

The Collective Communications in the ‘Wild Globalization’

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Abstract

In this phase of ‘wild globalization’, started with Covid-19 in 2020 and then exploded in these last years with the piecemeal world war, the largest corporations have engaged in global communication plans, unprecedented in terms of the scale of their funding, focused on key words such as corporate responsibility, sustainability, inclusion.

In the persistence of harsh global conflicts on a local scale, with the related landscapes of social and economic certainties and uncertainties, large global corporations have developed plans and programs recognizing that grand challenges require unconventional approaches and radical innovations. The issues underlying grand challenges are so large now that no individual organization can address them alone. Instead, large collective actions are necessary, including multilateral collaboration among multiple competitors (fighting rivals, and at the same time collaborating closely with the most direct competitors), within a network policy.

In this times of savage global competition, horizontal and vertical collective actions of communication will develop with increasing intensity, with very different aims and objectives.

Keywords: New Phase of Global Competition; Wild Globalization; China; US; Collective Commercial Communications; Horizontal Collective Communications; Vertical Collective Communications; Global Markets

1. China, US and the New Round of Global Competition

For a long time, China has been the World’s factory floor, where automated and high-tech production chains produced everything from electronics to household goods and batteries to solar panels to raw materials for construction.

Big Chinese corporations, backed by robust state development plans, satisfied the demand of worldwide global consumers and US and European production plants, without state development plans or simply defense plans, abandoned their countries

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of origin. In reality, large global corporations had long since not had localized production in their countries of origin, but they exploited the processes of globalization to achieve increasingly ambitious goals of expanding production and sales, and of course growing profits while paying the minimum amount of taxes and social costs.

Precisely in this phase of wild globalization, the largest corporations have engaged in global communication plans, unprecedented in terms of the scale of their funding, focused on key words such as sustainability, inclusion, corporate responsibility, etc.

In the persistence of harsh global conflicts on a local scale, with the related landscapes of social and economic certainties and uncertainties, large global corporations have developed plans and programs recognizing that grand challenges require unconventional approaches and radical innovations in products, services, or processes. At the same time, the issues underlying grand challenges are so large that no individual organization can address them alone. Instead, large collective actions are necessary, including multilateral collaboration among multiple competitors (fighting rivals, and at the same time collaborating closely with the most direct competitors), within a network policy, which offers unique benefits of scale and scope compared to multilateral cooperation of alliances and Merger and Acquisitions.

In this sense, in the near future of savage global competition, horizontal and vertical collective actions of communication will develop with increasing intensity, with very different aims and objectives.

Horizontal and vertical collective actions of communication have so far been studied mainly with reference to contingent market opportunities for the development of medium-small enterprises, while they have not so far been the subject of in-depth research in management studies in relation to the new opportunities offered to the largest corporations in the current phase of global competition.

2. Collective Commercial Communications

Collective commercial communications can be defined as communication programs whose advantages concern a plurality of companies, associated to achieve a common objective of a commercial nature. In other words, a collective communication is a coordinated effort shared by a group of corporations or organizations to achieve a common task, involving a pooling of resources, ideas, and efforts to create a unified and impactful message.

The member companies can operate in the same sector ('horizontal collective' communication), therefore collective actions developed by competing companies. In this case, the joint action aims to increase the overall demand for a given category of products, i.e. the so-called total or primary demand, regardless of individual brands, in order to stimulate the demand for a generic product (milk, beer, tourism, etc.).

Collective actions for commercial purposes can also be activated jointly by producers and sales intermediaries, with common short-term commercial objectives ('vertical collective' communication).

□ *Collective communication activities are understood in a broad sense and concern multiple and different marketing communication tools, since in joint commercial actions it is possible to consider advertising campaigns in the strict sense (Advertising), participation in fairs and exhibitions, sales incentive programs (Sales Promotion), 'Publicity' campaigns and finally sports and cultural sponsorship actions.*

Collective communication actions presuppose the formalization and finalization of the activity that explicitly differentiate joint communication actions from the so-called "halo-effect"; that phenomenon that manifests itself in the presence of substantial investments in brand communication whose positive effects on sales reverberate - in a completely random and involuntary way - also in favor of brands not supported by commercial communication.

