

VILNIUS UNIVERSITY

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Strategic institutional communication  
management and its contribution to  
institutional excellence in private  
entrepreneurial universities

**SUMMARY OF DOCTORAL DISSERTATION**

Social Sciences,  
Management S 003

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VILNIUS 2019

This dissertation was written between 2014 and 2019 (Vilnius university Kaunas faculty, Institute of Social Sciences and Applied Informatics)

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## Acknowledgments

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincerest gratitude to researchers, who supervised and reviewed my scientific activities during my doctoral studies in Vilnius University Kaunas faculty: to the dean Assoc. prof. Dr. Driaunys, to dr. G. Romeika, head of the Institute of Social Sciences and Applied Informatics, and to the colleagues from the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration in Vilnius for their valuable consultations in the very last months of this long journey.

I am very grateful to my supervisor Prof. dr. Dalia Štreimikienė for her unwavering support, especially when my self-confidence began to fade.

Of course, this dissertation would have never been finished without the silent, hidden, but equally significant work of our institute administrator Vaidilutė Kaminskienė and other colleagues at the central offices: doctoral studies department and the international relations office.

Special thanks to the institutions I had the great pleasure to visit for my fieldwork: Universidad de Navarra (Spain) and Universidad Austral (Argentina): prof. Juan Manuel Mora, Begoña Echevarne, Dr. Marcela Pizarro and so many others. I also feel grateful to my work colleagues for their interest in the process and happy ending of this stage in my professional path.

I will always remember with enormous gratitude the warmth and openness I experienced during my Erasmus fellowship at Universitat Internacional de Catalunya (UIC Barcelona, Spain), in particular the sincere dedication and interest of Prof. Méndiz Noguero, dr. Pilar Buil and so many others. The wonderful months spent in UIC Barcelona gave me the so much needed inner strength to continue till the finish line.

I would be nothing without my family, so with all my heart I thank God for having each of them in my life: my mum, my sister Lichi, my brothers Juan, Edu and Tomás, their spouses and children, a source of joy and unconditional love.

I am eternally grateful to my closest Kaunas friends in Žemaičių st., my Vilnius friends in Algirdo st.; also my dear Barcelona friends in Milanesat and so many others in Argentina. They have stood by me along these four years like a real family with tender care, tangible expressions of true friendship and lots of patience. I will never be able to repay all the love I have been given.

This doctoral dissertation is dedicated to my beloved father,  
who was an excellent communicator.



## ABSTRACT

The main aim of this dissertation is to identify how strategic institutional communication management contributes to institutional excellence in private entrepreneurial universities, considered as the archetype of contemporary hybrid HEIs. In order to make relevant scientific and managerial contributions, empirical research has been conducted in three private entrepreneurial universities that display some of the identified features of institutional excellence and excellent communication management. The empirical findings shed light on: 1) the importance of the interrelation and integration of the neuralgic trinomial mission-strategy-strategic communication in HEIs; 2) the recommended blended profile for the Communication Director (Dircom) in private entrepreneurial universities, with a declared preference for a communication practitioner and scholar (PhD holder) with full-right membership in the Highest Governance Body of the institution; 3) the coordination of external-internal communications to ensure transversal synergy with clearly established patterns and channels; 4) the urgency of stakeholder mapping and balanced stakeholder engagement in the mission fulfilment; 5) the significance of regular assessment of institutional communication management in accordance to the institutional mission and stakeholder expectations; 6) the suitability of the management-by-mission model for mission-based institutional excellence and the synergetic conciliation of competing institutional logics (Cardona & Rey, 2008); (Marimon, Mas-Machuca, & Rey, 2016); (Rodríguez-Ponce & Pedraja-Rejas, 2015). Theoretical and empirical insights allow to conclude that excellent universities who manage their institutional communication integrally and strategically, may display the features attributed to excellent organizations (Zerfaß et al., 2014); (Vercic & Zerfass, 2016);(Zerfass et al., 2017). Excellent institutions should aspire to have excellent mission-driven communication in order to make institutional excellence visible and sustainable.

Keywords: institutional excellence, strategic institutional communication, mission-driven management/governance, triple institutional mission, excellence in communication management, stakeholders, private entrepreneurial university, competing institutional logics, Institutional Logics Approach, hybrid institutional form.

## INTRODUCTION

### Relevance of the research topic

This thesis deals with two social phenomena in permanent evolution: the university, as a millennial core societal institution and communication, as a manifestation of the social nature of human beings. Institutional theory, in particular, the Institutional Logics Approach (ILA) sheds light on the interplay between competing institutional logics: the logics of business as pervading into the logics of education, with the additional accelerating institutionalization of the communication function in organizations. Modern hybrid institutions, such as entrepreneurial private universities, emerge as a natural consequence of these cross-institutional logic interactions. These Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) face the challenge of striking balance between the fulfilment of the societal mission (the commitment to pursue quality and excellence in accordance to the promises made to their stakeholders as declared in their unique mission statements) and the urge to maintain their earned license to operate in the competitive Higher Education (HE) sector.

The author highlights the important fusion between communication as a strategic function and the university, as an institution with an urgent need to communicate properly with its publics in a highly market-oriented environment. Institutional performance is increasingly measured in quantitative terms, quite often dictated by global rankings of university reputation, which in their turn, have become a sort of new institution in itself. Though sadly true, the search of quality and excellence in education may become a luxury only affordable when quantity is no longer the major concern (Cabanas, 2004). Contemporary universities are under the constant pressure for their own sustainability. Thus, quality and excellence are, more often than desirable, too much oriented to tangible results of quantifiable success in order to be catalogued as excellent, because of the plain perks that come together with a high-ranking position. Nevertheless, every university is committed to the triple backbone of excellence: teaching, research and knowledge transfer. In addition, this requires the continuous sap and vitality of strategic institutional communication to make mission-driven pursued or achieved institutional excellence widely known.

Every institution is a social construct and as such it *cannot not* communicate: whatever the institution says, does or fails to do, always communicates something *ad intra* as well as *ad extra* (Hanson, 2014); (Mateus, 2017). Each response to the challenges within its own institutional environment as well as those coming from the social context will leave a trace on the institution's communicative

curriculum. The university, as any other societal institution, must engage in active and transformational communication to provide answers for its *raison d'être*. Excellence of institutional communication in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) can become a flexible means to adapt to social and market demands, as well as contribute to the pursuit of institutional excellence. Thus, strategic institutional communication management ought to be fully aligned and respond to the mission and vision of the organization, its institutional model, the societal expectations and demands. The declared mission of a university should be the North Star that guides institutional endeavours, more independently of the dictum imposed by external requirements, like reputation rankings, league tables and non-mandatory accreditations, as if they were the only official voice of HE quality measurement. The criteria applied by reputation rankings may have an unquestionable validity; however, they may not reflect the excellence achieved by an institution with reference to its commitment with its stakeholders. A university that strives for excellence at all levels of performance may be entitled to deserve excellent reputation. Even though organizations can neither manage nor shape their reputation directly, excellent institutional communication can guarantee a more secure and sustainable path towards institutional excellence, as a bulwark of a long-lasting good reputation, deeply rooted in a cultivated mission-driven institutional identity, which can subsist amidst external pressure and environment changes. The dissertation author believes that the current complexity of HEIs is ripe for new paradigms such as mission-driven strategic institutional communication management. Management-by-mission offers a path towards a more transcendental and a less matter-of-fact vision of institutional communication management, based on strategic processes for key institutional stakeholders' internalization of the shared institutional mission and their identification with the joint pursuit of institutional excellence.

#### Scope of research

As stated in a collective review of existing perspectives on corporate communication (Lars T. Christensen, Cornelissen, Thøger Christensen, & Cornelissen, 2010), most current corporate communication research is focused on the controlled handling and organization of communication; however, too little attention is directed to communication *per se* and to developing updated models of communication with stakeholders. High rank scholars claim that “the field of corporate communication would benefit from a figure ground reversal aimed at a better understanding of how communication organizes (Taylor & Van Every, 2010) rather than the traditional focus on the organization of

communication”. This doctoral dissertation attempts to fill in the open space for theory development in the area of institutional communication management applied to HEIs, as a way to blend the important connections between largely separate traditions of corporate and organizational communication (Lars T. Christensen et al., 2010);(Shelby, 1993); (P. a. Argenti, 1996). The dissertation author adheres the call of prominent strategic communication scholars who advocate the need to expand the scope of strategic communication by integrating more disciplines so as to gain deeper knowledge of such a complex phenomenon (Heide, von Platen, Simonsson, & Falkheimer, 2018). These scholars assert that an organization’s capacity to communicate strategically comprises multiple sub-processes where managers and other employees take part daily and which deserve due attention as constitutive of the overall organizational performance as well as its strategic communication. On their part, communication practitioners clearly understand the urgent need to engage diverse audiences of internal and external stakeholders. They are extremely important co-creators of corporate identity and culture, who ought to be fully aligned with the institutional mission, aided by mission-driven communication management that plays a vital role in the transversal work of deploying the mission across the whole institutional structure. Gregory et al. (Gregory, Invernizzi, & Romenti, 2013) describe communication management as a process which determines how communication is organized and managed and argues that communication management can significantly contribute to corporate reputation, which for the dissertation author is the acknowledgement of achieved quality and pursued excellence. A thorough and rigorous analysis of the communication process in institutions and organizations can ensure that the communication function is structured and focused on activities worth organizational efforts. As a result of purposeful and strategic endeavours, institutions can harvest enhanced reputation that matches their conscientiously sought excellence with the undeniable aid of excellent communication management.

