

A FRAMEWORK OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION FOR GOVERNMENT OF PAKISTAN: NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CONCEPTS AND MANIFESTATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Strategic communication (StratCom forthwith) is growing in importance because countries need a planned communication campaign. For a country like Pakistan, it is even more important to have a StratCom policy. On one hand, the strategic geopolitical location of Pakistan poses several security threats to the country like proxy wars, terrorism, sectarian manifestations from within and outside, and organized social crimes, destabilizing the national progress. On the other hand, Strategic communicators are rarely found equally prepared to respond to seen and unforeseen situations. This paper, therefore, analyzes the concept and manifestation of StratCom in Pakistan while presenting challenges to, considerations for, and key principles for developing a framework for StratCom in Pakistan. The paper, therefore, is an attempt to suggest a framework for effective StratCom in Pakistan that could help the country achieve its strategic objectives and sustainable development goals.

Keywords: Framework, StratCom, strategic communication, Pakistan, strategic objectives, challenges, sustainable development goals.

INTRODUCTION

Strategic Communication is not new for those countries that have conventionally focused their resources and efforts on information dissemination systems. It is getting even more important with the realization that effective communication is valuable and critical to delivering the appropriate message using effective forms of communication at a suitable time for the prioritized audience (Figure 1). An effective StratCom approach helps to deal with sensitive issues, identify the target audience, and have a standard communication policy (Ozkan, 2015; Ekebom et al., 2008). Other than communicating a piece of information, the set principles of StratCom by a country are used to achieve strategic goals that may range from

persuasion to coordination to behavioral changes. Decision-makers in a country need to have a StratCom approach. They need to think holistically regarding communication efforts and for that matter, they must look beyond mere information sharing. Rather they must think purposefully about the goals which they want to achieve by communicating and sharing information. It is a planned communication campaign maintained by a state, army, government, small group, business, or NGO. For a country, it is used for multiple purposes which may include formal or informal studies, and measurable goals (Morteniuss, 2014; Ozkan, 2015).



Figure 1: Components of Strategic Communication Process (RRN, n. d.)

Concept of StratCom in Pakistan:

The influence of information in today’s world had made Pakistan the center of attention in the world. This influence has changed the battlespace from the “dominance of kinetic power” (Malik, 2011) to something heavily influenced by information warfare. Therefore, Pakistan, only if successful in the “infosphere battlespace, in the context of the events, actions, and reactions” (ibid.), will be able to deal with its allies and adversaries to achieve its strategic relations. It is, therefore imperative that the complexity of the infosphere battlespace is recognized by Pakistan to win the 5th generation warfare in which the country is presently engaged. To win this war strategic thinkers need to devise a comprehensive and coherent communication strategy to spread the information through various tools.

The information which is currently disseminated by the adversaries of Pakistan is harmful to national interests. Therefore, the country needs to understand the essence StratCom to make it effective to win information warfare. The adversaries are equipped with “highly professional and synchronized propaganda mechanisms” (ibid.) to disseminate the information through the latest

communications technologies. They are effectively exploiting the electronic media, recruiting global supporters, and influencing policy decisions. Therefore, for Pakistan, the “center of gravity” is its people. In this regard, the hearts and the minds can be won only through focused information and psychological operations.

The strategic thinkers in Pakistan must realize that the rapidly globalizing world is overburdening Pakistan with information that is creating cognitive effects on them and ultimately influencing their decision-making. Communication success rests upon the understanding of the audience. Therefore, for Pakistan, the internalization of information is required so that the perception of the audience becomes favorable to build the original message and counter the misinformation spread by adversaries. For that matter, a precise and clear set of comprehension objectives must be constructed after keeping the target audiences’ cultural intricacies into consideration, formulating a tailor-made message and deciding the delivery method that can be adapted according to the available facilitates to both the audience and the communicators. Finally, there is a requirement for a mechanism to measure the success (Figure 2).

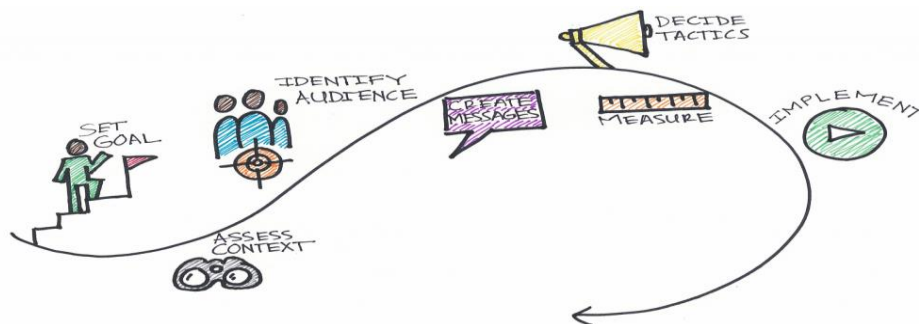


Figure 2: Strategic communication Process overview (RRN, n. d.)