The entity promoting collective communication for commercial purposes can be private or public. Collective actions are mostly activated by associations or consortia of private companies, but there are also significant examples of initiatives carried out by public and government programs. On the contrary, in recent times the latter have decisively accentuated their role as promoters of collective communications, seeing in this instrument a valid means of directing the consumption of products and services considered important for a country's economy or for the development of certain local realities, especially in order to contain the balance of payments deficit, or to exercise a protective action in favor of local productions.

3. Horizontal Collective Communications

Horizontal collective communications are activated jointly by companies offering similar goods, but distinguished by specific brands. In other words, horizontal initiatives are carried out by competing companies to achieve a common objective and therefore tend to promote, with a combined action, a product class as a whole, with an action delimited in predefined geographical and temporal areas.

Horizontal collective communication can be developed to achieve different purposes, which in practice may concern:

- the expansion of the total demand for certain goods, with an invariance of the market positions of the different brands of the promoting companies. In the context of the expansion of global demand, the joint actions from time to time may be focused on: the seasonal adjustment of consumption, the support of demand in yielding markets, the substitution between product classes, etc.
- the control of demand and the limitation of competition ('Non-Advertising Competition'), to exercise an action of support and maintenance of sales volumes without changing the competitive positions of companies. Collective campaigns aimed at obtaining control of demand and a

restriction of competition often play a substitute function for brand advertising, in order to contain the commercial communication costs of individual companies, and they can also constitute a high protective barrier to current and potential demand.

In the context of actions to protect the overall offer, initiatives aimed at affirming the particular qualifications of the bidding companies (fact-finding and dissemination actions) can usefully be distinguished, from initiatives aimed at dealing with specific events (contrast actions).

Collective actions for cognitive and dissemination purposes aim to develop the basic awareness of productions with particular characteristics of typicality of the product, or of origin (geographical area). In this regard, well-known examples can be seen in the activities in defense of typical local productions. The aim of these measures is to safeguard certain products from counterfeiting and to facilitate their recognition by establishing and advertising collective marks intended to: identify the product; guarantee pre-established minimum quality standards; allow the identification of member companies and able to ensure (also by virtue of appropriate inspections) compliance with these standards; and finally, to constitute a source of funding for consortium communication campaigns, in cases where a concession of marks is envisaged upon payment of a fee to a special common fund.

The so-called joint contrast actions, on the other hand, are activated to deal with specific negative events, which are likely to significantly affect normal market conditions, and therefore the sales of entire supply sectors. These interventions are of a purely defensive nature and are usually carried out in response to the manifestation of sudden alterations of certain supply systems (think, for example, of the information campaigns that can be conveyed in response to precautionary seizures of products motivated by health measures), and therefore tend to counteract the formation of negative judgments towards defined consumption.

Collective dissemination and contrast actions can be linked to a common purpose of protecting certain overall offers, but they present very different competitive landscapes; in the first case, in fact, information content and development behaviors (generally not short-term) are highlighted, while contrast actions have strong short-term defensive characteristics. Collective enforcement actions, in fact, are usually implemented under oligopoly conditions, i.e. by a limited number of bidding companies, some of which may also represent very significant market positions.

□ *The Associated Press, Reuters and Bloomberg News — pushed back on the White House decision to control who is a member of the press pool, saying that it threatened press freedom. “It is essential in a democracy for the public to have access to news about their government from an independent, free press,” the editors of the services said in a joint statement. “We believe that any steps by the government to limit the number of wire services with access to the President threatens that principle. It also harms*

the spread of reliable information to people, communities, businesses and global financial markets that heavily depend on our reporting” (Johnson, 2025).

Collective communication for commercial purposes can be aimed at developing national demand for certain goods, or it can tend to encourage consumption abroad, contributing to the expansion of export volumes.

From a theoretical point of view, the joint actions aimed at national or foreign markets do not present significant discrepancies, highlighting common aims of developing demand in defined geographical contexts. On the other hand, there are considerable differences with regard to the cultural models that can be used for the introduction and marketing of goods in the various countries.

Collective actions focused on foreign markets generally aim to increase knowledge and consumption of typical products, especially food products. These aims often concern small companies with relatively limited production, for which the possibility of entering and operating economically on foreign markets is impossible if voluntary cooperation is not implemented to develop joint commercial actions, supported by collective advertising campaigns and with common participation in international fairs and exhibitions.

