

Communication, digital media and future: new scenarios and future changes

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edited by
Elisabetta Gola, Andrea Volterrani, Fabrizio Meloni



RESOCONTI /1

This volume collects a set of meaningful full papers of Medcom2020+1 international conference, which has been organized by the University of Cagliari, University Hospital of Cagliari, and University of Tor Vergata (Rome). The conference has been held online from the 17th to 19th June 2021, on "Communication, digital media and future: new scenarios and future changes", which is also the title of this volume. The general topic has been divided in 8 sessions which range from social media to screen culture, from media education to social communication, politics and multiculturalism. The general topic has been divided in 8 sessions which range from social media to screen culture, from media education to social communication, politics and multiculturalism. The topics also embrace reflections on the experiences after-pandemic, that had a strong impact and caused many changes on communication and society. The proceedings of the conference include a selection of 22 papers out of the about one hundred talks from the conference.

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Preface

Elisabetta Gola¹, Fabrizio Meloni², Andrea Volterrani³

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This volume collects a set of meaningful full papers of Medcom2020⁺¹ international conference, which has been organized by the University of Cagliari, University Hospital of Cagliari, and University of Rome (Tor Vergata). The conference has been held online because of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Medcom2020, the VI world conference on "Media and Mass communication, indeed, was programmed for 28-30 May 2020, but after the Italian government undertook the lockdown in March, the 9th, it was immediately clear that it would be impossible to organize such a big conference: we received around 400 abstracts and we invited about 15 keynote speakers from all over the world around the theme "Communication and Cultural Change". Medcom2020 conference aimed at providing a platform for academics and researchers to share their collective wisdom on the implications, opportunities and challenges of communication in an interconnected world. In August 2020 we decided to postpone the conference to 17th – 19th June 2021. In deciding this delay, we slightly changed the general topic, which became: "Communication, digital media and future: new scenarios and future changes", which is also the title of this volume. We called it Medcom2020⁺¹: with this name we wanted to enhance Medcom2020 conference including the topics (and the relative accepted abstracts) of Medcom2020 and widen the gaze, embracing reflections on the experiences after-pandemic, that had a strong impact and caused many changes on communication and society.

The new keywords integrated the theme of communication and cultural change with a look at how communication, technologies, digital media have contributed to define the new scenarios and how they will contribute to the construction of future scenarios.

Medcom2020 conference had been designed to organize the talks by 10 parallel sessions, while in the enhanced 2020⁺¹ version we kept the same 10 panels (1. Social media: impact, future, issues 2. Theory of Communication, languages and media, 3. Public sector communication, 4. Politics, ethics and communication, 5. Health communication, emergency and environmental studies, 6. Journalism, 7. Multiculturalism, cultural studies, youth and gender communication, 8. Media Education, 9. Media and corporate, 10. Screen cultures), but in each one we added a specific point devoted to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Every panel had a chair and a scientific committee (see tables 1 and 2).

In this volume we selected some representative papers for some of the original areas. We want to underline, though, that the selection has been made possible by the great participation and discussion during the conference. The **first session**, about "Social media and online journalism: impact, future, issues", collects many papers which address different issues on the communication media sphere. Some of the papers examine how social media have revolutionized the ways of communicating and the ways of interacting among individuals. Other papers focus on dynamics of digital transformation and try to show how web analytics influence journalism and gatekeeping.

The **second session** covers the large area of “Public sector communication”, which has considerably changed in recent years. The arrival of new media, also in this case, has opened up new scenarios and thrown down new challenges. Public communication can now really be citizen-friendly. Papers in this session highlight the cultural changes but also the challenges related to digitalization.

The **third session** focuses on a very important topic in a society deeply mediatized: “Politics, ethics and communication”. The papers under this topic examine how social media affect the political participation and the possibility of democracy. Social participation in movements, and democratic and political participation, indeed, are both closely linked to the opportunities and problems of digital media and, in particular, of social media. While the communication between politicians and citizens is (or can be) more direct, the social responsibility of the communicator is still relevant for democracy.

The **fourth session** is devoted to “Multiculturalism, cultural studies, youth and gender communication”. Relations between different cultures (national, ethnic, generational, gender) represent the present and the future of the media in hybrid, fragmented and complex societies. Traditional media and government are not the only voice about these issues, and minorities and communities of interest use social media to raise awareness for them.