Organizational scholars and rhetoricians (Heath, Taylor, Palenchar, Boyd, & Waymer, 2011) readily acknowledge that negative reputation can nullify long years of hard philanthropic work. Nevertheless, these authors do not go deeper into the communicative processes by which negative corporate reputation has affected the organization. Thus, the effect seems taken for granted, whereas the plausible cause of poorly managed communication process remains underexplored.

Some scholars sustain that there are yet unexplored areas in the context of integrated overall organizational communication and its continuous intentional



and unintentional interactions with all its publics (J. Costa, 2014); (de Aguilera Moyano, Batlle, & Fernández, 2012); (Scheinsohn, 2010). Usually, research and findings of this kind emerge from the needs of and are applied to business or for-profit enterprises. The dissertation author focuses her attention on HEIs, more specifically private entrepreneurial universities, which face the double challenge of remaining competitive market performers and fulfilling the specific mission entrusted to all universities as educational and scientific knowledge cradles.

The level of exploration in the specific area of strategic institutional communication management applied exclusively to universities leaves plenty of room for further research, as few scientific papers deal with this question. Contributions directly related to communication management in contemporary universities are visibly scarce. Five publications have been thoroughly analysed as they deal more or less tangentially with strategic communication in HEI. The study by Sataøen and Wæraas (2016) sheds light on the use of one-stop portals as a strategic communication tool adopted by national governments to build the reputation of the Higher Education sector. Herranz de la Casa et al. (2009) explores the satisfaction level of internal collectives in Spanish HEIs with respect to the internal communication in their institution, highlighting the significance of proactive communication departments to initiate internal assessment. Fernández Beltrán (2007) deals with the actual and potential influence of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the management of internal communication in HEIs. Simancas-González (2016) explores the social function of public Spanish universities in the defence of participative communication and strategic planning of collaborative process initiated by a more inclusive communication department. Tauber (2009) analyses the scope and role of communication in the planning and management of public HEIs in Argentina and claims that governance bodies often fail to consider communication a strategic component.

Mission-driven governance, considered as a key requisite for enduring institutional excellence, has also been explored. Few relevant scientific papers have been found. The first, by Bermejo (Bermejo Muñoz, 2014) offers an anthropological model of prosocial leadership based on the framework of management-by-missions (Cardona & Rey, 2008) and suggests its application to private universities, hence its affinity with this present dissertation. The second work by (Pérez Pérez, 2016) also explores the management-by-mission approach, but in this case applied to the communication management in museums. In the last study, the institutional mission is considered a key variable related to the higher levels of quality achieved by universities, Rodríguez-Ponce Pedraja-Rejas

(2015) assert that there is a causal link from mission to quality, supported by the required internal and external consistency declared in the institutional promise (mission statement) as base for quality assessment. The dissertation author has also analysed abundant scientific articles in as much as some keywords, concepts, models and methods could be of relevance to the topic of this dissertation.

The latest scientific publications related to the main themes discussed in this dissertation reveal further research opportunities. Werder et al. (Werder, Nothhaft, Verčič, & Zerfass, 2018) invite scholars to “embrace an interdisciplinary worldview to further the development of strategic communication” (p.333). Zerfass et al. (Zerfass, Verčič, Nothhaft, & Werder, 2018) make other suggestions for further scholarly efforts directed to building up a conceptual corpus for the created value of strategic communication management to organizational performance and to disclose the resources involved in this value creation process. In the field of university performance and reputation measurements, Collins and Park (Collins & Park, 2016) address HE scholars with the request for “more nuanced accounts of ranking and reputation by scholars of higher education and in particular a greater emphasis on their successes and failures, the competing logics and unexpected outcomes of ranking and their implications for the future of universities” (p.115).

Regarding the expanding scope of the Institutional Logic Approach as part of the wider field of institutional theory, Smets et al. (2015) declare that they “see promising avenues for future research in the more prominent acknowledgement of the artefacts and materials that practitioners use in how institutions are created, maintained and changed to penetrate the micro-level practices in which logics are enacted and adapted” (p.19). Upton et al. (Upton & Warshaw, 2017) state that “of the multiple strategies at play in the universities’ responses to potentially competing values, the creation of new, hybrid logics is of particular interest” (p.89). The same scholars proclaim the concept of hybrid institutional logics as a “promising framework for understanding how universities can and do manage tensions in their mission” (op. cit. p.89). These calls for further research are tackled in this dissertation.

### Formulation of the problem

**Research problem/question:** how does strategic institutional communication management in private entrepreneurial universities contribute to institutional excellence?

**Object of the present study:** strategic institutional communication management in private entrepreneurial universities and its contribution to institutional excellence.

**Aim of the study:** identify how strategic institutional communication management contributes to institutional excellence in private entrepreneurial universities.

Research objectives to achieve the aim:

1. To disclose the importance of strategic institutional communication management for the institutional excellence in private entrepreneurial universities.
2. To define the concepts of strategic institutional communication, private entrepreneurial universities and institutional excellence.
3. To identify the prerequisites that affect the contribution of strategic institutional communication management to the institutional excellence in private entrepreneurial universities.
4. Based on the theoretical insights of strategic communication management, institutional theory and institutional excellence, to provide a theoretical grounding for the linkages between strategic institutional communication management, competing institutional logics and institutional excellence in private entrepreneurial universities.
5. To elaborate a conceptual model that integrates and explains the contribution of mission-driven strategic institutional communication to institutional excellence in private entrepreneurial universities.
6. To empirically assess how the identified prerequisites of strategic institutional communication management affect its contribution to the institutional excellence in private entrepreneurial universities.
7. To provide managerial insights for private entrepreneurial universities to improve their strategic institutional communication management as a strategic component of institutional excellence and to provide suggestions for further research that can expand exploration to other areas of communication management in HEIs.

Scientific novelty of the research and contribution to science

With this dissertation, the author attempts to answer some of the recent calls for further interdisciplinary scholar developments in strategic communication (Werder et al., 2018); (Zerfass et al., 2018), university performance measurements (Collins & Park, 2016) and the further application of the institutional logics perspective to hybrid institutional forms and their management in the specific context of HEIs (Upton & Warshaw, 2017); (Smets, Greenwood, & Lounsbury, 2015).

The dissertation author examines how strategic institutional communication can contribute to create, maintain and transform the institution towards the achievement of institutional excellence in accordance with the triple institutional mission. The author suggests the paradigm of management-by-mission as a suitable model to synergize the competing institutional logics pervading contemporary HEIs, and approaches private entrepreneurial universities as the archetype of hybrid HE institutional form, where she explores how strategic institutional communication management contributes to mission-driven institutional excellence. The author believes one of her contribution is a systematized review of the latest scientific literature and the most significant empirical studies related to institutional logics, institutional excellence, university triple mission, hybrid HE institutional forms and strategic communication. The author advocates an integral view of institutional communication in accordance to the institutional mission and presents a conceptualization for its strategic management in HEIs. A conceptualization of hybrid forms of HEIs resulting from market and education competing institutional logics is also presented to disclose the current combination of business sector expertise in hybrid HEIs capable of dynamic adaptation to fulfil their mission and achieve excellence. The author introduces the mission-driven approach to communication management and overall institutional governance with the management-by-mission paradigm, which endorses the declared focus on mission as a base for the assessment of institutional quality and excellence. The dissertation presents three established constructs (institutional excellence, management-by-mission and excellence in communication management) blended into a conceptual model for mission-driven strategic institutional communication management that contributes to institutional excellence in private entrepreneurial universities. The author also introduces the identification of pre-requisites and features that interact in the competing intra-institutional logics and impact the contribution of strategic institutional communication management on institutional excellence and a methodological framework for empirical research. Finally, a set of comprehensive models applicable to strategic institutional

communication management and its assessment in private entrepreneurial universities are presented as a result of the empirical research.

The dissertation author believes that a solid combination of the latest theoretical contributions from Institutional Logics Approach (ILA-institutional theory) with the most recent developments in strategic communication scholarship can result in relevant additions to advance applicable knowledge of private entrepreneurial universities as the archetype of contemporary HE hybrid institutional forms, where strategic management of communication can lead to a tangible and fruitful contribution to mission-driven pursue of excellence.

