In Practice

Corporate Image Reinforcement in an Era of Terrorism through Integrated Marketing Communication

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ABSTRACT

Over the past decade or so, corporate image has become an essential strategy for many organizations. However, non-profit organizations have only recently adopted this strategy in order to better communicate with their stakeholders. The purpose of this case study is to trace the integrated marketing communication (IMC) strategy of the Magen David Adom (MDA) Society (the Israeli equivalent of the Red Cross) in its attempt to reinforce its corporate image in an era of terrorism. This paper describes a holistic process of reinforcing the MDA Society's corporate image, focusing on the implementation of its corporate communication process through an IMC strategy. The case study described here reveals that corporate image can be reinforced even in an era of terrorism, provided that an effective IMC strategy is developed and successfully implemented.
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INTRODUCTION

Management of many organizations has come to the realization that an organization cannot detach itself from its publics (Abratt and Mofokeng, 2001). The importance of creating and managing a corporate image stems from the fact that corporate image secures a competitive advantage for an individual organization (Balmer and Stotvig, 1997).[1] Thus, the concept of corporate image became a strategic concept that requires planning so as to appeal to all of the firm's stakeholders (Baker and Balmer, 1997; Melewar and Saunders, 2000). It appears, however, that the process of communicating corporate image can pose difficulties for managers since it must be presented to several different audiences (Kedidi and Torfve, 2005).

Corporate communication has been defined as 'the process through which stakeholders perceive that the organization's image and reputation are formed' (Balmer and Gray, 2003). Many non-profit organizations have recently found themselves pondering the correct ways of communicating their

image to their internal and external stakeholders. This issue seems to be critical mainly in times of crisis and in situations such as terrorist attacks. The purpose of this case study is to trace the corporate communication process implemented by the management of the *Magen David Adom* (MDA) Society[2] in building the organization's image in today's age of terrorism.

INTEGRATION OF CORPORATE IMAGE INTO THE COMMUNICATIONS MIX

Whereas in the past management tended to regard integrated marketing communications (IMC) more as the tactical coordination of promotional elements, today it is perceived in terms of strategic integration (Kitchen and Schultz, 2000). According to Holm (2006), only strategically oriented integrated brand communications can help firms reach a sustainable competitive position. The IMC concept has been formulated as: the strategic analysis, choice, implementation and control of all elements of marketing communications that efficiently (best use of resources), economically (minimum costs) and effectively (maximum results) influence transactions between an organization and its existing and potential customers, consumers and clients (Smith *et al.*, 1999).

Since stakeholders are influenced in many different ways, organizations seek to use as many channels and methods as possible to get their message through (Gray and Balmer, 1998). In order to make the integration of this corporate image communications mix more applicable to managers, Miles and Mangold (2004) suggest an effective framework (Figure 1). Internal communications are directed at employees and external communications at customers.

Formal sources of internal communications include the organization's human resources management and public relations (PR) system, which disseminate information through recruitment documents, newspapers and periodicals, and the organization's websites. It is important that messages emanating from the human resources department be consistent with one another and with the organization's other communications (Goetting, 2000). In order to provide clear and consistent messages through these human resource systems, it is imperative to professionally manage the processes of attracting and recruiting employees, training and development, and compensation procedures (Miles and Mangold, 2004).

The second formal source of internal communications is the organization's PR
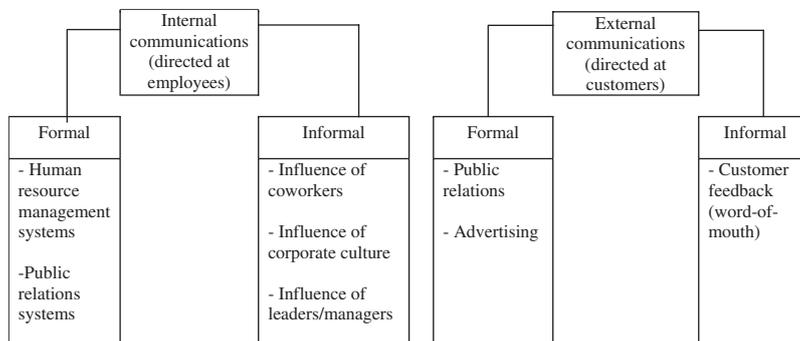
Based on Miles and Mangold (2004)

Figure 1: *Sources of corporate identity communication*
Based on Miles and Mangold (2004)

system. This source plays a major role in directing employees' understanding of the organization's business policies and social values. Advertising messages put forth by the PR system can project a particular image as well as an emotional tone (Mitchell, 2002).