Technology strongly affects learning and teaching activity by the cognitive artifacts, which mediate the world understanding process: new frameworks are discussed in the papers and new methodologies are proposed in the **fifth session** “Media education”. From metaphors to storytelling, from engagement strategies to contrasting hate speech, the papers outline the changes in education roles and professionals.

Economic development in a global society acts through and with the decisive support of digital media and mainstream media. In the **sixth session**, “Media and corporate”, the papers tackle some representative issues of this strong relationships: the different ways in which media, business, industries etc. are involved and related with communication are shown through some representative examples.

After the “turning points” that marked the theories of the late twentieth century in visual culture, many interesting themes need today to be reconsidered. In the **seventh session**, which is dedicated to “Screen cultures”, two case studies show the function of filmic narratives in construction of modern social identity.

The **last session** contains some reflections about “Communication and Covid-19 pandemic”, a topic that we have added to every panel in the conference. It is a theme that still generates debate, because of the importance of communication in crisis and emergency.

All the chairs of the sessions gave a great contribution in the organization of the conference and we want thank all of them and the scientific committee for their support and work that make the conference successful.

Last but not least, a special thank goes to the keynote speaker, who accepted the invitation despite all the difficulties due to the pandemic situation: Mohan J Dutta (Massey University, New Zealand), Vilma Luoma-aho (University in Jyväskylä, Finland), Rosalind Jill (University of London), Shannon A. Bowen (University of South Carolina, USA), Janet McCabe (University of London), Mario Pireddu (University of Tuscia), Phillip Martin (Senior Investigative Reporter, WGBH Boston, USA), Christopher Fenner (University of West Florida), Michele Sorice (LUISS University). See table 3 for information about the titles of their interesting talks.

The selection of papers collected in this volume show that communication and media processes have become more central to our daily lives than ever before. In the hope that it will be possible to build other opportunities for meeting and discussion on media and communication, these proceedings are a first contribution to reflection and debate.

Table 1. List of Conference Panel chair:

<p>01. Social Media: Impact, Future, Issues Giovanni Boccia Artieri (University of Urbino “Carlo Bo”, Alessandra Migliozi (SMM Ministry of public education), Gianluigi Tiddia (alias Insopportabile, influencer)</p>
<p>02. Theory of Communication, Languages and Media Francesca Ervas (University of Cagliari) and Daniela Viridis (University of Cagliari)</p>
<p>03. Public Sector Communication Alessandro Lovari (University of Cagliari)</p>
<p>04. Politics, Platforms and Participation Michele Sorice (LUISS University, Rome)</p>
<p>05. Communication, Emergency and Environmental Studies Maria Grazia Rossi (University of Lisbon: Universidade Nova)</p>
<p>06. Journalism Lorenzo Paolini (Director of <i>L'Unione Sarda</i>) and Antonio Rossitto (Director of <i>Panorama</i> weekly journal)</p>
<p>07. Multiculturalism, Cultural Studies, Religion, Youth and Gender Communication (Multiculturalism: Gaia Peruzzi, University of Rome “Sapienza”; Gender: Elisa Giomi, University of Rome 3 ; Religion Studies: Fabio Tarzia, University of Rome “Sapienza”)</p>
<p>08. Media Education Alessio Ceccherelli (University of Rome “Tor Vergata”)</p>
<p>09. Media and Corporate Communication Giuseppe Melis (University of Cagliari)</p>
<p>10. Screen Cultures Emiliano Ilardi (University of Cagliari)</p>
<p>11. Communication and Covid-19 Pandemic Elisabetta Gola (University of Cagliari), Andrea Volterrani (University of Rome “Tor Vergata”), Fabrizio Meloni (University Hospital of Cagliari)</p>

Table 2. List of Scientific Committee, constituted by scholars and experts selected for their great knowledge and competence of one of more topics for each panel. In this way we aim at guaranteeing the high quality and fairness of the reviewing process.

