

Communication Policy Features of the World Trade Organisation

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ABSTRACT. The article is devoted to a comprehensive study of the peculiarities of the communication process of international organisations, in particular the World Trade Organisation, in the context of increasing turbulence in the global geopolitical situation. The paper reveals the essence of the communication mix, communication policy and strategy. Based on a comparative analysis, the key components of these concepts are substantiated, namely means of communication, short-term and long-term goals, the systematic nature of the communication process, attitudes, criteria and guidelines. The elements of a company/organisation's communication policy and the logic behind its formation are identified. The work highlights the key elements of the communication mix of companies by type, as well as reveals the components of the communication mix of international organisations and provides their characteristics. The research focused on comparing the key elements of the communication policy of companies and international organisations and identifying the characteristics specific to organisations. The set of identified features is divided into client, instrumental and managerial ones in order to increase the level of justification of communication policy. Internal and external factors of WTO communication policy formation are identified, in particular, the features of the current stage of the global economy and global trading system (parallel processes of globalisation and regionalisation, digitalisation, asymmetry of economic development and widening gap in the pace of development between countries, application of new digital technologies that significantly affect the communication process), key stakeholders, public opinion about the organisation, resources for communication activities, goals and principles of activity. The elements of the WTO's communication policy are characterised, including the organisation's external and internal communication tools (diplomacy, digital tools, official documents, annual and special publications, educational content, public relations, events, etc.). Based on the results of their analysis, specific features inherent in the communication of this international organisation are identified and proposed to be divided into those determined by target audiences, priority tools and key features. The paper provides a critical review of the WTO's communication policy, identifies pressing issues and justifies four priorities for increasing the effectiveness of the WTO's existing communication policy potential: digitalisation,

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transparency, responsiveness and creativity. Appropriate measures for their implementation are proposed for each of them. The results obtained can form the basis for improving the communication policy not only of the WTO, but also of other intergovernmental and non-governmental international organisations.

KEYWORDS: communications, communication policy, intercultural communication, international marketing, World Trade Organisation, factors of the global trading environment, communication channels.

Introduction

The World Trade Organisation, performing important functions of liberalisation and simplification of international trade, is characterised by organisational complexity and ramification, a large number of stakeholders, ambitious goals, as well as a number of challenges, among which criticism of the WTO's activities has become increasingly prominent in recent years, justifying the need for systematic and integrated communication activities. Given the focus of previous theoretical and empirical studies on corporate communications, it is appropriate to analyse the WTO's communication policy in order to identify the key characteristics of communications specific to international organisations and to seek ways to improve the effectiveness of the World Trade Organisation's communication policy.

The problems of developing marketing communications in classical and international marketing and in the context of the role of global international economic organisations in this process, primarily the World Trade Organisation, in a global economic environment, in particular, have been studied by such foreign and domestic researchers as Barnett J., Beckers E., Drabek Z., Kartajaya H., Kotler F., Krøger E., Kumparulis D., Kupman R., Law P., Mavroidis P., Moriarty S., Piermarini R., Savelyev E., Setiawan A., Starostina A., Stoll P., Hancock J., Hookman B., Schorkopf F., Schulz D., Burakovsky I., Gordeeva T., Kanishchenko O., Kizim M., Matyushenko I., Melnik T., Moskalik R., Osyka S., Solodkovska Y., Tananaiko T., Yatsenko O. and many others.

Despite the existence of significant scientific work on communication policy and WTO activities, the topic of communications is usually studied through the prism of corporate governance, leaving international organisations outside the focus of study. 's communications are practically not considered in the context of marketing communications, as a means of brand support, tools for improving reputation, etc. Thus, the issue of the peculiarities of the communication policy of international organisations requires further research, which determines its purpose.

The purpose of this article is to conduct a marketing assessment of the communication policy of the World Trade Organisation, to identify the established features that distinguish it from the communication policy of

international companies, and to justify areas for improvement, taking into account the specific nature of the activities of international organisations. To achieve this goal, the following tasks were identified: summarising the theoretical foundations of communication mix, policy and strategy; identifying the common and distinctive characteristics of the communication policy of firms and international organisations; identifying the component structure of the communication mix of international organisations; determining the factors behind the creation of the World Trade Organisation's communication policy; characterising the goals and instruments of the WTO's communication policy; justifying areas for improving the WTO's communication policy in line with its statutory goals and the needs of its member countries.

The methodology used for the study consisted of systematising theoretical provisions on communication policy, defining its elements, and conducting empirical research on the methods and instruments of the WTO's communication policy. Both general scientific and special methods were used in the research process. The method of logical analysis was used to study the theoretical characteristics of communication policy, while the methods of observation, analysis and synthesis were used to study and structure WTO communication policy, and the method of expert assessment was used to evaluate the factors of the global trading environment and the issue of WTO perception. The methods of comparison and induction were used to identify the specific features of the communication policy of international organisations.

The information base of the study consisted of: domestic and foreign sources of scientific information (monographs, articles, reports, collections of scientific works, thematic studies, etc.) on the marketing aspects of the international communication process in the context of the activities of international organisations, in particular the World Trade Organisation; official statistical resources and WTO publications on the Internet.

Communication mix, policy and strategy

Communication is an extremely important aspect of the functioning of any organisation, as it performs both the functions of communication with the environment and its subjects, and the functions of internal coordination. A successful communication policy is usually created creatively, reasonably and consistently, in accordance with existing and potential influences on the communication process, as well as with the adequate implementation of the successful experience of other organisations^{3, 4, 5}.

³ Schultz D. *Integrated Marketing Communications: Putting It Together & Making It Work*

⁴ Burnett J., Moriarty S. E., Grant S. *Introduction to Integrated Marketing Communications*. Pearson Education Canada, 2000

⁵ Vakhovych I., Vakhovych V. "Theoretical Approaches to the Formation of a Company's Communication Policy." *Economic Forum*, 2017. http://nbuv.gov.ua/UJRN/ecfor_2017_2_34

Among the many definitions of communication policy, the most accurate, in our opinion, is the following: "control of an organisation's internal and external communication in order to ensure the optimal functionality of the organisation, including product development and sales"⁶. It is important to note that this definition does not limit communication policy exclusively to external communications and only to companies. Given that a significant number of domestic researchers tend to equate communication policy with communication mix (also known as promotion mix), as well as communication policy with communication strategy, there is a need to clarify the existing difference between the three concepts: communication mix, policy, and strategy.

The concept of communication mix is used almost synonymously with the terms "communication complex", "promotion complex", "promotion mix", etc. According to F. Kotler, the communication mix is defined as "a set of various methods and tools that allow you to more successfully bring a product to market, stimulate sales and create loyal customers for the company"⁷. According to J. Burnett and S. Moriarty, the marketing communication mix is "the measures or means used to achieve marketing communication objectives"⁸. A communication strategy can be defined as "an approach to communication in organisations that focuses on key audiences and the appropriate channels to reach them, and is measured in terms of achieving the organisation's goals"⁹.

Thus, it is advisable to distinguish between the concepts of communication mix, policy and strategy according to criteria such as the involvement of communication tools, short-term and long-term goals, the systematic nature of the phenomenon and the existence of specific settings, criteria and guidelines of the organisation (Table 1).

Thus, the communication mix, policy and strategy are based on the means and short-term goals of communication, while communication policy and strategy also take into account the consistency, attitudes, criteria and guidelines of communication. In addition to all of the above, communication strategy is focused on the long-term goals of the management entity.

⁶ Bergenholtz H., Johnsen M. 2006. "Language Policy and Communication Policy — Same Same but Different?" *HERMES — Journal of Language and Communication in Business* 19 (37):95-114. <https://doi.org/10.7146/hjlc.v19i37.25872>.

