



Universitatea
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MASTERCOM



*Politehnica Graduate Student
Journal of Communication*

Volume 6, Issue 1, 2021



Editura **POLITEHNICA**

POLITEHNICA UNIVERSITY TIMIȘOARA

FACULTY OF COMMUNICATION SCIENCES

MASTERCOM

***Politehnica Graduate Student Journal
of Communication***

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MASTERCOM - *Politehnica Graduate Student Journal of Communication*

ISSN 2734 - 7087 ISSN-L 2501 – 949X

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POLITEHNICA UNIVERSITY PRESS
TIMIŞOARA – 2021

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Printing date: 16.12.2021

ISSN 2734 - 7087 ISSN-L 2501 – 949X

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Corporate Social Responsibility in Romanian Companies

Cristina Alina ENEA

Abstract: *The concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) first emerged in Romania in the 1990s, with the development of various non-governmental organizations. This paper deals with corporate social responsibility practices carried out by companies operating on the Romanian market. The aim of the study is to present various aspects related to the implementation of corporate social responsibility campaigns in Romania, including the reasons for implementing these campaigns, the frequent obstacles that companies face during the implementation period, how they communicate with stakeholders, and some issues related to their areas of interest as well as to the implementation of CSR campaigns during the Covid-19 pandemic. The study highlights the fact that a well-defined CSR strategy, which incorporates an effective communication strategy, leads to the success of the company in terms of visibility and reputation.*

Keywords: *Corporate Social Responsibility, CSR campaign, CSR communication, CSR strategy, sustainability.*

1. Introduction

Corporate social responsibility has been defined in a variety of ways over time. The World Business Council for Sustainable Development provides a relevant and easy to remember definition: "Corporate social responsibility is the ongoing commitment of companies to contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of their employees and their families, as well as the community and society as a whole" (Anca et al. 2011, p. 8).

As the demands of the business environment for corporate social responsibility are growing, companies, whatever their size, have started to focus more and more on this concept and have become aware of the multiple benefits it may bring as well as of the negative aspects that may arise when sustainable behavior is delayed.

The 2000s were marked by major reforms as part of the preparation for Romania's accession to the European Union, which influenced the participation of small and large businesses in various CSR efforts. For the most part, these efforts involved replacing existing production technologies with more "environmentally friendly" ones, as well as a variety of social measures targeting company employees or society.

Following the country's accession to the European Union, the implementation of these responsible practices by the private sector has become more pronounced, largely because multinational companies that have opened working sites in Romania have transferred organizational culture and practices from their parent company, in the country of origin (Dumitrascu, 2016).

Initially, these efforts were "seasonal," as they were only carried out mostly around the holidays, with no solid plan or model to back them up. Evaluations were focused only on reputational or image concerns, with no regard for the idea of sustainable development or stakeholder demands. Now, with the growth of the CSR industry in Romania, CSR practices have

become more aligned with those of nations with a long history in this industry. At the same time, CSR campaigns and their impact have become more visible and valuable as companies incorporate them in their yearly reports (Veringă and Veringă, 2019).

Evaluation of and reporting on CSR practices and results are significant instruments for addressing sustainability concerns (Almășan et al., 2019 apud KPMG, 2013). CSR reporting is a type of non-financial reporting (Vartak, 2016).

In terms of non-financial reporting, enterprises in the European Union with more than 500 employees are required to provide non-financial and diversity information by the EU Directive 95/2014 (Tachiciu et al. 2020). The primary objective of this Directive is to create the conditions for a corporate reporting model that encourages companies to incorporate sustainability into their business strategy and to supplement financial transparency with information needed to understand the company's performance and development, as well as its impact on society (Green report, 2020).

CSR initiatives can be presented via a variety of channels. There are two sorts of channels: those controlled by the company and those that cannot be controlled by the company. The former include paid advertising, brochures, the corporate website, newsletters, annual reports and social media channels, while the latter include news, blogs, social media channels and websites of experts/NGOs/other people interested in the company's activities. The choice of channel is made according to the purpose of the campaign and the target audience. Of course, the costs will be higher based on the company's decision to display its CSR results and performance through as many media as possible (Kim and Ferguson, 2014). Each organization should keep a record of their CSR initiatives, including both successful and unsuccessful efforts, to ensure transparent communication (Kim and Ferguson, 2014 apud Coombs and Holladay, 2011).

There are many studies on CSR in the literature, but only a few focus on the CSR actions carried out by Romanian companies. This study adds to prior case studies by providing additional information on CSR initiatives in Romania, including CSR implementation, communication and reporting. The companies taking part in this study are some of the largest on the Romanian market.

2. Research methods

The first part of this research consisted in reading existing studies, analyses and specialized literature focusing on the Romanian market, with the purpose of discovering the distinctive characteristics of local companies. This step helped me not only to create a survey targeting organizations, but also to develop the theoretical framework of this study.

The second part consisted of 2 research methods: an online survey and a comparative analysis. Both research methods assisted me in gathering relevant information. The survey was sent to those in charge of CSR activities at the 221 largest companies in Romania that have implemented CSR campaigns in recent years. The survey was administered online via the iSondaje platform during December 2020 – February 2021, and was completed by 32 representatives from the selected companies. The sampled companies were chosen mainly from the Romanian CSR Awards website, but also from other profile websites.

By administering the survey, I tried to obtain information on the implementation of CSR campaigns in Romania, taking into account several factors such as the reasons for implementing this type of campaign, the obstacles that companies face during the implementation period, areas of preferred investments, budgets, communication of CSR activities to the stakeholders, non-financial reporting, difficulties in implementing CSR campaigns during the Covid-19 pandemic and so on.