Challenges to StratCom in Pakistan:

There is a visible deficiency “of a synchronized inter-agency communications doctrine at all levels of the security and governance apparatus” (Malik, 2011) portraying Pakistan as an occupation force within its borders by its adversaries and their allies through consistent information and psychological operations (ibid.). There are specific reasons leading to “the protraction of the insurgency” (Malik, 2011) and one of the major reasons is that Pakistan always neglects focused strategic agenda and long-term communication strategy that should be incorporated within its national legislative framework (ibid.). Resultantly, the development of national identity becomes difficult in some areas of Pakistan, e.g., in the FATA and Baluchistan. The StratCom that Pakistan needs to develop must therefore focus on coordinated dissemination of information to pursue national interests and objectives. The StratCom in Pakistan should be aimed at influencing the target audience in respect of their perceptions. The audience must be understood listened to and engaged in a dialogue. It is something more than merely synchronizing a message across the board within government departments and agencies. It is seeking the complete information ‘in words’ and ensuring that it is reflected by the government ‘in conduct.’

Here are the challenges that Pakistan is facing in terms of communicating strategically and effectively and the initial steps to building the foundation of a solid StratCom is understanding the existing strong connections within and outside the country:

i. **Feedback:** The Strategic Communicators must get timely feedback, negative or positive. Unfortunately, Pakistan is not connected with many other countries on a one-on-one basis and neither is getting proper feedback for what is it communicating. Even if it is getting, there are chances that the feedback is not properly monitored and analyzed. As a result, the country is not prepared for effective communication and timely response to an event.

ii. **Absence of Strategy:** The presence of an effective strategy is not so visible in Pakistan making mutual connections difficult. Pakistan is often found communicatively not ready for any situation, foreseen or unforeseen. In Pakistan, common pitfalls are not identified due to not understanding communication gaps and audience

needs. Moreover, there is no proper evaluation of the effects of presently held communication strategies. There is also a lack of understanding of the urgency of implementation and intervention. All this leads to ignorance concerning determining the “plan of action” for specific stances and occurrences.

iii. **Communication Overload:** Communicators in Pakistan, due to lack of relative education, bombard the audience with tweets, addresses, and press conferences thinking this is the best way to improve communication. Resultantly, this wastes time and energy reducing the overall productivity. Various governments in Pakistan have failed to address information overload. The country does not have communication experts that realize the information relevant to the audience. Even if they do, it is often conveyed incomplete or in the wrong manner.

iv. **Contextless Communication:** Often a lack of informational context is observed in Pakistan that impacts StratCom negatively. Many times, the government assumes the audience is aware of the context and passes along information. Resultantly, people handle it without knowing the history of communication, leading to serious missteps.

v. **Internal Transparency:** To correctly inform its citizens around the globe about an event or policy is a big challenge for Pakistan. It is unfortunate that the citizens of Pakistan mostly do not find out about the country’s news through internal communication. Instead, external sources such as foreign or social media, often not considered impartial by them, are the main source of information.

vi. **Right Tools Selection:** For executing StratCom in Pakistan, there are still deficiencies in selecting the right tools with the right bandwidth, applications, and software which are often more efficient than regular ones. This deficiency of not having the right tools at Pakistan’s disposal makes the difference in terms of the implementation of StratCom. Therefore, in Pakistan, governments, and people should be familiar with using multiple tools rather than a few social media platforms.

vii. **Lack of Balance:** There is an absence of a balanced communication approach in Pakistan as every government faces the challenge of either too much or too little communication happening. Strategic Communicators often do not seem to find

a scale balance. The communicators need to understand that not everything needs to be shared with the people or other countries. Similarly, they should not be left out of important announcements. Pakistan faces the challenge of striking the right balance in this regard by choosing a combination of the right timing, medium, and message (Figure 1 reback), and the use of appropriate channels.

viii. **Budget Restrictions:** The StratCom requires dedicated resource allocation, which Pakistan does not have the liberty to do due to multiple factors including financial constraints. It is difficult to effectively implement a strong communication strategy and it tends to take a backseat.

ix. **Onboarding New Strategic Partners:** Pakistan is also facing challenges in trying to familiarize its strategic partners with its culture, especially the new ones. The country needs a clear set of guidelines to make new partners feel welcomed and retain them through effective StratCom.

x. **Device Dilemma:** Pakistan also lacks the tactics to develop its StratCom keeping the developing technology in mind resultantly limiting the outreach of the strategic messages and failing to tap into the mobility potential. A policy is needed to optimize StratCom through preferred devices, to reduce negative impacts on its efficiency.