A current classification of collective communications, specifically related to the growth in the intensity of global competition, concerns the nature of the homogeneity of the joint communication initiatives (which can be product, or marketing) that constitutes the object. In relation to this character, collective actions can in fact be distinguished according to whether they are characterized by:

- a homogeneity of offer (product class, 'unbranded product');
- a homogeneity of market development of the goods offered (marketing of a system of brands).

Joint actions characterised by a physical homogeneity of offer concern competing companies belonging to the same sector of activity. The physical homogeneity of the products implies a direct substitution between the brands of the companies participating in specific consortium activities, so the joint actions must promote a generic product (product class).

Conversely, in the case of homogeneous market development of the goods offered, collective actions concern products with accentuated characteristics of complementarity on the demand side, i.e. products that are also markedly dissimilar but nevertheless present considerable affinities in the function of the needs of specific segments of consumers/users.

Homogeneous collective communications for the market development function are usually carried out by companies with related products in the choices of demand (for example, in the furniture sector, different types of home furniture; furnishing accessories; lighting fixtures; etc.) and which therefore aim to establish company brand systems in specific markets, with a high degree of complementarity.

Horizontal collective communications are used for a number of objectives: (a) to expand global demand for defined goods; (b) support for ceding sectors; c) defense of the overall offer.

In particular, collective actions to expand overall demand for a product assume expectations of growing global demand. A well-known example of successful international export of product class concerns the introduction and expansion into international markets of the Japanese motorcycle industry (Brondoni, 2021).

In domestic markets, collective communication actions aimed at expanding the overall demand for a good are encouraged by the presence of:

- favourable conditions for substitution between similar product classes for basic needs (for example, in the consumption of beer over wine for the function of 'social drinking', or, in the proposals of consortia of hoteliers, to direct the choices of a potential clientele towards certain tourist areas). In these collective actions, a condition of maximum effectiveness is constituted by the limited differentiation of the different offers;
- applications characterized by strong seasonality, suggesting particular ways of use capable of counteracting seasonal trends. In this sense, well-known examples are represented in the carbonated drinks and ice cream sectors, to reduce the concentration of sales in the summer period;
- promotion of consumption in certain geographical areas, with the proposal of innovative consumption models.

Unlike initiatives to expand overall demand, horizontal collective communications to support sales tend to be activated when consumption in defined sectors shows substantial and not temporary declines.

Collective actions to support sales of ceding sectors are specifically aimed at:

- limit marketing competition. In selling markets (often attacked by types of substitute products, with high brand advertising investments), collective actions make it possible to pursue objectives of 'advertising non-competition', i.e. voluntary limitation of the advertising investments of individual companies.

□ At the end of the 1920s, U.S. ice bar manufacturers, seeing their sales decline due to the gradual emergence of domestic refrigerators, banded together to promote a collective campaign to support sales. The results were initially encouraging and the ice makers were able to introduce their product to families who were not in the habit of using it. Icemakers achieved positive results as long as refrigerator prices remained in the luxury goods range. With the start of mass production, however, the price of refrigerators fell and sales of ice bars dropped significantly. (Magliocco, 1932).

Finally, collective actions for the defense of supply differ from activities aimed at supporting or expanding demand in that the critical factors of activation of individual initiatives are linked to particular supply problems, rather than to defined opportunities or threats related to the expected dynamics of sales.

Horizontal collective actions for the protection of supply are usually aimed at:

- dealing with sudden events, destined to affect the sales of defined product classes for a long time. For example, information actions to counter measures adopted by public authorities (seizures of adulterated or sophisticated goods; precautionary health measures against certain producers);
- allow a specific qualification of the typicality of the product. In this case, the actions to protect the offer aim to affirm particular characteristics of recognition of defined productions, through the dissemination of knowledge of qualifying connotations of origin, provenance, processing, etc.

Horizontal collective initiatives have, in their various types, numerous advantages for the companies that promote their implementation. Among these, the possibility of pursuing objectives for entire product classes with a benefit/communication cost ratio that is significantly more favorable than those obtainable by individual companies is particularly highlighted.

