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Corporate Communication and Strategy in Educational Institutions in Bengaluru: A Conceptual Framework and Research Design for Commerce and Management Colleges

Dr. Pankaj Choudhary
Principal, BMS College of Commerce and Management, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

Dr. Preethi Stanley
Head, Department of Management and Corporate Communication, BMS College of Commerce and Management, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

Abstract - Corporate communication has become a strategic management function in higher education, shaping institutional reputation, stakeholder engagement, student recruitment and competitive position. In Bengaluru, where commerce and management colleges compete in a crowded and fast-changing market, communication is also tested by external events: national ranking and accreditation reforms, tighter scrutiny of advertising claims, and abrupt changes in state degree policy. This paper develops a conceptual framework linking four communication practices (integrated communication, digital engagement, message consistency and stakeholder-oriented communication) to three strategic outcomes (institutional reputation, student engagement and strategic alignment), and sets out a mixed-methods research design to test it. Four recent Bengaluru and Indian cases are used to ground the framework. The design combines structured questionnaires to administrators, faculty, marketing staff and students with semi-structured interviews of institutional leaders, a stratified sample across college types, and analysis by descriptive statistics, correlation, regression and thematic analysis. Five testable hypotheses are proposed. The paper reports no empirical findings; its contribution is a theoretically grounded, context-specific framework, a measurement and analysis plan, and a communication-governance model that colleges can use while the empirical study proceeds.

Keywords: corporate communication; strategic management; higher education; institutional reputation; stakeholder engagement; Bengaluru

1. Introduction

Colleges once relied mainly on word of mouth, a university affiliation and a prospectus. Today they must communicate continuously with applicants, parents, current students, faculty, alumni, recruiters, regulators and the media, across print, web and social channels. Corporate communication, the coordinated management of internal and external communication to build favourable relationships and a favourable reputation, is the discipline concerned with this task [1, 2]. Its relevance to universities is well established: a review of the higher-education marketing literature concluded that institutions increasingly compete for students, staff and funding, and that reputation and image are central to that competition [3].

Commerce and management colleges in Bengaluru illustrate the pressure. Bengaluru hosts some of India's best-known institutions, for example the Indian Institute of Science and the National Law School of India University, which have topped national rankings in their categories [4], alongside a large number of private and aided colleges that compete for similar applicants. In this environment, communication cannot be treated as a brochure-and-hoarding exercise run by an admissions office. It is a strategic capability that should be aligned with institutional mission, informed by stakeholders' needs and governed by clear responsibilities and standards.

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Despite its importance, little systematic work examines how Indian colleges manage corporate communication as part of strategy, and almost none focuses on a single city's commerce and management sector. This paper addresses that gap in two ways. First, it builds a conceptual framework from the corporate-communication, stakeholder and reputation literatures and grounds it in four recent, verifiable developments in Bengaluru and India. Second, it specifies a mixed-methods design to test the framework empirically. The specific objectives of the proposed study are:

- **O1.** to assess the communication channels adopted by commerce and management colleges in Bengaluru;
- **O2.** to evaluate the alignment between communication practices and institutional objectives;
- **O3.** to examine stakeholder perceptions of communication effectiveness; and
- **O4.** to identify challenges affecting the implementation of strategic communication.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents four live cases from the Bengaluru and Indian higher-education environment. Section 3 reviews the theoretical background. Section 4 develops the conceptual framework and hypotheses. Section 5 describes the research design. Section 6 proposes a communication-governance model, and Sections 7 and 8 discuss limitations and conclude.

2. The Bengaluru Context: Four Live Cases

Abstract models of communication are best understood against concrete events. Four recent developments show why communication is a strategic matter for Bengaluru's colleges. Table 1 summarizes them, and the discussion that follows adds detail. They are drawn from public sources available at the time of writing; readers should check for later updates.

2.1 National rankings and the "Perception" parameter

The National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF), run by the Ministry of Education, published its India Rankings 2025 on 4 September 2025 across 17 categories, including a new category on sustainable development goals [4]. In the overall methodology, five parameter groups are scored: teaching, learning and resources; research and professional practice; graduation outcomes; outreach and inclusivity; and perception, the last carrying a weight of about 10 per cent [4]. Two lessons follow. Perception is an explicit, scored element of the rankings, so reputation among peers and employers has a direct institutional payoff. But roughly nine-tenths of the score rests on substantive performance, so communication can amplify and explain quality; it cannot substitute for it. Colleges that publicize a rank must also be able to say which category, year and edition they refer to.