⁷ Kotler P. *Principles of Marketing*. Prentice-Hall, 1980

⁸ Burnett J., Moriarty S. E., Grant S. *Introduction to Integrated Marketing Communications*. Pearson Education Canada, 2000

⁹ Argenti P. "Communication Strategy" In *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Corporate Reputation*, 138-40. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2016. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483376493.n60>.

Table 1

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF COMMUNICATION MIX, POLICY AND STRATEGY

Term	Means of communication	Short-term goals	Systematicity	Goals, criteria, benchmarks	Long-term goals
Communication mix					
Communication policy					
Communication strategy					

Source: compiled by the authors based on ¹⁸⁻²⁰

Marketing communications are traditionally seen as a tool for companies to create demand for products or services and stimulate sales¹⁰. However, with the development of the concept of relationship marketing, which involves the use of marketing to build trust and maintain long-term relationships between an entity and its stakeholders, they have ceased to be a tool used exclusively by companies and have gained good prospects for further application and development by entities whose activities are not commercially oriented¹¹.

In order to identify the essential features of the communication policy of international organisations (in comparison with the more widely studied communication policy of firms), we will characterise the key elements that influence the logic and process of creating a communication policy: goals, objectives, factors of creation and tools (Fig. 1).

Domestic researchers identify four main objectives of a company's communication policy: "raising awareness among target audiences; reinforcing marketing decisions; ensuring a positive attitude towards the company's products and the company itself; achieving understanding with target audiences"¹².

Among the tasks that are relevant when considering the communication policy of an international organisation, we consider the formation and implementation of a communication strategy and the creation of a positive image of the organisation¹³.

¹⁰ Kanishchenko O. "The Development of International Marketing Communications in the Context of Commodity Market Globalisation." *Economic Bulletin of the State Higher Educational Institution "Ukrainian State Chemical Technology University"*, 2021. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32434/2415-3974-2021-13-1-161-168>

¹¹ Mato-Santiso V., Rey-García M., and Sanzo-Pérez M. J. "Managing Multi-Stakeholder Relationships in Nonprofit Organisations through Multiple Channels: A Systematic Review and Research Agenda for Enhancing Stakeholder Relationship Marketing." *Public Relations Review*, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2021.102074>

¹² Slyusareva L., Kostina O. "Improving the Communication Policy of an Enterprise." *Economy and Society*, 2018. <https://repository.hneu.edu.ua/handle/123456789/19377>

¹³ Vakhovich I., Vakhovich V. "Theoretical Approaches to the Formation of Enterprise Communication Policy." *Economic Forum*, 2017. http://nbuv.gov.ua/UJRN/ecfor_2017_2_34

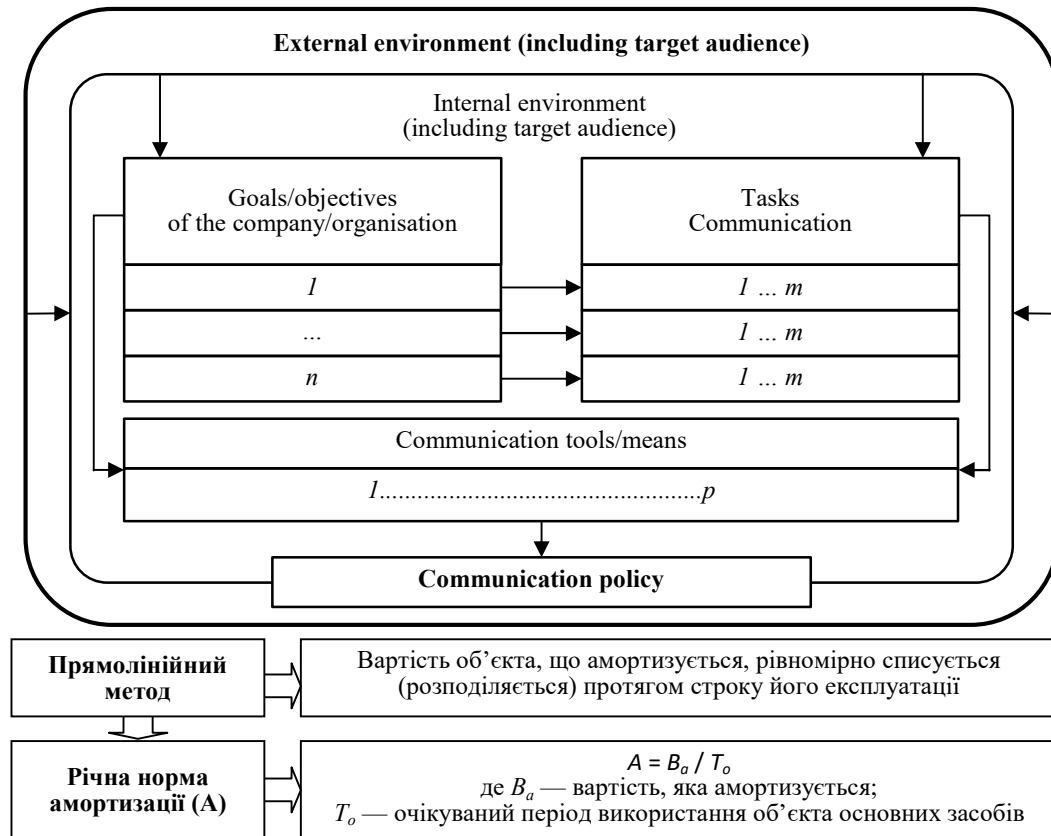


Fig. 1. Logic of forming a communication policy for a company/organisation

Source: developed by the authors

Communication policy is created under the influence of external factors that depend on the environment in which the communication subject operates, and internal factors that arise within the functioning of the communication subject. According to the classification proposed by a group of domestic scientists, communication is influenced by such external factors as the state of the macroenvironment, the market situation, the state of public opinion, direct competitors and consumer behaviour, while internal factors include the communication direction of the firm's activities, the parameters of its strategic alternatives, skills and resources, and strengths and weaknesses in the use of opportunities in the field of communications¹⁴.

¹⁴ Myronenko, E., Fomichenko, I., Barkova, S., Alaeva, M. "Features of the development of the communication environment of an industrial enterprise in modern economic conditions." *Economic Herald of Donbas*, 2021. [https://doi.org/10.12958/1817-3772-2021-2\(64\)-144-150](https://doi.org/10.12958/1817-3772-2021-2(64)-144-150)

For further study of the actual application of the communication policy of international organisations, we will determine which elements of the complex of promoting companies are outlined in the modern paradigm of international marketing (Table 2).

Table 2

ELEMENTS OF THE COMMUNICATION MIX OF COMPANIES

Type of communication mix	Means of communication
Sales (historically the first)	direct marketing; export consulting; direct offer; tender organisation.
Classic (American promotional mix based on the 4P concept)	advertising; public relations (PR); direct marketing; sales promotion.
Synthetic (combination of several elements of a classic mix in one instrument)	exhibitions and fairs; branding; sponsorship and integrated marketing communications at points of sale.
The latest (information technology, digitalisation, artificial intelligence)	trend-setting; word-of-mouth; event marketing; buzz marketing (including provocative marketing, flash mobs, etc.); product placement in the media; life placement; presence in the digital space.