<p>1. Social media: impact, future, issues</p> <p>Hanife Aliefendioğlu (Eastern Mediterranean University, Turkey) Giovanni Boccia Artieri (University of Urbino, Italy) Alberto Berretti (University of Rome “Tor Vergata”, Italy) Alessandro Chessa (CEO and Data Scientist Linkalab, Italy) Francesca Comunello (University of Rome “Sapienza”, Italy) Amira El-Deeb (American University, Egypt) Fabio Giglietto (University of Urbino, Italy) Fauziah Hassan (University Sains Islam Malaysia, Malaysia) Jeyasushma V (Xiamen University Malaysia, Malaysia) Alessandra Migliozi (Journalist, social media manager, Italy) Lilia Raycheva (The St. Kliment Ochridsky Sofia University, Bulgaria) Gianluigi Tiddia (Influencer, Italy)</p>	<p>2. Theory of Communication, languages and media</p> <p>Mustak Ahmed (University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh) Marianna Bolognesi (University of Bologna, Italy) Emanuela Campisi (University of Catania, Italy) Alessio Ceccherelli (University of Rome “Tor Vergata”, Italy) Anna Maria Contini (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Italy) Francesca Ervas (University of Cagliari, Italy) Ivone Ferreira (Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Portugal) Antonietta Marra (University of Cagliari, Italy) Michele Pandi (University of Genoa Italy) Francesca Piazza (University of Palermo, Italy) Giovanni Ragone (University of Rome “Sapienza”, Italy) Maria Grazia Rossi (Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Portugal) Micaela Rossi (University of Genoa, Italy) Franciscu Sedda (University of Cagliari, Italy) Elena Semino (University of Lancaster, UK) Gerard Steen (University of Amsterdam, Netherlands) Pietro Storari (University of Cagliari, Italy) - Prof. E.E. Scheimer (Royal Roads University, Canada) Astrid Vandendaele (Ghent University, Belgium) Luca Vargiu (University of Cagliari, Italy) Daniela Francesca Virdis (University of Cagliari, Italy)</p>
<p>3. Public Sector Communication</p> <p>Daniele Bellasio (University of Milan “Cattolica”, Italy) Nicola Bonaccini (SNA, Italy) Shannon A. Bowen, (University of South Carolina, US) Lucia D’Ambrosi (University of Macerata, Italy) Gea Ducci (University of Urbino) Anil K Kaya (Eastern Mediterranean University, Turkey) Ülfet Kutoğlu Kuruç (Eastern Mediterranean University, Turkey) Vilma Luoma-aho (University of Jyväskylä, Finland) Melina Mahpuz (Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia) Letizia Materassi (University of Florence, Italy) Alessandra Migliozi - (journalist, social media manager, Italy) Baruck Okal Opiyo (Eastern Mediterranean University, Turkey) Rosanna Romano Chief of Press Officer Sardinia Regional Council Michele Sorice (Luiss, Rome, Italy)</p>	<p>4. Politics, platforms and participation</p> <p>Laura Iannelli (University of Sassari, Italy) Nuurrianti Jalli, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia Raffaello Lombardi (University of Rome “Sapienza”, Rome) Chiara Moroni (University of Tuscia) Gaia Peruzzi (University of Rome “Sapienza”, Italy) Marco Pignotti (University of Cagliari, Italy) Dana Popescu (University of Lumiere 2, Lyone, France) Savera Mujib Shami, University of the Punjab, Pakistan Michele Sorice (Luiss, Rome, Italy) Augusto Valeriani (University of Bologna, Italy)</p>