2.2 Accreditation reform: communicating a new quality signal

The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) came under scrutiny after a bribery row, and a reform committee led by former ISRO chief K. Radhakrishnan recommended replacing letter grades with a binary outcome, "Accredited" or "Not Accredited", together with optional Maturity-Based Graded Levels from one to five [5, 6]. NAAC announced the shift in February 2025, and reporting indicated that existing grades would continue during the transition [6]. For colleges, this creates a communication task: applicants and parents who understand "A+" or "A++" must now be helped to understand what "Accredited" and a maturity level mean, and institutions must avoid presenting old and new signals in ways that mislead.

2.3 Regulation of advertising claims

On 13 November 2024 the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) issued Guidelines for Prevention of Misleading Advertisement in the Coaching Sector, 2024, prohibiting false claims about courses, faculty credentials, fees and refund policies, selection numbers, ranks and success rates, and guaranteed job outcomes. At the time of the announcement the authority had imposed penalties of ₹54.6 lakh on 18 coaching institutes [7, 8]. These guidelines target

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coaching centres rather than degree colleges, and the Advertising Standards Council of India had separately prescribed guidelines in 2023 for advertising by educational institutions, programmes and platforms [8]. Taken together they signal regulatory attention to exactly the claims that colleges are tempted to make about placements, "100% placement" and rankings. Verification of every public claim is therefore a governance requirement, not a courtesy.

2.4 Policy volatility: the NEP–SEP transition in Karnataka

Karnataka was the first state to adopt the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, introducing a four-year honours degree. After a change of government, the state announced it would draft its own State Education Policy (SEP), and in the run-up to the 2024–25 admissions season colleges were distributing applications for four-year programmes while the government's decision remained unclear, leaving students in limbo [9]. On 8 May 2024 the government issued an order withdrawing the four-year honours option from 2024–25 and reverting to the three-year degree [10]. Reporting in 2025 described continued uncertainty for students who had entered under the four-year structure and exited after three years [11]. The episode is a natural case study in crisis and change communication: colleges had to explain a shifting policy to applicants and current students quickly, consistently and with limited official guidance.

Table 1: Four live cases from the Bengaluru and Indian higher-education environment

Case	What happened	Communication challenge	Link to framework
NIRF 2025 and Perception	Rankings released 4 Sept 2025; perception is a scored parameter [4]	Use rank claims accurately and show evidence behind them	Reputation; message consistency
NAAC reform (2025)	Letter grades replaced by binary status and maturity levels [5, 6]	Explain a new quality signal to applicants and parents	Stakeholder-oriented communication
Advertising regulation (2023–24)	ASCI guidance for educational advertising; CCPA coaching guidelines and penalties [7, 8]	Verify claims on placements, ranks and faculty	Communication governance
Karnataka NEP–SEP change (2024–25)	Four-year honours degree withdrawn on 8 May 2024; admissions confusion [9, 10, 11]	Crisis and change communication under policy ambiguity	Integrated communication; strategic alignment

2.5 Cross-case synthesis

Read together, the four cases show a common pattern. In each, an external actor (a ranking body, an accreditor, a regulator or a government) changed the rules or the signals on which stakeholders rely, and colleges had to translate that change for their own audiences. Three capabilities were tested: accuracy (saying only what can be evidenced), speed (informing students and parents before rumour does) and consistency (giving the same answer in the prospectus, on the website, at the admissions desk and on social media). These are precisely the practices that the framework in Section 4 isolates, and the cases supply the real-world conditions under which the proposed hypotheses will be examined. They also show that communication problems in colleges are often governance problems: unclear ownership, no verification routine and no protocol for change.

3. Theoretical Background

3.1 Corporate and strategic communication

Corporate communication is commonly defined as the coordinated management of all internal and external communication so as to build and maintain favourable relationships with the stakeholders on whom the organization depends [1, 2]. The related field of strategic communication stresses that communication must be purposeful: organizations communicate to advance their missions [12]. Zerfass and colleagues similarly define strategic communication as communication used by an organization to fulfil its overall purpose, and emphasize its contribution to organizational goals and alignment with strategy [13]. These perspectives justify treating communication in colleges as a management function with its own planning, governance and measurement, not as an add-on to marketing.

