategic communications: stakeholder analysis is predominantly applied either to corporate communications or to the field of international relations and public diplomacy, without a systematic consideration of their interconnections. This separation of research perspectives complicates the understanding of strategic communications as a coherent multi-level process and limits the possibilities for broader theoretical generalisation. Therefore, there is a need for a comprehensive analysis aimed at integrating the international and corporate dimensions of strategic communications within a unified stakeholder-based framework.

Despite the widespread application of the stakeholder approach in studies of corporate communications and international relations, contemporary academic literature lacks a comprehensive conceptualisation of strategic communications as a multi-level stakeholder-oriented system. As a result, the international and corporate dimensions of strategic communications are typically analysed in isolation, which complicates the identification of their structural interconnections and narrows the analytical potential of stakeholder theory in communication research.

The purpose of the article is to substantiate the stakeholder approach as a methodological foundation for analysing strategic communications in both international and corporate dimensions.

To achieve this objective, the article:

- outlines the conceptual foundations for applying the stakeholder approach to strategic communications;
- analyses the specific features of stakeholder interaction within the international communication environment;
- examines the corporate dimension of strategic communications through the lens of stakeholder theory;
- systematises the tools and criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of stakeholder-oriented communication strategies.

The main material presentation. In the contemporary communication environment, strategic communications are increasingly interpreted as a comprehensive managerial activity aimed at achieving an organisation's long-term goals through systematic interaction with key stakeholder groups. The shift away from linear models of communication towards multidirectional dialogue creates a demand for theoretical approaches capable of adequately reflecting the complexity and multi-level nature of contemporary communication processes. In this context, the stakeholder approach represents one of the most relevant analytical frameworks, integrating managerial, social, and communication dimensions.

The stakeholder approach is based on the premise that an organisation's activities are shaped not only by its internal resources or market conditions but also by the nature of its interactions with a wide range of actors who have an interest in the outcomes of these activities or are capable of influencing them. This perspective highlights the importance of considering the communicative dimension of such interactions [3; 4]. Within this logic, stakeholders become key actors in the communication process, with whom organisations build relationships based on the exchange of information, expectations, and values. In this study, the stakeholder approach is applied not merely as a tool for classifying audiences but as a conceptual framework for analysing strategic communications, allowing them to be interpreted as an integrated system of relationships rather than a set of isolated communication activities [3; 10].

The application of the stakeholder approach in strategic communications provides a foundation for moving beyond the one-way transmission of messages towards a dialogical model of interaction. In this perspective, communication performs not only an informative or persuasive function but also becomes an instrument for aligning interests, building trust, and establishing long-term partnerships. This is particularly important in the context of the growing importance of reputation, corporate social responsibility, and organisational transparency [1; 5].

The stakeholder approach in strategic communications enables the integration of different levels of analysis — from the intra-organisational to the international level — thereby creating the possibility for a systemic analysis of interconnected communication processes within a single analytical framework. At the micro level, attention is focused on internal organisational communication and interaction with immediate stakeholders, including employees, management, and shareholders. The meso level encompasses relationships with business partners, clients, media, and professional communities. At the macro level, the organisation appears as a participant in international communication processes, interacting with governmental institutions,

international organisations, global audiences, and transnational media [11; 12].

The stakeholder approach is closely linked to the logic of strategic communication planning, within which strategy is understood not as a plan for transmitting messages but as a mechanism for managing relationships with various stakeholder groups. A communication strategy is developed through the identification of key stakeholders, the analysis of their interests, expectations, and influence, as well as the selection of priority channels and formats of interaction. Such an approach not only enhances the effectiveness of communication but also helps minimise potential conflicts by ensuring that communication activities remain aligned with the organisation's overall development strategy [13; 14].

An important aspect of applying the stakeholder approach concerns reputation management and crisis situations, in which communication assumes a strategic character. In crisis conditions, an organisation's ability to rapidly identify key stakeholder groups, take into account their expectations, and adapt its communicative response largely determines the effectiveness of crisis communication. In this sense, the stakeholder approach functions not only as an analytical tool but also as a framework for making strategic communication decisions in situations of heightened reputational vulnerability [15].

