

The present and future of strategic communication in Asia Pacific

Seven starting points for discussion for this year's first Asia-Pacific Communication Monitor

BY ANA ADI AND JIM MACNAMARA

The Communication Monitor series – both European and Latin American – have been providing us with exciting insights into the status and challenges of strategic communication. It was therefore only a matter of time until the research team would also focus on one of the most rapid moving and fast paced regions in the world: Asia Pacific.

Questions of how communication creates value in the region as well as whether mass media are losing their leading and influential role in shaping public opinion are of great interest here. The answers can point us to new trends

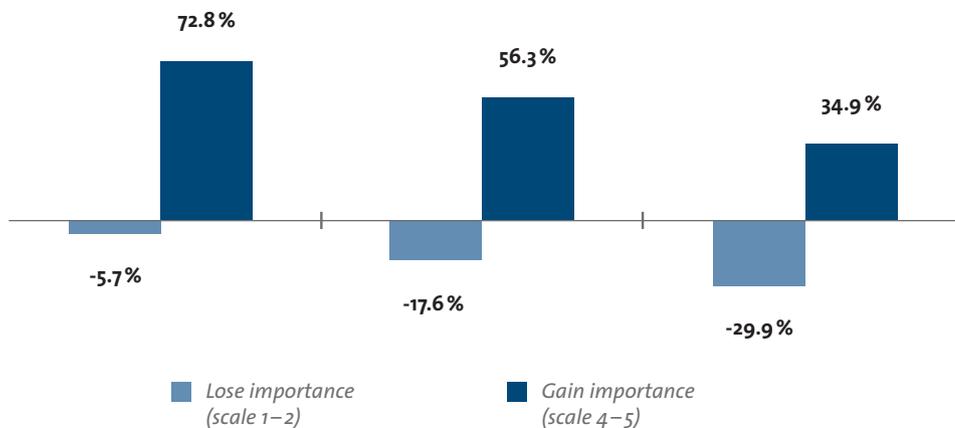
as well as to the skills that practitioners feel they need in order to adapt to be successful in future. In this respect, social media and measurement play a central role in this year's edition of the Asia-Pacific Communication Monitor, as does job satisfaction. In this article, we look at the standout findings of the report.

Future and relevance of mass media

Communicators in Asia Pacific foresee an increase in use and importance of owned media (56.3 per cent) well beyond tradi-

tional corporate publishing and websites. As Macnamara (2014a, 2015) suggests, these include new content formats such as sponsored content and 'native advertising'. While enabling communicators to reach more people in more creative ways and controlling their content, the rise of owned media brings multiple challenges. On the one hand, the skillset and competencies that professionals will need will change. On the other hand, the blurring of boundaries between journalism and public relations as well as between peer communications and public relations will undoubtedly raise questions about transparency and ethics.

Figure 1 Future relevance of media for strategic communications: earned and owned media are rising in importance; inconsistent views on paid media



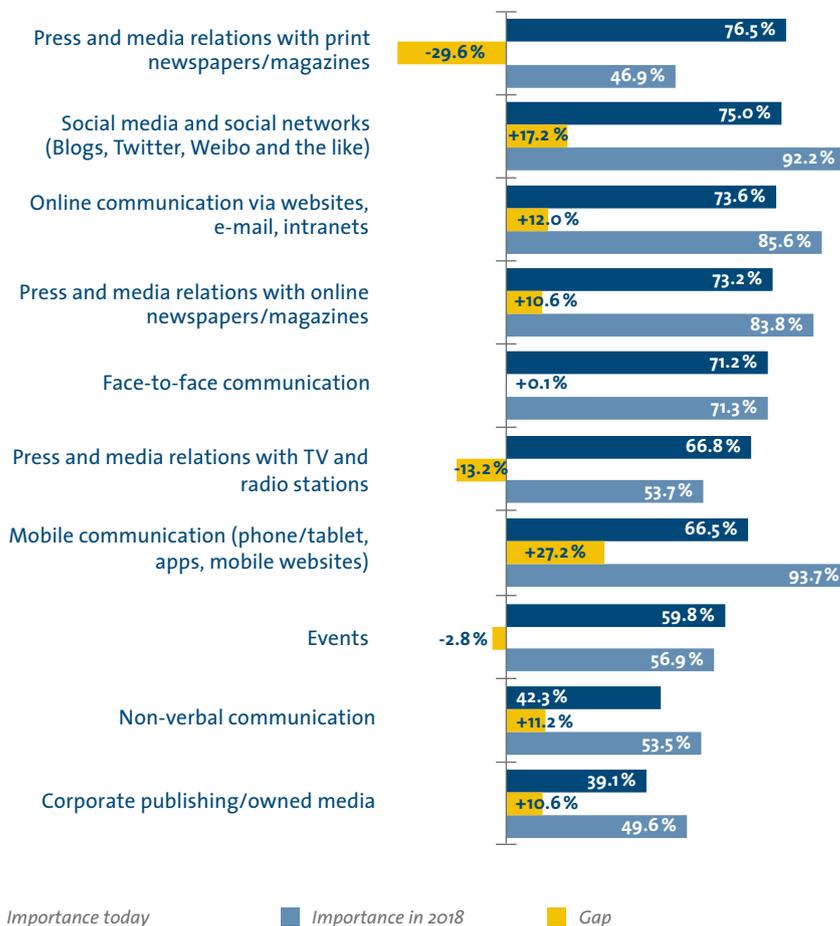
www.communicationmonitor.asia / n = 1,200 PR Professionals from 23 countries. Scale 1 (Lose a lot of importance) – 5 (Gain a lot of importance).