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3.2 Stakeholder theory

Freeman's stakeholder approach holds that organizations must manage relationships with all groups that can affect, or are affected by, their objectives [14]. Mitchell, Agle and Wood proposed that stakeholder salience depends on power, legitimacy and urgency [15]. A college's stakeholders include applicants and parents, enrolled students, faculty and staff, alumni, employers and recruiters, the affiliating university, accreditation and ranking bodies, regulators and the media. Their information needs differ: a parent comparing fees needs different content from a recruiter assessing graduate quality. Stakeholder-oriented communication therefore means segmenting audiences, identifying what matters to each and listening as well as broadcasting.

3.3 Identity, image and reputation

Christensen and Askegaard distinguish corporate identity (what the organization is and says it is) from image (how audiences perceive it), and argue that the two interact through continuing communication [16]. Reputation is the accumulated, relatively stable judgement of stakeholders over time [17]. The Reputation Quotient provides a multi-stakeholder measure built on dimensions such as emotional appeal, products and services, vision and leadership, and workplace environment [18]. In higher education, Sung and Yang found that external prestige and reputation influence students' evaluation of a university [19]. For colleges, message consistency across channels and over time is critical, because inconsistent claims erode credibility.

3.4 Digital and social media engagement

Kietzmann and colleagues describe social media through seven functional building blocks (identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation and groups) and warn that organizations must choose which to emphasize [20]. In an empirical study of a UK university, Rutter, Roper and Lettice found that social-media interaction was associated with university brand and with recruitment performance [21]. Digital engagement for colleges therefore involves more than posting: it involves two-way interaction, responsiveness and linkage with the institution's brand.

3.5 Internal communication and the faculty voice

Corporate communication is directed inwards as well as outwards [1, 2]. In a college, faculty and staff are both an audience and a channel: they advise applicants, explain policy changes to students and shape the institution's reputation through everyday conduct. If internal audiences learn of a policy change from the press before they hear it from management, they cannot answer students consistently. For this reason the proposed study samples faculty and administrators alongside students, and treats internal communication quality as part of integrated communication, not a separate topic.

4. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

The framework proposes that four communication practices are associated with three strategic outcomes, and that the strength of these relationships depends on communication governance and institutional context. Table 2 defines the constructs and indicative measures.

Table 2: Constructs, definitions and indicative measures

Construct	Definition	Indicative measurement (5-point Likert unless stated)
Integrated communication (IC)	Coordination of messages and channels across admissions, academics, alumni, placement and leadership communication [2]	Existence of a communication plan; coordination between units; shared brand guidelines
Digital engagement (DE)	Two-way, regular interaction with stakeholders on web and social channels [20, 21]	Posting frequency; responsiveness; interaction rates; perceived usefulness of channels

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Construct	Definition	Indicative measurement (5-point Likert unless stated)
Message consistency (MC)	Alignment of claims and tone across channels and over time [16]	Perceived consistency; verification of public claims; one-voice protocols
Stakeholder-oriented communication (SOC)	Audience segmentation, listening and feedback [14, 15]	Segmented content; feedback mechanisms; stakeholder satisfaction with information
Institutional reputation (IR)	Stakeholders' overall judgement of the institution [17, 18]	Adapted Reputation Quotient items; perceived standing among peer colleges
Student engagement (SE)	Students' involvement in academic and campus life, and with institutional communication [22]	Adapted engagement items; participation in events; use of official channels
Strategic alignment (SA)	Fit between communication activity and institutional objectives [12, 13]	Perceived link between communication goals and strategic plan; use of communication metrics

Building on the literature, five hypotheses are proposed for empirical testing.

- **H1:** Integrated communication is positively associated with institutional reputation.
- **H2:** Digital engagement is positively associated with student engagement.
- **H3:** Message consistency is positively associated with institutional reputation and with strategic alignment.
- **H4:** Stakeholder-oriented communication is positively associated with strategic alignment and student engagement.
- **H5:** Administrators rate the effectiveness of institutional communication higher than faculty and students do, indicating a gap between communication planning and stakeholder experience.

H5 is included because planners typically assess their own activity favourably, and because a plan–implementation gap is one of the study's stated concerns. Institution type (for example autonomous versus affiliated, and aided versus private) is treated as a control and as a possible moderator, and the challenges identified through the qualitative phase (O4) are expected to explain variation in communication effectiveness. The hypotheses concern association, not causation: reputation may also shape how communication is received.