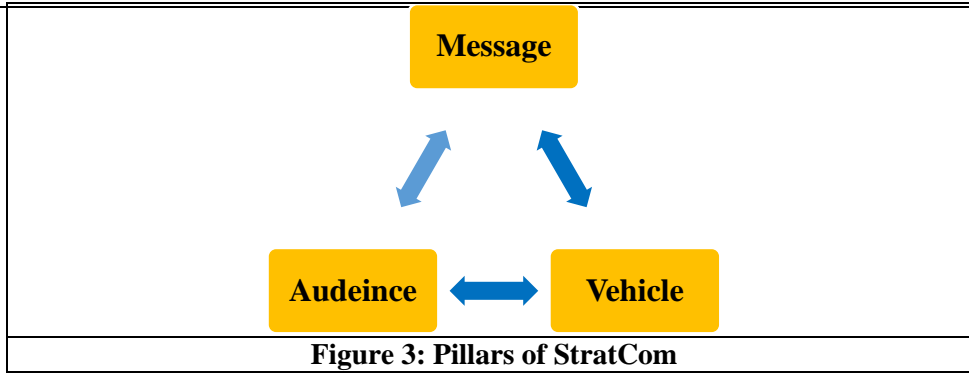
xi. **Cross-Departmental Communication:** In Pakistan, the efforts in providing a distinction between various departments, a connection failure is visible otherwise essential for seamless communication, resulting in misunderstandings, ambiguities, finger-pointing, etc. All these hinder the maintenance of StratCom. There are, most of the time, unclear communication guidelines that fail to inculcate a sense of togetherness. Ultimately, there is less peaceful co-existence and a collaborative environment within the country.

xii. **Real-Connect Communication:** In Pakistan, strategically communicating is not easy due to the absence of institutional proactiveness. Communicators in Pakistan need to realize the importance of StratCom and its pivotal role in the success of the country's bottom-line growth. Whether it is developing a strong mutual connection with a country or tweaking the existing communication strategy, for Pakistan, no step is too small. StratCom for Pakistan is an ongoing affair that needs constant monitoring and upgrades.

Suggested Framework and Matrix for StratCom in Pakistan:

"Unlike the past, conflicts are now more information-based with actors involved in the conflicts adept in modern communication and influencing minds of the people more effectively than before" (Kiran, 2016). Pakistan's critical geopolitical location relates to several security threats the country is facing today. Proxy wars, terrorism, sectarian conflicts, organized social crimes and many more have been impacting the nation's progress. This condition also demands that civil and military-strategic communicators are equally prepared and respond towards critical situations, seen or unforeseen.

Communicating is not merely a press release or holding conferences to answer queries. A modern and proactive communication strategy is required by Pakistan with well-defined messages, which should use several channels to target the message audience. A communication strategy is only possible through a StratCom framework developed and implemented. Therefore, the clearly articulated interlinked pillars of StratCom (Figure 3) should form the core of the StratCom framework suggested in Fig. 4. The various steps of the StratCom framework are as suggested below:



Step 1: The first step for designing a framework should be to set the StratCom goals and objectives.