Source: compiled by the authors based on^{15, 16, 17}

For international organisations, the communication mix looks somewhat different from the one described in the table above, as it includes diplomacy, a tool that is not typical for most companies. At the same time, tools included in the table, such as advertising and everything related to sales (sales promotion, exhibitions and fairs in the context of product presentation, product placement in the media and life, export consulting and direct offers, etc.), are not relevant for organisations. In addition, given the general specifics and image needs of international organisations,

¹⁵ Vakhovich, I., Vakhovich V. "Theoretical approaches to the formation of an enterprise's communication policy." *Economic Forum*, 2017. http://nbuv.gov.ua/UJRN/ecfor_2017_2_34

¹⁶ Slyusareva, L., Kostina, O. "Improving the communication policy of an enterprise." *Economy and Society*, 2018. <https://repository.hneu.edu.ua/handle/123456789/19377>

¹⁷ Kanishchenko O. "Development of international marketing communications in the context of globalisation of commodity markets." *Economic Bulletin of the State Higher Educational Institution "Ukrainian State Chemical Technology University"*, 2021. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32434/2415-3974-2021-13-1-161-168>

non-standard tools such as creating hype, guerrilla marketing, etc. are rarely used in their communications.

The above allows us to outline a communications complex for an international organisation with tools that are used and/or have the potential for further use, as follows: diplomacy, public relations, direct marketing, branding, sponsorship, word of mouth, event marketing, digital presence and content marketing, and others (Fig. 2).

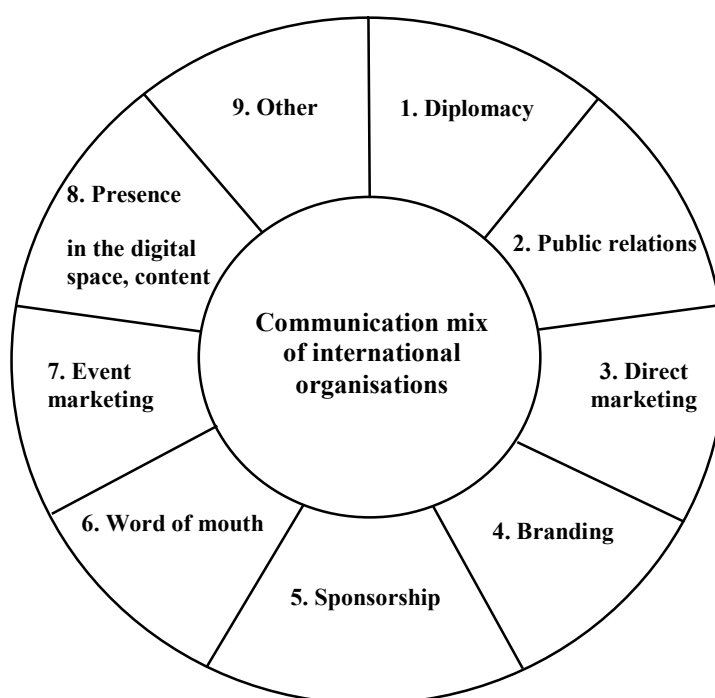


Fig. 2. Basic component structure of the communication mix of international organisations

Source: developed by the authors

It is worth emphasising the particular importance of such communication channels for international organisations as the media and digital channels. Historically, diplomatic activity has been the main channel of communication for international organisations. At the same time, most of the information about the organization remained "behind the scenes" for the public and a number of interested parties who were not connected with the foreign ministries of their countries. However, with the spread of communication activity on the Internet, international organisations began to effectively use this channel to disseminate their information messages,

thereby promoting greater openness and transparency in their activities. The publication of information about international communications activities in the media has increased the organisation's influence on what is communicated to the general public about its activities and how public opinion will be formed. The use of digital tools by international organisations, such as their own official websites with sections that are open to the global public and, accordingly, restricted to delegation staff, international civil servants and other stakeholders in the organisation's member countries, has also contributed to increased control over publications, along with the mass dissemination of information. Partial access restrictions also apply to their own statistical resources containing all the information that these organisations collect in the course of their main activities.

Another important element of digital communications for international organisations is social media, which offers access to current news, important recommendations, information about events and other useful content that the organisation considers appropriate to offer to its target segments. This development indicates that international organisations are increasingly involved in the global communication process and recognise the importance of maintaining their own voice in the media space in order to ensure a positive impact on their perception and reputation.

Based on the characteristics identified above, it is advisable to conduct a comparative analysis of the communication policies of companies and international organisations by elements (Table 3).

Table 3

**COMPARATIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COMMUNICATION POLICIES
OF COMPANIES AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS**

Elements of communication policy	Companies	International organisations
Goals/objectives of companies, international organisations	Commercial, situational, determined by their own capabilities and market environment factors	Non-commercial, determined by the provisions of the organisation's charter
Communication policy objectives	Broadly specify the goals set by the company in terms of directions and priorities	Partly determined by the organisation's charter, partly by environmental factors
Factors influencing policy formation	The state of the micro- and macro-environment, market situation, public opinion, direct competitors, consumer behaviour; the company's	Global development imperatives, public advocacy, behaviour of key stakeholders, the organisation's communication priorities, parameters of the organisation's strategic alternatives, the organisation's

Elements of communication policy	Companies	International organisations
	communication activities, parameters of the company's strategic alternatives, skills and resources, strengths and weaknesses in exploiting opportunities in the field of communications	declared goals/principles/objectives and the degree to which they are achievement/compliance, skills and resources, strengths and weaknesses of communications
Communication tools (mix)	Advertising, personal selling, public relations, promotion, direct marketing, sales promotion, exhibitions and fairs, branding, sponsorship, point-of-sale marketing communications, trend setting, word of mouth, content marketing, event marketing, product placement in the media, provocative marketing, flash mobs, diplomacy, organisational (internal) communications	Diplomacy, highly specialised publications/reports, official documents and memos, organisational (internal) communications, direct marketing, digital communications, public relations, content marketing, event marketing, sponsorship, point-of-location marketing communications
Target audiences	Priority — buyers, consumers, customers; Important: key stakeholders	Priority — government officials of member countries, international civil servants; Important: international public advocacy community

Source: developed by the authors

Thus, when comparing the elements of communication policy of firms and international organisations, a number of features specific to organisations should be highlighted:

- the stability of the international organisation's goals;
- the fact that most communication tasks are determined by the essential provisions of the founding documents and/or adaptation to the requirements of the operating environment while maintaining the same goals;
- the imperative nature of factors and their long-expected horizon of action;
- the diversity of communication mix tools with a conditional division according to their purpose — for the internal and external environment of the organisation;
- the priority of the target segment as a group of representatives of the organisation's member countries and its international employees, given the importance of the international public advocacy community segment.

Thus, what is specific to international organisations compared to companies is the presence of a defined, stable goal for which they were created and continue to function. This goal is documented and influences both the organisation's communication messages and the choice of tools for this purpose. At the same time, the main communication goal is to maintain relations with stakeholders, as well as to conduct campaigns to inform about the specifics of its activities and their results.

Given that international organisations involve a wide range of participants from different countries, the goal of coordinating cooperation horizontally (between participants) and vertically (between participants and the organisation's management) comes to the fore.

The tasks of an international organisation's communication policy can be divided into two groups: the first is aimed at supporting the implementation of the tasks set out in the Charter, and the second is aimed at solving problems that have arisen in the external and/or internal environment of the organisation. The process of selecting factors for shaping communication policy also has its own characteristics. While companies respond quickly and flexibly to environmental changes, organisations respond primarily to global development imperatives and long-term trends that are relevant to all participants in the organisation.

A certain conservatism and measured activity of international organisations explains the range of communication tools. Thus, diplomacy and the publication of official documents and reports are characteristic of organisations. However, with a growing understanding of the role of public communications in image building, commercial marketing tools are increasingly being used: communication through websites and social networks, public relations, content marketing, communications at locations, organisation of events and educational projects, etc.

In the modern paradigm of international marketing, the target audience for communication is not only consumers, but also all stakeholders. This is also true for international institutions, but with a certain clarification. In particular, we are talking about an objective division of stakeholders into decision-makers (the international organisation itself) and consumers of the results of the international organisation's decisions in member countries (Fig. 3).