Thus, the stakeholder approach in strategic communications should be viewed not merely as a tool for analysing interactions with particular stakeholder groups but as an integrative theoretical and methodological framework that enables the study of strategic communications as a multi-level system of interconnected relationships within a globalised environment. Such an interpretation provides the basis for integrating the corporate and international dimensions of strategic communications within a unified stakeholder logic, which shapes the further structure and analytical focus of this study.

The theoretical foundation of this study is the stakeholder approach, which originated within the field of management and corporate development and was subsequently adopted in communication research. In its classical formulation proposed by R. Freeman, an organisation is viewed as a system of interactions with stakeholder groups that can influence the achievement of its objectives or be affected by the outcomes of its activities. Such a perspective moves beyond a narrow shareholder-oriented view and allows communication to be interpreted as a mechanism for balancing the interests of various social actors [3].

The further development of stakeholder theory is associated with the work of T. Donaldson and L. Preston, who systematised it within normative, instrumental, and descriptive dimensions. In the context of strategic communications, this typology makes it possible to simultaneously analyse the ethical foundations of stakeholder engagement, the practical effectiveness of communication strategies, and the actual behaviour of organisations within the communication environment [4].

For the applied analysis of strategic communications, models for stakeholder identification and prioritisation are of particular importance. The salience model proposed by R. Mitchell, B. Agle, and D. Wood enables the evaluation of stakeholders according to the criteria of power, legitimacy, and urgency [16]. M. Clarkson's distinction between primary and secondary stakeholders facilitates the structured determination of an organisation's communication priorities [17]. T. Rowley's network approach emphasises the relationships among stakeholders themselves, which is particularly relevant in complex, multi-actor communication environments [11].

The stakeholder approach in strategic communications is also closely connected with legitimacy theory. According to M. Suchman, organisational legitimacy is formed through interaction with the social environment and maintained through appropriate communication practices. This proposition is particularly significant for analysing reputational processes, corporate social responsibility, and crisis communication [15].

The corporate dimension of strategic communications has been strongly shaped by the Excellence Theory developed by James E. Grunig. Within this framework, communication is integrated into the system of strategic management of an organisation, and the two-way symmetrical model is understood as a mechanism for balancing the interests of the organisation and its stakeholders. In this sense, Excellence Theory conceptually aligns with the stakeholder approach by treating communication as an instrument for building trust and legitimacy [5].

In the works of C. van Riel and J. Cornelissen, corporate communications are interpreted as a coordinated system of internal and external messages aimed at shaping corporate identity and reputation. When combined with stakeholder logic, this perspective allows corporate communication to be viewed not merely as a set of instruments but as a strategic resource for managing relationships with stakeholders [1; 2].

The international dimension of strategic communications is conceptualised in academic literature through theories of public diplomacy, media diplomacy, and the concept of soft power. In particular, J. Nye conceptualises communication as a source of international influence grounded in the attractiveness of values and narratives. Research by N. Cull and E. Gilboa highlights the role of media in diplomatic interaction and in shaping international image [8; 9]. In the digital context, the work of M. Castells is particularly relevant, as it describes the transformation of communication in the network society [12].

Thus, the theoretical framework of the study is based on the integration of stakeholder theory, concepts of strategic and corporate communication, and theories of international communication. This integrative perspective provides the foundation for a comprehensive analysis of strategic communications in both international and corporate dimensions. Strategic communications are therefore conceptualised not as a separate managerial function but as a multi-level system of stakeholder interaction, in which corporate and international dimensions represent analytically distinct yet interconnected levels of the implementation of communication strategy.

An analysis of academic literature indicates that the stakeholder approach has been most extensively developed within studies of corporate governance and corporate communications. In this body of research, stakeholders are viewed as key groups whose interaction with the organisation determines the effectiveness of its activities, the level of its reputation, and its social legitimacy.