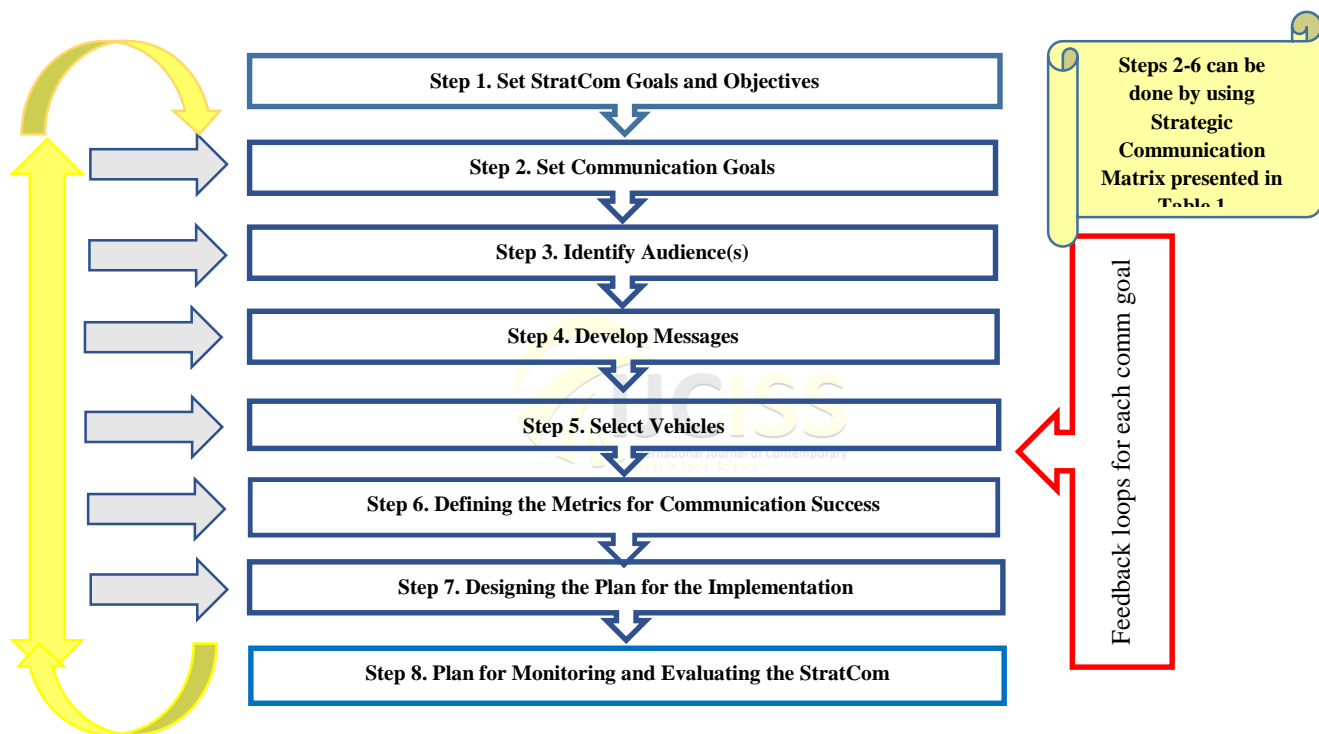


Fig. 4: Generalizable StratCom Conceptual Framework (Inspired by Harwell et al., 2020)

Step 2: The next step is to derive the communication goals from the StratCom goals. This will drive the communication process and accomplish the communication goals. Establishing communication goals is the first step toward a strategic communication plan (Timm et al., 2016) so the decision-makers must be clear about the desired results of communication efforts. The communication goals may be like sharing the decisions with fellows to gather support for future pursuits or encouraging external policymakers to

devise their decision-making processes accordingly.

Step 3: At this stage, the target audience is to be identified including what they already know and what and how communicators would like them to get information. During the process of developing and implementing the communication plan, strategic communicators if working on a two-way communication approach, may gain more information about the background culture, knowledge and behavior traits of the target

audience. This is critical for effective communication practices and feedback and evaluation of their designed and implemented

StratCom (Groffman et al., 2010; Long et al., 2015;).

Table 1: Template of StratCom Matrix (Inspired by Harwell et al., 2020)

Strategic Goal	Insert Communication Goal 1 here. This template can be adjusted to fit Communication needs based on the identified Communication goal.		
Strategic Sub Goal	Insert Communication Sub-goal 1 here. This is the first sub-goal necessary in aiding and accomplishing Communication goal 1.		
Communication Goal	Insert Communication Goal 1 here. This is the first communication goal necessary in aiding and accomplishing Sub-Goal 1. Ask “What are we trying to achieve?”		Insert Communication Goal 2 here. This is the second communication goal necessary in aiding and accomplishing sub-goal 1. Ask “What are we trying to achieve?”
Audiences	Insert Target Audience 1 here. This is the first audience targeted to achieve Communication Goal 1.	Insert Target Audience 2 here. This is the second audience targeted to achieve Communication Goal 1.	Insert Target Audience 1 here. This is the first audience targeted to achieve Communication Goal 2. Insert Target Audience 2 here. This is the second audience targeted to achieve Communication Goal 2.
Messages	Insert list of messages here. These messages are appropriate in aiding and accomplishing Communication Goal 1 and are specific to the targeted audience identified as Audience 1.	Insert list of messages here. These messages are appropriate in aiding and accomplishing Communication Goal 1 and are specific to the targeted audience identified as Audience 2.	Insert list of messages here. These messages are appropriate in aiding and accomplishing Communication Goal 2 for both Audience 1 and Audience 2 and are specific to the targeted audiences identified as Audience 1 & 2.
Vehicles	Insert a list of vehicles here that is specific to Audience 1 and their messages.	Insert a list of vehicles here that is specific to Audience 2 and their messages.	Insert a list of vehicles here that is specific to Audiences 1 & 2 and their messages.
Matrix	Insert a list of metrics for success. These metrics aid in monitoring and evaluating the success of communicating Communication Goal 1 with Audience 1.	Insert a list of metrics for success. These metrics aid in monitoring and evaluating the success of communicating Communication Goal 1 with Audience 2.	Insert a list of metrics for success. These metrics aid in monitoring and evaluating the success of communicating Communication Goal 2 with Audiences 1 & 2.