The joint actions in question, in fact, are activated with the financial contribution, distributed pro rata according to appropriate criteria, of a plurality of companies and this basic condition tends precisely to configure an optimal size of the allocation required for the implementation of individual initiatives.

The cost/benefit comparison of horizontal collective actions highlights the possibility of achieving significant economies of scale, which can specifically be defined as economies of basic awareness, concerning a generic promotion of entire product classes of goods.

□ *Promotional elasticity measures the responsiveness of sales to changes in the advertising that causes the change. In analyzing response to promotion, a distinction may be made between (1) industry elasticity, ie. the responsiveness of the entire industry's sales to advertising; and (2) share elasticity, ie., the responsiveness of a firm's market share to change in its share of the industry's advertising. The promotional elasticity of a product will probably change over the product's life cycle of public acceptance, and its market elasticity and share elasticity may also vary with the stage of market development (Dean, 1951).*

Finally, collective communications have a specific advantage regarding the degree of acceptance of the message.

The horizontal joint actions are promoted by directly competing companies and therefore the communication must emphasize only the characteristics common to the

offers of all the producers participating in given initiatives, each of which thus assumes the role of guarantor of the quality level of the offers of the other producers.

Horizontal collective communications also have significant potentially limiting elements, including:

- the rationality of the method of determining the budget. The quantification of the investment for the period must in fact reconcile the different market positions of the member companies with the need to reach the minimum budget threshold (threshold level), the amount of which must also exceed the constraint of the threshold of halo effects for any non-promoting companies (wearout level);

□ *The term “threshold” is capable of many interpretations but it has essentially only one interpretation. It is taken to be that level of advertising which precipitates an initial response ... It is assumed that below this level advertising has virtually no effect. ... The term “wearout” is capable of fewer interpretations... it is taken to be that level of advertising which corresponds to the point at which an individual fails to respond to the advertising stimulus (Corkjndale & Newall 1978).*

- the discrepancy in the communication advantages for individual companies. In the presence of significantly different market conditions (market share, type of distribution, etc.), the activation of a joint action may consolidate concentration phenomena (Lambin, 1976; Schmalensee, 1972; Doyle, 1968; Chamberlin, 1933) or, at the opposite extreme, accelerate processes of fragmentation of demand, with effects contrary to the objectives of neutrality of advantages for bidders;
- the limited efficiency of the message, as the communication often takes the form of messages that are not characterized by incisiveness and memorability, presenting only the minimal characteristics common to all offers.

In addition to the general elements mentioned above, horizontal collective actions reveal further specific constraints in the prior assessment of the consistency between the objectives of the joint action and the objectives of brand communication, which often impose specific codes of conduct that the members must undertake to adopt for certain periods of time, in order not to derive undue advantages to the detriment of the other promoters (e.g. as a result of campaigns carried out simultaneously with joint actions, or using the same arguments, etc.).

4. Vertical Collective Communications

Vertical collective communications concern communication activities carried out by specific producers with specific sales intermediaries, to achieve common short-term commercial objectives.

In the past, before global competition became fierce, vertical collective communications have always been a widely used promotional tool, with a tactical and accessory nature to brand advertising, especially by medium and small-sized industrial companies and retailers, looking for short-term profit opportunities.

In recent decades, however, vertical collective communications have become an innovative management tool in global highly competitive contexts, and especially in this latest phase of '*wild globalization*', where the search for profit becomes obsessive and is systematically applied by major corporations in a multi-business logic.

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Vertical collective actions have specific qualifying elements, which concern:

- the typically commercial nature of the objectives that can be pursued. This purpose is linked to the specific typology of promoters, for whom (especially for intermediaries) a jointly carried out promotional action must be oriented towards achieving short-term objectives, with a rapid return on investment, which therefore exclude the possibility of developing long-lasting actions;
- the type of communication that can be used. Vertical collective actions emphasize the positive brand values of the notoriety and/or image of certain industrial brands and associate them with the values attributed by buyers to specific intermediaries, in order to stimulate sales with effects that can be verified in a short time.

Vertical collective communications show numerous elements of affinity with horizontal joint actions: 1) the identification of a common objective that justifies the activation of joint initiatives; 2) the conflict of interests of the promoters, which however, unlike what occurs for horizontal collectives, does not derive from direct competition caused by a homogeneity of supply, but rather derives from the different roles in industry-distribution relations.