#### Practical implications of this thesis

The author believes her dissertation contributes these applicable insights:

- a. A comprehensive strategic institutional communication management model that implies the allocation of an ad hoc full-fledged structural unit with highly qualified staff.
- b. Coordination or joint supervision of external-internal communications by an ad hoc communication management unit that ensures transversal synergy with clearly established patterns and channels.
- c. Enhancement of the internal communication function (place in the organizational structure; resource allocation).
- d. Emphasized significance of stakeholder mapping and balanced stakeholder engagement for mission-driven strategic institutional communication management.
- e. Strategic collaboration to cope with intact demands of academics, executive leadership and administration: ad hoc structural adjustments in the stakeholder-oriented governance of academic units.
- f. Recommended blended profile for the Dircom in private entrepreneurial universities (extensive to other HEIs): preference for communication practitioner and scholar with PhD.
- g. Importance of the interrelation and integration of the neuralgic trinomial mission-strategy-strategic communication in HEIs.
- f. Application of the modern management-by-mission paradigm to strategic institutional communication management in private entrepreneurial universities.
- h. Significance of regular assessment of institutional communication management in accordance to the institutional mission and stakeholder expectations.

i. Further application of managerial implications to public HEIs: urgent need for balanced entrepreneurship for triple mission fulfilment).

### Structure of the thesis

The thesis consists of four parts: a literature review with a theoretical framework and conceptual model for mission-driven strategic institutional communication management in private entrepreneurial universities; a review of previous empirical research findings. The third part introduces the substantiation of the chosen research design and methodology for this study, ending with an empirical research model. In part four, the author presents the empirical research findings, conclusions, research limitations and suggestions for further research.

### Defended propositions

1. Institutional communication contributes to institutional excellence in private entrepreneurial universities when the communication function is integrated into a mission-driven institutional strategy.
2. Strategic institutional communication contributes to institutional excellence in private entrepreneurial universities when the communication management function is entrusted to an empowered and qualified structural unit led by a Director of Communication (DirCom) directly reporting to Higher Governance Body (HGB).
3. Strategic institutional communication contributes to institutional excellence in private entrepreneurial universities when the institution has clearly identified institutional stakeholders and established patterns and channels for their engagement and alignment with the institutional mission and strategy.
4. Strategic institutional communication contributes to institutional excellence in private entrepreneurial universities when the organizational structure facilitates balance between communication centralization and autonomy and the integration of internal and external communication.
5. Strategic institutional communication contributes to institutional excellence in private entrepreneurial universities when there is a regular assessment of mission-oriented generated communication contents and stakeholder relations.

### Research methodology

In order to identify prerequisites as mechanisms that explain phenomena, the researcher has relied on retroductive mode of inference to reconstruct the

conditions for the occurrence of the observed empirical phenomenon (Berth Danermark, 2002);(Blundel, 2007); (Ackroyd & Fleetwood, 2005);.(Easton, 2010);(B Danermark, Ekstrom, Jakobsen, & Karlsson, 2002); (Marschan-Piekkari, R., & Welch, 2011); (Morais, 2015).

Methods: the research design is a collective case study, epistemologically framed under the philosophical stance of critical realism. Data gathering and interpretation methods include: analysis of scientific literature, documents, situation analysis, comparative Web-based content; analysis of empirical findings and designing of theoretical models; triangulation of data sources and methods through combined Web-based content analysis, an exploratory survey questionnaire delivered to Alumni, an experts survey and experts interviews and in-depth with institutional representatives of three private entrepreneurial universities. Limitations are presented at the end of the dissertation, the main being the difficulties in getting responses from students, Alumni and other representatives, because HEIs were not authorized to send requests for research purposes of external scholars.

Literature sources used in this dissertation: the author has consulted and referred to 305 scientific works of scholars affiliated in international and national institutions from Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Denmark, England, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Mexico, Portugal, Slovenia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, the Netherlands and United Kingdom and the USA.

### Dissemination of research results

#### In international and Lithuanian scientific conferences

1. Conference paper: „*Rituals, culture, organizations*“. International scientific-practical conference “Creative Urban Development: culture, business, community“. November 20<sup>th</sup> , 2014. Kaunas, Vilnius University Kaunas Faculty.
2. Conference paper: „*A communicative Approach to Organizational Rituals and their role in Organizational Culture*“. International Conference on Changing World and Social Research I. August 25-28<sup>th</sup>, 2015. Viena, Austria.
3. Conference paper: „*Strategic Communication for Organizational Sustainability*“. 13<sup>th</sup> International Scientific Conference “Management

Horizons in Changing Economic Environment: Visions and Challenges”. September 25-26<sup>th</sup>, 2015. Kaunas, Vytautas Magnus University.

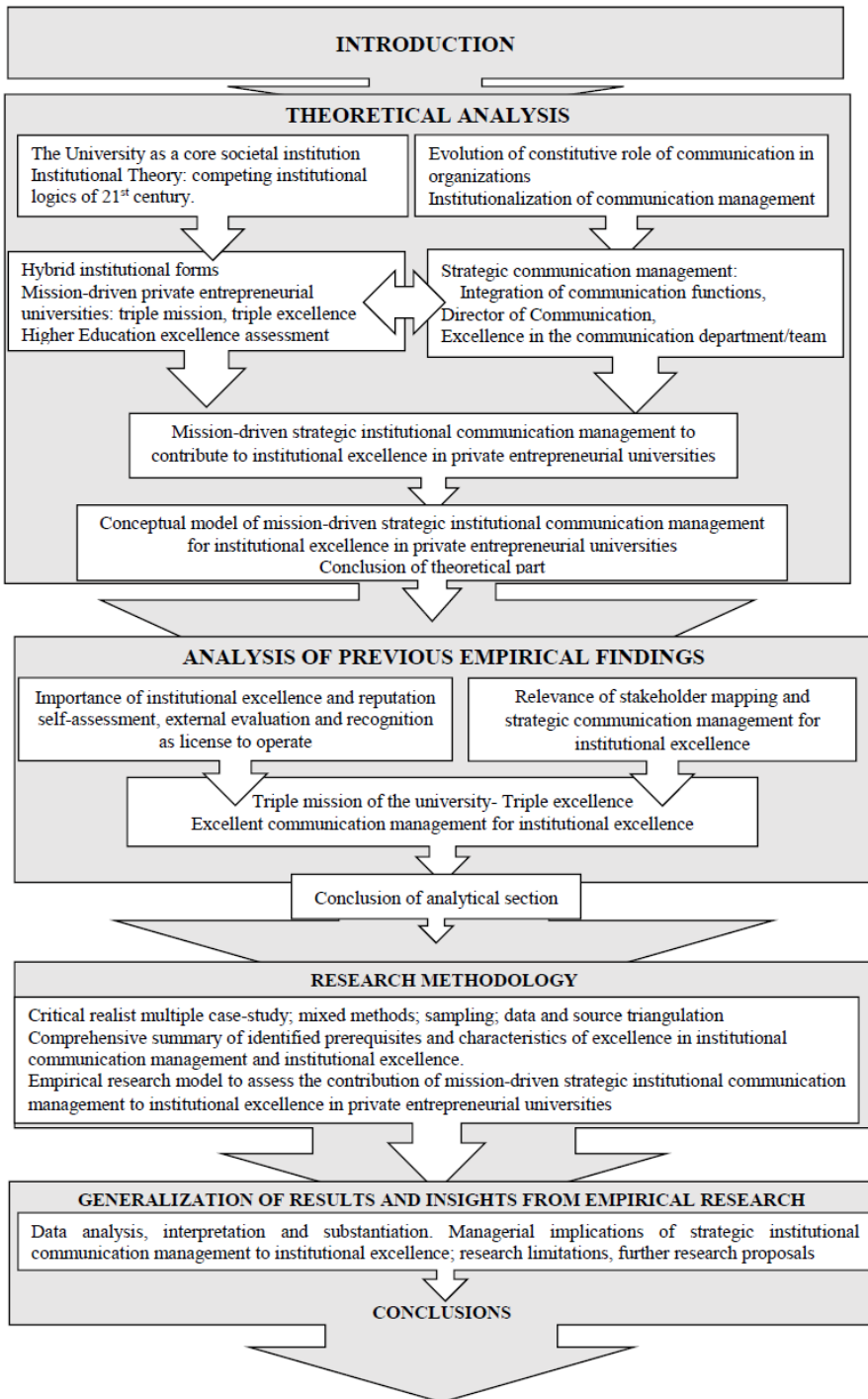
4. Conference paper: “*Strategic communication management in Higher Education institutions. A theoretical framework*”. Presented at national scientific conference “Information and Communication, theory and practice”, held in Vilnius University School of Communication. March 24<sup>th</sup> 2017, in Vilnius, Lithuania.
5. Conference paper: “*Towards competitive advantage of Higher Education Institutions through the strategic communication of uniqueness*”. Presented at international scientific conference “Communication and Information Sciences in Networked Society. Experiences and Insights”, organized by Vilnius University School of Communication. June 14-15, 2018 in Vilnius, Lithuania.
6. Conference paper: “*Socially engaged universities: reputational communication strategy or mission-based duty?*” International Conference on Vulnerability and Digital Culture. Madrid, Spain. 18-19<sup>th</sup> October 2018.
7. Conference paper: “*Mission-driven universities: actions that reach out and pay off*”. Ibero-American Conference on Social Publicity and Institutional Communication. Madrid, Spain. 17-18<sup>th</sup> October 2018.