In research on strategic communications, primary attention is typically focused on issues such as the strategic integration of communication, relationship management, and crisis communication practices. In particular, within W. Coombs's Situational Crisis Communication Theory, communication strategies are linked to the level of organisational responsibility and reputational risk. At the same time, in some of these studies stakeholders are often equated with audiences, which limits the possibilities for analysing their influence and the interactions among them [6].

In the field of international communication and public diplomacy, analysis has traditionally focused on states as the principal actors in the communication process. Although contemporary research increasingly recognises the growing role of corporations and non-state actors, the stakeholder approach is applied largely in a fragmented manner and is not always integrated with the analytical tools of strategic communication.

Thus, academic literature reveals a clear separation between corporate and international strands of research, which creates the need for an interdisciplinary approach. The present study aims to address this fragmentation by integrating the international and corporate dimensions of strategic communications within the framework of stakeholder methodology.

The methodological foundation of this article is the stakeholder approach combined with a multi-level analysis of strategic communications. The research is situated at the intersection of theories of strategic, corporate, and international communication.

Both general scientific and specialised research methods are employed in the study. These include analysis and synthesis for the examination of theoretical sources, the comparative method for analysing the corporate and international dimensions of strategic communications, and the structural-functional approach for identifying the roles and functions of stakeholders in the communication process. A critical literature review is used to identify existing research gaps and to substantiate the relevance of a comprehensive approach to the study. The application of comparative and structural-functional methods made it possible to substantiate the conceptual differences between the international and corporate dimensions of strategic communications and to formulate the author's interpretation of their interconnection within stakeholder logic. The use of a multi-level methodological framework allows strategic communications to be examined at intra-organisational, inter-organisational, and international levels, thereby ensuring the coherence and systemic nature of the study.

Contemporary international communications operate within a complex multi-level environment characterised by a growing number of actors, channels, and formats of interaction that exist in constant interdependence and competition for the attention of international audiences. The traditional model of international communication, in which states were the primary actors, is undergoing transformation under the influence of globalisation, digitalisation, and the increasing involvement of non-state actors, which complicates the process of strategic communication management. Under these conditions, strategic communications are increasingly understood as an instrument of purposeful engagement with international-level stakeholders aimed at building trust, legitimacy, and a positive international image.

The application of the stakeholder approach makes it possible to interpret international communications as a process of aligning the interests of various stakeholder groups whose influence extends beyond national borders. These stakeholders include governmental institutions, international organisations, transnational corporations, non-governmental organisations, international and national media, digital platforms, as well as global and local audiences. Within strategic communications, engagement with these groups requires the clear identification of priorities, the adaptation of messages, and the selection of appropriate communication channels.

An important theoretical foundation for analysing the international dimension of strategic communications is provided by the concept of soft power proposed by J. Nye, which interprets communication as a resource of influence based not on coercion but on the attractiveness of values, narratives, and symbols. Within the stakeholder approach, soft power acquires a communicative dimension, as its implementation occurs through systematic interaction with different groups of international stakeholders. Under such conditions, strategic

communications should be understood not as an instrument of one-way image formation but as a mechanism for the long-term alignment of expectations, legitimacy, and support among key international audiences [7].

The further development of these approaches can be observed in studies of public diplomacy, particularly in the works of N. Cull, who conceptualises it as a multi-channel and multi-level process of strategic communication within the digital environment. Within the stakeholder approach, public diplomacy may be interpreted as a form of systematic engagement with key groups of international stakeholders rather than merely an instrument for informing external audiences. Such an interpretation makes it possible to integrate public diplomacy into the broader logic of strategic communications oriented toward building trust, legitimacy, and long-term relationships in the international environment [8]).

In contemporary international communication practice, public diplomacy is increasingly implemented not as a one-way informational activity but as a process of systematic interaction with various stakeholder groups. The active use of digital platforms by states and international organisations for direct communication with foreign citizens, expert communities, and media actors is transforming the logic of strategic communications, strengthening the role of feedback and the dynamic adjustment of messages. Within this model, strategic communications acquire the character of an ongoing negotiation process with stakeholders aimed not only at transmitting positions but also at building long-term relationships and sustaining legitimacy in the international arena.