The figure shows that the first target audience for communications in international organisations is the group of specialists involved in ensuring the effective functioning of all structural units of the organisation — international civil servants, representatives of member countries (usually permanent), and employees of the relevant governing bodies of member countries. Together, they are the developers/producers of the international organisation's products — decisions that take various legal forms such as conventions, treaties, agreements, directives, resolutions, decrees and

decisions. Accordingly, the second target audience is the "consumers" of the results of decisions in the member countries of the organisation. Together, they form an international community of public advocacy for both individual decisions (their consequences) and the organisation's activities as a whole.

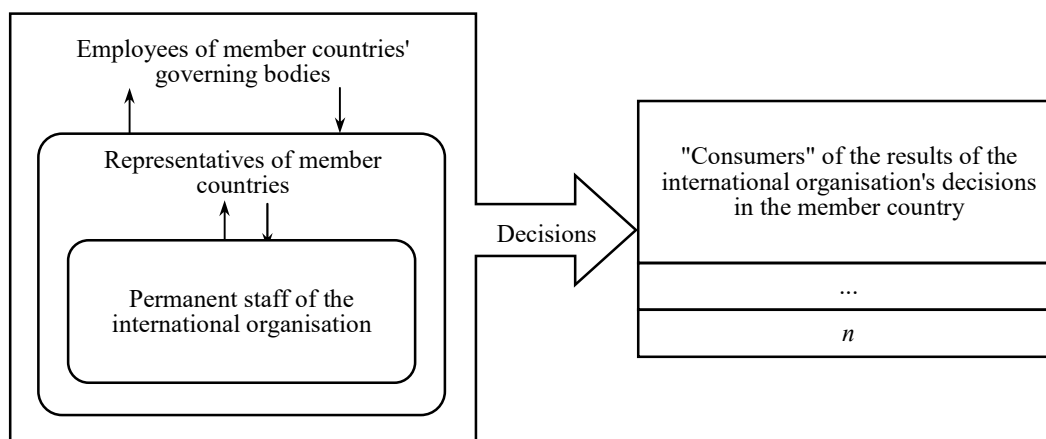


Fig. 3. Target audiences of the communication process of an international organisation

Source: developed by the authors

Factors shaping the WTO's communication policy

Since the World Trade Organisation was founded in 1995, established norms of external and internal factors for the creation of its communication policy have been formed. External factors include various aspects of the state and prospects/scenarios of the global trade environment, in particular: deglobalisation and regionalisation, asymmetries in the regulation and structure of world markets; the transformation of approaches to marketing communications: the growing importance of the latest digital technologies, increased attention to sustainable human development and environmental issues; the behaviour of the organisation's stakeholders; the state of public opinion, etc. Internal factors include: key objectives, tasks and principles of the WTO, the positions of member countries on decision-making, activities in multilateral negotiations, the organisation's resources for communication, etc.

According to the WTO World Trade Report (2023), due to the emergence of new global challenges, including those caused or exacerbated

by globalisation processes (the global COVID-19 pandemic, military actions in Ukraine, the Middle East, the conflict between India and Pakistan, etc.), tensions are rising between participants in the global trading system, as evidenced by a steady overall trend towards an increase in the number of trade disputes (Fig. 4).

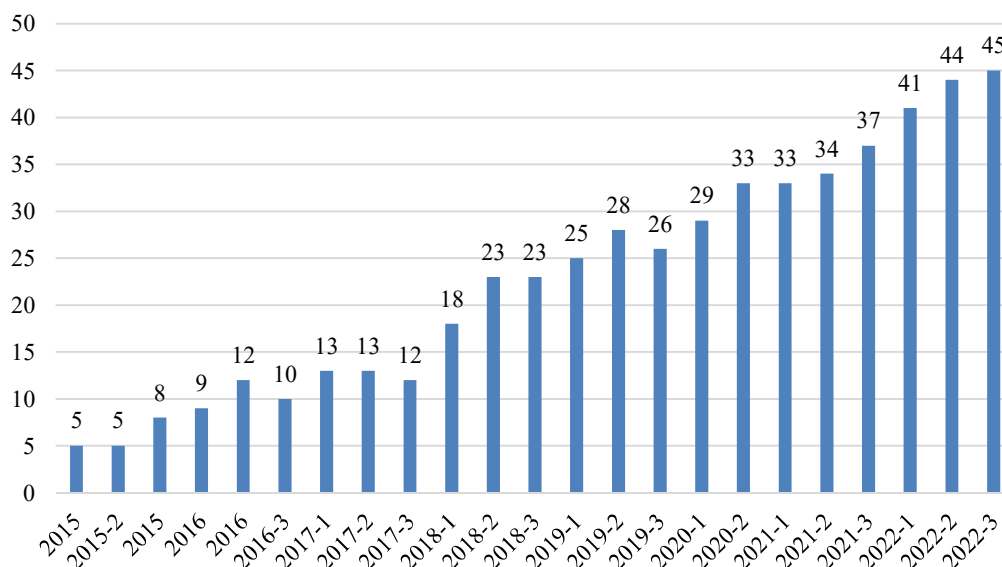


Fig. 4. Dynamics of the number of trade disputes in commodity trade brought before the Council for Trade in Goods in 2015-2022¹⁷

At the same time, there is a trend towards regionalisation, which manifests itself in the prevalence of trade within trading blocs over trade outside them¹⁸.

One of the most acute challenges is the existence of significant asymmetries that create contradictions and hinder global economic development. At the macro level, these asymmetries lead to a widening income gap between developed and developing countries. At the micro level, this is the income gap between large firms and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). In addition, asymmetries at the macro and micro levels result in income gaps between individual workers and overall disparities in living standards. Annual reports by the WTO (World Trade Report 2024), the World Bank and the UN signal that asymmetries are currently deepening due to different rates of economic growth in developing and developed

¹⁸ World Trade Report 2023. Re-Globalisation for a Secure, Inclusive and Sustainable Future. https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/booksp_e/wtr23_e/wtr23_e.pdf

countries as a result of the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as active military conflicts^{19, 20, 21}.

The digitisation of marketing is almost a key factor in shaping the WTO's communication policy. According to the International Telecommunication Union, the number of Internet users has grown steadily over the past ten years (Fig. 5).