5. Research Design

5.1 Overall design

The study uses a convergent mixed-methods design in which quantitative and qualitative data are collected in parallel, analysed separately and then integrated [23]. The quantitative strand tests the hypotheses and describes practice; the qualitative strand explains how communication is planned, what barriers arise and how leaders view the cases in Section 2. Table 3 maps each objective to the data source and analysis.

Table 3: Alignment of objectives, data and analysis

Objective	Data source	Analysis
O1: Channels adopted	Questionnaire (administrators, marketing staff); audit of official websites and social accounts	Frequencies and percentages; cross-tabulation by college type
O2: Alignment with objectives	Questionnaire; interviews; review of strategic plans where available	Descriptive statistics; correlation; regression of SA on IC, MC, SOC; thematic analysis
O3: Stakeholder perceptions	Questionnaire (faculty, students, administrators)	Group comparison (ANOVA or Kruskal–Wallis); correlation and regression for H1–H4; test of H5
O4: Challenges	Semi-structured interviews; open-ended items	Thematic analysis [24]

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5.2 Population and sampling

The population comprises commerce and management colleges in Bengaluru. Colleges will be stratified by type (for example autonomous, affiliated private or aided, and constituent or deemed-university units), and a proportional sample of colleges will be drawn from each stratum. Within each selected college, respondents will be drawn from four groups: institutional administrators, faculty members, marketing or communication professionals, and students. For the regression models, a minimum sample of about 98 complete responses is needed to detect a medium effect with up to six predictors, using the rule $N \geq 50 + 8m$ [25]. To allow subgroup comparisons across stakeholder types and to protect against non-response, a target of at least 300 usable questionnaires is proposed. Because respondents are nested within colleges, the intraclass correlation will be examined and cluster-robust standard errors or multilevel models will be used where it is material. Semi-structured interviews will be held with 12–15 leaders (principals, deans, heads of admissions or marketing), selected purposively until themes are saturated.

5.3 Instruments and validation

Questionnaires will use five-point Likert items adapted from established instruments where available, namely the Reputation Quotient for reputation [18] and the National Survey of Student Engagement for engagement [22], with new items for integrated communication, message consistency and strategic alignment, for which no standard scales are known. Content validity will be checked by an expert panel of academics and communication practitioners, and a pilot with a small sample from outside the final sample will precede the main survey. Internal consistency will be assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with 0.70 as the usual minimum for research use [26], and construct validity through factor analysis. The interview guide will cover communication planning and ownership, channels and budgets, handling of the policy and regulatory events in Section 2, measurement, and perceived barriers.

5.4 Analysis

Quantitative analysis will begin with data screening, descriptive statistics and reliability testing, followed by Pearson or Spearman correlations and multiple regression for H1–H4, with checks for multicollinearity (variance inflation factors), residual normality and heteroscedasticity. H5 will be tested by comparing mean effectiveness ratings across stakeholder groups. Qualitative data will be coded and analysed by reflexive thematic analysis [24]. Integration will be carried out through a joint display that sets the statistical results beside the themes that explain them [23].

5.5 Model specification

The primary regression models will take the form: Institutional Reputation = $\beta 0 + \beta 1$ (Integrated Communication) + $\beta 2$ (Message Consistency) + $\beta 3$ (Stakeholder-Oriented Communication) + $\beta 4$ (Digital Engagement) + controls + error; Student Engagement = $\beta 0 + \beta 1$ (Digital Engagement) + $\beta 2$ (Stakeholder-Oriented Communication) + controls + error; and Strategic Alignment = $\beta 0 + \beta 1$ (Integrated Communication) + $\beta 2$ (Message Consistency) + $\beta 3$ (Stakeholder-Oriented Communication) + controls + error. Controls will include institution type, size (enrolment band), years of operation and respondent group. Because the predictors may be correlated, standardized coefficients and variance inflation factors will be reported, and the models will be re-estimated with composite scores and, if sample size permits, with structural equation modelling to test the framework as a whole.

5.6 Ethics

The study will seek institutional ethics clearance and informed consent from all participants. Participation will be voluntary and anonymous, with no student participant under 18, and institutional data will be reported in aggregate or with pseudonyms so that individual colleges cannot be identified without consent.

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6. A Communication-Governance Model for Colleges

While the empirical study proceeds, the framework and the cases suggest a practical governance model that colleges can adopt. It has five components.