#### In publication in scientific research journals

1. Scientific paper “*The Impact of Integrated Organizational Communication on Organizational Sustainability*“. June 2016. “Management of Organizations. Systematic Research“. ISSN 1392–1142 (print), ISSN 2335–8750 (Online).
2. Scientific paper “*Organizational Rituals as Tools of Organizational Culture Creation*” . June 2016. “Transformations in Business and Economics“. ISSN: 1648 – 4460.



Figure 1. LOGICAL LAYOUT OF THE DISSERTATION



Own elaboration

Proponents of the Institutional Logics Approach (ILA) include market, state, community, family, religion, profession, and corporation as institutional sectors whose logic may be increasingly overlapping in the hybridization process by which new forms are emerging. Amongst the organizations recognized as institutionally complex by their very nature, hospitals, universities and social enterprises can be listed for their jurisdictional overlap by which structures and practices permanently face the challenge of competing logics.

Smets et al. (2015) admit that the institutional logics perspective prevails as the leading trend in contemporary institutional theorizing, with exploration of institutional complexity focused on the sources and consequences of competing multiple logics as a remarkably prosperous research domain that can benefit scholars and practitioners. Five elements constitute the core of the Institutional Logics Approach (ILA): society, agency (enabled through the plurality of logics), organizations as a medium through which the logics of sectors interact, the material and cultural or symbolic components of institutional logics and fifth, historical contingency (Smets et al., 2015). For this dissertation, the main elements of interest are the spatial and temporal setting of the private entrepreneurial universities as hybrid forms of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, marked by corporatization of all institutional logics, market economy and neo-liberal models which are shaping the expectations and demands of society and agents or stakeholders.

Skelcher et al. characterize hybrids as carriers of multiple institutional logics and, based on a priori combinations of institutional logics, propose five hybrid types according to the structural ways of accommodating their institutional pluralism: segmented, segregated, assimilated, and blended and blocked (Skelcher & Smith, 2015).

The dissertation author believes private entrepreneurial universities share features of segmented, assimilated and blended hybrid types, since the core logic from HE adopts some of the practices and symbols of a new logic (business principles) and they implement synergistic incorporation of both logics into the new specific logic of a private organization with an inherent social mission that is accountable to private ownership, the internal community and wide society.

Undeniably, the contemporary knowledge-based and market-minded society keeps re-shaping the role and mission of the university with a mandatory call to become entrepreneurial in the execution of its threefold mission while maintaining its academic identity (Guerrero, Urbano, Fayolle, Klofsten, & Mian, 2016). Amongst entrepreneurial universities, both public and private ones can be listed and even though that substantial differences in this regard do not abound in scholarly sources, yet a distinction can be made between entrepreneurial intention of public HEIs (Yıldırım & Aşkun, 2012), entrepreneurial orientation or mandatory entrepreneurship for sustainability of the HEIs, as they are inevitably immersed in a demanding market where collaboration between academia and the private sector through joint educational and scientific projects is not only desirable but also strongly recommended (Ec-Oecd, 2012).

The dissertation author again asserts that private entrepreneurial universities can be counted amongst the contemporary hybrids immersed in the pluralistic institutional logics of education, the market, social and governmental politics. Moreover, the academia's intersection with the private sector markets is not an inherent feature of public HEIs, whereas private universities belong to the private sector, hence the entrepreneurial nature and character is an essential feature of private HEIs.

As discussed before, several symptoms of conflicting logics are perceivable in the contemporary university, especially in private ones, where academization, marketization, standardization, managerialism are all processes which can hardly be stopped, thus the urgent need for a suitable management framework which soothes the embedded conflicting institutional logics and helps the entrepreneurial university to pursue its unique way of fulfilling the triple mission. For all the reasons exposed above and also inferring from the contribution of other scholars (Pache & Santos, 2013) the dissertation author narrows the focus of competing institutional logics to private entrepreneurial universities where the co-existing logics are most often found. Out of the three strategies (Pache & Santos, 2013), the author asserts that selective coupling seems to be the least costly and most effective hybridizing option in private entrepreneurial universities, because they do not need to craft new or alternative practices to match internal preferences nor to negotiate the

support of influential institutional members. The dissertation author believes that management by missions (MBM) can be an appropriate choice for the reconciliation of conflicting social and commercial logics that private universities are facing.

This modern holistic approach to strategic management puts forward a clear focus on the institutional mission with a strong stakeholder approach and a fully developed programme to guide institutions towards mission formulation, deployment and review based on strategically managed communication (Cardona & Rey, 2008); (Marimon, Mas-Machuca, & Rey, 2016).

2. “Human communication is as old as humankind, but theorizing about strategic communication is rather new” (van Ruler, 2018). Communication management is unarguably a strategic management function, and even if this fact has for long been taken for granted, it has not been addressed directly by scholarly research till recent times. Strategic communication is an emerging area of study in the communication and management sciences and has recently been defined as the study of how organizations use communication purposefully to fulfil their overall missions (Heide et al., 2018).

For Van Ruler (van Ruler, 2018), communication is the pillar of strategic communication, whereas strategy would be the context in which strategic communication takes place, by this meaning that communication must be aligned with modern approaches to strategy development. Strategic communication in universities must accept urgent challenges: the management of intangibles and the subsequent need of *ad hoc* qualification of governance body members; empowerment of communication departments through the appointment of a qualified director with governance right; joint task of the highest executive board together with the communication department to involve the whole organization in assuming the institutional identity, innovating to improve institutional performance towards excellence.

The researcher asserts that only by tackling these issues will excellence in communication management prove its contribution to make the achieved excellence visible and audible. If excellence is perceived and valued by

key stakeholders, the institution should ensure that this perception is not only justified, but also strategically, widely and timely communicated.

Whatever the university organizational structure and the internal distribution of functions, tasks and responsibilities within the unit entrusted with the institutional communication management, the contribution of communication departments to the cultivation of university excellence pivots around two essential axis: excellence in the performance of specific communication-related activities and excellence in executive managerial actions beyond the internal organization of the communication department. This implies contributing a communicative perspective to decision making in all spheres. In order to achieve excellence in communication management, the institution needs an excellent department led by an excellence-oriented mission-savvy director, with strategic vision of the whole institution and team-work vision to manage his/her department.

A communication department in a university can and ought to undertake the strategic role of managing mission-driven, strategic and all-embracing institutional communication as their main contribution to the whole institution. In order to fulfil their task excellently, the institutional communication department requires a vantage point that can be granted by the direct line of command with the highest governance body: the rectorate or rector's office.

A university that seeks excellence at all levels of performance should realize the importance of having a specialized department of communication that is also excellence-oriented and endowed with the discussed characteristics of excellent communications departments (Vercic & Zerfass, 2016). A further step is acknowledging the change that may be brought to all institutional members if the crucial communication function is placed at the highest level of organizational management. Scattered and dependant communicative services can be gathered under the integrating 'umbrella' of the communication department. An excellent communication department placed at the highest level of management in the university organizational chart is more likely to gain respect and authority for transversal work, as it would no longer execute downward

orders, but cooperate at executive level in the attainment of strategic institutional aims.

Most scholars interested in defining the scope of the interdisciplinary field of strategic communication have felt compelled to depart from the seminal multi-authored article where one of the essential features of strategic communication is its purposefulness and instrumentality in making an organization fulfil its mission by means of communication (Hallahan et al., 2007). Ten years later, Van Ruler (2018) emulates this claim: stating that “when communication helps to move the organization’s mission forward, we may speak of strategic communication” and goes further to say that only communication that has the intention to advance an organization’s mission can be defined as strategic (van Ruler, 2018, p. 372).

Given all these premises and contributions, the author of this dissertation has elaborated a working definition of strategic institutional communication, which serves as the basis to develop a conceptual model for the strategic management of the mission-driven institutional communication in entrepreneurial universities aimed at institutional excellence.