Communication channels and instruments

Social media and traditional media are almost equally important in the eyes of Asia-Pacific communicators. Social media are rated as the most important channels in the Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam and China. Traditional press/media relations remain important in most countries, but are particularly important in Japan, India, Hong Kong and Malaysia.

Interestingly, face-to-face communication is seen as declining in importance in a number of Asian countries between now and 2018, most notably in the Philippines (from 86.8 to 73.7 per cent seeing it as important) and Taiwan (from 58 to 48 per cent); while in Japan, China and Hong Kong for instance it is seen as increasingly important. The wide adoption of social media in Asia Pacific could well be one of the reasons for these changes.

Figure 2 Expected development of communication channels in Asia-Pacific until 2018



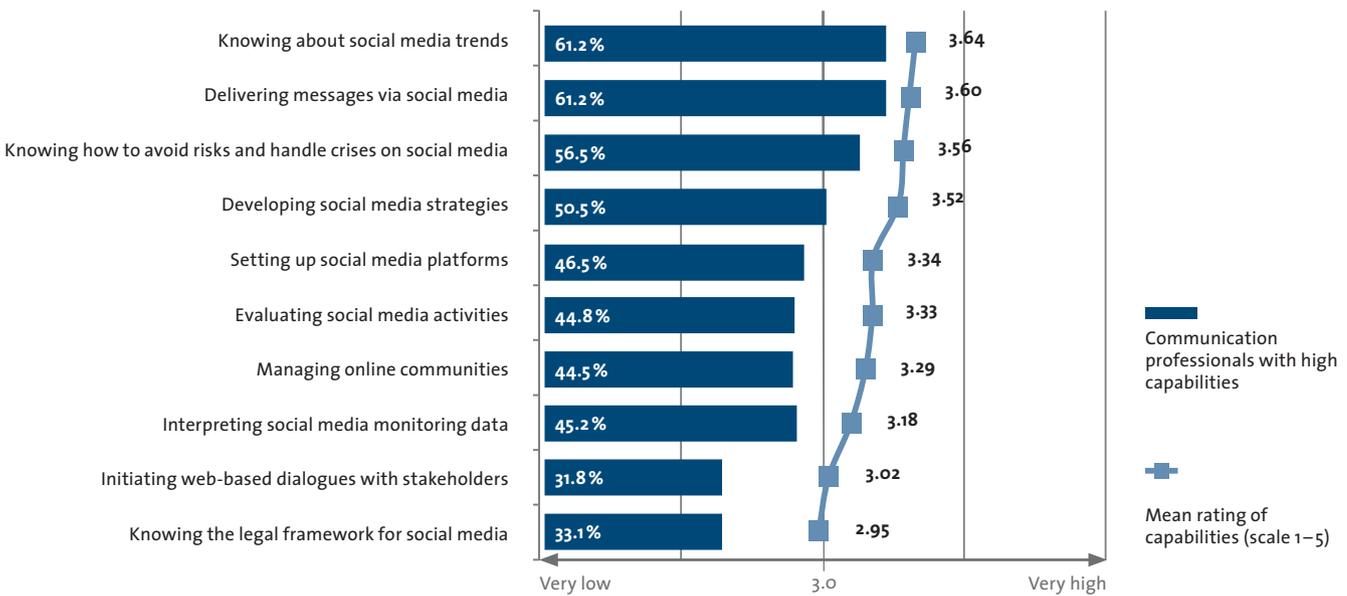
www.communicationmonitor.asia / nmin = 1,148 PR Professionals. Scale 1 (Not important) – 5 (Very important). Percentages: Frequency based on scale points 4-5.