<p>5. Health communication, emergency and environmental studies</p> <p>Sarah Bigi (University of Milan “Cattolica”, Italy) Mohan J Dutta (Massey University) Maurizio Galluzzo (IUAV, Italy) Jeanine Guidry (Virginia Commonwealth University, USA) Sharmila Kayal, Adamas University, India Andrea Mameli (CRS4, Italy) Hermine Penz (University of Graz, Austria) Maria Grazia Rossi (Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Portugal) Elena Semino (University of Lancaster)</p>	<p>6. Journalism</p> <p>Hanife Aliefendioğlu (Eastern Mediterranean University, Turkey) Lakhdar Chadli (Canadian University Dubai, UAE) Wan Norshira Wan Mohd Ghaza (International Islamic University Malaysia, Malaysia) Fauziah Hassan (University Sains Islam Malaysia, Malaysia) Sharmila Kayal (Adamas University, India) Jeyasushma V (Xiamen University Malaysia, Malaysia) Luca Lecis (University of Cagliari, Italy) Phillip WD Martin (Senior Investigative Reporter for WGBH News, Boston, USA) Marcus Messner (VCU, USA) Lorenzo Paolini (Editorial Director of newspaper “L’Unione Sarda”, Italy) Anna Piras (Director of Rai TRE Sardegna, Italy) Lilia Raycheva (The St. Kliment Ochridsky Sofia University, Bulgaria) Antonio Rossitto (Journalist at “Panorama”, Italy) Christian Ruggero (University of Rome “Sapienza”, Italy) Carlo Sorrentino (University of Florence, Italy)</p>
<p>7. Multiculturalism, cultural studies, religion, youth and gender communication</p> <p>Francesco Bachis (University of Cagliari) Roberta Bartoletti (University of Urbino, Italy) Marco Bruno (University of Rome “Sapienza”, Italy) Cristina Cabras (University of Cagliari, Italy) Valentina Cuzzocrea (University of Cagliari, Italy) Francesca Ervas (University of Cagliari) Elisa Giomi (University of “Roma TRE”, Italy) Giuliana Mandich (University of Cagliari, Italy) Gaia Peruzzi (University of Rome “Sapienza”, Italy) Lilia Raycheva (The St. Kliment Ochridsky Sofia University, Bulgaria) Fabio Tarzia (University of Rome “Sapienza”, Italy)</p>	<p>8. Media Education</p> <p>Andrea Dresseno (President of Italia Videogame Program (IVIPro) e responsabile dell’Archivio Videoludico di Bologna) Stefano Federici (University of Cagliari, Italy) Beatrice Ligorio (University of Bari, Italy) Stefania Manca (CNR, Institute for Education Technology, Genoa, Italy) Mariasosaria Nardone (University of Bologna, Italy) Mario Pireddu (University of Rome, Roma Tre, Italy) Marco Pitzalis (University of Cagliari) Mike Megrove Reddy (University of Zululand, South Africa) Marco Scarcelli (IUSVE Venezia) Simona Tirocchi (University of Turin, Italy)</p>

9. Media and Corporate Communication	10. Screen cultures
<p>Daniele Bellasio (University of Milan “Cattolica”, Italy)</p> <p>Paolo Costa (University of Pavia and founding partner of Spindox, Italy)</p> <p>Christopher Fenner (University of West Florida, USA)</p> <p>Anil K Kaya (Eastern Mediterranean University, Turkey)</p> <p>Jeong-Nam Kim (University of Oklahoma, USA)</p> <p>Ülfet Kutoğlu Kuruç (Eastern Mediterranean University, Turkey)</p> <p>Alberto Marinelli (University of Rome “Sapienza”, Italy)</p> <p>Giuseppe Melis Giordano (University of Cagliari, Italy)</p> <p>Siti Ezaleila Binti Mustafa (University of Malaya, Malaysia)</p> <p>Lucia Porcu (University of Granada, Spain)</p> <p>Simone Sangiorgi (partner Jellyfish and CEO Kippy, Italy)</p>	<p>Mustak Ahmed (University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh)</p> <p>Alfonso Amendola (University of Salerno, Italy)</p> <p>Andrea Balzola (Screen player, movie Director, director of the School of New Technologies of Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera, Italy)</p> <p>Davide Benvenuti (Nanyang Technological University, Singapore)</p> <p>Ivan Blecic (University of Cagliari, Italy)</p> <p>Sergio Brancato (University of Naples, Italy)</p> <p>Donatella Capaldi (University of Rome “Sapienza”, Italy)</p> <p>Lakhdar Chadli (Canadian University Dubai, UAE)</p> <p>Wang Changsong (Xiamen University Malaysia)</p> <p>Emiliano Chirchiano (University of Naples, Italy)</p> <p>Fabio D’Andrea (University of Perugia, Italy)</p> <p>Amira El-Deeb (American University, Egypt)</p> <p>Antioco Floris (University of Cagliari, Italy)</p> <p>Giovanni Fiorentino (University of Tuscia)</p> <p>Sebastian Grobler (Ostwestfalen-Lippe - University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Germany)</p> <p>Sharmila Kayal (Adamas University, India)</p> <p>Tatiana Mazali (Politecnico di Torino, Italy)</p> <p>Binta Kasim Mohammed (Kaduna State University, Nigeria)</p> <p>Simone Mulargia (“Sapienza” University of Rome)</p> <p>Siti Ezaleila Binti Mustafa (University of Malaya, Malaysia)</p> <p>Nevina Satta (CEO Fondazione Sardegna Film Commission, Italy)</p> <p>E.E. Scheimer (Royal Roads University, Canada)</p>