Thus, in this dissertation strategic institutional communication is conceived as a mission-driven dynamic process managed by an *ad-hoc* specialized institutional ‘unit’ (Communication Department) led by a communication executive/DirCom through whom the communication function is fully integrated into the general institutional strategy, by means of a facilitating organizational design. This strategic process is under continuous evaluation, based on research and monitoring to imbue all institutional actions and decisions with a communicative perspective that helps to deploy the institutional mission, transmit the institutional culture and values and forge an identity in search of institutional excellence. This comprehensive definition leads to conceiving strategic institutional communication in private entrepreneurial universities as mission-driven and oriented to excellence.

Managing communication in a university may seem at first sight very similar to managing the usual processes of any other organization: setting goals, allocating resources and assessing results of performance to make the necessary adjustments. Nevertheless, the institutional aims of a

university are not only a matter of ‘*corporate choice*’. A university cannot *choose* to teach, research or transfer knowledge, neither can it only offer that to a few ‘chosen’ ones according to groundless and whimsical admission criteria. Despite the highly commoditized HE, the contemporary entrepreneurial university is not a ‘pure institutional form’ of the market/business sector. It is first and foremost an educational institution and, as it has been already discussed, a university has an imperative mission set by its institutional nature, which entails certain external demands to be met in order to maintain legitimacy.

Besides, the long-term commitment with institutional stakeholders differs dramatically from that of any other societal institution and the impact of the choice of HEI is significantly more transcendental, transformational and long-lasting: it shapes the personality, equips the individual for the upcoming decades of occupational life, it can mark the entrance into a social position and can meaningfully determine the whole future of innumerable stakeholders.

Furthermore, stakeholders in HEIs, especially students, should not be considered ordinary customers who perform a consuming function, but rather long-term members, participants and makers of the institution and as such, contributing to institutional excellence from within, and not only as external evaluators of a service render.

The “sameness” shared by the common institutional mission of all universities must be paradoxically combined with the so badly needed differentiation dictated by the increasingly competitive HE market trends of the last two decades. These transformational waves are rapidly imposing “good” business practices from the private sector, such as performance management, managerialism, entrepreneurialism and new models of financing and governance (Wæraas & Solbakk, 2009) into the heavily institutionalized specificity of universities (Kosmützky & Krücken, 2015). Excellence in communication management is not an item included in the various existing reputation rankings; however, thoroughly examined literature lets the author infer that strategic communication management is an extremely important asset of institutional excellence and an unalienable aid to the university reputation building process, bearing in mind that this can only be done indirectly (Vercic & Zerfass, 2016). If reputation is

conceived as a fruit that an institution may harvest when objective and subjective quality has been achieved and perceived, the direct contribution of an excellent communication department should focus on making quality well-known and positively evaluated. In other words, communicating achieved excellence or the institutional achievements in the quest for excellence.

### 3. Empirical methodology and key findings

This dissertation is based on a multiple-case study, or multi-case design, including more than one unit of analysis: three private entrepreneurial universities in Argentina, Lithuania and Spain with their own very specific and original settings. The three selected institutions are: Universidad de Navarra (hereinafter-UNAV), Universidad Austral (hereinafter-AustralArg, to distinguish it from Universidad Austral de Chile and Universidad Peruana Austral) and a private entrepreneurial university from Lithuania (hereinafter, PEU-Lt).

Aims and objectives of the empirical research

Aim: empirical research has been conducted to assess how the identified prerequisites of strategic institutional communication management affect its contribution to the mission-driven institutional excellence in private entrepreneurial universities.

The author has formulated these empirical research objectives:

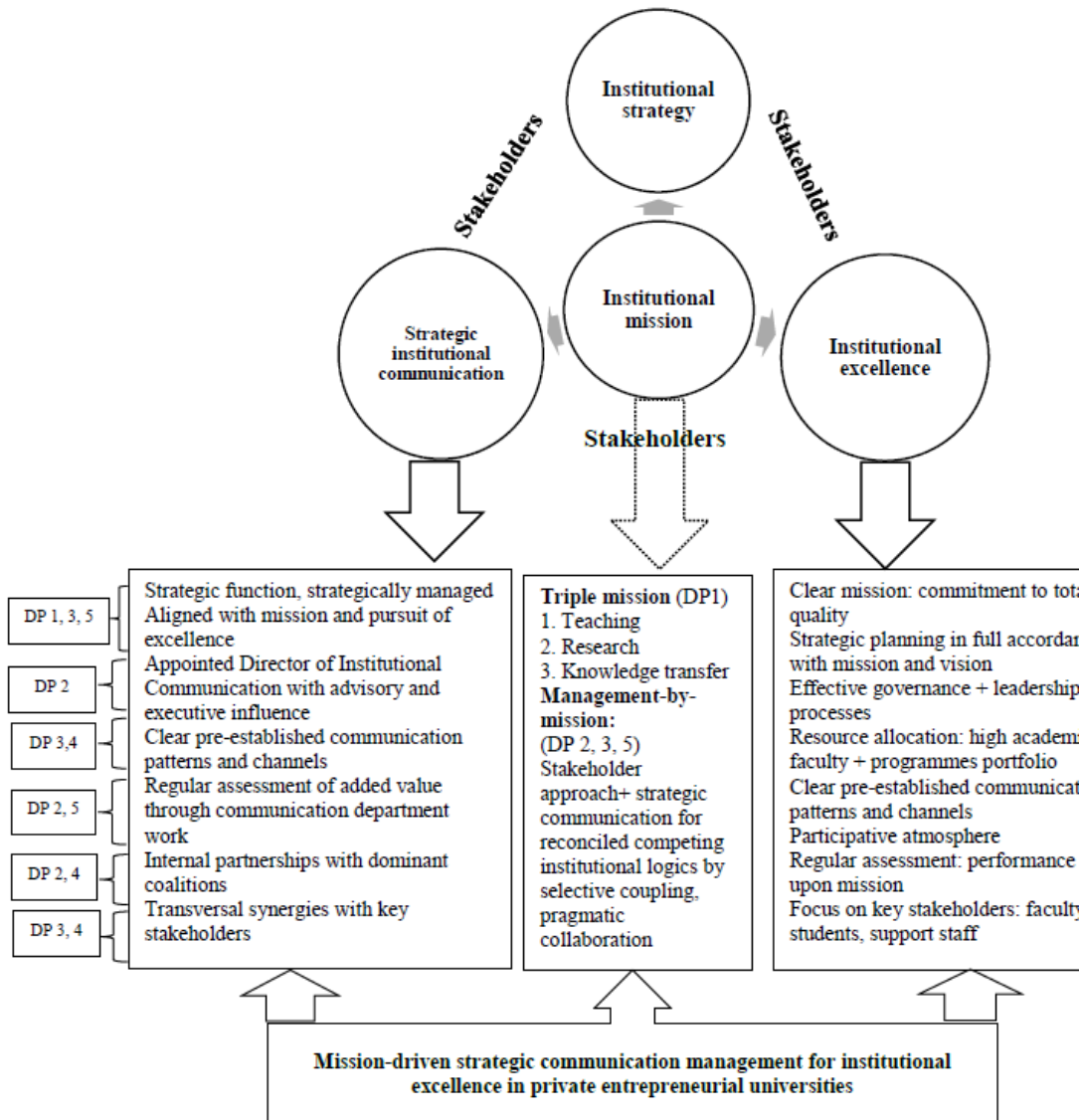
1. Analyse how private entrepreneurial universities manage their institutional communication in relation to its contribution to institutional excellence and the institutional mission
2. Discover the criteria that underlie the way institutional communication management is managed by the institutional department(s), and/or staff in charge of this function in private entrepreneurial universities.
3. Discover how governance body members understand the role of institutional communication and the management of this function in relation to institutional excellence.
4. Find out how the communication management staff perceive their own role in the management of institutional communication as related to institutional excellence.



5. Get to know how administration, academic staff and students perceive the role of institutional communication in relation to institutional excellence.
6. Find out how and whether the communication management unit in private entrepreneurial universities manage the institutional communication processes and resources with a clear reference to and awareness of the institutional mission and pursuit of excellence.
7. Investigate whether and how the communication management unit in private entrepreneurial universities engage key institutional stakeholders.
8. Get to know about the internal organization of communication management unit in private entrepreneurial universities: functions and task distribution, resources, reporting lines, transversal synergy with other organizational units.
9. Inquire into the status and position of the DirCom or equivalent appointed responsible for institutional communication.

The conceptual model for empirical research displays the compilation of theoretical and analytical insights from part I and part II, with the 5 defended propositions assigned to the different items.