For the comparative analysis, 100 companies from different industries were chosen from the same sample. The objective of this comparative analysis was to analyze the communication strategies used by businesses to communicate CSR activities online. The comparative analysis grid allowed me to see whether corporations disclosed CSR information on their websites, social media (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter), specialized platforms, and whether they published sustainability reports on one of the above-mentioned channels.

3. Results and discussion

The survey was completed by 32 companies, including the following: Transgaz, Friesland Campina Romania – Napolact, Digi Romania, Sage Automotive Interiors Romania, NTT Data, Continental Automotive Romania, Vodafone Romania, Agricola, Smithfield Romania, Carrefour Romania, Fortech, Daikin Romania, Banca Comercială Română, Kaufland Romania, Engie Romania, Azomureș, SC Apavital SA, Black Sea Oil&Gas SA, Roche Romania, Jysk Romania, Auchan Retail Romania, Avon Cosmetics Romania, Deutsche Telekom Services Europe Romania, Cargus, CEZ Group Romania and Lidl Romania.

Regarding the reasons why companies choose to perform CSR actions, most of them, i.e. 19.3% (28 companies), said that they start such campaigns because they are included in the company philosophy and values. 18.6% of companies do it to involve their employees in the community, while 16.6% start CSR actions to improve their reputation. Attracting and retaining employees is another reason for 10.3% of the respondents, whereas 4.1% do it to retain customers, 0.7% for tax deduction, 9.7% for increased visibility, 3.4% for competitive advantage, 4.1% to promote products and/or services, and less than 2% to increase the company's financial value or out of obligation.

Table 1 Reasons for implementing CSR campaigns

Why does your company engage in CSR activities?	Responses	
	N	Percent
a) To improve company reputation	24	16.6%
b) To improve client fidelity	6	4.1%
c) For tax deduction	1	0.7%
d) To attract and retain employees	15	10.3%
e) For visibility	14	9.7%
f) They are part of the PR strategy	15	10.3%
g) Competitive advantage	5	3.4%
h) To promote the company's products/services	6	4.1%
i) To increase the financial value of the company	3	2.1%
j) It is imposed by the company's policy	1	0.7%
k) It is part of the company's philosophy and values	28	19.3%
l) To involve our employees in the community	27	18.6%

In line with the literature and the results in Table 2, the environment, education and health seem to be the most frequently supported domains. This can be accounted for by the fact that pollution is one of the most important environmental problems. The commercial impact of pollution is extensive, with only one example demonstrating how pollution affects people's health, resulting in increased medical bills and loss of production. Hiring and keeping workers in heavily polluted locations, for example, is difficult.

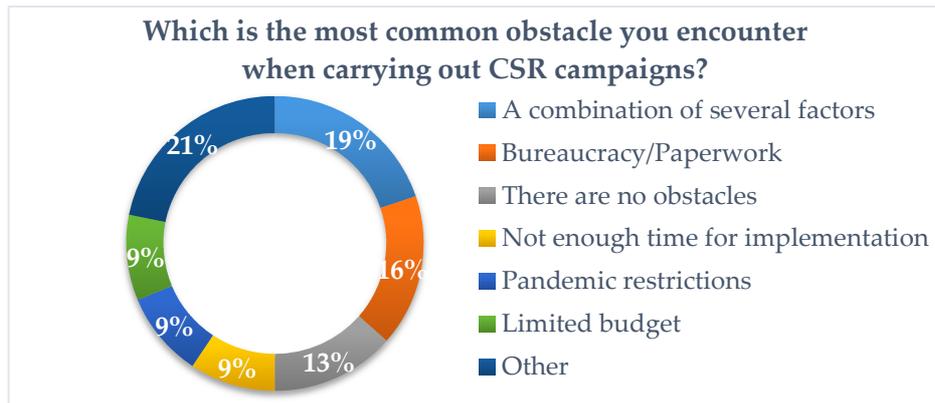
Other areas of investment include sports, information technology, the creative industries, and capacity building for civil society.

Table 2 Areas of interest

Which are the domains your company focuses on?	Responses	
	N	Percent
a) Environment	25	17.7%
b) Education	25	17.7%
c) Community support	25	17.7%
d) Cause Related Marketing	2	1.4%
e) Digital innovation	2	1.4%
f) Health	22	15.6%
g) Intersectoral partnership	6	4.3%
h) Employee support	12	8.5%
i) CSR in social media	7	5.0%
j) Internal campaigns	12	8.5%
k) Others	3	2.1%

Most companies typically encounter a combination of obstacles in implementing CSR campaigns, as illustrated in Figure 1. The most common obstacle is bureaucracy. However, 13% of the companies said they had not encountered obstacles in implementing CSR campaigns. Other challenges include the lack of professionals, the lack of support from the media or appropriate partners, restricted budgets, internal decisions or the lack of coordination with other institutions.

Fig. 1 Frequent obstacles



Communicating with the employees is as important as communicating with the external public. As shown in Table 3, most companies stated that they inform their employees about CSR efforts by e-mail, newsletters, display panels and other tools, such as unique screensavers, brochures, internal platforms or private social media groups.