Table 3. List of Keynote speakers and the titles of their talks

<p>Mohan J Dutta (Massey University, New Zealand) <i>Addressing health inequalities through communication activism: A culture-centered approach</i></p>
<p>Vilma Luoma-aho (University of Jyväskylä, Finland) <i>Citizens from Venus, Authorities from Mars - Public Sector Communication.</i></p>
<p>Rosalind Jill (University of London) <i>Posting a perfect life: Affect, social media and fear of getting it wrong</i></p>
<p>Shannon A. Bowen (University of South Carolina, USA) <i>Ethical responsibilities of communicators during crises and pandemics</i></p>
<p>Janet McCabe (University of London, UK) <i>Divided Bodies, Crossings Borders, Transnational Encounters: towards a feminist approach of transnational TV studies</i></p>
<p>Mario Pireddu (University of Tuscia) <i>The space-time of learning. Education, networks and media ecologies</i></p>
<p>Phillip Martin (Senior Investigative Reporter, WGBH Boston, USA) <i>Investigating right wing extremism in Trumpian America and the limits of traditional journalism</i></p>
<p>Christopher Fenner (University of West Florida, USA) <i>The Mediated Construction of Reality. How to Understand and Analyze The Role of The Media?</i></p>
<p>Michele Sorice (LUISS University, Italy) <i>Political platforms and communication</i></p>

Investigating Employees' Voices and Internal Communication Strategies: The Case Study of LEM Industries Group

Corso Biagioni¹, Maurizio Masini², Omar Antonio Cescut¹, Giuseppe Segreto², Alessandro Lovari^{3*}

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Abstract

The study aims at investigating the quality of relationships between companies and their employees, highlighting the value of internal communication strategies, and the perception of what communication tools and practices could be planned and implemented to inform and better engage internal publics. Indeed, the quality of employees' relations is considered strategic to increase the efficacy of the communication flows, but also to increase company reputation with prosocial activities or positive megaphoning behaviours, as well as to prevent or mitigate possible crisis. Adopting a qualitative approach, the study focuses on LEM Industries Group, an Italian corporation with the headquarter in Tuscany (Italy), involved in the development of companies active in accessories and finishes of international and national luxurious brands. Based on theories in corporate communication, public relations, and employee communications, eighteen in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted in person with a non-probabilistic sample of employees, selected according to specific criteria, on a total of 400 current ones. Thematic analysis of findings shows interesting path of loyalty, a rare emotional attachment for the corporation, emerging bottom-up communication practices, as well as a different approach on using digital platforms and social media for employees' communication. Practical implications for top managers and communication officers are critically discussed.

Keywords: employee communication, public relations, internal communication, corporate communication

Introduction

Nowadays internal communication is considered and recognized as one of the crucial leverages for the engagement of employees in companies, and in general in complex organizations. This function, if strategically conceived, managed and planned, is not only useful for transferring information, instructions and orders within the company context, but also it strengthens the sense of belonging, creates a culture of transparency between management and collaborators, as well as encouraging identification of the values and the alignment of the objectives of the collaborators with those of the organizations (Men & Bowen, 2017; Mazzei, 2018; Mazzei, Togna, Kim, Lee & Lovari, 2019).

1. Theoretical Framework

Scholars pointed out that a people-centric logic is quickly emerging among companies in western societies, bringing collaborators together with managers to become protagonists in the life of the companies, in their successes and failures, not just commercial ones. Thus, collaborators are increasingly perceived as influential actors for the success of organizations rather than passive recipients of communication flows and management practices. Employees and collaborators become central and fundamental for the reputation of a company, for building the brand identity, as well as having a role in business innovation processes and

customer experience and satisfaction (Frandsen & Johansen, 2016). Moreover, the quality of employees' relations is today considered strategic in order to increase the efficacy of the internal communication flows, but also to nurture company reputation with prosocial activities (Dalton, 2010; Mazzei, 2018), or enhancing positive megaphoning behaviours (Mazzei et al., 2019; Kim & Rhee, 2011), also to prevent or mitigate possible crisis or emergencies (Heide & Simonsson, 2011, 2018).