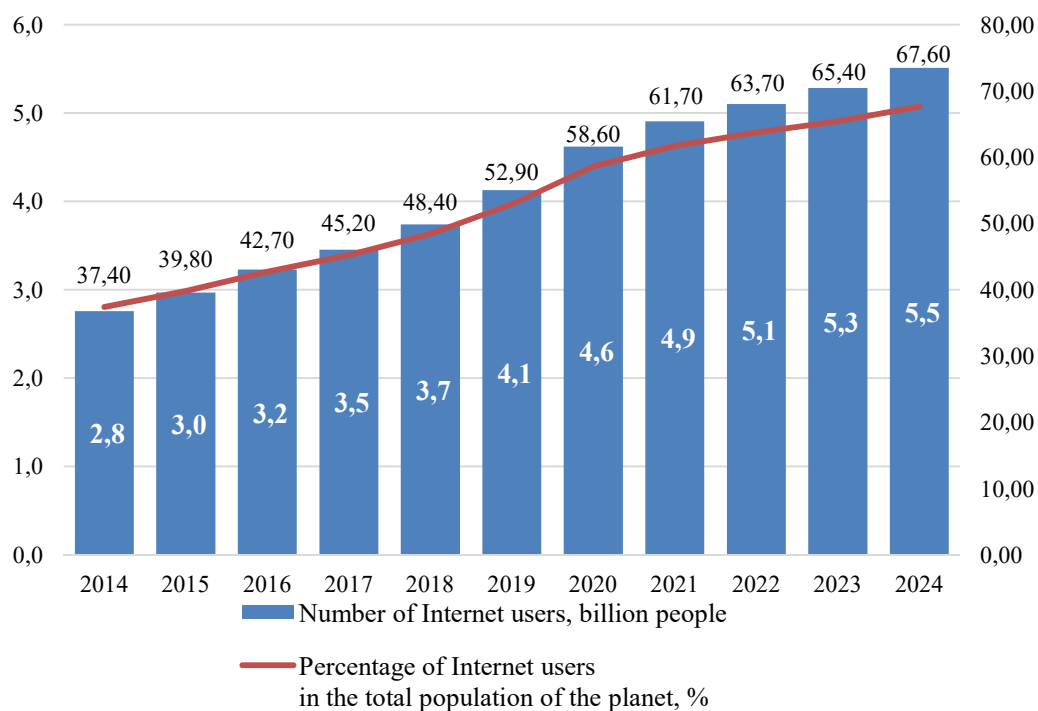


Fig. 5. Number of Internet users worldwide (2014-2024)²²

For global communications, this means a change in the technical component and a transition to the use of new technological media for communication messages, which has expanded the audience of readers and listeners in an unprecedented way. Marketing communications are improving as a result of the rapid spread of technologies such as MarTech

¹⁹ World Trade Report 2024. Trade and inclusiveness — How to make trade work for all https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/booksp_e/wtr24_e/wtr24_e.pdf

²⁰ World Development Report 2024: The Middle-Income Trap. Washington, DC, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-2078-6>

²¹ The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2024/>

²² International Telecommunication Union. "Individuals Using the Internet." International Telecommunication Union. Accessed 26 May 2025. <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx>

(marketing automation technologies): artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, Big Data, blockchain and 5G connectivity. These technologies help both directly during the communication process and in preparatory activities, such as creating content and designing communication messages, checking channels of access to the target audience, establishing and maintaining a contact database, etc.^{23, 24}.

Another factor is the strengthening of the focus on sustainable development and global greening of the world economy. In 2015, the UN approved 17 Sustainable Development Goals designed to promote environmental protection and reduce social inequalities, which were to be achieved by 2030. According to the organisation's data, progress in achieving these goals has slowed significantly as a result of the above-mentioned global problems, but the efforts of global economic actors to ensure sustainable development remain a pressing issue²⁵. The issue of greening trade, which became particularly relevant in 2022, led to a certain increase in the turnover of green products. As a result, there has been an increase in communications aimed at encouraging the purchase of eco-friendly goods. In addition, the increase in green trade reflects the growing demand for "green" goods in global society, which has elevated green marketing and communications from a "nice-to-have" to a "must-have" in international trade²⁶.

Stakeholders, or interested parties, play a key role in shaping the WTO's communication policy, as they are the core target audience of communication activities²⁷. The target audience for WTO communications is its members in the form of their governments and representatives, as well as observers of WTO activities — other countries and international organisations. In addition, the WTO identifies the following types of stakeholders: companies from member countries engaged in foreign trade; media and journalists; non-governmental organisations; current and potential employees of WTO bodies, including students and young professionals^{28, 29}. We believe it is appropriate to add to this list the general public — consumers of goods, services and intellectual property rights, as well as non-governmental structures created by them (organisations, associations, leagues, chambers, etc.).

²³ Kotler P., Kartajaya H., and Setiawan I. *Marketing 5.0: Technology for Humanity*. John Wiley & Sons, 2021

²⁴ Tsygankova T., Gordeeva T. *International Economic Policy*, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.33111/iep.2023.38.03>

²⁵ *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024*. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2024/>

²⁶ Kotler P., Kartajaya H., and Setiawan I. *Marketing 5.0: Technology for Humanity*. John Wiley & Sons, 2021

²⁷ Kotler P. *Principles of Marketing*. Prentice-Hall, 1980

²⁸ WTO and you. World Trade Organisation. Accessed 26 May 2025. https://www.wto.org/english/forums_e/forums_e.htm

²⁹ Nelson M., Hoekman B, Mavroidis P., Nelson D., and Wolfe R. "Stakeholder Preferences and Priorities for the Next WTO Director General." *Global Policy: Special Issue: Trade Conflicts, Multilateral Cooperation and WTO Reform*, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.12926>

Public opinion and perception of the organisation's activities are important external factors influencing the WTO's communication policy. The current perception of the WTO's activities is not entirely positive. Some researchers, such as D. Koumparoulis in his article "International Trade: How the Global Economy Was Lost?", accuse the WTO of the general ineffectiveness of the concept of the organisation's existence, arguing that trade liberalisation has not delivered the promised results in terms of increasing overall welfare and is not the way to achieve it³⁰. E. U. Petersmann believes that there is an existential threat to the legal system and dispute settlement system that has arisen as a result of the failure of the Doha Round of WTO negotiations, the protectionist trade mercantilism of the Trump administration since his first presidency (2017-2021), incompatibilities with the goals of China's authoritarian state capitalism, trade rivalry between China and the US, and the rise of authoritarian "populist regimes" that undermine constitutional democracies and rules-based multilateralism³¹.

The rest of those who support the view that the WTO is in crisis argue that its existence is not meaningless and agree with the idea of liberalising world trade, but point to the ineffectiveness of the current WTO, calling for reform of the organisation's activities — for example, increasing transparency, which will require a corresponding readjustment of communication policy^{32, 33}. Supporters of the WTO believe that despite the existing problems, the organisation currently has no more effective alternatives and, on the whole, demonstrates positive results³⁴. It is impossible to disagree with this point of view.

The internal factors in the creation of the WTO's communication policy are its goals and principles of operation, as well as the organisation's resources, which determine the scope of its activities and its communication model.

According to the Marrakesh Agreement, the objectives of the WTO are "to raise standards of living, ensure full employment, a large and steadily growing volume of real income and effective demand, and expand production and trade in goods and services, while allowing for the optimal use of global resources in accordance with the goal of sustainable development... ensuring that developing countries, and in particular the least developed among them, secure a share in the growth of international

³⁰ Koumparoulis D. "International Trade: How the Global Economy Was Lost?" *Transnational Corporations Review*, 2012. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19186444.2012.11658323>

³¹ Petersmann, E. U. "How Should WTO Members React to Their WTO Crises?" *World Trade Review*, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474745619000144>

³² Drabek Z. "Is the WTO Terminally Ill? Threats to the International Trading System." *Asia and the Global Economy*, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aglobe.2024.100078>

³³ Low P. "The WTO in Crisis: Closing the Gap Between Conversation and Action or Shutting Down the Conversation?" *World Trade Review*, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474745622000064>

³⁴ Koopman R., Hancock J., Piermartini R., Bekkers E. "The Value of the WTO." *Journal of Policy Modeling*, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpolmod.2020.03.008>

trade commensurate with their economic development needs"³⁵. These objectives determine the activities of the WTO and, as a result, encourage the implementation of a communication policy to continuously inform stakeholders about actions taken to achieve them and the results obtained or expected.

With regard to WTO principles, the most important ones for communication are: transparency and predictability through mandatory compliance with agreements reached, as this shapes a wide range of topics communicated by the organisation; promoting fair competition, as it requires the WTO to ensure equal access for stakeholders to all necessary information about its activities; promoting development and economic growth, as it defines one of the goals of its communication policy as educating and assisting stakeholders in acquiring knowledge on a wide range of international trade regulation issues.

The functions that define the WTO's activities are "facilitating trade negotiations; monitoring the implementation of the agreements and arrangements of the Uruguay Round package of documents; settling trade disputes through the creation of a special mechanism; reviewing the national trade policies of WTO member countries; cooperating with other specialised international organisations (IMF, WB, UNCTAD, OECD, etc.); providing technical assistance to developing countries on matters within the WTO's competence"³⁶. Each of these functions is served by the WTO's communication policy tools.