Informal sources of internal communications include co-workers or supervisors, the organization's culture, and its leadership and management, all of whom play an important role in building a corporate image (Miles and Mangold, 2004). The first informal internal source is co-workers. In some cases, information transmitted through co-workers – via interaction or observation – may reflect organizational realities more accurately than the messages transmitted by formal sources. The second informal internal source is the organization's culture. Organizational culture consists of a set of values, norms, standards of behavior and common expectations that send messages to members about the goals they should pursue and how they should behave in order to reach those goals (Jones and George, 2003). The third informal internal source is the organizational leadership and management. Charismatic leaders in any organization typically help their subordinates understand the organization's values and vision and are able to communicate a plan for achieving that vision (Burns, 1978).

External communications, directed at customers, likewise emanate from both formal and informal sources. Formal sources of external communications include public relations and advertising. Advertising is considered to be a powerful tool in comparison with public relations, since the organization has the ability to control and supervise it. Managers must understand that messages transmitted to external stakeholders through public relations and advertising must be consistent with the messages transmitted to internal stakeholders. Informal sources of external communications include customer feedback and word of mouth. Word-of-mouth communication is highly credible, compared with the organization's formal communications and the messages conveyed through media advertising (Bone, 1995; Herr et al., 1991).

AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE MDA CORPORATE IMAGE AND COMMUNICATION EFFORT

The MDA is charged with saving human lives, both routinely and in emergency situations. It is a non-profit organization run by means of 12 regional centers located throughout the country, which provide maximal coverage enabling the organization to fulfill its functions. The MDA's main objectives include, among others, providing first-aid services and maintaining a storage service of blood, plasma and their by-products. In addition, the organization supplies instruction in first-aid, pre-hospital emergency medicine, maintains a volunteer infrastructure and trains them in the provision of first-aid and basic and advanced life support, transports patients and women in labor, evacuates people injured in accidents and transports doctors, nurses and medical auxiliary forces.

The MDA like any other Red Cross society in the world is based on five values: humanity (the respect and protection of human life and health), neutrality (avoiding taking sides in hostilities), independence (based on the idea of voluntarism rather than profit), unity (coverage of the entire country) and universality (sharing the International Red Cross organization's liability).

During the past several decades, the MDA has enjoyed a most positive image. Being an extremely vital organization that receives daily exposure by various media channels (due to its important roles in the Israeli reality), the organization has enjoyed a high capability for raising funds from local authorities, health funds, the general Israeli public as well as for obtaining significant contributions from the Jewish community

and friends of the MDA societies throughout the world.

Over the years, the communication activity of the organization originated from sporadic management decisions and from local needs. The internal and external, formal and informal communication activities stemmed from management's decision to voice specific issues that were on the agenda at the time. For example, every year, the organization used television media mainly by launching a campaign based on the organization's image message, about two weeks before the annual fundraising drive. In order to solicit blood donations from the general public, the organization positioned its mobile blood collection units in city centers throughout the country and using local stands located adjacent to the units, collected blood donations. Through such activity, the organization strengthened its bond with the community and met its goal of collecting a large number of blood donations. In order to recruit new volunteers, the organization fully collaborated with the Ministry of Education, which enabled MDA to visit high schools and talk to students about the organization's activities. Such visits included various demonstrations intended to show students that they have the capability to save lives, and thus pique their interest and bond them to the most powerful organization in the country in the area of life saving. Similar to its previous activity, here too the organization succeeded in tying its activities to the community itself, and students who volunteered in the organization felt they were serving the community in which they live. In order to raise monetary contributions in Jewish communities throughout the world, the organization acted through its contact people – heads of Jewish communities throughout the world, and invited them to visit the organization's facilities, submitting an annual report that informed them about the organization's various activities. Such visits were widely covered by reporters from different countries and were later publicized in the local press of each community.

These communication activities were characterized as being performed during a period of calm and routine, were focused on issues that at the time seemed important to the organization, often stemmed from internal or external pressures and were performed with no leading management-communications strategy. They can be regarded as one-dimensional activities, tactics that served the proclaimed objectives of the MDA management. During that period, the motto of all such communications activities was to present the *organization* as a 'hero'. The emphasis was on the organization, its important contribution to society as a voluntary organization with a significant contribution, primarily in the area of life saving. The organization strove to build an image that would assist it both in recruiting more volunteers, mainly from among high school students, and in raising blood donations and funds. In these areas, the objective of the communications, and specifically the external communications, was to form an image for the MDA that would be favored over that of other voluntary organizations.