Figure 2. Conceptual model for empirical research



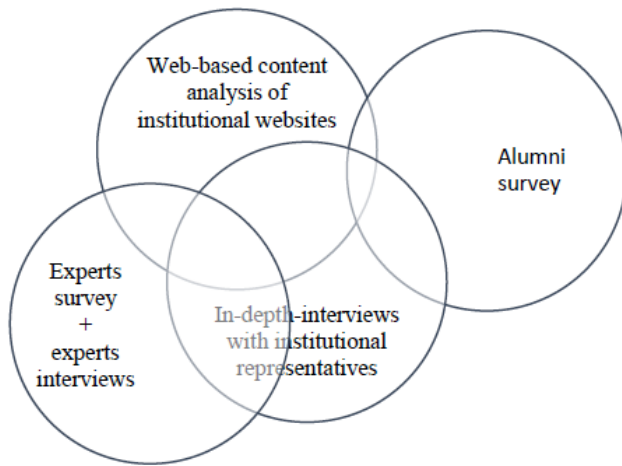
Own elaboration

Research methods and data gathering techniques

The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods enhances the solidness and reliability to findings and conclusions (Conde, Rosa, & Ruiz San Román, 2005); (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2001); (Jenner, Flick, von Kardoff, & Steinke, 2004). These two methodological approaches with diverse data collection techniques from different sources corroborate data and methodological triangulation, which help to gain a better

understanding about complex social phenomena like institutional communication in contemporary private universities and to strengthen the researcher's stance. Data source triangulation implies using a variety of sources to increase validity (Baxter & Jack, 2008). To this end, the researcher collected primary data through interviews with different stakeholders of the selected universities: executive board members, communication department staff members, Directors of communication, other administrative employees of different areas, departments and levels, academic staff representatives and students. Alumni of the three examined institutions were surveyed. Besides, experts external to the universities were consulted through qualitative interviews and survey questionnaires. Secondary data was gathered from institutional portals or websites, institutional social media, printed institutional materials and on-site observation (billboards for special events, settings, buildings, offices and facilities on campus). Other sources include webpages of world university rankings, digital news media items about the chosen universities. Methodological triangulation defined as the "observation of a research issue from at least two different points" (Jenner et al., 2004) is also applied as a validation strategy through the use of various data collection methods to compare results and cross-check similarity, repetition or deviation. Survey research has been used to collect data from Alumni and experts. In both cases, self-administered questionnaires were designed (Check & Schutt, 2012).

Figure 3. Achieved methodological triangulation



Own elaboration

The author has applied at least two combined methods to examine all the identified prerequisites and characteristics of institutional and communicative excellence included in the mentioned table 33 under the light of their mutual interdependence mediated by the management-by-mission paradigm to conciliate competing institutional logics. Alumni survey (with 81 respondents) shares the exploration field with Web-based content analysis and in-depth interviews; expert survey and expert interviews (16 experts) share the exploration field examined through Web-based content analysis and in-depth interviews with institutional members. Finally, the 56 interviews held with different stakeholders of the chosen universities allowed the dissertation author to compare and contrast the secondary data obtained through web-based content analysis. Therefore, methodological triangulation has been achieved by applying at least to two different methods to explore the same phenomena, as illustrated in figure 3

Empirical research results and key findings. The variety of applied methods and techniques has allowed to get sufficient and adequate data to confirm that the three examined HEIs can be considered private entrepreneurial universities consistently seeking for institutional excellence. Each of them displays different levels of achievement in the identified prerequisites and features of communicative and institutional excellence, as shown in table 1.

Table 1. Application of identified excellence prerequisites and features to the three examined private entrepreneurial universities

Pre-requisites and characteristics for excellence in communication management and institutional excellence		Examined HEIs	
Common items to institutional and communication excellence	1. Participative atmosphere	UNAV, AustralArg, PEU-Lt	
	2. Clear pre-established communication patterns and channels within and amongst departments across organizational structure	UNAV	
	3. Institutional members well-informed on university initiatives	UNAV	
	4. Facilitated collective discussion of set institutional objectives	UNAV, AustralArg, PEU-Lt (partially)	
Excellence in communication management	Examined HEIs	Institutional excellence	
5. High identification with institutional culture + mission	UNAV, AustralArg, PEU-Lt	5. Clear mission: declaration of total quality	UNAV, AustralArg
6. Commitment to quality	UNAV, AustralArg, PEU-Lt	6. Effective governance + leadership processes	UNAV, PEU-Lt (partially)
7. Coupling with communication-oriented HGB	UNAV	7. Mission-based/driven strategic planning	UNAV
8. Highly-qualified communication management staff (for sub-functions)	UNAV, AustralArg (some)	8. Resource allocation for high-quality academic offer	UNAV, AustralArg
9. Expertise in strategic planning + advising senior management	UNAV	9. Qualified and dedicated faculty a) Cognitive and social competence (empathy) b) Role model for students c) Continuous professional + personal development d) Teamwork for research	UNAV, AustralArg, PEU-Lt (a, b, d)
10. Alignment with governance through Dircom directly reporting to CEO/ member of HGB	UNAV, AustralArg, PEU-Lt		
11. Well-developed listening structures + techniques	UNAV		
12. Self-assessment of added value	UNAV	10. Regular review/assessment of performance	UNAV, AustralArg
13. Strategy for overall communication: listening and messaging	UNAV	11. Rich relational capital	UNAV, AustralArg
14. Internal partnerships with dominant coalitions in structural units for integration and intensive collaboration	UNAV, PEU-Lt (partially)	12. Focus on key stakeholders: a) Faculty; b) Students	UNAV, AustralArg (only b), PEU-Lt (only b)
15. Transversal synergies & common projects	UNAV, PEU-Lt (partially)		

Own elaboration

In order to deliver excellence, the communication management needs to be elevated from tactical to strategic level with the pertaining structural adjustments and resource allocation. This implies a communication-oriented Higher Governance Body and highly qualified communication staff, who prove their value of their work. Some institutions, like UNAV seemed to have taken the

challenge very seriously and have taken tangible decisions to make the most of the competing institutional logics and achieve excellent results out of the pragmatic collaboration and selective coupling of the strengths of academia and management. This has led to enhancing communication to be not only fully integrated into, but considered an essential component of the overall institutional strategy supported by strategies in each of the managerial functions, amongst them, the communication function. Other institutions have managed to cultivate such a strong sense of identification with the institutional mission that even in the absence of a well-designed institutional strategy, communication is strategic in as much as it is still mission-supportive and mission-oriented, as it occurs in AustralArg. There is yet a third way: having smart strategies for different management areas (infrastructure, finance, communication, marketing, etc.). *Having* a communication strategy does not *automatically* result in its *being* strategic communication, if it does not emerge from the mission and is not fully oriented to deploy it through integrated management of all communication functions, as seems to be the case of PEU-Lt. Hence, the extreme importance of stakeholder identification, prioritization and cultivation of relations through clear and well-established patterns and ad hoc channels and mission-based contents. The researcher upholds the view that excellent universities who manage their institutional communication integrally and strategically, may display the features attributed to excellent organizations (Vercic & Zerfass, 2016);(Zerfass et al., 2017) with excellent communication departments (Zerfaß et al., 2014); (Zerfaß, Tench, Verčič, Verhoeven, & Moreno, 2014); listening more openly to stakeholders, significantly more developed structures and techniques of organizational listening in order to be more responsive. Each university ought to foresee the level of communication management professionalization in order to attain positive results that match the institutional aims declared in their mission statements. Excellence in mission-driven strategic institutional communication management is crucial to make institutional excellence visible and sustainable, since excellence should remain the target behind all institutional endeavours of a university. Excellent institutions deserve excellent communication, with the institutional mission as the core unifying element that relies on strategic communication to imbue the declared institutional promise all through the institutional structure, creating and cultivating relations and synergy. Scattered institutional achievements, however excellent, amount to lesser value than all held together by the underlying institutional mission, like the thread of a necklace that holds the beads together.