The WTO's awareness of the importance of comprehensive and continuous communication activities is evidenced by the budget expenditure under the heading "General services", which includes expenditure on telecommunications and postal services, contractual services and technical maintenance, energy and supplies, documentation and publications. In 2024, 17.3 million Swiss francs were allocated for general services (compared to 15.6 million in 2023), which indicates the organisation's ability to fully support the communication process^{37, 38}. The presence of the WTO Secretariat's Information and External Relations Division, which deals with communication and information provision to various target audiences, administers the official website, organises publications, holds regular briefings and other events, confirms the WTO's ability to develop and implement an effective communication policy³⁹.

³⁵ Marrakesh Agreement. Accessed 26 May 2025. <https://treaties.un.org/pages/showDetails.aspx?objid=08000002800ade6c>

³⁶ World Trade Organisation (WTO). Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the UN Office and other International Organisations in Geneva. Accessed 26 May 2025. <https://geneva.mfa.gov.ua/en/embassy/2604-about>

³⁷ *WTO Annual Report 2023*. https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/publications_e/anrep23_e.htm

³⁸ *WTO Annual Report 2024*. https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/publications_e/anrep24_e.htm

³⁹ The WTO: Secretariat and budget. World Trade Organisation. Accessed 26 May 2025. https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/secre_e/div_e.htm

Objectives and instruments of the WTO's communication policy

The above factors form the basis for the WTO's communication policy objectives, which we consider appropriate to divide into the following groups: information, coordination and image.

The informational objectives of the WTO's communication policy are driven by the organisation's desire to support the development of the global economy, as well as the need to provide information about the nature, legal basis and functioning of the organisation to its target audience, which includes the organisation's stakeholders and potential participants who have not yet acquired observer status. These objectives include providing information on the state of the global trading system, its challenges and prospects, and key trends; providing information on the WTO's current activities; and providing information on the progress of global trade negotiations and global trade agreements signed to date.

The coordination objectives arose in order to implement the main functions of the WTO and consist of providing communication support for the interaction between the WTO management apparatus and its participants, and between the participants themselves. The coordination objectives are to provide information on the global trade policies of member countries; to provide information on trade disputes and the stage at which they are being resolved; to organise the resolution of trade disputes; encouraging members to adhere to the main guidelines and principles of the organisation's activities; internal coordination of activities (employees); developing and signing agreements on key issues of global trade regulation; discussing problematic issues and seeking solutions to them.

The image goals of communication policy arise from the WTO's need for positive perception and consist of the following objectives: strengthening a positive image; maintaining stakeholder loyalty and trust in the organisation.

The tools of communication policy for firms are elements of the promotion mix, which in the classical sense includes advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, direct marketing and public relations^{40, 41, 42}. A number of scholars argue that the modern promotion complex is expanding with a number of new elements, including event marketing, content

⁴⁰ Kotler P. *Principles of Marketing*. Prentice-Hall, 1980

⁴¹ Kanishchenko O. "Development of international marketing communications in the context of globalisation of commodity markets." *Economic Bulletin of the State Higher Educational Institution "Ukrainian State Chemical Technology University"*, 2021. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32434/2415-3974-2021-13-1-161-168>

⁴² Vakhovych I., Vakhovych V. "Theoretical approaches to the formation of a company's communication policy." *Economic Forum*, 2017. http://nbuv.gov.ua/UJRN/ecfor_2017_2_34

marketing, word-of-mouth, and others. For communication entities that are active at the macro level, the communication complex also includes diplomacy⁴³. Based on a study of WTO resources and publications, we will consider which of these tools are used by the international organisation to achieve the stated goals.

An empirical study of the WTO's communication process makes it possible to identify the following key communication tools: commercial diplomacy; the publication of specialised publications and paper editions; the use of digital resources, applications and social networks; the development of public relations; the use of content marketing, event marketing and direct marketing.

The term "commercial diplomacy" originated during the existence of the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade), which for decades played the role of the World Trade Organisation in regulating the international trading system. Commercial diplomacy acts as the main tool for resolving issues between the organisation's members, making it both a source of communication and a tool for communication. Although the organisation's staff do not participate in communications, the WTO serves as a platform for organising negotiations between participants in the form of working group meetings and ministerial conferences, and oversees the overall progress of negotiations through the Trade Negotiations Committee under the General Council⁴⁴.

Although critics express concern about the degree of involvement of the General Secretariat in trade dispute negotiations, we agree with the position that its participation is necessary in order to moderate and engage impartial experts to resolve problematic issues and situations⁴⁵.

The use of digital communications is well developed in the WTO, as evidenced by the extensive system of digital resources for communication (Fig. 6).

One of the main communication tools is the official website, which contains all information about the organisation's activities: what the WTO is and how it works, its history, founding documents, list of members and observers, etc. In addition, there is a section with information for a number of WTO stakeholders: non-governmental organisations, entrepreneurs, parliamentarians, journalists, etc.⁴⁶. Social media is systematically maintained on an ongoing basis using unified branding.

⁴³ Kopyka V. "International communications as determinants of the foreign policy of global actors." *Bulletin of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv*, 2019

⁴⁴ *WTO Annual Report 2024*. https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/publications_e/anrep24_e.htm

⁴⁵ Nelson M., Hoekman B., Mavroidis P., Nelson D., and Wolfe R. "Stakeholder Preferences and Priorities for the Next WTO Director General." *Global Policy: Special Issue: Trade Conflicts, Multilateral Cooperation and WTO Reform*, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.12926>

⁴⁶ List of WTO online systems. World Trade Organisation. Accessed 26 May 2025. https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/wtoapps_e.htm