Terrorism Raises its Head

In early 2000, with the escalation of terrorism and its becoming an integral part of daily life in Israel, the organization found itself in a completely new situation. Whereas in the past, the organization came across as a first-class humane and neutral organization whose history was intertwined with the life of the country throughout all of its rough periods, it was now beginning to be perceived more as an estranged body, disconnected from the community and from the people; it was also perceived as less reliable. The reasons for this modified image stemmed from the new situation that was forced on the organization, which required it to change the nature of its activities during terrorist

events, the frequency of which was increasing. The organization was forced to increasingly disengage from its ongoing community-related activities and from its contact with high school volunteers, as well as from potential blood donors. In addition, the high rate of terrorist attacks and the difficulty in adapting to the new work routine led the organization to operate under difficult conditions, often providing inaccurate reports that created a feeling among the public of an unprofessional organization that was not performing its job properly. As a result, management made a strategic decision to strengthen the organization's image. To that end, management began strategic communications planning with the objective of using the organization's activities as a life-saving organization in an era of local terrorism to reinforce its image in the eyes of all of its audiences. In order to implement this objective, management decided to cease all of its sporadic marketing communications intended for the short term and to adopt a communications policy that would serve the organization and its clients in the new situation.

IMC STRATEGY IN THE SHADOW OF TERRORISM

MDA's management decided to work systematically in three stages. First, characteristics of terrorist events were identified and defined, primarily from an image-communications perspective; objectives and activities were formulated for the organization and the stakeholders involved in such were mapped, as described in Table 1.

In the second stage of the process, management consolidated the central value that was to constitute the core of the new organizational image. An analysis of terrorist attack characteristics and activities performed during their occurrence, as specified in Table 1, indicated the function and unique contribution of the service providers at the scene. Management realized that an image

that relies on individuals who are at the scene can contribute to the reinforcement of the organization's image and reputation much more than an image that is based on the organization as a holistic and abstract entity. The organization's target audiences more easily identify with the service providers and their personal stories than with general organizational activity. It was therefore decided to shift the focus from 'the organization as a hero' to 'service providers as heroes'.

In the third stage, management decided to adopt an IMC strategy in order to assimilate and implement the new image. At this stage, the organization had to find the best ways to communicate its new 'service profiles as heroes' corporate image to its internal audiences (workers and volunteers) and to its external audiences (the general public, health funds, governmental agencies and the media) based on the characteristics of terrorist events.

Following is a description of the IMC strategy adopted by the MDA, both to introduce the change in its corporate image, and more currently, to ensure that the organization's messages are communicated accurately on an ongoing basis.

Formal Internal Communications

After examining the various communication channels available to the organization, management decided that formal internal messages would be disseminated via human resources management and PR systems.

After the organization decided to base its corporate image on the concept of presenting its employees and volunteers as 'heroes', all levels of the organization's personnel had to be made aware of the organization's conceptual change and new value. To that end, management, assisted by the human resources department, compiled a collection of procedures in which all possible cases and scenarios of multi-casualty terrorist events were described. According to

Table 1: Relationship between Terrorist Event Characteristics, Objectives and Activities, and Target Audiences

Characteristics of terrorist events from a communications perspective	Organization's objectives and activities	Entities involved – Internal stakeholders	Entities involved – External stakeholders
High degree of surprise	To ensure maximal mobilization of organization personnel and to direct them to the scene of the event	Spokesperson, regional managers, paramedics and medical assistants	General public, media, public at the scene
Involvement of multiple rescue agencies (army, police, fire brigade)	To be first on the scene among all rescue agencies	Regional managers, paramedics and medical assistants	General public, media, government agencies
Disturbance on the part of the general public and media	To carry out an educational process of decision making regarding casualty evacuation order, evacuation destinations, on-site medical treatment; dealing with families of casualties	Regional managers, paramedics and medical assistants, volunteers	General public, media
Interruptions in communications due to collapse of communication systems	To work according to preset procedures in order to prevent disaster	Spokesperson, regional managers, paramedics and medical assistants	General public, media
Limitations in the release of information due to security and personal dignity considerations	To provide objective and reliable information within reasonable time, even if is partial	Spokesperson, regional managers, paramedics and medical assistants	General public, media, government agencies, donors
Immediate investigation and learning of lessons at end of event	To improve preparedness for future terrorist attacks and to issue improved procedures	Director General, spokesperson, regional managers, event manager, organization personnel and media	Government agencies, army, police, fire brigade, hospital directors, local government (heads of local authorities), donors

