

Strategic Communication for Managing Communication Barriers in Multinational CSR Programs to Create Corporate Value

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Abstract

This research examines the communication strategies implemented by PT. Tradeasia in managing communication barriers in the execution of the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program through the Tradeasia Academy initiative. The main objective of this study is to explore how communication strategies can enhance the effectiveness of CSR programs and add value to the company. The method used is descriptive qualitative research with data collection techniques through in-depth interviews with key informants. Data analysis was conducted by referring to the Shannon and Weaver communication model to identify the types of communication barriers that arise, as well as applying Hafied Cangara's communication strategy model and SWOT quadrant analysis to formulate the strategic approach used by the company. The research results show that PT. Tradeasia implements a Strength-Opportunity (SO) based communication strategy, which involves leveraging the company's internal strengths to optimize external opportunities. This approach has proven effective in enhancing the company's global reputation, as evidenced by the increase in market share and recognition in international forums. These findings underscore the importance of strategic communication in the implementation of CSR by multinational companies, particularly in addressing cross-cultural and geographical communication challenges in order to build competitive advantage.

Keywords: Communication Barriers, Communication Strategies, Multinational Companies, Corporate Social Responsibility

INTRODUCTION

The operations of multinational companies (MNCs) inherently face complex communication challenges arising from the management of human resources with diverse cultural backgrounds. Communication gaps often occur due to differences in values, habits, and communication styles between expatriate and local employees. These challenges are caused not only by language differences but also by contrasting communication styles, such as the

more direct and formal communication of expatriates versus the more relaxed and informal local style.

In the context of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs, these communication challenges become increasingly critical. CSR implementation requires clear, inclusive, and culturally sensitive message delivery to avoid misinterpretation. PT Tradeasia, a multinational company operating in the chemical raw materials trade sector, faces similar challenges through its CSR program, Tradeasia Academy. This global-scale educational program encounters significant obstacles arising from differences in language, culture, and time zones among participants and speakers, potentially hindering program objectives.

Theoretically, these obstacles can be understood as communication barriers or “noise” in the Shannon and Weaver communication model. These barriers may be technical (channel disturbances such as poor internet connection or time zone differences), semantic (misinterpretation due to language, accent, and educational background differences), or effectiveness barriers (failure of communication to produce the expected behavior).

To overcome these barriers, companies must design a communication strategy, which according to Hafied Cangara is a systematic plan for delivering messages to achieve specific objectives. This strategy includes situation analysis, determining objectives, identifying audiences, designing messages, selecting communication media, implementing strategies, and evaluation. One key method in situation analysis is SWOT analysis, which identifies internal factors (strengths and weaknesses) and external factors (opportunities and threats).

In addition, multinational companies must be able to process complex and often ambiguous information from diverse operational environments. Karl Weick’s Organizational Information Theory explains how organizations collectively reduce information equivocality through rules and communication cycles. This theory emphasizes the importance of adaptive decision-making in dynamic environments.

The importance of communication strategy is further reinforced by the evolution of CSR itself. Modern CSR has shifted from philanthropy toward shared value creation, where economic interests are integrated with social development. In this paradigm, CSR becomes a strategic investment rather than a cost center, with communication acting as a bridge to transform CSR initiatives into tangible corporate value.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Strategy and SWOT Analysis

Strategy is defined as a systematic and long-term plan designed to achieve organizational objectives through the optimal use of available resources. SWOT analysis is widely applied as a strategic tool to identify internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as external opportunities and threats. By mapping these factors into SWOT quadrants, organizations can determine appropriate strategic orientations, such as growth-oriented, diversification, stability, or defensive strategies. In this study, SWOT analysis serves as a framework to analyze communication strategies in managing CSR-related communication barriers.

Communication and Communication Strategy

Communication is a process of transmitting messages to create shared understanding between communicators and audiences. Lasswell's communication model emphasizes five key elements: communicator, message, channel, audience, and effect. Communication strategies are systematic approaches designed to ensure message effectiveness by considering audience characteristics, message design, media selection, and contextual factors.

Strategic communication aims to enhance understanding, influence attitudes and behavior, build effective relationships, and support organizational goals. Effective communication strategies involve situation analysis, goal setting, audience analysis, message design, media selection, implementation, and evaluation.