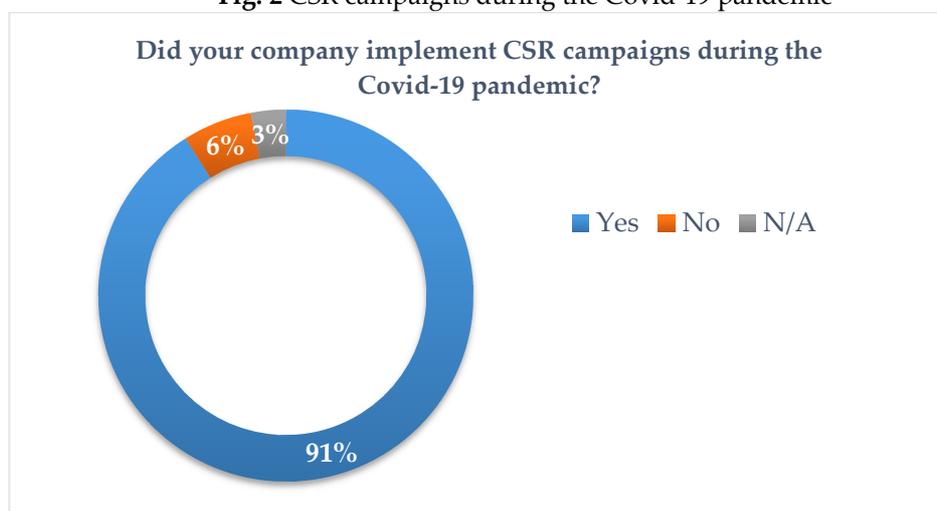
Table 3 Internal communication tools

What tools do you use to inform employees about CSR campaigns?	Responses	
	N	Percent
a) Newsletters	25	28,5%
b) Briefing notes	10	11,5%
c) E-mail	28	32,2%
d) Display panels	16	18,4%
e) We do not inform employees	1	1,1%
f) Other	7	8%

The results presented in Figure 2 reveal that the majority of the companies that took the survey (91%) continued to conduct CSR campaigns

despite the numerous restrictions imposed by the authorities as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Only 6% did not conduct CSR efforts throughout the pandemic. However, the areas of interest have shifted over this period, with health and education industries being the most prioritized by companies.

Fig. 2 CSR campaigns during the Covid-19 pandemic

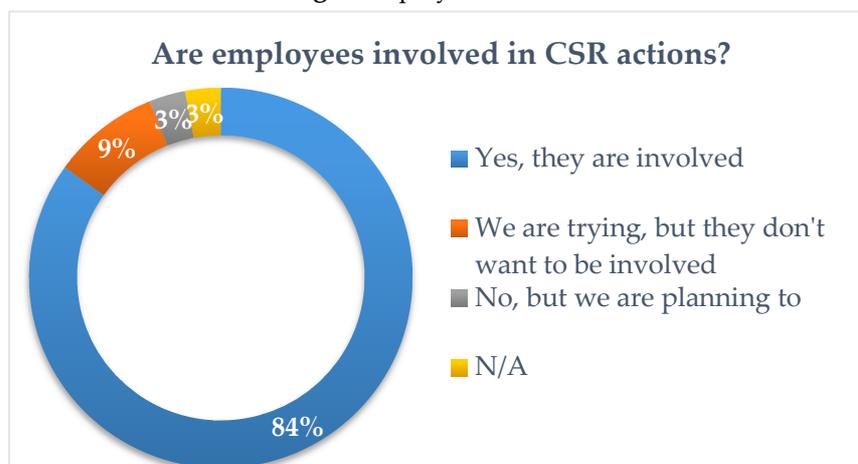


Other things related to CSR campaign implementation have changed during the pandemic, such as the shortage of volunteers, the lack of engagement with beneficiaries, quicker mobilization due to the unknown that came along with the pandemic, the need to rethink CSR strategies and relocate activities online, although collaboration with state institutions was improved.

In terms of employee involvement, the answers presented in Figure 3 show that most companies (84%) involve their employees in CSR actions and state that they are very committed. In contrast, 9% try to involve them, but say employees refuse to get involved, and only 3% of the companies do

not involve them at all but are considering it for the future. 3% of the respondents did not answer this question. However, when it comes to employee engagement and, by extension, CSR program participation, the size of the organization matters.

Fig. 3 Employee involvement



The results shown in Table 4 provide some important details in terms of CSR communication. Most organizations have CSR sections on their main websites, which go by a variety of names, such as commitment, social involvement, sponsorship, foundations and sustainability, among others. In terms of social media communication, Facebook seems to be the most popular platform for CSR communication, followed by Instagram and LinkedIn. Only 9 of the 100 companies included in the study have Twitter profiles. Given that LinkedIn is a more professional network, using the company's LinkedIn profile as the primary communication channel for CSR initiatives might be a viable decision. However, I believe that additional communication methods that might help the company to reach a larger and more varied audience should not be overlooked.

Table 4 CSR communication

Nr. crt.	Industry	CSR section on the website	Social media				CSR platform	Sustainability report
			F	I	L	T		
1.	Retail	14	13	6	11	1	4	7
2.	Energy	8	7	4	5	2	1	4
3.	Pharmaceutical & health	22	8	4	5	0	4	13
4.	Finance & banking	9	8	5	6	2	2	4
5.	Food & beverages	9	9	2	3	0	0	4
6.	IT	5	6	4	5	1	1	4
7.	Oil & gas	5	3	2	3	0	1	2

Foreign organizations in the pharmaceutical industry, unlike organizations in other industries, do not have websites or social media pages for their subsidiaries in Romania. Hence, the information on CSR actions published there is not entirely relevant to the public in the country. As a result, pharmaceutical companies are the least developed in terms of informing the public about CSR policies and campaigns.

