Strategic Communication Master's Degree – Case study evaluation

Case study – *Solar Wave*

SolarWave is a rapidly expanding cleantech SME headquartered in Milan and operating across several European markets, including Spain, Germany, and the Netherlands. The company develops compact photovoltaic systems designed specifically for urban environments, where traditional rooftop installations are often impossible due to rental contracts, architectural restrictions, or limited space. Its flagship product, the "WavePanel Mini," allows apartment residents to generate electricity through balcony-mounted solar modules connected to household circuits via a plug-in inverter. This plug-and-play approach makes renewable energy adoption accessible to millions of urban renters worldwide, a segment historically excluded from the transition to solar energy. Since its international launch in late 2022, SolarWave has attracted attention from sustainability-focused media outlets and environmental organizations. The company was featured in the Global Urban Innovation Summit in Berlin and received the European Sustainable Start-Up Award in 2024 for its contribution to decentralized energy production. Partnerships with NGOs promoting energy equity in low-income urban districts further strengthened SolarWave's mission-driven positioning. However, despite the positive reputation among sustainability advocates, the company struggles to build consistent brand recognition in competitive international markets dominated by larger, established cleantech corporations.

Communication aims.
SolarWave's communication objectives reflect its international ambitions and include:
• increasing brand visibility among urban Millennials and Gen Z in major European cities
• building credibility around the reliability and performance of balcony solar systems in diverse climatic conditions
• generating qualified leads and quotation requests through localized websites and online platforms
• positioning the company as an innovative global player in accessible renewable energy

First steps by Communication function
The company identifies several strengths that support its international expansion:
• universal ease of installation requiring no technical expertise or building modifications
• measurable reductions in household energy consumption, appealing to environmentally conscious consumers and cost-sensitive renters
• alignment with global sustainability trends and EU energy transition policies

Nevertheless, SolarWave faces critical weaknesses that hinder market penetration:
• a limited communication budget relative to global competitors
• concerns regarding product durability and safety standards across different regulatory environments
• difficulty adapting messaging to multiple cultural contexts and consumer expectations

Opportunities emerge from broader geopolitical and regulatory developments. EU incentives for residential renewable energy adoption, city-level sustainability plans in places such as Amsterdam and Barcelona and growing public interest in reducing energy bills create favorable conditions for SolarWave's expansion. Potential partnerships with international housing associations, green building initiatives, and municipal sustainability programs represent additional avenues for growth.
However, the company also confronts substantial threats. Large Asian manufacturers offer low-cost alternatives that undermine SolarWave's value proposition. Varying national regulations related to building aesthetics and façade modifications create barriers in cities such as Paris and Vienna. In some markets, property owners express skepticism about safety, structural impact, and compliance with condominium regulations, delaying adoption.

Communication strategy and tactics
To address these challenges, SolarWave launched an integrated, multi-market communication strategy. Online initiatives include collaborations with micro-influencers in different countries who document their experience with the WavePanel Mini, educational videos explaining energy savings, and user testimonials framed as "energy diaries" that highlight cultural and geographical diversity. The company also implemented

localized content strategies, adapting messaging to national priorities—for example, emphasizing cost savings in Spain and environmental impact in Germany.

Offline activities vary by market and include workshops in residential complexes, participation in international sustainability expos, and pilot projects with municipal housing programs. These initiatives aim to build trust through real-world demonstrations and personal storytelling.

Initial results indicate strong social media engagement in Germany and the Netherlands, where sustainability awareness is high. However, conversion rates from online interest to quotation requests remain lower than expected in Southern Europe. Offline events have also produced mixed outcomes, with different partners positioning the product either as a low-cost entry solution or as a premium technological innovation. This inconsistency has led to confusion about SolarWave's global positioning and value proposition.

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Questions:
1. **Why is a well-managed international digital presence essential for SolarWave, and what risks could emerge from inconsistent communication across different markets and cultural contexts?**
2. **To what extent can micro-influencers support SolarWave's international objectives, and which criteria should guide their selection across multiple countries?**
3. **How could the SWOT analysis be improved to provide stronger strategic guidance for international expansion?**