Table 3. Key empirical findings by research methods and substantiation of defended propositions

Data collection method	Key findings	Defended propositions
Web-based content analysis	<p>Features of excellence in communication management (cfr. tables 41-42)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institutional excellence coupled with institutional mission.</li> <li>• Institutional mission as basis for strategy; integration of communication into institutional strategy.</li> <li>• Status of the communication function: position in the structure, appointed Dircom; internal organization of the institutional communication department (ICD).</li> <li>• Differences in levels of centralization and alignment of communication management in terms of structure and design of the Website of the whole university and that of each academic unit.</li> <li>• Existing and lacking pre-established communication lines with key institutional stakeholders (faculty, students and administration staff) to interact with the ICD and reach highest governance body</li> <li>• Strategic choices of content generation; signs of autonomous and centralized content management.</li> <li>• Explicit mentions/lack of triple-mission contents; market-driven tendencies in contents.</li> </ul> <p>Quality and excellence as interchangeable terms. Mentions of external assessments of excellence: rankings, accreditations.</p>	DP1, DP2, DP3, DP4, DP5
Alumni survey from examined HEIs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Features of institutional excellence as most important:</li> <li>• mission-driven institutional excellence; effective governance clearly identified stakeholders and prioritization of their needs; higher valued to international recognition of achievements</li> <li>• Indistinctive use of the terms <i>excellence</i> and <i>quality</i> applied to teaching and faculty.</li> </ul>	DP1 DP3
Expert survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocate the importance of a mission-driven institutional strategy and favour the integration of the communication function in the overall institutional goals counting on the full-right membership of the DirCom in the Highest Governance Body of the institution</li> <li>• Acknowledge the need for integrated management of internal and external communication, with cohesive outputs that reflect the unique institutional communicative identity.</li> <li>• Internal communication function requires a communication professional in cooperation with the Direction of Personnel or Human Resources department.</li> </ul>	DP1, DP2, DP3, DP3, DP4
Expert interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scholar experts claim differences in managing communication in a university from this practice in other organizations: institutional mission, the specificity of expected services and the wide scope of stakeholders</li> <li>• Advocate the importance of a mission-driven institutional strategy and favour the integration of the communication function in the overall institutional goals counting on the full-right membership of the DirCom in the Highest Governance Body of the institution</li> </ul>	DP1, DP2, DP3, DP3, DP4
In-depth interviews with representatives from examined HEIs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Currently existing and lacking features of excellence in communication management and institutional excellence (cfr. Tables 41-42).</li> <li>• Different levels of achieved strategic pragmatic collaboration between academia, the executive leadership and administration staff through selective coupling and blending of the managerial expertise.</li> <li>• Regular self-assessment as weakest areas in institutional management, particularly communication management beyond media clipping.</li> </ul>	DP1, DP2, DP3, DP3, DP4, DP5

Own elaboration

The dissertation author adheres to the words of UNAV Vice-rector for communication: *“only when an ad hoc communication professional is placed in the right place and at the right time, only then the communication function grows. Communication has done its job when it has created such a communicative culture that the communication management department is no longer needed, because everyone and everything communicates. When you have managed to make communication an essential element of the organizational culture, then your job is done”*.

General conclusions, research limitations, further research

General conclusions

The author has achieved the seven set objectives for this doctoral dissertation and has validated the five defended propositions:

1. The importance of strategic institutional communication management for the institutional excellence in private entrepreneurial universities has been disclosed: the author has substantiated linkages between institutional excellence and communicative excellence, the latter being achievable through mission-driven strategic institutional communication management. The author does not claim an absolute causal correlation; however, it can be asserted that one can hardly subsist without the other, as it has been theoretically grounded and empirically ratified with abundant evidence.
2. Conceptualization of private entrepreneurial universities, institutional excellence and strategic communication, has been thoroughly discussed and concepts have been theoretically grounded with abundant scientific sources; the author has suggested her own working definitions of institutional excellence and strategic institutional communication.
3. The prerequisites that affect the contribution of strategic institutional communication to institutional excellence in private entrepreneurial universities have been identified, systematized and explored with mixed empirical research methods in three institutions with similarities and differences in their degree of achieved overall institutional excellence and communicative excellence.
4. Based on the theoretical insights of strategic communication management, institutional theory and institutional excellence, the author has provided a theoretical grounding for the linkages between strategic institutional communication management, competing institutional logics and institutional excellence in private entrepreneurial universities.



5. These linkages have been integrated in the author's elaborated conceptual model that explains the contribution of mission-driven strategic institutional communication to institutional excellence in private entrepreneurial universities.

6. The identified prerequisites of strategic institutional communication management that affect its contribution to the institutional excellence in private entrepreneurial universities have been empirically assessed applying retroductive inference to examine the phenomena in the three purposefully selected private entrepreneurial universities as units of this multiple case-study research design.

Critical realist multiple case-study research design has proved a suitable choice which has allowed the author to explore the complex phenomena of the interrelated institutional excellence and institutional communication in the real contexts where identified pre-requisites have disclosed how they influence the course of action, decisions and outcomes in each of the examined organizations using the same empirical research instruments. The author has conducted empirical research with double triangulation of data sources and data gathering methods: Web-based content data analysis; survey responses from 81 Alumni, survey data obtained from 10 experts with 6 additional communication experts interviews and 56 interviews with representatives from the three examined HEIs. This thorough empirical research has permitted the author to gather relevant and sufficient evidence to confirm the defended propositions.

7. Managerial insights have been provided for private entrepreneurial universities to improve their strategic institutional communication management as a strategic component of institutional excellence; further research suggestions that can expand exploration to other areas of communication management in HEIs have as well been made by the dissertation author.

8. Defended propositions have been formulated based on thorough theoretical substantiation of the linkages between conceptualized institutional excellence, strategic institutional communication and the competing institutional logics that demand an adequate mission-driven management paradigm.

The five defended propositions have been validated with sound evidence gathered through mixed methods of empirical research.

DP1 has been validated: the fuller the awareness of the Highest Governance Body of the significant contribution of institutional communication to institutional excellence, the higher status attributed to the communication function, the more effectively this function is integrated into the overall mission-driven institutional strategy. Considering the institutional excellence as coupled with the institutional mission entails establishing effective and efficient mission fulfilment as the base

for institutional performance assessment. Plenty of evidence has been provided through primary data obtained from Web-based content and corroborated with expert interviews and interviewees from the three selected universities. This allows to confirm that the status and position of the communication function is affected by the level of awareness that the highest governance body (executive steering team, rectorate) has about the significant impact of communication management on long-term institutional excellence. Institutional communication tends to remain at a tactical-operational level, if the executive steering team does not raise the management of this function to executive level with corresponding structural design and resource allocation. An excellent institution cannot be considered as such unless it strives for excellence at all levels of performance. Thus, in order to achieve and sustain the identified features of institutional excellence, strategic institutional communication must also display the features of excellent communication management.

DP2 has subsequently been demonstrated, because given the first condition stated in DP1, the communication management function is placed at the highest executive level in the organizational structure and the management of this function is entrusted to a structural unit, usually called Communication Department, Direction of Communication or alike denominations. Most Dircoms in HEIs are currently too much focused on media relations, positioning the rector, and marketing communications for promotion and enrolment. However, university management implies management of knowledge, thus it requires expert knowledge in all areas of institutional governance. Therefore, university communication requires the highest level of expertise on communication management: the university Dircom must *know about* communication to manage communication with competence and empower others to communicate as professionally as possible.

The choice of organizational structure conditions the status and position of the institutional communication management function and its potential contribution to institutional excellence. As empirical data has demonstrated, this structural unit tends to report directly to Highest Governance body, and in some cases with full membership in the executive board. Substantial evidence (obtained through Web-based content analysis, insights from experts and interviewees from the three examined universities, in particular those in managerial positions and communication management staff) has been provided to reveal the pressing need for highly qualified Directors of Communication with extraordinary personal skills and outstanding qualification, professional experience and vast knowledge of several disciplines, namely communication management, strategic

management, organizational behaviour and governance. The status and position assigned to this senior communicator is highly dependent on his/her personal endowment: when the candidate fails to have the required profile, he/she has little executive and advisory influence and inference with the dominant formal and informal coalitions and with his/her own department as well. In such cases, communication tends to play a supportive, tactical role rather than being a forerunner and strategic element that pervades the whole organization. Pertaining empirical findings as well demonstrate that the advisory and executive influence of the DirCom in a university is significantly enhanced when the Dircom has not only proved practitioner experience, but also a solid academic background (preferably PhD). This is also demonstrated by the increasing number of universities with a vice-rectorate for communication and institutional relations. Thus, a strategic inflection point is the choice of the suitable candidate for the position of DirCom in a university, where the role of Dircom is still poorly defined or underexploited.

DP3 has been demonstrated as a key mechanism to favour the contribution of strategic institutional communication to institutional excellence in private entrepreneurial universities. When there is an *ad hoc* structural unit entrusted with the management of the institutional communication function, communication channels and patterns can be developed and monitored to build and maintain the rich relational capital expected from excellence-seeking universities. Then, interests and needs of key institutional stakeholders are given due attention. In return, they refeed the co-created social capital based on a shared institutional mission and strong identification with the pursued institutional excellence and joint achievements. Successful enactment of pragmatic collaboration and selective coupling in hybrid institutional forms can also be perceived in structural arrangements that facilitate transversal cooperation, synergetic work and better outcomes. A clear example of this is a unified governance structure across all academic units, where governance boards gather the expertise of academia and management.

Stakeholder identification and prioritization has also emerged as a key concern and urgent matter to tackle the inherent and necessary tension to be encountered in private entrepreneurial universities (extensively applicable as well to state-run HEIS). Current academia is pressurized to bear quantifiable results, while university executive leadership and administration management increasingly seems rather focused on sustaining the business, thus centred on students (former, current and mostly-prospective ones). Faculty's sceptical and fault-finding attitude towards communication management is in part justifiable. tangible

results of communication work either fall short or are not properly communicated precisely to professors, who are the most visible institutional stakeholders, the interphase between the institution and students and their families, between the university and society.