Planning and performing an efficient internal communication positively affect the corporate climate, lays the foundations for improving relations with employees and collaborators, ensures the effectiveness of information flows between them and the management (Men & Bowen, 2017). The activation of the voices of collaborators through what in the literature is called the megaphoning process (Kim & Rhee, 2011), becomes central not only in the ordinary management of relationships, but also in crisis situations, both in those caused by external factors (such as the current pandemic, an environmental disaster, etc.), and from those that arise from direct corporate responsibility (such as a faulty product, incorrect behaviours of the property and / or management, non-compliance with the rules, etc.). The company's interest is to develop positive megaphoning and avoid or minimize negative voices from its employees that could damage the company's reputation, given the close connection, often the intertwine, between internal and external communication environments in contemporary communication ecosystems (Mazzei et al., 2019). The advent of digital media and social media has broadened the spectrum of tools and channels available to marketing and corporate communication (Masini, Segreto & Pasquini, 2017), with a strong impact also on activities of the company managers who are responsible for dealing with internal communication and for stimulating employee's involvement (Mazzei, 2018). In particular, the use of social media in a business context, if strategically managed, strengthens the sense of belonging and enhance the exchange of information, thus making a concrete contribution to the development of good relationships at a company level (Donadio, 2017; Freberg, 2019).

Internal communication impacts also on organizational cultures and influence the organizational climate. An organizational culture is thus strictly connected to the collaborators working for the organization, and it is shaped by employees' behaviours and attitudes (Flamholtz, 2001; Men & Bowen, 2017).

In this context this pilot study aims at investigating the quality of relationships between LEM Industries Group, an Italian corporation, and their employees. Using a qualitative method, this study focuses on internal communication strategies and the quality of relations between the corporation and their collaborators, but also among the employees themselves.

2. Methodology

Before describing the methodology of the study, it is important to give some basic information about LEM Industries Group, in order to better frame this case study, focusing especially on the market characteristics, the human resources management and the company marketing and communication approach.

LEM Industries Group is based in the province of Arezzo, in Tuscany, covering an area of 30,000 square metres with industrial plants and offices. Founded in 1974, it embraces today nine companies (see fig.1) in the development of companies active in accessories and finishes of international luxurious brands companies. It works in a business to business perspective (B2B), supplying solutions and galvanic technologies to large prestigious groups and brands of the industry, ensuring Italian craftsmanship as well as industrial quality.

At the time of the study, the corporation counted on a total of 450 current ones. LEM Industries Group's population is composed of 50% women and 50% men, collaborators belong to five different nationalities, and the average age of the employees is about 39 years.

In fall 2019, LEM Industries Group' top management decided to strategically invest in internal communication and employees' engagement activities starting a collaboration with the University of Siena and the University of Cagliari. The following study represent the first part

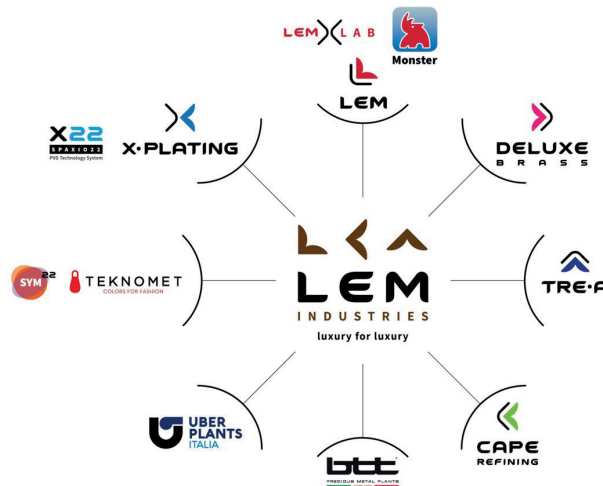


Figure 1: LEM INDUSTRIES Group brand architecture –
Source: <https://www.lemindustriesspa.com/>

of a broader research project that will involve other research activities that will have positive impacts on company's marketing and communication functions. Starting from ad hoc data collection, content analysis of primary sources and media coverage, the project will enable LEM Industries Group not only to evaluate the quality of employees relations and engagement, but also to proactively intervene with specific communication strategies.