It is important to notice that corporate social responsibility actions of organizations who have CSR platforms or operate through a foundation/association and use more than one communication channel are more visible.

When engaging with stakeholders, several organizations, particularly those in the IT industry, employ English. This method has the

potential to be beneficial since it allows a broader public to become aware of the CSR measures that have been taken.

In terms of reporting, only 38 out of 100 companies have published the latest sustainability reports on their websites or other relevant platforms that they are using. Fewer of them have stated the framework on which they based their report.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the willingness of corporations to disseminate information about their CSR actions is limited. Although the opinions of those surveyed are not of major importance for Romanian enterprises developing CSR activities, they did allow me to test some hypotheses and detect some trends.

I believe that the interest in CSR will grow in the following years as people become more aware of what they are consuming, whether it is food or other products. People tend to increasingly look for brands that demonstrate sustainable behavior toward the environment and the community to which they belong, sanctioning those who do not. As a result, in order to preserve their market position, businesses must adapt and stay up with changing customer preferences and a market that is continuously evolving.

To summarize, a well-defined CSR strategy that also incorporates an effective communication strategy across numerous media may increase the company's online presence and thus build or enhance its reputation.

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Webography

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The Influence of CSR Actions on Company Reputation Case Study: Company Image Before and After the Implementation of the CSR Program

Iasmina-Nicoleta HAIDUC

Abstract: *The abbreviation CSR comes from the English term corporate social responsibility. This concept first appeared in the United States around the 80s, but it was introduced in Romania only around 2005. The first conference on this topic, entitled CSR'06, was organized in Romania in 2006, in Bucharest. This paper focuses on the beneficial actions performed locally by the companies Mondial, Autoliv, Hella and Honeywell, in the municipality of Lugoj, Timiș County, Romania. Each company has implemented various CSR campaigns, whose actions have generated positive opinions from both employees and citizens, which has contributed to maintaining company prestige and reputation. The four above-mentioned companies have always been in competition. This is also due to the fact that they operate in a small town, and each wants to attract as many employees as possible, and of course, important partners so as to become well known for their products and services regionally and nationally. The purpose of the case study is to highlight certain aspects of corporate social responsibility actions, but also to identify the beneficial impact these actions have had on the community.*

Keywords: *corporate social responsibility, CSR campaigns, beneficial CSR actions, positive opinions, company reputation, beneficial changes.*

1. Introduction

The reason why I chose this topic is my interest in the welfare of the community I belong to, but also the desire to take part in corporate social responsibility actions. I believe that any company should feel responsible for the society in which it operates, thus trying to compensate for the harm created by pollution through activities that protect the environment or any other activities that involve the good of citizens.

Another solid reason why I found this topic useful is the active involvement of companies in the lives of employees. Once there is concern for those inside the company and appreciation for employees increases, their confidence in the management gets stronger and work efficiency inevitably increases as well.

The first objective of this study was to research the concept of corporate social responsibility by finding answers to questions such as: When did the concept of CSR appear? What changes have there been to CSR over time? What kind of CSR actions have been carried out so far?

The second objective is more specific, including the following: what contributes to the implementation of CSR activities both inside and outside the company, the exchange of benefits brought both to the companies and to the community in which they carry out their activity, as well as how many CSR campaigns conducted by the local companies have been remarkably successful.

In short, the research I have done has helped me discover and understand how CSR activities have evolved over the years. Not only has the image of the companies changed for the better thanks to CSR, but so has the appreciation of the employees and citizens. The employees feel that they are a part of something much more important than a simple group of workers, they feel like a real team, a big family, where respect is guaranteed for everyone.

2. Expert sources consulted

The topic of this paper has been researched by various authors from different fields: teachers, analysts, businessmen, each of them coming with their own vision related to corporate social responsibility activities.

According to Camelia Crişan (2013, p 20), in order to define the concept of CSR and to get an idea as clear and close to reality as possible about it, one should rely on several sources from various fields, such as law, philosophy, economics, political science, sociology, psychology, geopolitics, etc.

As explained by William Frederick (2006, pp. 90-104), CSR is representative of an era when corporations implement an ethical culture that observes the major principles of human dignity. Therefore, companies hire only those managers who make decisions in accordance with ethical principles, and who are able to identify and, at the same time, solve the problems that occur in the daily activity of companies.

Also, Archie Carroll and Ann Buchholtz (2008) argue that CSR illustrates the present relationship between corporations and society, which can be accounted for by the fact that nowadays the business environment is automatically included in the social environment and citizens begin to have expectations from companies.

Last but not least, here are the 7 specific corporate issues outlined by Stephen R. Covey (2020), a well-known American businessman and a motivational speaker, in his paper "Ethics of the Effective Leader", each illustrating an interesting point of view in this field:

1. The vision and values are not supported by all members of the organization;
2. We must understand that there is no set strategy for success;
3. Weak harmonization needs to be worked on;
4. There are mistakes in approaching the style;

5. Employees' poor skills need to be identified;
6. Customer confidence must be increased;
7. The current values must correspond to the old habits!

3. Research methods

I have used various research methods to meet the objectives of my study, as follows: a questionnaire administered to the employees at four companies in Lugoj, an interview with the manager of one of them, reading magazine and journal articles as well as specialized books written by Romanian and by foreign authors, and consulting official websites in the field. I have tried to fulfill the objectives of my work in a clear, concise and balanced way, providing both research from others and my personal opinions.