Step 4: Next is the development of appropriate messages for the target audience because they conceive a message according to their backgrounds and beliefs – important to be taken into account (Halpern et al., 2012). The messages must be clear to get intended responses and lead to the preset goals. Establishing effective communication keeping in mind the audiences’ perspectives guarantees success in strategic objectives (DeLauer et al., 2012).

Step 5: Next a “careful and wise selection of tools, mediums and channels” (USFWS, 2016) based on the knowledge about the target audience is required. A communication vehicle is effective if it

can be used to steer a StratCom effort despite the “different ethnic groups, languages, and religions” (ibid.) of the target audience. “Meetings, workshops, posters, and environmental educators may also be ... effective communication vehicles” (Harwell et al., 2020) for the success of StratCom’s objectives. The vehicles that do not involve the audience in the communication process have a limited impact.

Step 6: At this stage, the identification of vehicles for each communication goal are identified along with the success metrics of the message. These metrics are used while implementing, monitoring, and evaluating a StratCom plan and need to focus

on one specific aspect e.g., a general aspect like holding a successful press conference, or some more comprehensive aspect e.g., the overall communication goals (NPS 2016).

Step 7: Implementation of StratCom plan should be coupled with communication and strategic goals and establish mutual understanding between the communicator and the target audience. A StratCom plan operationally may have several messages and may be implemented in different forms of content and delivery. Likewise, a message persuasive for one may not be so for another audience. So, the messages require to be region, work, or project size specific. The suggested StratCom Matrix (Table 1) may help in this regard and can be consulted to organize, track and implement a communication plan in a sophisticated way.

Step 8: The last and critical stage for a StratCom plan is its evaluation and interactive feedback ideally occurring throughout the communication process. These loops are important to ensure that the messages have the intended impact (Ferguson, 2015). The response of the target audience and accordingly adjustments are also monitored at this stage. This framework, therefore, suggests the requirement of interactive development and feedback loops throughout the StratCom process.

Considerations for Developing a StratCom Framework in Pakistan:

The principles, methods, and tools of StratCom are derived from a mixture of approaches. It is useful if a framework for Pakistan is developed with major properties such as:

- i. **Communication vs Information:** Based on “Aristotle’s concepts of ‘vertical’ (dominant) and ‘horizontal’ (democratic) models,” (Okaka 2010) differentiated from information, communication means “feedback to solve the rising problems competently” (ibid.).
- ii. **DevCom:** Development Communication in the 1960s was for “nation-building, rural development, agricultural extension, health and sanitation, and family planning ... [It is] the planned use [of] communication processes and media products. It supports policymaking, public participation, and project implementation” (GTZ, 2006) as a two-way social interaction process.
- iii. **Awareness-raising:** This can be used while in doubt about the problems, the solutions, and the messages.

iv. **Formal education:** Formal education for developing StratCom at a local, regional and global scale may be carried out e. g. at educational institutes “as a long-term investment in future generations” (GTZ, 2006).

v. **NFE:** This means non-formal education or the out-of-school learning often associated with adult education that “can be applied [to any field relevant to Strategic Objectives -] be it social, economic, or ecological” (GTZ, 2006).

vi. **Vocational training:** Professional qualification for planning, implementing, and monitoring StratCom may be helpful in all sectors of the country.

vii. **EnvCom:** Environment Communication is also used in policymaking and project management related to environmental and socio-political issues. For communication strategy, EnvCom is helpful in the efficient use of methods, instruments, and techniques.

viii. **Social marketing:** As a sub-element of DevCom, built on innovation and behavior change, it has phases like awareness, interest, evaluation, trial, adoption, or rejection. StratCom should likewise focus on convincing techniques.

ix. **Mobilization:** The StratCom plan must consider participation by locals to change and make Strategic policy more effective. Communicators should allow the participation of people to improve the communication program and add credibility to it. The communicative, social, and political competence of specific communicators, having credibility and convincing power, may be utilized for that purpose.

x. **Environmental Education:** The general population of Pakistan may be made aware of and concerned about StratCom and possess the knowledge, skill, attitude, motivation, and commitment to communicate individually and collectively helping and supporting the strategic communicators in achieving their communication objectives. There should be public participation after critical education for StratCom.

xi. **Conflict management:** It can be frequently used for specific aspects of StratCom as an alternative policy instrument. It offers consensus building during open conflicts and conflictive decision-making processes in StratCom, especially during social communication, dialogue, reflection, participatory situation analysis, action planning, etc.