Based on theories in corporate communication, public relations, and employee communications (Dalton, 2010; Heide & Simonsson, 2011, 2018; Jiang & Men, 2015; Kim & Rhee, 2011; Mazzei, 2010, 2015, 2018), eighteen in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted in person with a non-probabilistic sample of employees, representing the 4.5% of LEM Industries Group' employees selected according to specific criteria (age, type of company, positive/negative attitude, date of hiring, nationality). Semi-structured interviews were chosen for the exploratory nature of the study. They were carried out in person in Fall 2019 by two independent researchers. Interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed for the analysis. They varied in length, with an average duration of 45 minutes each. A thematic analysis of findings (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) was carried out by the two researchers. Field notes and preliminary conclusions were discussed among the researchers who solved alternate explanations to resolve discordant conclusions. The following section reports main finding and discuss them.

3. Results

Empirical results showed a good quality of relationships within all the companies of LEM Industries Group. In more than one interview, the respect for the employee as a person has emerged as a distinctive feature of the company. However, if it is true that, in recent years, it was observed an increased capacity to listen to the needs of employees, some of those interviewed asked for a more continuous contact with top management. This could be explained by the fact that, in the last two years, LEM Industries Group has rapidly grown, in terms of share of market, employees' number, and reputation. Therefore, in the last period before the Covid-19 pandemic, the company dealt with the economic growth of the group – also with the relative growth of the company size - and the need to maintain a personal relation with each of the collaborators.

About the information flows, the study shows that the information on the management and, in general, on the LEM Industries Group, reaches employees through word of mouth with other colleagues (inside or outside the company plants) or directly from social media (electronic word of mouth). Except in exceptional cases, there was no voluntary search for information or news on the mass media (regional television, local newspapers, etc.). In this

regard it must be said that LEM Industries Group can be considered a kind of “small town company”. It has an important economic and social role on the territory; from the interviews it is clear that there are a very special and tight relations from inhabitants of the local valley and the history of the company.

Regarding instead the acquisition of information on the work to be carried out within operational contexts, it is possible to say that according to the interviewees the information transmission chain seems to work with satisfaction. Almost all the interviewees showed the satisfaction to have updated internal communication flows in the departments and plants, highlighting the use of signage and face to face meetings to facilitate the working activities.

About the communication tools currently used by the companies of the LEM Industries Group, the younger employees reported an excellent predisposition to use online platforms and digital tools, while the older ones expressed a marked preference for using traditional media, starting from the importance of reading the company house organ. But the study pointed out a common point: all the interviewees - young and old, long-time employees and new employees, managers, executives, and production workers - have expressed the desire for more opportunities for face-to-face communication. This request aligns with the decision of LEM marketing department to organize a growing number of events, in comparison with the previous years. For example, LEM industries Group usually organizes a Christmas event for all the collaborators, an open day factory where company open its plants to the family of the employees, as well as an educational training day in August, on the first working day after the summer holiday. In this way LEM industries Group aims to establish a good dialogue among all the components of the companies that are part of it. It is no coincidence that all these events were evaluated positively almost unanimously by the respondents of the study who recognized the communicative values of such initiatives.

A satisfactory evaluation was also expressed about corporate welfare policies that impact on the quality of relations between companies and their collaborators. In some cases, a real gratitude towards the company has emerged. To give some examples, the company opened an internal library named “sliding words” (see fig. 2) with different types of books that every employee can borrow to read. At the same time employees can donate books to the library, thus enriching those bought by the company.

Another topic raised in the interviews which is also related to a specific company project, is the company restaurant, intended not to be a company canteen but a real restaurant with table service and a chef, and where everyone can have a lunch together with the other company collaborators without any differences between level, hierarchy or so on. All these efforts were clearly perceived by the interviewees, and there is the awareness that the top management is investing in these activities to increase a sense of belonging to the company: LEM Industries Group should be, and is perceived, not just a place to work.