The questionnaire was administered to staff members from four companies in Lugoj, namely Mondial, Autoliv, Hella and Honeywell. There were 80 respondents (39 women and 41 men) aged between 25 and 50 years old. They all have a university degree and they all live in Lugoj. Most of them work in fields such as: Human Resources, Public Relations, Management, Marketing and Finance.

4. Results

For a better understanding of my research, here are the most important findings that I have chosen to include in this paper.

As shown in Figure 1 below, when asked whether they are familiar with the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility, 63 out of the 80 respondents answered yes, while 17 said no. From my point of view, these figures point to the efficient internal management of the four companies under analysis. The high percentage of those familiar with CSR (78,8%) indicates both their obvious practice in the field and an efficient and

balanced communication between the management and the employees to whom the projects of the companies in which they operate are brought to attention.

Fig. 1 Familiarity with the CSR term

Q1. Are you familiar with the CSR concept?

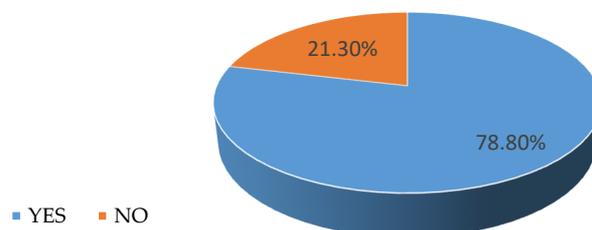
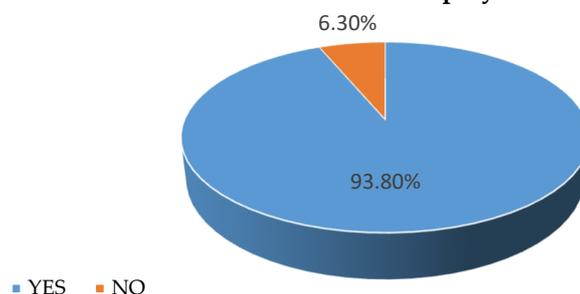


Figure 2 depicts the employees' opinion about whether the company they work for has formed a positive image due to its active involvement in the lives of its employees. 75 out of the 80 respondents answered affirmatively, which suggests a high degree of awareness of the importance of CSR activities and their internal effects. On the other hand, 5 respondents answered negatively, not considering these activities essential. This may be due to either their lack of knowledge or lack of interest in this area.

Fig. 2 Image of the company through the eyes of the employees

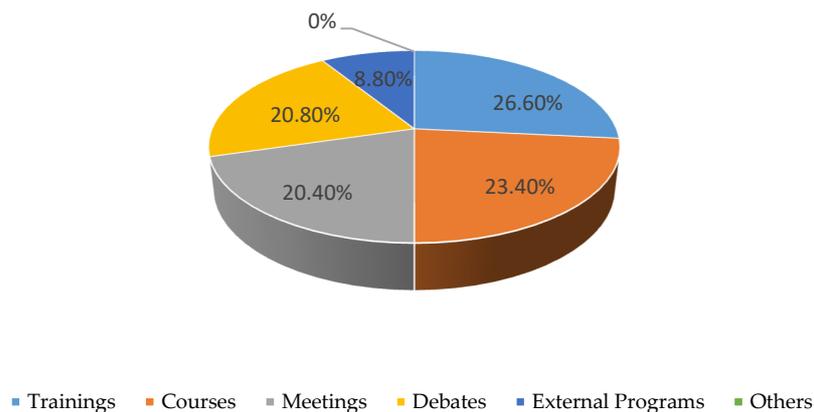
Q4. Do you consider that the company you belong to has formed a positive image due to its active involvement in the lives of its employees?



Another question concerned the professional development services offered to employees by the company. This was a multiple-choice question, where the respondents could select more than one answer. As illustrated in Figure 3, there were 73 answers for trainings, 64 for specialized courses, 57 for debates, 56 for meetings, and 26 for external programs. As a general idea, these figures indicate the active involvement of the management in the professional development of the employees, offering them the possibility of promotion.

Fig 3. Professional formation of the employees

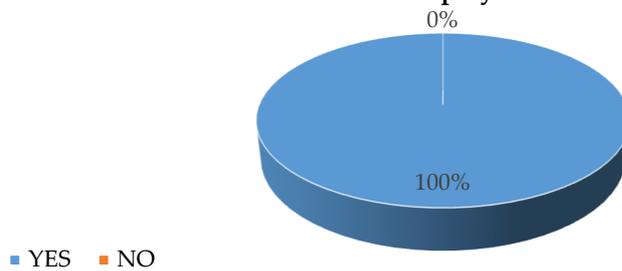
Q6. Regarding the professional training of your own employees, what services were offered to you by the company you work for?



As for the existence of benefit packages for employees, all the respondents answered affirmatively (Fig. 4), which shows that the four companies studied (Mondial, Autoliv, Hella and Honeywell) have benefit packages for their employees, obviously rewarding their work.

Fig 4. Employee benefit packages

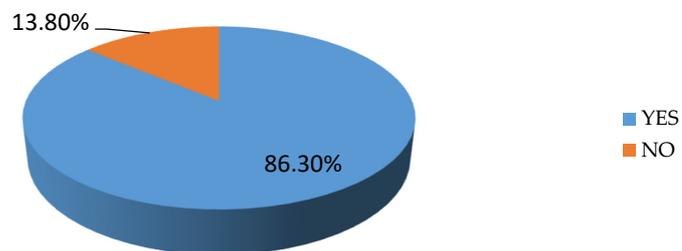
Q7. Does the company in which you work have a benefit package for its employees?