Communication Barriers

Communication barriers, commonly referred to as noise in Shannon and Weaver's communication model, include technical, semantic, and effectiveness problems. In multinational organizations, communication barriers often arise from language differences, cultural diversity, and organizational complexity. These barriers may distort message interpretation and reduce communication effectiveness, making strategic management of communication essential in CSR program implementation.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Corporate Social Responsibility refers to an organization's commitment to ethical behavior and sustainable development while improving the quality of life of employees, communities, and society. CSR has evolved from philanthropic activities to a strategic organizational function that contributes to competitive advantage, corporate image, and value creation. Strategic CSR integrates economic, legal, ethical, and social dimensions to ensure long-term organizational sustainability.

Organizational Information Theory

Organizational Information Theory, proposed by Karl Weick, explains how organizations process information to reduce uncertainty and ambiguity. Organizations operate within complex information environments and must collectively interpret information to create shared meaning. Through rules, communication cycles, and interaction patterns, organizations manage equivocal information. This theory is relevant for analyzing how multinational companies manage communication barriers during CSR implementation.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design. This method is suitable for understanding complex social phenomena in real-life contexts. Primary data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews using purposive sampling. Five key informants participated in this study, including company management, CSR coordinators, and program participants from different countries.

Data analysis employed pattern matching techniques, with qualitative coding stages consisting of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. SWOT analysis was used to evaluate strategic conditions. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of the Corporate Social Responsibility Program

PT Tradeasia, as a multinational company operating in Indonesia, carries out its corporate social responsibility obligations in accordance with Law No. 40 of 2007. The company has selected the education sector as its primary focus and established Tradeasia Academy, a global initiative aimed at equipping young talents with knowledge and skills in international business. The program is conducted online, utilizing Zoom for learning sessions and WhatsApp for coordination, allowing participation from individuals across different countries.

The program implementation is designed to enhance the quality of the learning experience. Evaluation processes are conducted through quizzes, monthly presentations, and one-on-one discussion sessions with mentors. These evaluations aim to measure participants' understanding and assess their contributions to the company's strategic objectives, such as expanding into new markets.

Communication Barriers in the Implementation of the Tradeasia Academy CSR Program

During the implementation of the Tradeasia Academy CSR program, several communication barriers were identified that affected the effectiveness of achieving program objectives. One of the primary barriers was cultural differences and language accents among participants from various countries. Although English was used as the lingua franca, strong accent variations—particularly among participants from South Asia—often hindered comprehension of the material, as stated by one informant:

“Although all participants use English, everyone has their own accent depending on their country. Sometimes we need to ask them to repeat themselves because the pronunciation is different and rather difficult to understand.”
(Teguh, 2025)

Another communication barrier stemmed from differences in time zones between participants and organizers. The program followed Jakarta time (Indonesia), which was often incompatible with participants from regions such as the United States, causing difficulties in attending live sessions.

“When the program runs at 5 p.m. here, in America it’s still around 4 or 5 a.m. Eventually, they couldn’t attend the regular sessions and ended up withdrawing from the program.”
(Faiz, 2025)

Communication barriers also arose from technical factors, such as limited internet connectivity among participants, particularly those in areas with low network stability. This frequently disrupted content delivery and forced participants to request repetition of materials, hindering session flow.

“In terms of communication, participants sometimes experience signal problems, so during presentations they interrupt and say, ‘Sorry, there was a signal issue,’ and ask for the material to be repeated.” (Faiz, 2025)

In addition to technical issues, differences in participants’ educational backgrounds also posed significant communication barriers. Technical materials related to chemical raw materials or supply chain terminology were difficult for participants from non-technical backgrounds to understand, increasing cognitive load.

“I don’t come from a chemical background... so that was a new thing for me learning about different products.”
(Sika, 2025)

Based on interviews and analysis using the Shannon and Weaver communication model, three types of communication barriers were identified in the implementation of Tradeasia Academy:

A. Technical Barriers

These barriers relate to disturbances in communication channels.

1. **Time Zone Differences:** Programs based on Jakarta time created difficulties for participants from other regions, such as the United States, who were required to attend sessions late at night or early in the morning. This resulted in irregular participation and participant withdrawal.
 2. **Internet Connectivity Quality:** Participants from regions with unstable internet access, such as parts of Central Asia, experienced unclear audio or video, hindering information transfer.
- B. Semantic Barriers**
These barriers relate to differences in message interpretation.
1. **Accent and Language Differences:** Despite using English as a lingua franca, strong accent variations—especially from South Asian participants—caused comprehension difficulties for both participants and speakers.
 2. **Educational Background Differences:** Participants without chemistry or international business backgrounds struggled to understand technical terminology related to chemical products or trade concepts such as INCOTERMS, creating comprehension gaps.
- C. Effectiveness Barrier**
These barriers relate to the impact of communication on participants' behavior. Miscommunication and comprehension gaps reduced the program's effectiveness in achieving its objectives. Participants who struggled to understand the material required more time to complete projects, and their performance outputs (e.g., sales or inquiries) tended to be lower. This indicates that communication processes had not optimally transformed knowledge into competence and concrete action.