DP4 has been validated in as much as the organizational structure of the examined universities have proved to be either a passive/active facilitator. Existing reporting lines and established structures may be used adequately or simply ignored; they may even become a sort of nuisance that hinders stakeholder engagement and alignment of all structural units, whenever the structure reinforced too strong centralization at the expense of deep-rooted autonomy of certain management areas, including the communication function. In brief, a full-fledged communication department that coordinates internal and external communication functions in cooperation with equivalent communication management teams in the academic units facilitates their legitimate autonomy, without undermining the unity of the institutional identity, mission and joint pursuit of institutional excellence. This matrix model of double reporting with empowered communication delegates or unit dircoms can be considered the ideal organizational design for an entrepreneurial university with well-developed large structural units. This way, autonomy and alignment are reconciled.

Private entrepreneurial universities acknowledge the increasing relevance of internal communication management as a strategic long-term factor of institutional excellence; however, they tend to allocate more resources to the external communication function. Integration of internal and external communication has proved to be affected by the level of understanding and importance given by the highest governance body to internal communication in comparison to resources allocated for the external communication (in terms of structure and personnel). This is also evident in as much as the institutional strategy tackles the two communication sub-functions/ areas as equally significant for the achievement of long-term mission-driven excellence and sustainable positive performance. The pragmatic collaboration and selective coupling of blended expertise of communication professionals with Human Resources managers has emerged as a favoured option and in some of the explored universities, as an outcome of well-managed competing logics.

DP5 has been substantiated with evidence from Web-based content analysis, which has been later corroborated with abundant responses of the interviewees, as legitimate witnesses to the undeniable competing institutional logics that pervade the generated internal and external communication contents. The knowledge created and accumulated in a university needs to be properly managed

and communicated ad extra as well as ad intra, hence the constitutive role of communication to reveal the excellence achieved in a university. The increasing and alarming tendency to focus on tactical market-driven and short-term communication actions is often suffocating long-term more strategic outputs that safeguard and reflect the triple institutional mission. The more market-driven is the institutional strategy, the more imbalance and disproportion between external and internal communication, with market-oriented external communication outputs generally upstaging mission-driven internal communication efforts. The more mission-driven the internal communication, the sooner this function gets formalized, as a strategic component of a more sustainable institutional excellence. Content generation and their dissemination through carefully selected communication means and channels has proved to be closely related to the available resources (ref. DP1 and DP2), to the personal endowment of the communication management unit and its visionary and well-qualified director with the necessary status, executive and advisory influence.

Regular assessment emerged as the weakest area with the most urgent needs to implement pertaining changes that can enhance the contribution institutional communication to institutional excellence in private entrepreneurial universities. Regular evaluation of the quality of stakeholders' relations is one of the core tasks of the university Dircom. Only by assessing the current status quo of this vital management function and by pinpointing the ailing areas that require improvement and adjustments (DP2-DP5), can decisions be made and solutions be sought, as long as the Highest governance body gains awareness (DP1) of how much really strategic institutional communication can contribute to long-term, sustainable and mission-driven institutional excellence. Overestimated and unbalanced focus on external drivers of excellence, such as rankings is a frequent deviant communication behaviour. Instead, the criteria of world university rankings should better become self-assessment instruments to monitor and improve institutional performance and communicate it more effectively.

#### Limitations of this dissertation

1. Respondents and methods: the author had intended to apply a larger proportion of qualitative research methods for the primary data collection, as it seemed to correspond better with the research design chosen to explore the research question. Even though in the end each data gathering technique was applied with a sufficient sample of key informants, respondents and experts to achieve the aim set for each method, yet the researcher encountered unexpected obstacles during

the scholarly visits to the universities in Spain and Argentina. The intended meetings with students and Alumni to conduct collective interviews or focus groups could not take place due to certain restrictions in the institutions regarding involvement of students. Thus, survey method was used. In the future, quantitative methods with larger samples of institutional stakeholders could be used to provide additional findings of interest for the HEIs and counting on their cooperation to collect data.

2. Multi-case sampling and replicability: one of the chosen universities (namely, Universidad de Navarra-UNAV) could have been sufficient unit of analysis as a single case study applying the criteria of typical single case of best practice or exemplary institution. The author expanded the sample to three institutions for comparative analysis and for deference with the Lithuanian HE context, since the dissertation has been written under the affiliation of a Lithuanian university, hence the inclusion of a Lithuanian case. A third non-European institution has also been included for wider coverage of the globalizing phenomena taking place in the HE context. The author believes many of the identified prerequisites, empirical findings, and provided models can be applied to other similar educational institutions.

3. Intercultural dimension: the geographical location of the three explored HEIs is very different and could have allowed a thorough cross-cultural comparative analysis with deeper insights on the cultural-laden approaches to institutional management. However, the author asserts that the HE is rapidly globalizing and HEIs in absolutely opposite latitudes are facing very similar market-driven challenges. Admittedly, the dissertation author has a multicultural profile with long experience in the three cultural environments tangentially explored in this research paper. Nevertheless, cross-cultural comparison of HE market trends was not the main aim of this dissertation.

4. Depth of exploration: being a multiple-case study research design with critical realist paradigm, the present dissertation did not seek to explore all and every detail of the organizational behaviour in the three chosen universities. This could be done as further research with specific variables or factors and other or similar combination of methods

5. The phenomena selected by the author led to her specifically focusing on two main constructs: strategic communication management and institutional excellence as interrelated through the mission-driven paradigm for institutional governance and management in which communication plays a vital role. Other areas of institutional management could be also explored.

6. Use of foreign languages: the terminology in Lithuanian language poses some difficulties, because some of the keywords lose their original semantic field, for instance the word “excellence”. The equivalent in Lithuanian could be *pranašumas*, which would be the same term widely used for *competitive advantage*. Instead, the word *tobulumas* (in English -perfection) seems to be officially adopted in the Lithuanian scientific literature applied to the field of management. Similarly, the word “institutional” is not frequently used by Lithuanian scholars and practitioners in the field of communication management; meanwhile, this term is commonly used in English, Spanish, French, Italian and Portuguese and other languages.

#### Further research proposals

Many of the following proposals are already part of the research activity envisioned by the dissertation author.

1) Longitudinal study would allow to track the improvements in communication management and measure its impact on institutional excellence. However interesting the results might be, it is rather time-consuming and the sample should probably be reduced to either one or two institutions, or to one geographical area to facilitate fieldwork.

2) Large samples of respondents from each stakeholder group could allow quantitative analysis of correlations between excellent communication management, impact on externally and internally measured reputation and excellence. Access to data could be difficult in countries where personal data protection regulations are in force and respondents may be unwilling to answer, thus response rate could affect reliability.

3) Thorough examination of cultural factors would allow cross-cultural comparisons to explore the extent of the national culture impact on institutional governance of private entrepreneurial universities, bearing in mind the increasingly globalizing phenomenon of the marketization of HE and the subsequent communication management paradigms.

4) Further research on the same or other chosen HEIs could be conducted with a focus on the impact of leadership styles on mission-driven governance and its approach to the role of communication management. In this dissertation, the author could already foresee some trends in this respect, as two of the explored universities have gone through serious executive team changes during the dissertation writing period. The same can be said when a given institution changes its mission, vision and values, as this should be accompanied by an

evident change in institutional strategy that should naturally affect the strategic communication function.

5) Further empirical research about the impact of internal communication management exploring the engagement of different stakeholder groups could be illuminating in terms of excellence and overall organizational sustainability, aided by professionalized strategic communication management.

6) Additional quantitative and qualitative analysis of communication contents generated and delivered through different channels and means for different targeted audiences could be conducted to examine congruence, consistency and coherence with the declared institutional mission and pursued institutional excellence.

7) This thesis advocates the significance of communication-oriented and mission-driven institutional governance as conditioning the contribution of communication to institutional excellence. Thus, further research could address the influence of leadership style on the management model choice to facilitate this contribution.

8) Both the theoretical contributions and managerial recommendations could be blended into a wholesome set of institutional communication management audit portfolio, as suggested by some of the interviewees, who expressed genuine interest in receiving feedback for their respective institutions after empirical data analysis.

9) Sampling could include top universities (by world rankings) to explore their institutional communication management in relation to excellence. However, this would require solid financial aid and leverage to access institutional data.

10) High-rank public entrepreneurial universities could be selected as cases to explore how the competing logics in the public sector influence executive leadership approach to communication management and its implication in the overall institutional strategy. In any case, it would be advisable to restrict the sampling to zones of certain economic, social, political and cultural affinity, which strongly affect the status quo of HEIs and the HE market trends.



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