Figure 5: Framework for Issue Management through Effective Communication Strategy (Inspired by UNECE, 2021)

Key Principles of StratCom in Pakistan:

An effective StratCom is people-centered and ensures long-term benefits for marginalized people. In Pakistan particularly, an effective StratCom framework must have a long-term vision and a mutually agreed-upon timeframe including an approach to deal with short and medium-term goals. For example, the government’s StratCom vision must not be one-party specific but have the commitment of all political parties integrated with the economic, social, and environmental goals. Otherwise, a negotiated balance and the possible needs of future generations must be taken into consideration. Further, to avoid an “incident” converting into a “disaster,” a framework for issue management is suggested in Figure 5 and another for proactive communication in Figure 6.

The communication strategy must be “integrated into the budget process to have the financial resources” (Okaka, 2010) for the communication plans with clear identification of priorities. Otherwise, the achievement of intended outcomes is impacted due to capacity constraints and time

limitations. Targets must be challenging but need to be realistic and the priorities must be set after a comprehensive analysis of the present forecasted situation, “trends, and risks” (ibid.). Likewise, “links between local, national, and global challenges” (ibid.) must be examined especially the external pressures on Pakistan through credible and reliable analyses and their correlations with the strategic objectives of the country. To analyze the present situation, local capacities and existing information should be utilized while monitoring and evaluation should be included in StratCom to keep the communication processes going on and track its progress. This will also help to capture lessons and indicate the necessary changes in the strategy. It is the need of the hour that Pakistan develops its strategy as the past ones have often resulted from various external pressures. For a long-term implementation and result, it is a must that policy and institutional changes occur but financial resources are committed and there remains a dedication for the implementation of StratCom.

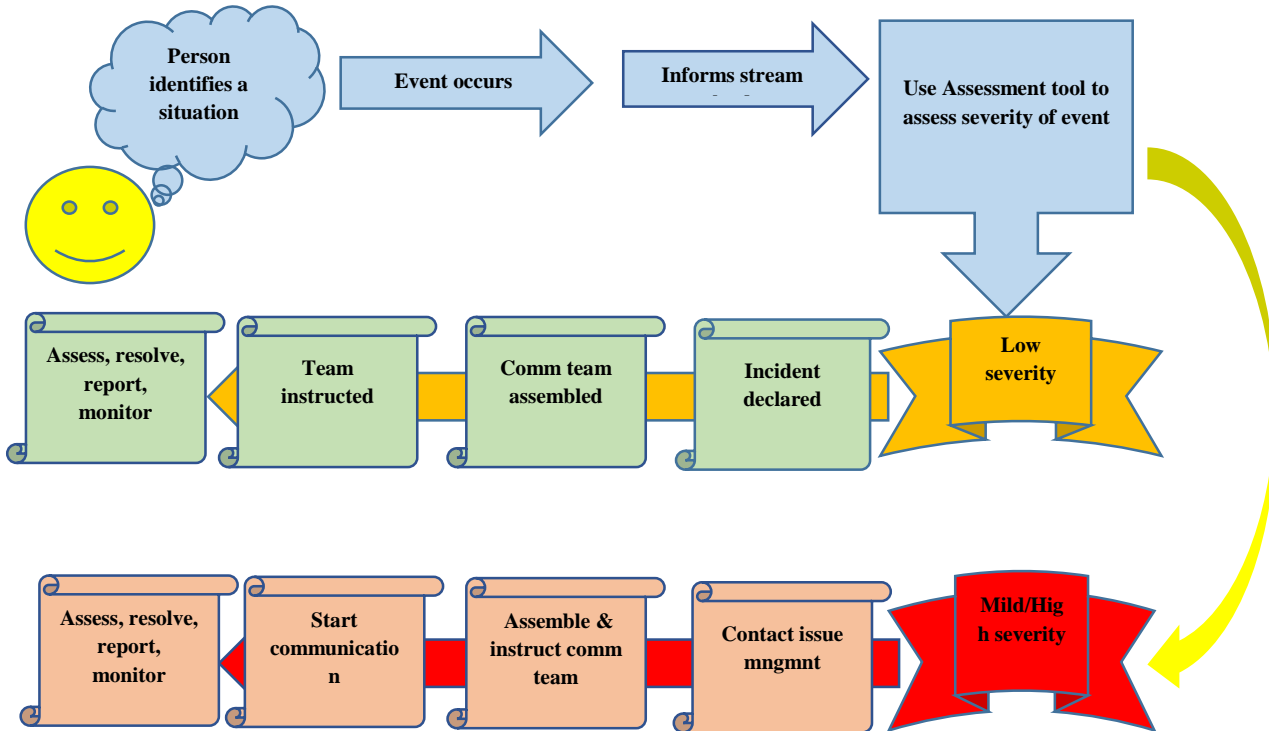


Figure 6: Framework for Proactive Communication (Inspired by UNECE, 2021)