In what concerns the employees' participation as volunteers in social events organized by the company, the results of the survey show that 69 out of the 80 respondents stated that they participated in such events. Only 11 respondents answered negatively, having no involvement in such activities, as can be seen in the pie chart below. The high percentage of positive responses (86,30%) illustrates both the civic spirit and the interest of employees in supporting disadvantaged people, while also contributing to the promotion of these projects in the future.

Fig. 5 Volunteering

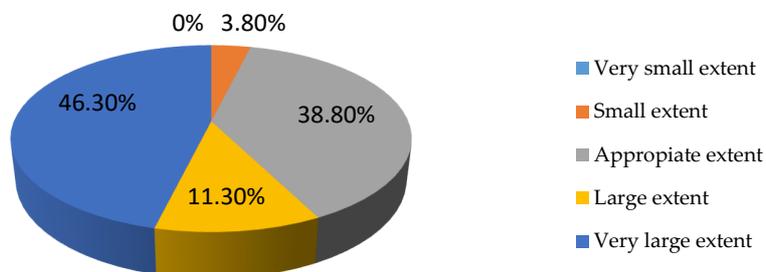
Q21. Did you participate as a volunteer in a social event organized by the company you belong to?



When asked to assess the extent to which the company they work for has evolved thanks to CSR activities (Fig. 6), 37 out of the 80 respondents were of the opinion that the company had evolved to a very large extent, 31 said to an appropriate extent, 9 stated to a large extent, while only 3 considered that the company had evolved to a small extent. These figures indicate the employees' appreciation of the social projects carried out by the companies as well as their desire to continue doing such activities on a regular basis. I also believe that the involvement of employees in CSR activities allows them to combine the useful and the pleasant, by dealing with other issues not related to their daily work while also increasing their work performance to some extent.

Fig. 6 Evolution of the companies

Q22. If you were to look back, before doing all these activities, to what extent do you think the company you work for has evolved?



Conclusion

In my opinion, corporate social responsibility is the set of actions initiated for the wellbeing of society and its members. These actions can refer to the protection of the environment, the support of education in educational

institutions, the provision of jobs for the most disadvantaged people, the implementation of better conditions for existing employees, etc.

I think that another factor that has led to the emergence of CSR activities is the increase in personal expectations. My generation has a higher level of expectations than the generation of our parents and grandparents because we have been educated in such a way so as to respect ourselves. Once people have high self-esteem, they will stop accepting injustice, refusing to be blind, deaf and dumb to undesirable behaviours and will request more acts of welfare from companies.

In conclusion, the benefits that corporations can get could be achieved through a broad and continuous process, which I will try to explain through a metaphor. Let's suppose a corporation is depicted as a tree; the benefits obtained are in the crown, at the top of the tree. To reach the top, the roots must be well planted in the ground, thus forming a solid trunk and strong branches. Then, in order to regenerate and fruit, the tree must be watered, cleaned, cared for, and the branches must be pruned regularly. After years and years, my children and grandchildren will be able to proudly say that this tree is beautiful, majestic and impressive.

The essence of my comparison is this: results are obtained through constant actions. The change occurs from the inside to the outside. To obtain mutual benefits, both for the company and for the community, corporations need to create a pleasant environment for their employees. Just like someone who is well-raised by their parents, not lacking the necessary resources and appreciating what they have received – that someone will not only do the same for other people, but they will also positively influence their acquaintances (and in the future, their children) to act similarly, because good can be contagious.

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The Evolution of Corporate Social Responsibility Actions in Romania. Case Study of 2019 and 2020

Ana-Lăcrămioara REBELI-SZABO

Abstract: *Taking into account the shifts that have happened in the Romanian society during the year of 2020 due to the fast and sudden outbreak of the COVID-19 virus, this paper focuses on the changes that have occurred during the 1 January 2019 and the 31 December 2020. The main purpose of this study is to determine whether there were changes in the way in which companies put out their CSR measures, whether there were differences in the corporate social responsibility strategies, whether the companies have adapted their corporate social responsibility strategy or whether things have remained the same. The comparative analysis will reveal that all of these aspects have suffered transformations but the conclusion is optimistic because through these hardships, the Romanian CSR has proven that it can adapt and evolve.*

Keywords: *corporate social responsibility, Romanian CSR, communication, pandemic response, predictions.*

1. Introduction

The world is moving at a faster pace nowadays and there are all sorts of challenges that both the population and the companies will have to face. 2019 was described as the last year before this huge reset button was pressed by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Changing CSR priorities and affecting the social responsibility strategies for 2020, the coronavirus has struck a field that was ready to evolve: the social involvement measures in Romania. Thus, how can we learn to prepare ourselves for the next crisis situation? By studying how this crisis has affected the social responsibility measures.

The main goal of this article is finding out whether the Romanian CSR has changed, adapted or remained the same throughout these two years. In this research, this goal will be achieved by comparing the social involvement measures of some well-known companies that run their business in Romania. These companies are Kaufland, Lidl, Vodafone and Orange.

2. Research methods

Relevant data was gathered from multiple sources such as the official website of the companies (by browsing through the sections and finding any mentions about their corporate social responsibility measures, statements and even any hint of a financing program for the NGOs), the annual CSR or financial reports, press releases and even social media.