Social media skills and knowledge

Social media may well be rising in perceived importance as a means of shaping public opinion, however its use comes with increased pressure on communicators to up-skill. While 60 per cent of the participants say they know about trends in social media, fewer feel confident when it comes to setting up social media platforms (46.5 per cent),

interpreting social media monitoring data (45.2 per cent) or, more importantly, evaluating social media activities (44.8 per cent). This is perhaps the reason why most corporations in the region use social media in traditional ‘broadcast’ ways – i.e., focused on speaking rather than two-way communication including listening (Macnamara, 2013, 2014b, 2016).

Figure 3 Social media skills and knowledge: Communication professionals in Asia Pacific report moderate capabilities



www.communicationmonitor.asia / n = 1,200 PR professionals from 23 countries. Scale 1 (Very low) – 5 (Very high). Percentages: Frequency based on scale points 4-5 / Mean values.

Strategic issues and value contribution

Given that communication professionals in Asia Pacific see social media and mobile communications as the most important developments in the field, and the modest levels of social media skills and knowledge reported, it is perhaps not surprising that coping with the digital evolution and social web is perceived as the most important issue for communi-

cation management in Asia Pacific over the next three years (53.1 per cent). For professionals in India, the Philippines and China this is their utmost priority, while for communicators in Japan and Vietnam it is the linking of business strategy and communication that is seen as more important.

In terms of demonstrating the value of communications, communicators in the region usually revert to “explaining positive effects of good reputation, organ-

isational culture and brands” (79.8 per cent) rather than to “pointing out the demand for communication and transparency by mass media” (56.6 per cent). This could indicate the existence of potential misperceptions of the communication profession in the region, which forces communicators to focus on explaining and justifying the benefits of the practice rather than on operational matters.

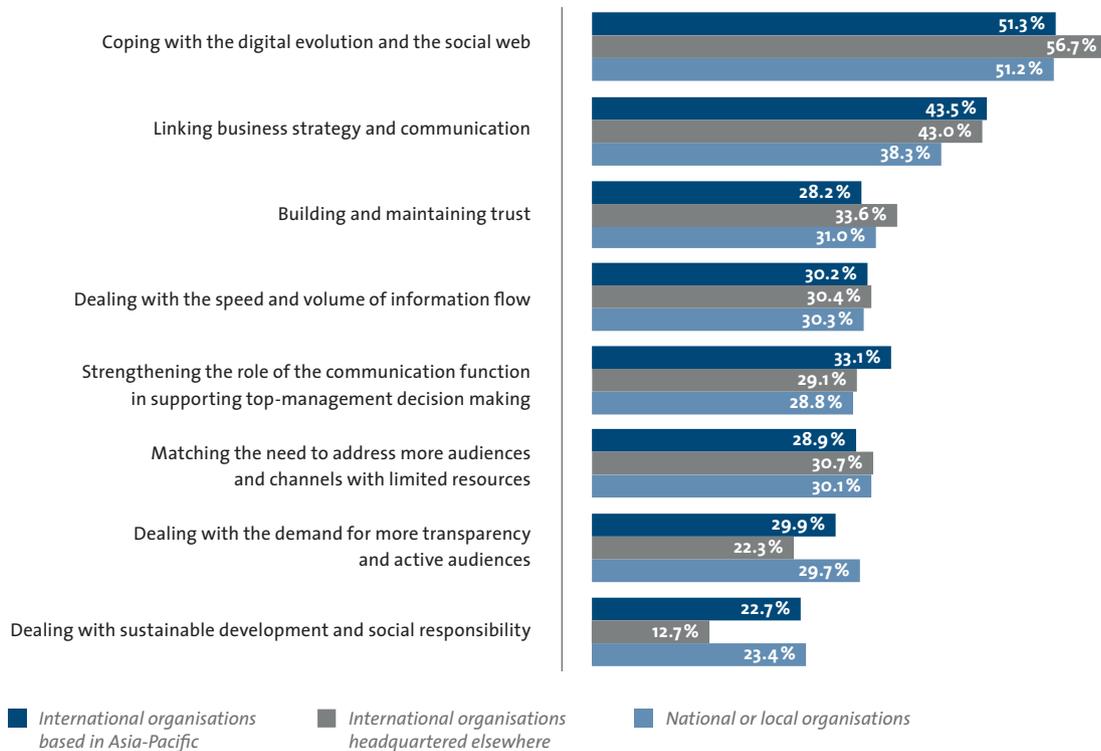


Figure 4 Organisations with different regional background and scope rate important issues mostly similar – but CSR, transparency, and trust are valued differently

www.communicationmonitor.asia / n = 1,200 PR professionals from 23 countries.