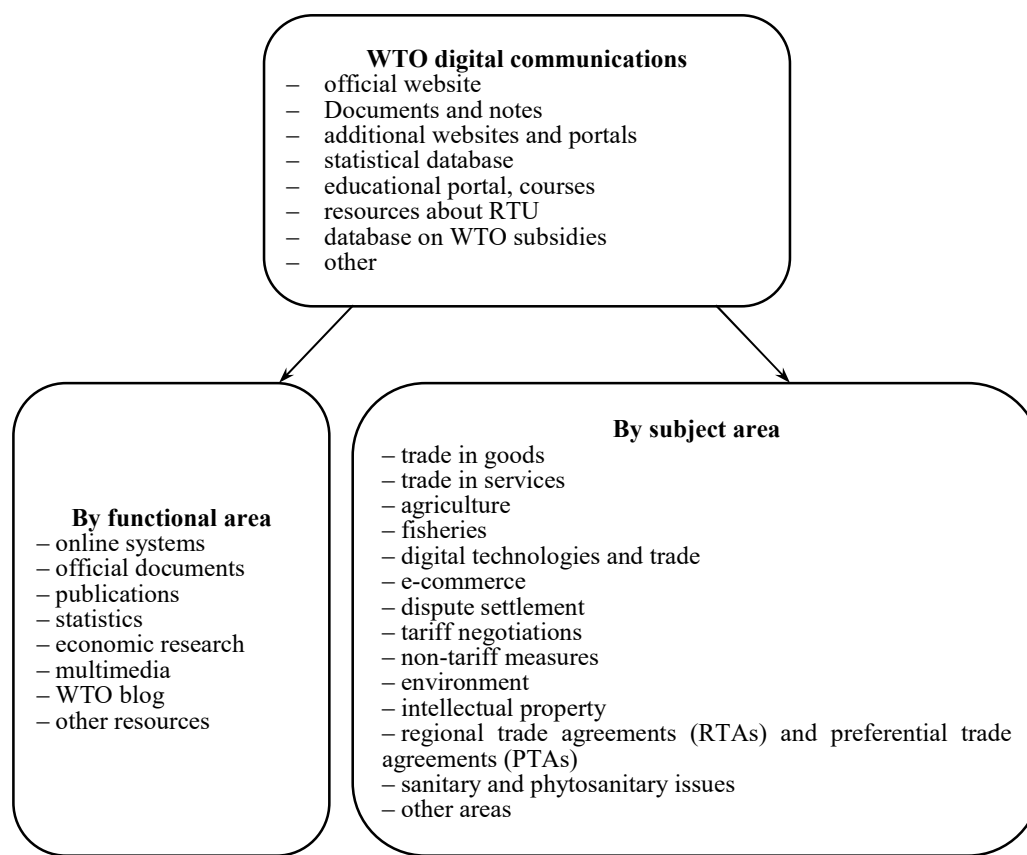


Fig. 6. WTO digital communications by thematic and functional classification

Source: developed by the authors

Another extremely important communication tool for the WTO is the publication of printed and digital publications with up-to-date information about the organisation itself, the state of the global trading system, and other topics related to the activities of the organisation and its members. The WTO considers its key publications to be the Annual Report (containing information on activities during the reporting year, the budget, and major events), the World Trade Report (containing key information on global trade trends during the reporting year), and the World Trade Statistical Review (a concise statistical report on changes in global trade and the international economy at the end of the reporting year)^{47, 48, 49}. The WTO also publishes a large number of so-called ad hoc

⁴⁷ *World Trade Report 2023. Re-Globalisation for a Secure, Inclusive and Sustainable Future.* https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/booksp_e/wtr23_e/wtr23_e.pdf

publications and reports on topics related to specific issues of global trade (e.g., the Digital Trade for Development report), areas of WTO activity (e.g., WTO Dispute Settlement: One-Page Case Summaries (1995-2022)), and WTO cooperation with other international organisations (e.g., WTO contribution to the 2022 UN High-Level Political Forum). In addition, communications use explanatory notes, letters and official documents, and publish reviews of member countries' trade policies. Incidentally, according to Antynio Guterres' comment in a recent speech, many UN publications do not reach a wide enough audience due to the excessive volume and complexity of these materials⁵⁰. Sharing this view, we believe that the World Trade Organisation needs to simplify and increase the creativity of its digital communications system, including expanding the use of infographics.

Public relations are another tool used to achieve communication goals. The organisation cooperates with journalists and the media by creating a separate online resource for them, Media newsroom, with restricted access that can only be obtained after confirming one's qualifications as a journalist. After registering with the Media newsroom, they gain access to advance copies of reports and publications that are not publicly available; details of the responsibilities of staff and contacts in the WTO's Information and External Relations Division; high-quality photo and video material for use in publications, as well as a special version of the schedule of meetings and briefings within the WTO for journalists⁵¹.

A more modern communication tool is content marketing, which is used to cover specific international trade topics in a more accessible and interesting format for people who are not directly involved in trade. First and foremost is the Let's Talk Trade podcast, which is broadcast on Spotify, Amazon Music, Google Podcasts, Apple Podcasts and Overcast⁵². In addition, access is provided to thematic courses and other educational content that helps those involved in foreign trade, as well as other interested parties, to better understand the organisation's activities and global trade⁵³.

We cannot fail to note that the WTO successfully uses event marketing, which consists of organising events to increase stakeholder engagement. In the context of communications, such events become a platform for interaction between representatives of the organisation and participants and the press, as well as providing an opportunity for networking. For the

⁴⁸ *World Trade Report 2024. Trade and Inclusiveness — How to Make Trade Work for All.* https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/booksp_e/wtr24_e/wtr24_e.pdf

⁴⁹ *World Trade Statistical Review 2023.* https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/booksp_e/wtsr_2023_e.pdf

⁵⁰ Nichols M. "UN Report Finds United Nations Reports Are Not Widely Read". Reuters. Accessed 21 August 2025. <https://www.reuters.com/world/un-report-finds-united-nations-reports-are-not-widely-read-2025-08-01/>

⁵¹ World Trade Organisation. For journalists. https://www.wto.org/english/forums_e/media_e/media_e.htm

⁵² Let's talk trade by WTO. Spotify. <https://open.spotify.com/show/3NdALxnSfEsIOo2BYe8y6r>

⁵³ WTO e-Learning. World Trade Organisation. <https://www.learning.wto.org/>

WTO, examples of such events include the annual Public Forum, which provides an opportunity to "discuss the latest developments in world trade and propose ways to improve the multilateral trading system", and the annual WTO Open Day, during which anyone can visit the organisation's headquarters⁵⁴.

The organisation also uses direct marketing in its communications, giving interested users the opportunity to subscribe to an e-mail newsletter to receive regular and timely news about the organisation's activities and the development of international trade.

The systematic nature, regularity and quality of the materials used in WTO communications, as well as the alignment of communications with the overall goals and expectations of the organisation's stakeholders, give reason to speak of a high level of application of communication policy tools, which, in our opinion, in the context of clear communication goals and the composition of the target audience and, accordingly, its characteristics (Table 4).

Table 4

**WTO COMMUNICATION POLICY TOOLS BY VECTOR
"ORGANISATION GOALS — TARGET AUDIENCE"**

Tool	Communication goals	Target audience
Diplomacy	Coordination, information	Participants, observers
Official publications and reports	Information, image (for periodical paper and electronic publications); Coordination (for explanatory notes and letters)	Participants, observers, international trade entities (exporters and importers), media and journalists, non-governmental organisations, employees, the public, educational and scientific institutions
Official website (www.wto.org)	Information, coordination, image	Participants, observers, international trade entities (exporters and importers), media and journalists, non-governmental organisations, employees, the public, educational and scientific institutions
Social networks (Facebook, Instagram, etc.)	Image, information	Media and journalists, the public, international trade entities (exporters and importers), employees (including potential employees)
Public relations	Image	Media and journalists, the public

⁵⁴ Open Day. World Trade Organisation. https://www.wto.org/english/forums_e/open_day_e/open_day_e.htm

Tool	Communication goals	Target audience
Educational content (podcasts, courses)	Informational	International trade entities (exporters and importers), non-governmental organisations, employees, higher education institutions
Public events	Image-building, informational	WTO Open Day – the public, media and journalists; Public Forum – all interested stakeholders
Direct marketing	Informational	International trade entities (exporters and importers), media and journalists, non-governmental organisations, the public

Source: developed by the authors

Thus, diplomacy is a special communication tool for the World Trade Organisation, particularly its specific form known as commercial diplomacy, which has a significant impact on the achievement of the WTO's statutory goals regarding free trade. An important tool, as for other international organisations, is the publication of official reports, documents and statistics, for which the organisation uses both print media and its official website. The WTO maintains social media accounts and maintains a presence in the media in order to disseminate information about its activities to the public and to support its positive reputation. For stakeholders involved in WTO activities or international trade in general, the organisation conducts training and organises thematic public events, as well as using direct marketing tools to communicate with interested target audiences who subscribe to its email newsletter on their own initiative.

The study allows us to identify a set of features of the World Trade Organisation's communication policy, which we have divided into three groups:

1. Client-related – characteristics of target audiences;
2. Instrumental – characteristics of priority tools;
3. Management features.

The group of client characteristics includes the increased importance of building sustainable relationships with stakeholders and focusing communications on an audience that is professionally competent in international trade and law. Since the activities and achievement of the WTO's goals largely depend on the interaction of the organisation's members, as well as on public advocacy, building constructive dialogue through diplomacy and other WTO instruments is an important goal of the organisation's communication efforts.