- **1. Ownership and structure.** Assign one accountable leader for institutional communication, define roles across admissions, academics, placement, alumni and IT, and create a small communication committee that reports to the principal or director.
- **2. Message architecture.** Define the institution's core positioning, a limited set of key messages and brand guidelines, so that all units speak with one voice (message consistency).
- **3. Claims verification protocol.** Require documentary evidence and a named approver before any public claim about rankings, accreditation status, placements or faculty is published, with the source and year stated. This responds directly to the regulatory developments in Section 2.3.
- **4. Stakeholder segmentation and channel plan.** Map audiences, define what each needs, choose channels accordingly and create feedback loops, including a visible response standard for social-media queries.
- **5. Change and crisis protocol.** Prepare a protocol for rapid, factual and consistent communication when external rules change, as in the NEP–SEP episode: a single source of truth (for example a dedicated web page and FAQ), time-bound updates and a channel for student queries.

Illustration (constructed for exposition, not empirical data). Suppose the placement office of a commerce college wishes to advertise placement results. Under the claims-verification protocol, the office submits the figures with their source (the placement register for a stated batch and year), the definition used (for example, offers accepted versus offers made, and whether higher-study admissions are counted) and the salary statistic (median rather than highest). The communication committee checks the evidence, requires the batch and year to be printed with the claim, and rejects phrases such as "100% placement" that cannot be substantiated for every student. The approved claim is entered in a claims register and reused across the prospectus, website and social posts, which also secures message consistency. The extra step costs little and reduces both regulatory and reputational risk.

Table 4 links these components to indicators that can be tracked, drawing on the balanced-scorecard idea that strategy should be translated into measures [27].

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Table 4: Illustrative communication indicators

Outcome	Indicator	Source
Reputation	Perception scores among peers, recruiters and alumni; trend in applications per seat	Annual stakeholder survey; admissions data
Student engagement	Response time to student queries; attendance at institution events; use of official channels	Helpdesk logs; event data; analytics
Message consistency	Share of public claims with documented evidence; number of corrections issued	Claims register

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Outcome	Indicator	Source
Strategic alignment	Proportion of communication goals linked to the strategic plan; budget share by goal	Plan review; finance data
Change communication	Time from policy announcement to institutional notice; query volume after notice	Communication log

7. Limitations, Implications and Future Work

7.1 Limitations and future work

This paper has no empirical results, so the framework and hypotheses remain to be tested. The four cases are drawn largely from news and secondary reports and may be superseded by later developments, and some of the facts (for example, the exact weight of NIRF parameters in different categories and the transition rules for NAAC grades) should be re-verified against official notifications at the time of publication. The cases involve events in Karnataka and India and may not generalize to other settings. The design relies mainly on self-reported perceptions, which may be biased by social desirability, and respondents are nested in colleges, which complicates inference. A cross-sectional design cannot establish that communication causes reputation or engagement. Future work should therefore collect the proposed data, consider longitudinal designs tracking colleges through external shocks, and add objective outcome measures such as application volumes and enrolment yield.

7.2 Implications for practice and policy

For college leaders, the main implication is to treat communication as an institutional capability with a named owner, a budget, standards and metrics. For affiliating universities and state departments, the Karnataka episode suggests that policy changes affecting admissions should be accompanied by timely, single-source guidance so that colleges can inform students consistently; ambiguity at the top is multiplied across every institution below it. For regulators and ranking or accreditation bodies, plain-language explanations of new status labels, such as the NAAC binary outcome and maturity levels, would reduce the risk that institutions and families misread them. For researchers, the Bengaluru commerce and management sector offers a bounded and well-documented setting in which to study how institutions respond when the rules governing their reputation change.

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8. Conclusion

Corporate communication has become part of how colleges compete, comply and adapt. The Bengaluru cases examined here show that rankings reward perceived standing, that accreditation reform changes the signals families rely on, that regulators are scrutinizing the claims colleges make, and that sudden changes in state policy test institutions' ability to communicate under uncertainty. The proposed framework links four communication practices to reputation, student engagement and strategic alignment, and the research design provides a way to test those links in commerce and management colleges. The governance model offers practical guidance in the meantime. The study, once completed, is expected to give college leaders evidence on which communication practices matter most, and to give researchers a context-specific account of communication as a strategic capability in Indian higher education.

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