StratCom in Pakistan should be built on already existing planning rather than thinking about a new process to enable various frameworks and planning policies to converge into and complement one another. For that purpose, management to ensure coordination between mechanisms and processes is required along with identification and resolving of potential conflicts by an impartial facilitator. This third-party facilitator may also help in clarifying the roles, responsibilities, and relationships of various participants of StratCom. There are several benefits of this broad participation such as generating new ideas, exposing issues required to be addressed, and identification of preferences and capabilities, etc. resulting in a consensus for better actions and implementations. The government may provide leadership, incentives, and financial resources while multi-communicators such as civil society and marginalized sectors will act as decentralized authorities. All this will be possible with effective communication mechanisms having transparency and accountability.

Needless to say, StratCom should be an interactive and iterative process involving national and decentralized levels. At the national level, main

strategic principles and directions should be set for policies such as economic, fiscal, trade, legislative, and international/external relations, etc. while at the decentralized level, detailed planning, implementation, and monitoring can be undertaken. However, before designing and implementing the strategy process, the political, institutional, human resource, and financial capacities of the state are to be well analyzed and if needed, the development of necessary capacities must be ensured during the strategy process to optimize the local skills. No wonder, StratCom is called the “lifeblood of success” (Okaka 2010) because, if there will be no reciprocal communication engaging key stakeholders, there will be a compromise on cooperation and collaboration, and the strategic objectives will not be achieved.

StratCom in Pakistan thus can act as a comprehensive system for the collection of information, analysis, and monitoring as simple as suggested back in Figures 4, 5 and 6. A key task is to materialize engagement of various stakeholders and produce collaboration. This would enable the StratCom framework to be effectively constructed,

utilizing the pre-existing synergies and removing inconsistencies, conflicts, and gaps. Following important factors for understanding and developing the concepts and manifestations of StratCom in Pakistan must be taken into consideration:

1. **The Scope:** The scope for StratCom in Pakistan should revolve around what can the country do to support its strategic objectives by developing a strategic approach to communications? Moreover, how can the framework for StratCom be made practical but adaptable to the country’s needs? (Fig 7)

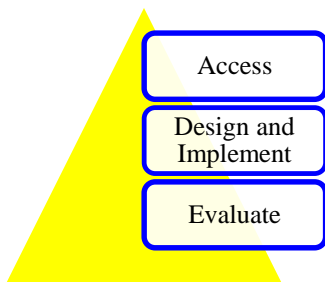


Figure 7: An Example of Designing the Scope of the Framework

2. **Three-tier approach:** The StratCom framework should be assessing the strategic objective which needs to be achieved through strategic communication. After that, the actual designing and implementation of strategic communications should happen. Lastly, the evaluation should be carried out (Figure 8).

Figure 8: The Three-Tier Approach

3. **Assessing the strategic objectives – the main considerations:** Figure 9 below explains how from keeping in mind its strategic objectives, the communication needs to be defined and implemented. The country must implement its communication strategy through definite staff having well-worked convincing strategies and abilities to engage audiences after doing all required research work requisite for evaluation and development.



4.