Media diplomacy occupies a distinct place in the analysis of the international dimension of strategic communications. According to E. Gilboa's approach, the media function not only as channels for the dissemination of information but also as independent actors of international interaction capable of influencing diplomatic processes and shaping international public opinion [9]. Within the stakeholder framework, international media and digital platforms should therefore be regarded as autonomous stakeholders possessing their own interests, operational logics, and communicative power. This interpretation underscores that strategic communications in the international environment unfold not solely between states but within a broader field of interaction with media actors capable of amplifying or transforming strategic narratives.

Digitalisation further complicates the architecture of international strategic communications, transforming them from a hierarchically organised system into a network of interconnected actors and information flows. M. Castells's analysis of the network society provides a framework for interpreting international communications as part of global information networks, within which strategic influence is generated not through control of communication channels but through the management of interaction [12]. Under such conditions, the effectiveness of strategic communications is determined less by the ability of actors to transmit messages and more by their capacity to coordinate engagement with multiple stakeholders in real time, adapting narratives to the dynamics of the networked environment [18].

In crisis situations, digital platforms function not only as channels for the dissemination of information but also as independent actors of strategic communications that directly influence the formation of the international agenda and public opinion. Content distribution algorithms, moderation rules, and platform policies shape the visibility of messages, the prioritisation of narratives, and the tempo of communicative dynamics. Within the stakeholder framework, digital platforms should therefore be regarded as key stakeholders capable of redistributing communicative power among participants in international interaction, which necessitates their systematic consideration in the development of strategic communication strategies.

Russia's war against Ukraine serves as an empirical catalyst for the transformation of Ukraine's international strategic communications, clearly demonstrating shifts in the structure, composition, and prioritisation of stakeholders under crisis conditions. In such circumstances, the importance of international audiences, foreign governments, international organisations, and global media increases sharply, highlighting the need to reconsider traditional communication strategies and to transition toward a multi-level stakeholder-oriented model of engagement.

The application of the stakeholder approach reveals a shift in the balance among different stakeholder groups caused by crisis conditions and a high level of communicative turbulence. The parameters of urgency and legitimacy become decisive in the process of stakeholder prioritisation, while the criterion of formal hierarchy loses its dominant role. Traditional diplomatic channels are increasingly complemented by direct communication through digital platforms and international media, which enhances the importance of public diplomacy, strategic narratives, and visual communication as instruments for managing trust and legitimacy.

A significant feature of the transformation of the stakeholder structure has been the growing influence of non-state actors. This increased influence has manifested, in particular, through the activation of volunteer networks, business representatives, civil society organisations, and the Ukrainian diaspora abroad, all of whom have become full participants in international communications, creating additional channels of interaction with stakeholders. Such developments indicate an expansion of the stakeholder field and a reduction in the monopoly of state institutions over international communication.

Ukraine's experience demonstrates that in conditions of wartime crisis, strategic communications evolve into a multi-level system of stakeholder engagement in which state, corporate, and civic actors interact simultaneously.

Within the context of international strategic communications, the stakeholder approach enables the systematisation of multi-level interactions between state and non-state actors in the global communication environment. Unlike the corporate level, where strategic communications are predominantly operational and managerial in nature and aimed at coordinating managerial and reputational decisions, the international dimension of strategic communications operates according to a different logic — one centred on legitimation, narrative formation, and the cultivation of long-term value-based support.

To generalise the strategic dimension of stakeholder engagement in the international environment, it is useful to systematise the key groups of international stakeholders, the strategic objectives of communication with them, and the main channels through which international strategic communications are implemented (Table 1). This systematisation has an analytical character and reflects a synthesis of approaches presented in contemporary research on strategic communications.