The professional focus of WTO communications is reflected in the detailed presentation of information, the use of specific terminology and a

professional style. While meeting the needs of some stakeholders, such communication does not fully take into account the public's need for access to data on WTO activities and a complete and correct understanding of the organisation's specific actions and decisions, as well as the overall purpose and necessity of continuing to function despite the critical attitude of representatives of many member countries towards the achievements of the WTO and the system of global international organisations in general.

The priority tools include the following features: conducting a significant part of communications for the purpose of informing, the key role of commercial diplomacy in the communication mix, and a ramified system of digital communications. Thus, the comprehensive and large-scale nature of the World Trade Organisation's activities necessitates regular communication with the organisation's key stakeholders about the specifics of its activities to liberalise trade, the state of the global trading system, the status of trade dispute resolution and other topics. This necessitates large-scale information campaigns involving all elements of the WTO's communication mix.

As one of the most important tools for implementing the trade policies of the organisation's members, commercial diplomacy is both a source and a special communication tool for the WTO, on which the principle of the organisation's functioning and the achievement of its statutory goals are based.

The development of technology and the need to support an information ecosystem that is easily accessible to stakeholders and can be quickly updated necessitates the existence of a ramified system of digital communications, as mentioned above (Fig. 6).

Management features refer to a globalised approach to regional adaptation of the communication mix, as well as the availability of human, financial and intangible resources for communication: staff, budget, defined corporate style.

Due to the fact that the WTO, applying a globalised approach, does not distribute communication channels by region, the organisation takes into account the peculiarities of perception in different cultures, forming its communication messages in such a way that they reach recipients from different participating countries without distorting the essence and evoke an adequate perception, which was intended by the sender of the information (by the relevant WTO departments).

The World Trade Organisation is characterised by a responsible approach to communications, which takes into account the existence of a defined corporate visual and textual style, as well as the allocation of the necessary human and financial resources to ensure high-quality and continuous communication.

Priorities for improving the WTO's communication policy

Given the existing challenges and certain problems of public perception of the WTO caused by the exacerbation of asymmetries in the world economy and global trade system, and taking into account the prospects for the development of digital communication tools, the WTO's communication policy needs further development. From the set of appropriate directions and specific measures, we have identified priorities, justified them and proposed the most adequate innovations, in our opinion (Table 5).

Table 5

**PRIORITIES FOR IMPROVING
THE WTO'S COMMUNICATION POLICY**

Priority	Justification	Possible implementation
Digitalisation	Digitalisation is one of the most important factors in the development of the world economy and global trade. Communication will increasingly take place in digital format, which necessitates the proactive modernisation of the WTO's digital communication tools.	Creation of a mobile application for access to the statistical dashboard; Creation of a mobile application for access to WTO courses in order to optimise the mastery of educational content from smartphones; Use of generative artificial intelligence tools to speed up the creation of everyday SMM content and free up staff resources for more complex communication projects.
Transparency	Criticism of the WTO on a number of issues related to the organisation's activities necessitates an increase in stakeholder trust, as the organisation's brand, image and reputation depend on its level. Clear, transparent and understandable information disclosure will help to strengthen trust by providing answers to complex/controversial questions about the organisation's activities from the source. Achieving this requires the effective implementation of communication transparency.	Detailing the organisation's budget expenditures; Coverage of specific decision-making processes, especially "sensitive" ones; Ensuring the possibility of providing feedback and encouraging communication recipients to do so.
Responsiveness	As the WTO's activities are subject to criticism, in order to increase trust in the organisation's brand, it is advisable to ensure systematic anti-crisis	Establish a system for monitoring and analysing public opinion with a rapid and adequate response to negative and unfounded/unprofessional/

Priority	Justification	Possible implementation
	communication measures that address the main negative arguments about the WTO and explain why they are false or what measures are being taken to remedy the situation. The WTO already has experience with such communication, which was used after the protests in Seattle in 1999.	biased criticism.
Creativity	Since WTO communication involves commenting on complex and difficult topics, it is advisable to find ways to present such information more creatively to the public, which is not directly involved in WTO processes or does not have the relevant professional competence. The formal, restrained and polished corporate style currently used in communications has a negative impact on public trust in the organisation.	Finding the right arguments when addressing consumers, explaining complex issues in simple terms with examples, involving education specialists to formulate the right messages, introducing a relevant section on social media and/or creating an adapted educational course to familiarise ordinary citizens of member countries with the activities of the WTO. Creating a section in informal communication resources whose main target audience is the general public (podcasts, social networks, etc.).

Source: developed by the authors.

Thus, in order to improve its communication policy, the WTO should digitise its communications, taking into account, on the one hand, the communication methods and tools currently available and, on the other hand, the needs of the target audience. Another important area for improvement is ensuring the transparency of communications, as presenting information in an unclear form or providing access to it only to some stakeholders will contribute to growing mistrust in the organisation's activities in the future.

Given the turbulence of the international economic environment and the lack of transparency in communications, there is a growing risk of crisis situations (strikes, protests, biased and commissioned publications, etc.) that negatively affect reputation. To minimise such risks, the WTO must monitor and respond in a timely manner to negative, provocative comments and information requests from the public and other stakeholders, providing timely and comprehensive information on the issue raised, and doing so with a view to ensuring that the information is properly perceived by the target audience.

Conclusions

Summarising the results obtained and proposals made, as well as assessing the achievement of the research objectives and tasks, we note the following. Communication mix, policy and strategy are interrelated concepts that influence the implementation of the communication process, but differ in terms of the level of consideration of means, factors, attitudes and guidelines, goals and the systematic nature of communications. The communication policy of both companies and international organisations is developed taking into account internal and external environmental factors, as well as target audiences that determine the goals and objectives of the communication entity. The latter form the communication tasks, which determine the nature and scope of the set of tools included in the communication mix of the firm/organisation. It has been determined that the communication mix of international organisations consists of elements such as diplomacy, public relations, direct marketing, branding, sponsorship, word of mouth, event marketing, digital presence and others.

Despite the common logic of communication policy development, the different nature of the activities of companies and international organisations determines the specific differences in their communications. Thus, international organisations are distinguished by the presence of stable goals, the conditioning of communication tasks by the provisions of founding documents or the impulses of the environment in which they operate, the imperative and scale of the factors involved, the complexity of the communication mix, and the importance of both internal target audiences (international civil servants and representatives of member countries) and external (public advocacy community).

The World Trade Organisation develops its communication policy under the influence of a number of external and internal factors determined by the global trade environment, relations with stakeholders and the public, specific approaches to marketing communications, and the characteristics of the organisation's functioning: its goals, principles, objectives and resources. The WTO carries out the communication process, guided by information, coordination and image goals and using the following communication mix tools: commercial diplomacy, digital resources (official website, social networks, etc.), official publications and reports, public relations, educational content, public events, and direct marketing via email.

The organisation's communication policy has a set of characteristics that should be divided into three groups: client, instrumental and managerial characteristics, taking into account their impact on various aspects and stages of the communication process, as well as target audiences. The specifics of the target audiences include the increased importance of

establishing trusting relationships with stakeholders and directing communications primarily at a professionally competent audience. Instrumental features are determined by a large share of communications for informational purposes, the increased importance of commercial diplomacy, and the existence of an extensive digital communications system. Management features are characterised by a globalised approach to regional adaptation of the communication mix and the availability of resources for communication.

Current challenges and prospects for the functioning of the WTO shape four key areas for improving its communication policy, which include timely digitalisation, increased transparency, systemic responsiveness, and thoughtful creativity. The implementation of the proposed measures in accordance with the priorities set out at will increase stakeholder confidence, strengthen public advocacy, improve reputation and strengthen the brand of the World Trade Organisation.

*This article was translated from its original in Ukrainian.

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