The method that was used for this research is comparative analysis. This was used as a tool to observe the possible changes in the corporate social responsibility agenda for the years of 2019 and 2020. All of the actions that Kaufland Romania, Lidl Romania, Vodafone Romania and Orange Romania have implemented during 1 January 2019 and 31 December 2020 will be observed.

In this research, the following things will be of great importance:

- The types of the CSR measures that the companies have introduced in their social responsibility strategy
- The areas that were of interest for the companies during the COVID-19 crisis
- The changes that have occurred regarding their CSR practices over the years.

Therefore, the focus will be on the main findings that will provide useful insight for future CSR research and possible theories that will explain how the companies in Romania position themselves towards changes at the core level of the society.

3. Results

Social responsibility pillars

It is crucial that the social responsibility pillars of each company are mentioned in this study. By doing this, it can be further analysed whether these companies have carried out social involvement actions during the two-year time frame, in all of their proclaimed pillars or whether some areas of their CSR strategy have been placed on hold.

The following tables will simply highlight the findings through the graphic representation of the types of social involvement that two of the biggest Romanian retailers and two of the leading telecommunication companies in Romania are approaching in their strategies as a form of their brand identity. Because every company adapts these pillars to fit their budget, sphere of activity and the overall CSR model of their parent company, it will be easily noticed that there are many ways in which the Romanian society can benefit through their responsibility measures.

As it can be seen in Table 1, Kaufland Romania has more than three CSR pillars that are yearly a priority due to the pillar's integration in the brand strategy. While there is no arguing that 2020 has been difficult, Kaufland managed to continue to implement measures in all of

these pillars: education, environment, culture, social projects, health and sports.

Table 1. Corporate social responsibility pillars - Kaufland

CSR pillars	2019	2020
Education	✓	✓
Environment	✓	✓
Culture	✓	✓
Social projects	✓	✓
Health & sports	✓	✓

By looking at the information displayed in Table 2, it can be determined that Lidl Romania has not had a change in their social involvement pillars during 2019 or 2020. Known for their involvement in creating a food bank, Lidl has strayed away from the well-known types of CSR and has adapted their social involvement actions in a unique way by finding out the main areas of concern in the Romanian society: hunger due to extreme poverty in some areas in the country and loss of lives due to a lack of equipment for health emergencies and poor education with regard to offering the first aid.

Table 2. Corporate social responsibility pillars – Lidl

CSR pillars	2019	2020
Education	✓	✓
Environment	✓	✓
Emergency services development	✓	✓
Food bank	✓	✓

Vodafone Romania focuses on four main CSR pillars, one of them being volunteering, which means that some of their employees are getting involved in the social responsibility measures throughout the years. During 2019 and 2020, they made an effort to implement social involvement actions in all of the four pillars as it is shown in Table 3,

while at a deeper level the pandemic has disrupted their efforts, they have managed to adapt quickly.

Table 3. Corporate social responsibility pillars – Vodafone

CSR pillars	2019	2020
Education	✓	✓
Health	✓	✓
Volunteering	✓	✓
Social services	✓	✓

Moving forward to the last company in the study, it can be concluded that Kaufland, Lidl and Vodafone are active in two particular fields, i.e. education and health, which may have pointed out some of the current struggles that Romania as a country faces: being unable to provide a unitary education system and being unable to reach the health requirements due to various reasons.

Table 4. Corporate responsibility pillars - Orange

CSR pillars	2019	2020
Digital education	✓	✓
Innovation and entrepreneurship	✓	✓
Environment	*	✓
Community	✓	✓

While consulting the information in Table 4, one aspect is particularly in focus: while being a part of their CSR strategy pillars, in 2019 there were no environment-driven actions reported. While this could have been expected to be the case for 2020, instead of 2019, this research has proven the lack of environmental measures that took place in the previous year.

Corporate social responsibility during the pandemic

The crisis situation that made its debut with the spread of the coronavirus in the first half of the year of 2020, has challenged the

companies to act fast and to shift their priorities. While Kaufland has cut in half of their budget for the #INSTAREDEBINE NGO funding programme, in order to use the funds as a response to the pandemic effect on the Romanian society, others have not reported insights with regard to how they handled the financial aspects between 16 March 2020 (i.e. when the state of emergency was declared) and 31 December 2020.

Table 5. Social responsibility in the context of the pandemic

COVID-19 involvement	Kaufland	Lidl	Vodafone	Orange
Education	✓	✗	✓	✓
Health	✓	✓	✓	✓
Social	✓	✓	✓	✓

The comparative analysis of the social involvement of these companies during the pandemic shows that there were certainly some pillars that were considered to have a higher priority as shown in Table 5. It is important to note that as we all know, the healthcare facilities and hospitals were heavily affected by the spread of the COVID-19 virus, which has been barely possible to deal with. Therefore, all of the companies in the study (i.e. Kaufland, Lidl, Vodafone and Orange) have decided to make numerous donations in order to provide help with the purchase of medical equipment (such as mechanical ventilation devices), disinfectants, protective equipment or UV-C lamps.

All of the companies have paid attention to the social pillar because there were so many people struggling with the loss of income, mental health issues and even depression due to the sudden increase in COVID-19 infections and lockdown measures that were installed by the authorities. Out of the four companies, Lidl did not declare any CSR measures regarding the educational field, which was also affected in the

context of the pandemic. This fact reiterates the idea of priority in choosing where and how the companies can get involved.

Conclusion

The Romanian CSR has been struck by the pandemic, being caught by surprise, but this has only proven that the corporate social responsibility in our country has reached a level of maturity that is ready to face unprecedented challenges.