Measurement and evaluation in communication departments

Assessing results and processes of communication enables practitioners to demonstrate the value of their activities. Communicators in Asia Pacific however focus heavily on media clippings and response (85.6 per cent), internet/intranet use (67.8 per cent) and internal client satisfaction (66.2 per cent). These are generally measuring ‘outputs’, making the profession backward facing and showing a great need to integrate other measures, particularly ‘outcome’ such as audience and stakeholder awareness and positive attitudes, as well as ‘outflows’ such as impact on financial/strategic targets or intangible/tangible resources).

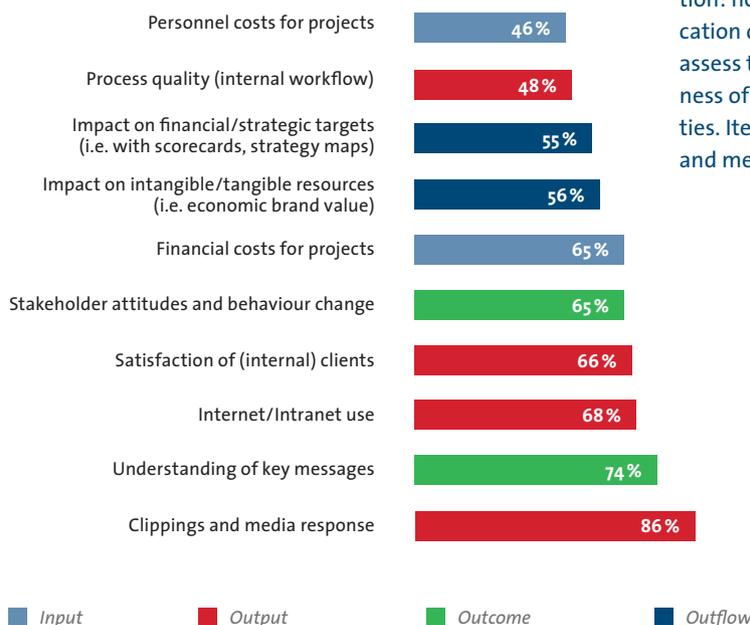


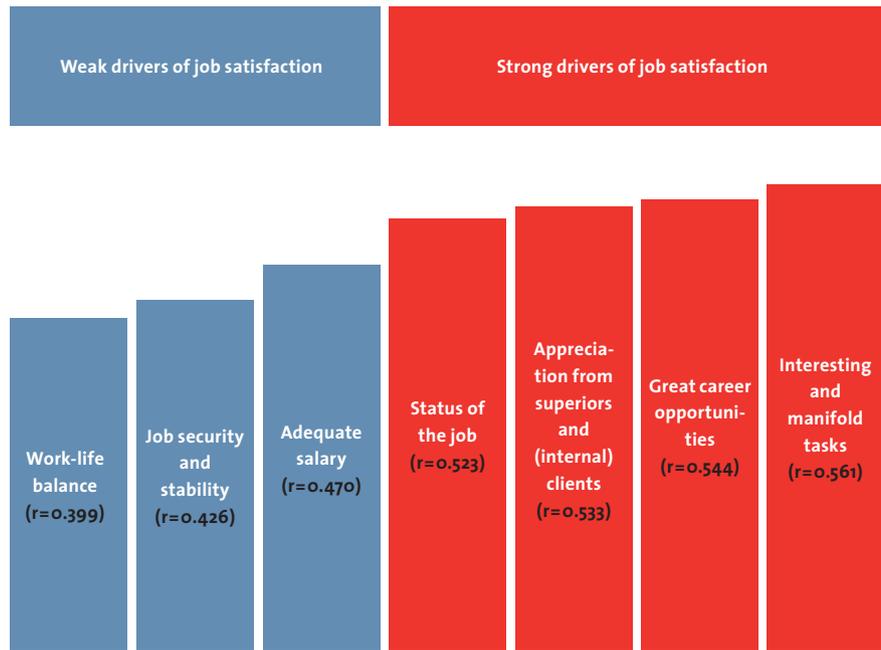
Figure 5 Measurement and evaluation: how communication departments assess the effectiveness of their activities. Items monitored and measured.

www.communicationmonitor.asia / nmin = 847 PR professionals in communication departments. Scale 1 (Do not use at all) – 5 (Use continuously). Percentages: Frequency based on scale points 4-5.