the procedures, no one other than the spokesperson has the authority to issue notices to external entities during a terrorist event. This ensures utmost accuracy in the transmission of messages by a central entity that has control over the entire operation, thus preventing incorrect messages that might generate unnecessary fear, confusion and loss of precious time, as well as impairing judgment during the decision-making process. Adherence to the procedures imparts greater security to the organization's personnel even if communication systems collapse. A clear division of labor exists, whereby organization personnel know exactly who is authorized to report to the media and what they are permitted to say. Since this issue is vital in order to ensure the provision of objective information without creating needless panic, the organization's spokesperson has constructed a communications workshop. The workshop provides each of the organization's employees and volunteers with an overview of the way in which the general public, from their perspective, sees the organization during a terrorist event. Participation in this workshop is mandatory for all organization personnel and it is held annually in each of the organization's 12 regional centers. During the workshop, the spokesperson selects several senior, high-level employees and above, all have highly developed verbal skills. These employees will serve as temporary spokespeople and ambassadors of the organization during a terrorist event. In addition, the MDA also makes extensive use of its PR system, mainly through special events and an internal newsletter.

The newsletter reports on the success of the organization in meeting its tasks, structural changes that have taken place or that are planned to be implemented, promotions at the various regional centers and snapshots of organization life with respect to local activity of each of the 12 national centers and to the tightening of relations between them. The newsletter also serves as a first-class

communications tool for the dissemination of information obtained in investigations that are conducted following each terrorist event, with the objective of improving and being better prepared for future events. The organization makes sure that when the investigation results of a terrorist event warrant a change in the organization's procedures, the change is implemented immediately and is disseminated through the intranet so that it permeates immediately and the employees can prepare accordingly for the next event.

Informal Internal Communications
MDA management is well aware of the importance of disseminating informal messages with the objective of reinforcing the organization's image among its employees. This is manifested in various activities, such as spontaneous events that are held at each of the organization's 12 regional centers. Such events include private employee parties and the celebration of birthdays, marriages, birth of children and so on. Such events enhance the employees' pride as members of a team in a unique organization that plays a central role in a terrorist-stricken country. Through such events, the organization enables its employees to relax, connecting to the personal life stories of other employees, which bond the employees and impart a true feeling of a small family (the national center) within a larger family (the entire organization).

The informal information communicated at these events has helped the MDA build its reputation as a fair and sensitive employer in terms of work conditions, employer–employee relationships and the organization's willingness to support its employees.

Informal messages are also communicated through the interactions of employees with their managers. Since management believes that the organization can best express its values if employees can learn from their own and others' mistakes, they have, over the years, established an 'open door' policy that

encourages employees at all levels to meet them whenever they believe that the company's mission, values and/or principles are not being upheld by supervisors and managers. The organization's spokesperson also encourages all employees to submit any idea or suggestion they might have for improvement; they all have the spokesperson's direct phone number and are guaranteed a meeting within one week, at the latest, from the time of such a request.

Formal External Communications

The MDA also makes extensive use of its PR system to help new volunteers internalize the company's mission and new values, by presenting stories that focus on individual employees and mainly on volunteers who have saved lives in one of the terrorist events. Such people are perceived by high school students as heroes and it is, therefore, much easier to recruit them by presenting role models.

The advertising strategy of the MDA entails communicating its message through every available media source. External advertising falls into two main categories: (1) The internet allows the organization to present to the general public the organization's values and mainly the uniqueness of the service provided by each of the organization's personnel. (2) A television campaign focuses on the importance of contributing funds/money to the organization. This television campaign is designed to increase awareness of both present and potential donors and focuses on the organization's personnel as heroes. It depicts personal stories of employees and volunteers in several areas throughout the country, in order to form a connection between local citizens and the organization (Plates 1 and 2).