Vertical collective communications impose a distinction between initiatives promoted by a producer and carried out jointly with specific intermediaries (*Retail Communications*), and promotional activities activated by individual sales intermediaries and in whose implementation certain industrial producers participate (*Cooperative Communications*).

Joint initiatives promoted by retailers (*Cooperative Communications*) present numerous industrial brands, under the trade mark of a retailer. The purely competitive purposes require the prior adhesion of producers to individual initiatives, the definition of the methods and times of implementation and the share of

communication costs attributable to each product, the amount of which varies considerably from case to case due to the interest in participation.

Industrial producers who join joint initiatives promoted by intermediaries can obtain many advantages: significant benefits in terms of sales with significantly reduced costs and often effective promotion directly at the point of sale. Moreover, for industrial companies with branded products, participation in vertical collective communications can generate specific risks of retaliation and claims by commercial companies adjacent to the promoter. With negative effects also in the long term.

Joint initiatives implemented by intermediaries (*Cooperative Communications*) constitute a competitive tool aimed at increasing sales of specific assortments in particular periods of the year, but they can also present serious limitations for intermediaries. Such actions can in fact involve excessive costs compared to the achievable results, especially in terms of latent costs, i.e. costs that escape normal accounting control (for example, requiring a commitment of time and resources greater than expected, creating difficulties in managing assortments and stocks, etc.). Significant negative consequences for intermediaries can also arise in relation to an exceptional success of the promotion, when an excess of demand is determined, with purchase expectations referring to advertised products that cannot be satisfied due to a lack of supply.

Joint initiatives promoted by manufacturers (*Retail Communications*), on the other hand, identify commercial communication activities in which a specific branded product is presented together with identification elements of a commercial firm (logo, company name, address, etc.), in order to facilitate the availability of the promoted good. Such actions typically concern products that are not purchased frequently and have a high unit value, or products that are usually purchased after a preliminary comparative evaluation of prices and quality (furniture, household appliances, office machines, industrial goods, etc.).

For industrial companies with branded products, promotional initiatives in collaboration with certain retailers reveal critical evaluation elements, on the one hand in the selection of intermediaries that can be included in commercial communications of the product and, on the other hand, in the consideration of the advantages and limitations, in terms of marketing opportunities, resulting from the explicit indication to potential buyers of specific names of retailers.

In general, vertical collective actions stimulate industrial companies with branded products to achieve defined short-term sales objectives, with the active collaboration of particularly interesting intermediaries.

In the context of vertical collective actions, a particular form of intervention finally concerns quality marks created by an industrial company and granted by it to processing companies, in order to certify the origin, provenance, nature, or processing procedures.

The use of quality marks is regulated by the granting company, usually a supplier of intermediate materials, through the right to control the finished products of its customers, to verify compliance with certain quality standards. To obtain a judgment of conformity to the standards, the processing company must comply with a set of requirements, which may also vary over time.

Quality marks attributable to vertical collective communications are in practice configured as a trademark, completely similar to a normal product identification mark. The granting or revocation of the use of a quality mark, as well as the right to define and modify the technical standards and specifications of the trade-mark, are regulated between the parties in specific contracts.

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Firms compete today in a situation of intense rivalry, in global markets that are subject to political, social and technological instability. As a result, no company can rely only on its own resources, knowledge and skills as it did in the past.

Global managerial economics demands ramified, widespread and strongly interrelated organisations (networks). These complex structures favour managerial capabilities and outsourcing relations with co-makers and external partners (competitive alliances) (Brondoni, 2008).

Innovation is really the key driver of strategic alliances (coopetition), i.e., alliances between competitors (Brondoni, 2015, Bengtsson and Kock, 2000, Brandenburger and Nalebuff, 1996). As coopetition makes possible the combination of complementary and compatible resources and at the same time provides a competitive pressure, it is expected to generate more value and innovation outcomes than other relational modes such as M&A, accords and agreements with non-competitors.

In the context of management innovations arising from strategic alliances imposed by new global markets, collective communications determine a new path of global business development between industrial mega organizations (*horizontal collective communications*), or between global industrial networks and large-scale commercial structures (*vertical collective communications*).

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