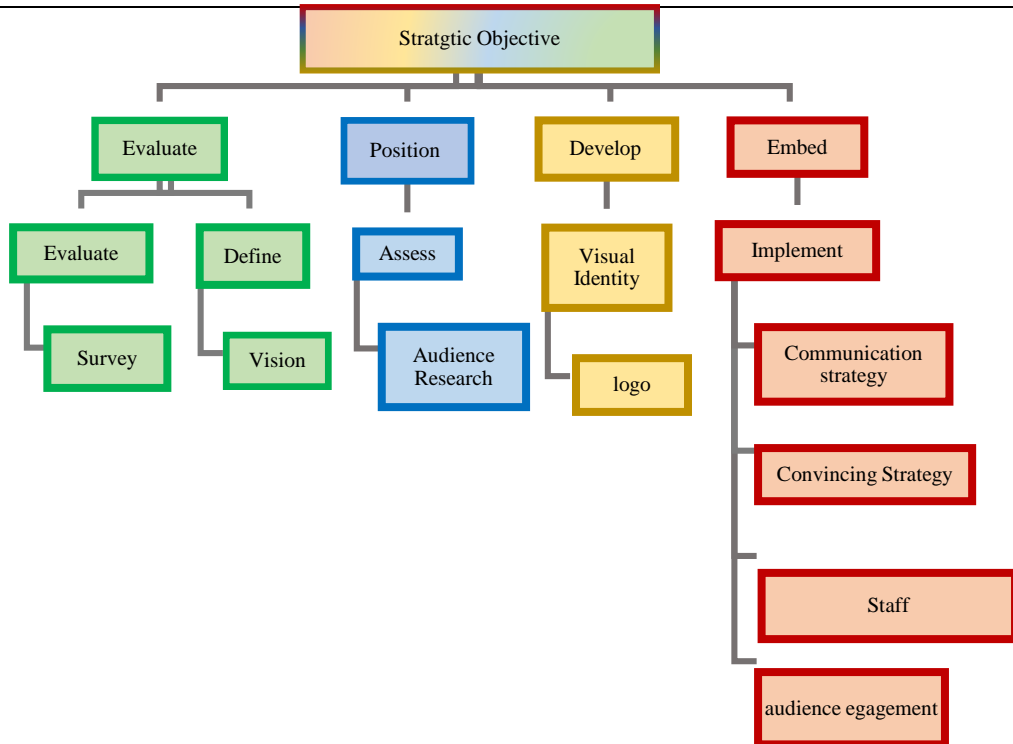


Figure 9: Assessment of Strategic Objective and Communication Development

5. **Designing and Implementing StratCom:**
 The designing and implementation StratCom should according to the “How to” approach for referencing values and principles, scanning the environment scan, and defining objectives. The target audience needs to be

explored while channels and contents are to be developed and utilized for crisis and issue management (GTZ, 2006). A model framework for the “Strategic Communication Process” can be somewhat like elaborated in Figure 10 below:

Before the Event	Establish the Infrastructure					
	Charter a strategic communication team	Assign responsibilities	Train StratCom team as needed	Embed sensitive issues identification	Develop a relationship with the audience	Institute environmental monitoring
	Establish the Procedure					
	Review learned lessons from previous experiences	Identify and anticipate the next issues	Define key audience	Plan scenarios	Conduct simulation exercises	Do preparations to deal with issue
During the Event	Assess the threat					
	Investigate the preliminary event		Change senior management		Launch the team	
	Execute the Plan					
	Determine the urgency	Confirm or modify the target audiences	Confirm or modify the communication strategy	Confirm or modify the standby statement	Implement the planned strategy	
	Evaluate the Process					

After the Event	Provide promised follow-up info	Review the success activities	Derive some lessons for future handling of issues and events
Figure 10: Strategic Communication Process			

Conclusion:

Based on the foregoing, the following are concluded:

1. StratCom should be proactive and not reactive. This means that Pakistan should be ready to respond to events and situations.
2. StratCom connects communication to national strategy and policy.
3. If the StratCom is implemented, correctly, foresightedly, and vigorously, it will shape the advanced future battlespace for Pakistan and provide the country with secure relationships deterring its existing and potential adversaries.
4. Fundamental components of StratCom are information, psychological operations, public affairs, relations, and diplomacy.
5. Therefore, Pakistan needs to embody planning and tactics for the perception of the message by the audience according to set objectives. The message must be conveyed to the audiences through the most developed tools.
6. Effective StratCom will provide successful results for Pakistan in achieving its strategic objectives.

Recommendations:

The StratCom in Pakistan must have the following characteristics:

- i. It must be multi-dimensionally structured.
- ii. There must be a determined goal and victory standard.
- iii. Preplanning is important for the selection of communication tools, messenger, message, and retriever.
- iv. An alternative plan must also be studied.
- v. To achieve desirable results, tactics and methods should be worked upon.
- vi. The message should have controlled perception, decoding, and understanding.
- vii. It should be ensured that the message is well-understood by the audience.
- viii. The subconscious taking of the message by the target audience must be ensured.

- ix. Negotiation with the audience at national and departmental levels may be used regularly.
- x. The communicators can explore broad strategic objectives around the globe to be utilized in Pakistan.
- xi. An adaptable set of mechanisms may be established to pursue identified objectives.
- xii. The departments should adopt principles and standards not only through legislation but through voluntary actions also.
- xiii. To predict effectiveness, pilot activities should be carried out.

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