PR activities are considered crucial for the MDA's efforts to communicate their values and image. To that end, the organization holds annual press conferences at which the Director General and the spokesperson present reporters with the main findings of the investigations they conducted during the work year and information on actions that were taken in order to better prepare for future terrorist attacks. In addition, immediately after each terrorist event, organization managers meet representatives of the army, police, fire brigade and heads of local government to share their experience to improve communication and cooperation between the various authorities. Immediately after each serious terrorist event, the spokesperson invites reporters from all media to visit the organization's stations and learn about the difficulties and challenges that the organization faces and about the way in which the organization prepares itself. Such meetings also expose the human aspect of events from the perspective of the organization's employees and volunteers. Reporters are also invited to observe the annual MDA exercise intended to prepare the organization for anticipated terrorist attacks.

Informal External Communications

Informal external messages come in the form of citizens' feedback and word-of-mouth communications. MDA management

Plate 1: Illustration of MDA personality

Plate 2: Illustration of MDA external communication

encourages citizens to express both positive and negative opinions about their experiences and expectations from the organization. In this way, management hopes to be able to respond quickly, to improve service as required and to ensure that it is considerate, caring, personal and professional. The MDA, like any other professional company, is aware that word of mouth is the most important form of advertising available. The organization endeavors to learn how the image of the organization is communicated at events such as nationwide fundraising and blood-donor drives in shopping and city centers throughout the country.

Owing to the great interest created as a result of the change described above in the organization's image and its focus on the people themselves, Israel's primary television channel created an original drama series featuring the personal stories of MDA employees before, during and after a terrorist event, with an emphasis on the life of the organization's employees and volunteers and on their experiences. The television series, which won several awards as the best original drama series, conveys the essence of the organization to the general public better than extensive communication campaigns have done in the past. This program generated considerable media attention among the general public in Israel and ratings peaked at about 20 percent.

CONCLUSIONS AND RESULTS

The success of the new corporate image communication process is evident among the internal and external audiences of the MDA society; employees seem to be more committed than ever to acting according to the new procedures established within the framework of the organization's overall corporate image, which is based on the characteristics of terrorist events.

Employees are now more aware of their conduct during terrorist events, in terms of issuing messages to the media, and this has strengthened relations between employees and management. Employees and volunteers also feel greater identification with the organization than in the past and, in fact, most of the focus now is on them and on their actions. In light of the new image, there is great demand, especially on the part of high school students to volunteer and be part of the professional rescue teams that operate at an extraordinary work pace and to belong to an organization that promises unique experiences.

Surveys (Brain Storming Research Institute, 2004–2006) conducted over the past two years indicate that the receptiveness of the general public has improved considerably due to the fact that the focus is on the employees rather than on the organization. It seems that the various media are exhibiting greater sympathy and openness that

result from their becoming more familiar with the MDA. Today, the organization is perceived, both by the general public and by the media, as reliable and as a leader in the area of dissemination of information from the field. This is manifested in surveys (Brain Storming Research Institute, 2006) that show that, compared with information received from organizations such as the armed forces, the police and the fire brigade, information received from MDA is considered to be more reliable and more available. Whereas in the past, other non-profit organizations refrained from cooperating with the organization, today organizations such as the Israeli Women's Lobby and the Association of the Deaf do so.

Cooperation exists also with for-profit organizations, such as a joint effort between MDA and one of the country's leading banks and with a leading retail chain in order to raise money for a common social cause. A survey (Brain Storming Research Institute, 2006) presented recently at a conference dealing with the management of non-profit organizations in Israel indicates that MDA is perceived as the third most important of all Israeli non-profit organizations in its contribution to the state and to its citizens. According to the organization's managers, it is easier today to collect blood donations following a terrorist event, as well as donations from citizens and from Jewish communities and friends' societies throughout the world. The organization's new image as conveyed also to external agencies in the world has significantly assisted it to gain full membership in the International Federation of Red Cross. In addition, the MDA's image has afforded it the right to partake in multi-casualty events throughout the world, such as the earthquake in Turkey, as well as other humane activities in Ethiopia and even to assist with terrorist events taking place along the Egypt–Israel border.

It appears that the most difficult aspect of building a corporate image is the communication process, particularly in crisis situations, because the new image must be communicated to each and all target audiences. Our analysis of the MDA corporate image communication process ensures assimilation of the organization's values by both internal and external audiences. The success of this undertaking on the part of the MDA Society can serve as a model for other organizations both in the non-profit voluntary sector and in the profit sector, in their efforts to communicate their new images to their internal and external stakeholders.

NOTES

1 On the other hand, a negative image can weaken competitive advantage. We thank an anonymous reviewer for calling our attention to this fact.
2 The Israeli Red Cross.

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