During the interviews researchers used visual metaphors as creative research tools, asking respondents to associate the company with an animal or a colour. Most of them identify LEM Industries Group with a lion and associate the corporation to the red colour. From the interviews it emerges that the lion has been mentioned in relation to LEM Industries Group for its strength, its smartness, its pride but, especially, for the ability to defend its cubs (e.g., its employees). In the words of the interviewees, the lion (and therefore LEM Industries Group) can defend its territory from enemies and to face difficult situations. Regarding the red colour it was reported in interviews because it was historically the first colour of the brand, but also because red refers to the meaning of art, passion, and the family heart. Indeed, it is clear from the analysis, that the interviewees perceived and recognized a positive organizational climate and a family environment in the company and in relation with the top management.

4. Conclusions and further step of the study

In conclusion this qualitative pilot study, despite its limitation, revealed a good quality of relationships between LEM Industries Group and its collaborators. Nevertheless, a small



Figure 2: Image of the women section of the corporate internal library “sliding words”
Source: marketing department

percentage of employees expressed complaints and highlighted criticalities during the interviews. It is important to say that the company has launched in January 2022 a second step of the broader research project in which we carried out an online survey aimed at listening all the employees, and at evaluating the quality of relations perceived by different types of collaborators. In this way the company will be able to see if the small percentage of complaints emerged in the qualitative phase, it is something physiological, or LEM Industries Group might have some problems to face and solve in the short time in the relations with its employees, especially important in this phase of uncertainty due to Covid-19 pandemic.

About the information seeking processes, the study highlights that collaborators of the LEM Industries Group do not seem to be linked to media and communication tools as to interpersonal relationships. The interviewees showed the need to have a multi-channel communication mix, managed by the company, with a preference for using digital channels, with content that should not only focus on operational tasks but also on corporate life and company values.

Moreover, LEM Industries Group appears as a trustworthy company, which has a strong loyalty, and it communicates a great confidence through its corporate behaviours and commercial success. Internal communication acts as an enabler to stimulate employee’s engagement, even if further activities should be implemented especially in a phase of changes and transformations as that at the time of the interviews.

5. The pandemic as accelerator for internal communication

The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the internal communication strategies planned by the company. The emergency forced the company to change and accelerate its procedure, and to develop new digital solutions faster to face the turbulence of markets and the fears of collaborators (Heide & Simonsson, 2018; Frandsen & Johansen, 2016).

In this scenario, in the spring of 2020, LEM Industries Group created a closed group on Facebook (“LEM SUPER FORCE”) for improving internal communication¹. In this digital environment, the company decided to reach its employees quickly using a very popular platform like Facebook. Aims of the group was to inform employees about trade union negotiations, wages, or national laws related to the health emergency related to the pandemic, since not every collaborator was informed on of what the Italian government and the health public authorities were deciding. So, through Facebook, the company created a kind of public relation office, a flexible communication hub, that gave all the information and, above all, the updates on what was happening daily in the corporation and what the top management was deciding for the future activities, during and after the lockdown. The LEM SUPER FORCE Facebook group was also used to launch specific initiatives to stimulate call to actions for employees (Masini, Segreto & Pasquini, 2017) in order to find solutions for solving problems or improving the services’ quality, thus collecting creative insights and competences in the period of the lockdown.

Moreover, in summer 2020 LEM Industries Group created an application (app), a platform for internal communication, called “LEM INDUSTRIES FORCE”, with the same name of the Facebook group to give continuity to digital internal communication activities. The goal of the new communication app was the further improvement of internal communication, thus having a positive impact on the relations between employees and the management (Mazzei, 2018). The app shares the corporate mission and the business targets, as well as it informs employees on a regular basis, regardless of their roles and locations on the various Group companies. The “LEM INDUSTRIES FORCE” application is therefore a key tool to have a common vision of the company future. At the end of the lockdown, employees needed reassurance about their future and the company’s first step was to work to ensure a better dialogue through this new communication platform. The new tool was appreciated with great enthusiasm by the employees (in terms of subscriptions, participation, sentiment, etc.) and this result confirmed the idea of the top management to create an owned media ecosystem that has as its primary goal the engagement of internal publics.

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1 In Italy, from the end of March until the first week of May, there was a national lockdown decided by the government and most of the companies and production lines were closed, including those of LEM Industries Group.

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