Table 1

Stakeholders, Strategic Objectives, and Channels of International Strategic Communications

Group of International Stakeholders	Strategic Communication Objectives	Key Channels of Strategic Communications
Foreign governments and political elites	Legitimation of positions, formation of political support	Diplomatic channels, public statements, international forums
International organisations	Alignment of interests, coordination of actions, institutional trust	Official statements, joint communiqués, analytical reports
International media	Shaping the international agenda and narratives	Interviews, briefings, press releases, social media
Global public	Maintaining legitimacy, building trust	Digital platforms, social media, visual communication campaigns
International business structures and investors	Demonstrating stability, reducing perceived risks	Business forums, public speeches, ESG communication
Diaspora and transnational communities	Mobilising support, dissemination of narratives	Social media, civic initiatives, partnership networks
Crisis-related international stakeholders	Rapid response, minimisation of reputational losses	Crisis communication, emergency statements, coordination platforms

Source: compiled by the authors

The presented structure of corporate stakeholders confirms that strategic communications at the corporate level primarily perform the function of managing relationships and reputational risks rather than merely providing informational support for organisational activities.

At the corporate level, strategic communications serve to align the organisation's strategic objectives, its communication policy, and the expectations of key stakeholders, which ultimately determines the effectiveness of managerial and reputational decision-making. The principal groups of corporate stakeholders include employees, management, shareholders, clients, business partners, media, governmental institutions, and local communities. Interaction with these groups requires a differentiated approach that takes into account their level of influence, interests, and degree of involvement in the organisation's activities.

From the perspective of stakeholder theory, corporate communications function as a mechanism for balancing the interests of different stakeholder groups and for fostering long-term relationships. In this context, corporate communications can be understood as an integrated system of internal and external messages aligned with the organisation's strategy, which corresponds to the approaches presented in the works of C. van Riel and J. Cornelissen. Within this framework, strategic communications ensure not only the dissemination of information but also the formation of corporate identity and reputation [1; 2].

An important element of the corporate dimension of strategic communications is internal communication. Employees represent not only an internal audience but also active stakeholders who directly influence the organisation's image in the external environment. Within the stakeholder framework, internal communication acquires strategic significance, as employees act as key carriers of corporate reputation. This perspective is consistent with the principles of J. Grunig's Excellence Theory, in which two-way symmetrical communication is regarded as a condition for building trust and organisational loyalty [5].

The corporate dimension of strategic communications is closely linked to the formation and maintenance of organisational reputation. Within stakeholder logic, reputation emerges as the result of long-term interaction between an organisation and various stakeholder groups and is shaped by perceptions of its

actions, values, and communication practices. In this context, corporate social responsibility, sustainability, and ESG approaches acquire significance not only as management concepts but also as important components of strategic communications.

Russia's war against Ukraine has become a factor of radical transformation in the corporate strategic communications of Ukrainian companies, particularly in terms of stakeholder engagement and the reconsideration of ESG approaches. In the conditions of full-scale war, the social dimension of ESG has gained dominant importance, leading to a shift in corporate communication priorities from environmental and governance issues toward matters of security, social support, and solidarity with stakeholders. Charitable initiatives, volunteer programmes, and support for the country's defence capacity have ceased to function solely as instruments of corporate social responsibility and have instead become key communicative markers of corporate positioning within both domestic and international stakeholder environments.

At the same time, the logic of interaction with international stakeholders — such as investors, partners, and clients—has also been reconsidered under conditions of heightened political, reputational, and operational uncertainty. Ukrainian companies increasingly integrate the wartime context into their ESG narratives, using strategic communications as a tool to explain managerial decisions, demonstrate business resilience, and maintain the trust of international stakeholders.

The experience of Ukrainian businesses during the war illustrates a transformation in the stakeholder structure of corporate communications. This transformation is manifested in the growing significance of social and civic actors, the strengthened role of internal communication, and the need to adapt ESG communication to the international context. These developments confirm that in crisis conditions corporate strategic communications move beyond classical public relations practices and acquire a systemic, stakeholder-oriented character.