Job satisfaction

In Asia Pacific, overall job satisfaction among communication professionals is fairly high with the majority of respondents (65.4 per cent), with a little more than 10 per cent of respondents declaring themselves not satisfied with their jobs. The pattern is generally similar across the countries researched. Communicators in the Philippines and Japan report slightly higher levels of satisfaction in comparative terms, with about three out of four saying they are satisfied with their jobs.

The study has shown that the strongest contributor to job satisfaction is the diversity of the tasks performed, followed closely by career opportunities and appreciation from superiors and/or clients. Recognition is therefore very important for communicators in the region. This is also reflected in the stark differences among respondents placed higher in their organisational hierarchy: heads of communications and agency CEOs report higher levels of job satisfaction than unit leaders, who in turn are more positive than team members.



www.communicationmonitor.asia / n = 1,183 PR professionals. Scale 1 (Strongly disagree) – 5 (Strongly agree). Pearson correlation based on overall satisfaction as metric variable (highly significant, $p \leq 0.01$).

Figure 6 Drivers of job satisfaction for communication professionals in Asia Pacific

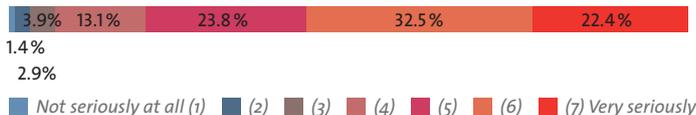
Characteristics of excellent communication functions

Excellence in public relations and communication is based on the internal standing of the communication function within the organisation (influence) and external results of the function's activities as well as the function's basic qualifications (performance). The Asia-Pacific Communication Monitor shows that there are significant differences between excellent communication departments and all other departments. For instance, excellent communication departments are more likely to be led by a chief communication officer who is a member of the executive board or reports directly to the CEO or highest decision maker.

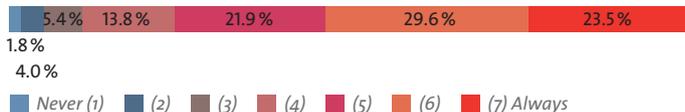
Equally, excellent communication departments use a broad variety of rationales (such as reputational effects, thought leadership and crisis preparedness) to explain the value of communication and employ wider and more complex monitoring and measurement of their activities. This makes them better in assessing business impact and stakeholder reactions, which in turn makes these departments have a stronger strategic input into their organisations. ●



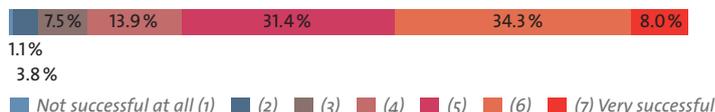
Advisory influence



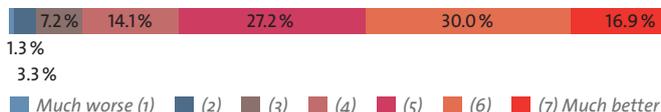
Executive influence



Success



Competence



www.communicationmonitor.asia / n = 901 PR professionals in communication departments. Scale 1–7 (wording see above). Percentages: Excellent communication functions based on scale points 6–7 for each question.

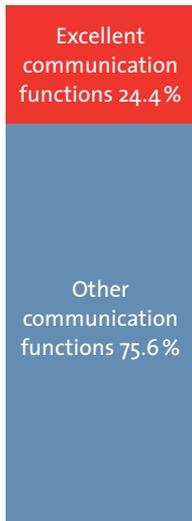


Figure 7 Excellent communication departments



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The Asia-Pacific Communication Monitor 2015/16 survey on the status quo and trends of communication management across Asia-Pacific is jointly organised by the Asia-Pacific Association of Communication Directors (APACD), Quadriga University of Applied Sciences and the European Public Relations Education and Research Association (EUPRERA). Supported by PRIME Research International, a global leader in strategic communication research, the international survey is based on replies from 1,200 communication professionals in 23 countries.

A research group of professors from leading universities in several countries, led by Professor Jim Macnamara, Associate Professor May O. Lwin, Professor Ana Adi and Professor Ansgar Zerfass, has conducted the project for the first time in the region. *The full report (102 pp.) is available online for free at www.communicationmonitor.asia*

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