SWOT Analysis of the Tradeasia Academy CSR Program

- A. Strengths**
Tradeasia Academy's primary strength lies in its global scale, enabling participation from multiple countries and offering content relevant to international trade, thereby supporting the company's global competitiveness. As stated by an informant:

"Tradeasia Academy is global, so anyone can join—even participants from the UAE, Thailand, and the United States. The topics are highly relevant to globalization."

- B. Weaknesses**

The program's weakness lies in limited teaching resources, as instructors are PT Tradeasia employees with primary job responsibilities, often leading to scheduling conflicts.

"The weakness is limited human resources because the instructors are also employees, so sometimes teaching schedules clash with work." (Teguh, 2025)

C. Opportunities

Tradeasia Academy benefits from increasing interest among Generation Z in online bootcamps and training programs that offer time and location flexibility. Additionally, the growing use of artificial intelligence presents opportunities to improve material development and program management efficiency.

"There's a growing trend of Gen Z joining online bootcamps, and our materials are unique because they focus on international trade. The rapid development of AI can help us design content, prepare materials, and evaluate participants." (Teguh, 2025)

D. Threats

Threats to Tradeasia Academy include potential government regulatory changes that may affect program sustainability, as well as competition from similar training programs. The online format also introduces technical challenges such as time zone differences and internet connectivity issues.

"Challenges arise from communication because participants come from various countries with different time zones, which affects interaction during the program." (Faiz, 2025)

SWOT Quadrant Analysis Results

Based on quantitative SWOT analysis, the Tradeasia Academy program is positioned in **Quadrant I (Strength-Opportunity)**, with a strength score of 4.5 and an opportunity score of 4.5. This position indicates dominant internal strengths and significant external opportunities. Therefore, the most appropriate strategy is an **aggressive growth-oriented strategy**.

Communication Strategy for Managing Communication Barriers

Based on its Quadrant I position, PT Tradeasia developed a systematic communication strategy guided by Hafied Cangara's six elements:

1. **Situation Analysis and Audience Identification:** Participant profiling through pre-assessment enabled effective audience segmentation.
2. **Communication Objectives:** Beyond instructional goals, the program supports market expansion and global corporate branding.
3. **Message Design:** Simple, relevant language and case-based materials were used to overcome semantic barriers.
4. **Media Selection:** Digital platforms (Zoom and WhatsApp) enabled two-way communication, supported by session recordings and subtitles.
5. **Strategy Implementation:** Adaptive communication cycles aligned with Karl Weick's Organizational Information Theory, allowing real-time problem-solving and AI-assisted content development.
6. **Evaluation:** Quantitative satisfaction surveys and qualitative engagement observation assessed both technical effectiveness and behavioral outcomes.

Communication Strategy and Corporate Value Creation

The implemented communication strategy successfully transformed Tradeasia Academy from a CSR obligation into a strategic value-creation instrument. This is reflected in several tangible outcomes: human capital development and global networking, enhanced reputation and credibility recognized by the World Economic Forum's New Champions Community, and successful market expansion into Brazil.

These achievements demonstrate that effective communication is not merely supportive but serves as a key driver of corporate performance. This approach aligns with Porter's (1985) concept of CSR as a source of competitive advantage and the shared value framework (Ahen & Zettinig, 2014), where both companies and society benefit. PT Tradeasia has successfully developed a unique and difficult-to-imitate CSR program that empowers society while strengthening market position and cost efficiency.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that PT Tradeasia's communication strategy in managing communication barriers within the Tradeasia Academy CSR program has been effective in creating significant added value for the company. By adopting a growth-oriented strategy based on internal strengths and external opportunities, the company successfully enhanced its global reputation, expanded markets, and developed competent human capital. Strategic and adaptive communication thus serves not only as a message delivery tool but also as a key component of sustainable competitive

advantage for multinational companies.

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