An important component of corporate strategic communications is interaction with governmental institutions and regulators, which is implemented through government relations (GR) instruments. Within the stakeholder framework, GR communication is understood as part of strategic engagement with institutional stakeholders that requires a high level of transparency, adherence to ethical standards, and consistency with corporate values. This is particularly relevant for companies operating in international environments or exposed to political and regulatory risks.

Digitalisation fundamentally transforms the nature of corporate strategic communications by expanding the range of stakeholders, accelerating information exchange, and increasing organisational vulnerability to reputational risks. Social media and digital platforms function not only as communication channels but also as environments in which reputation is shaped and stakeholder engagement is managed. Under such conditions, companies are compelled to adapt communication strategies to the network logic of interaction, taking into account the risks of reputational crises and the need for continuous monitoring of the information environment.

In crisis situations, the effectiveness of corporate communication is determined by an organisation's ability to consider the expectations of different stakeholder groups and respond promptly to reputational threats, which corresponds with the principles of W. Coombs's Situational Crisis Communication Theory. In this context, the stakeholder approach allows organisations to identify priority audiences, adapt communication messages, and minimise the negative consequences of crisis events [6].

The application of the stakeholder approach in corporate strategic communications involves the systematic identification of key stakeholder groups, the analysis of their interests, and the selection of relevant channels of interaction. Such an approach enables organisations to move from fragmented communication activities toward a coherent communication strategy integrated into the overall management system. In contemporary conditions—particularly in situations of heightened turbulence and crisis challenges—the effectiveness of corporate communications largely depends on the ability of companies to adapt communication instruments to the expectations of different stakeholder groups.

To illustrate the practical implementation of the stakeholder approach in corporate strategic communications, it is useful to systematise the main stakeholder groups, their key interests, and the channels of interaction used in communication management (Table 2).

Table 2

Stakeholders, Their Interests, and Channels of Strategic Communications
in the Corporate Context

Stakeholder Group	Key Interests	Main Channels of Strategic Communications
Employees	Safety, employment stability, social support, identification with organisational values	Internal communication platforms, corporate media, managerial communication, regular information updates

Continued from Table 2

Management and shareholders	Strategic stability, risk management, reputation	Strategic sessions, analytical reporting, internal managerial communication channels
Clients	Quality of products and services, ethical business practices, corporate social responsibility	Digital platforms, official websites, customer support services, public communication
Business partners and investors	Reliability, transparency of operations, compliance with ESG commitments, long-term partnership	Business communication, ESG reporting, investment presentations, international professional platforms
Government institutions and regulators	Regulatory compliance, tax discipline, social and economic responsibility	Official submissions, government relations (GR) communication, public consultations
Media and opinion leaders	Reliability of information, public relevance, expertise	Press releases, briefings, interviews, digital communication platforms
Local communities and civil society organisations	Social impact of business, community development, environmental responsibility	Partnership initiatives, public events, corporate social responsibility reporting
International stakeholders	Business resilience, ethical standards, compliance with international norms	English-language information resources, international media, global digital platforms

Source: compiled by the authors

The presented structure of corporate stakeholders confirms that strategic communications at the corporate level primarily perform the function of managing relationships and reputational risks rather than merely providing informational support for organisational activities.

The implementation of the stakeholder approach in strategic communications is based on the use of instruments that enable systematic engagement with stakeholders and the integration of communication into the overall organisational strategy. Unlike tactical communication activities, strategic communications are oriented toward long-term objectives, alignment of messages with the organisation's broader strategy, and continuous evaluation of stakeholder engagement.

One of the key instruments for implementing the stakeholder approach is stakeholder identification and mapping, which allows the stakeholder landscape to be structured according to the level of influence, interests, and strategic significance of different groups. This instrument makes it possible to systematise key stakeholder groups depending on their influence, interests, and importance for achieving strategic objectives. In strategic communications, stakeholder mapping is used to identify priority audiences, develop differentiated communication strategies, and prevent potential conflicts of interest.

Another important instrument of stakeholder-oriented strategic communication is stakeholder segmentation and the development of key messages adapted to the expectations and levels of engagement of different groups. Stakeholders differ in their expectations, degree of involvement, and informational needs, which necessitates the adaptation of communication messages. Within strategic communications, key messages must ensure consistency with the organisation's value orientations, maintain trust, and take into account the specific ways in which different stakeholder groups interpret and perceive information.

The selection of strategic communication channels is of strategic importance because it determines not only the accessibility of messages but also the level of trust and the opportunities for two-way interaction with stakeholders. In the contemporary communication environment, organisations employ a combination of traditional and digital channels, including media outlets, social networks, official platforms, public events, and internal communication systems. A strategic approach to channel selection is based on evaluating their relevance for specific stakeholder groups, their reputational reliability, and their capacity to facilitate feedback.

A critically important element of stakeholder-oriented strategic communications is the evaluation of their effectiveness. The criteria for assessing the effectiveness of strategic communications include levels of trust, reputational indicators, the degree of stakeholder engagement, the quality of feedback, and the alignment of communication activities with the organisation's strategic objectives. The use of both qualitative and quantitative indicators (KPIs) allows organisations not only to assess achieved results but also to adjust communication strategies in response to changes in the stakeholder environment.

In crisis situations, the importance of strategic communication instruments increases significantly, as they determine an organisation's ability to maintain trust and legitimacy within the stakeholder environment. Crisis communication built on the stakeholder approach involves the rapid identification of key stakeholder groups, the adaptation of messages to their expectations, and the maintenance of transparency in communication processes. Such an approach allows organisations to minimise reputational losses, preserve trust, and sustain legitimacy under conditions of heightened uncertainty.

The instruments used to implement the stakeholder approach form the applied dimension of strategic communications and ensure the connection between the theoretical framework of the study and the practice of

communication management. Their systematic application enables organisations to interact effectively with stakeholders in both international and corporate environments and to achieve strategic objectives in the long term.

Conclusions. The study substantiates that the stakeholder approach in strategic communications should be interpreted as a conceptual logic for organising a communication system in which communication performs the function of aligning interests, legitimacy, and trust among multiple actors. Such an interpretation moves beyond the instrumental understanding of communication as a set of messages and allows it to be considered a structuring element of strategic management.

Within this framework, it is demonstrated that the international and corporate dimensions of strategic communications are formed on a shared stakeholder foundation but differ in terms of the types of strategic objectives pursued, temporal horizons, and the degree of political and reputational responsibility involved. These differences determine distinct modes of functioning of strategic communications and shape the specific patterns of stakeholder engagement at each level.

The analysis shows that these distinctions are primarily reflected in the dominant functions of strategic communications. In the international dimension, strategic communications are oriented toward value-based and reputational legitimation, the construction of narratives, and the cultivation of long-term support among global audiences. In contrast, in the corporate context they have a predominantly operational and managerial character and are integrated into systems of reputation management, ESG practices, and crisis response.

At the same time, it is established that under conditions of crisis these distinctions become significantly more complex, as the stakeholder configuration of strategic communications undergoes dynamic transformation. The role of non-state actors, networked communities, and digital platforms increases, transforming strategic communications into a multidirectional system of interaction in which the boundaries between the international and corporate levels become less distinct.

In this context, it is argued that digital platforms should be considered not merely as communication channels but as independent stakeholders capable of influencing narrative formation, reputational dynamics, and the distribution of communicative power. Such an approach is essential for analysing contemporary strategic communications within a globalised and digitalised environment.

Summarising the results of the study, a conceptual interpretation of strategic communications is proposed as a multi-level system of stakeholder interaction in which corporate and international dimensions represent analytically distinct yet interconnected levels of the implementation of communication strategy. This interpretation expands the analytical potential of the stakeholder approach and provides a foundation for further research on strategic communications in the context of crises, digital transformations, and the growing role of non-state actors.

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