Based on the research that has been conducted, it can be concluded that the Romanian perspective of CSR has adapted very well to changes, even though the budget that was meant to support the CSR strategy pillars may have gone into helping the society during the COVID-19 crisis.

These companies went on with most of their annual plans as if nothing happened, by showing commitment and by being true to their core statements when approaching social involvement measures. It will be interesting to observe the CSR measures implemented in the next following years.

In Romania, there are some pillars of social involvement that are somewhat considered a priority, this study's results proving this to be the case for both years. These pillars are education and health, closely followed by the environmental pillar. The corporate social responsibility strategies are adapted to the brand identity and mostly come by the example of the parent company. Whether these companies have made public statements about their involvement in facing the pandemic or not, their impact on the Romanian society's overall welfare cannot be argued.

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The Role of Online Tools in Communication. Case Study: Negotiation in the Real Estate Business

Rebecca Ioana CHINCEA

Abstract: *With the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, all economic areas have been affected by measures taken both globally and by nations. As a result, the real estate business experienced a sudden shift from offline to online, adapting to new conditions in the context of the pandemic. This article analyzes the effect that the pandemic has had on real estate negotiations, but also how online tools could prove to be beneficial to this business field. Also, this study performs a comparative analysis of the negotiation methods employed by sellers and buyers both before and during the pandemic.*

Keywords: *COVID-19, negotiation, offline environment, online environment, negotiation, real estate business.*

1. Introduction

This paper attempts to tackle a new topic in real estate, since numerous studies over the past year have focused more on the influence that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the real estate market rather than on real estate negotiations.

Although the online environment has proven to be a real pillar for relationships between people, but also for various businesses, especially in the context of a force majeure event such as the COVID-19 pandemic, as we all had to resort more to the virtual environment than the physical one, it has not been found out yet to what extent online platforms and their tools are compatible with complex businesses.

Real estate is a complex business field, as "success or failure in this kind of business is determined by how you negotiate" (George H. Ross). Therefore, the sudden transition of real estate negotiating from the physical to the virtual environment has generated new challenges for professionals and clients alike.

The purpose of this paper is to conclude whether the virtual environment can really stimulate the relationship between sellers and buyers and whether, in the near future, we will be able to use only the online environment in real estate negotiations.

2. Research methods

The study consists of two parts: the theoretical part and the application part. In the theoretical part, the literature was reviewed, and in the application part, such tools as qualitative analysis, quantitative analysis and comparative analysis were used.

The qualitative analysis was performed based on interviews conducted with a set of 8 professionals working in the real estate market of Timisoara. Each of the interviewees had over 5 years of experience in real estate.

The quantitative analysis was carried out using a questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed to a number of 109 respondents, who were either clients or potential clients.

The comparative analysis correlated the sellers' answers in interviews with the customers' answers given in the questionnaire, in order to identify differences or similarities between their perceptions regarding the pursued objectives. The interviews took place online (e-mail), and the diagrams derived from the questionnaire were made by using the "Statistical Package for the Social Sciences" programme.

The objectives pursued were the following: negotiating before and during the pandemic; the influence of the online environment on negotiating; the relationship between sellers and customers; how both parties perceive and comprehend the negotiating process; the role of online tools; the pros and cons of the online environment.

The application part consists of a critical and objective analysis, at the end of which recommendations were elaborated and conclusions were drawn that could serve to improve negotiating in the real estate business in an unpredictable context such as the current one.

3. Results

With the help of the research methods mentioned above, a few general conclusions were drawn on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on real estate negotiations.

Following the *qualitative analysis*, many similarities between the answers of the interviewees stood out, while the differences were negligible. Regarding online tools and their use before the pandemic, respondents confirmed that they had mainly used the offline negotiating and only in exceptional situations online negotiations (e.g. negotiating via video conferencing with people from other countries). With the pandemic, respondents turned more to online platforms for negotiations, such as WhatsApp, Instant Messenger, Google Meet, Zoom or Skype. Also, prior to the advent of the pandemic, the interviewees only used the telephone or e-mail before meeting face-to-

face for a negotiation, in order to set the meeting place, to acquire general information or to decide on general lines of action.

Another conclusion is that professionals in the field claim that the lack of physical interaction and direct contact is the biggest disadvantage of online negotiations. Analyzing the subjects' answers, it appears that all the other disadvantages of the online medium decrease proportionally due to the lack of physical interaction.

An additional influence of the pandemic on real estate negotiations is the long time needed for closing a business deal due to the extensive explanations made during discussions with the clients who prefer online negotiating.

The *quantitative analysis* of real estate clients revealed a few general conclusions about how negotiating had been carried out before and during the pandemic. For clients or potential clients, the most important element in negotiating with a real estate professional is trust. Most respondents consider that negotiations conducted with the seller are quite difficult and believe that the feeling of trust during negotiating would tone down the tense atmosphere and secure a more relaxed mood.

Moreover, the legal factor seems to be a serious impediment for some respondents in conducting negotiations online, while other respondents believe that advanced technology helps any type of negotiation.

The questionnaire shows that the platforms that customers prefer in online negotiations are Zoom, Google Meet or Skype, while e-mail is at the opposite end of the preference spectrum. The choice of platforms enabling video conferencing is explained by the fact that they best emulate physical proximity.

The *comparative analysis* aimed to highlight the similarities and differences between the two negotiating parties (seller and buyer). Thus, sellers claim that they are facing an atypical situation on the real estate market, namely the fact that the client has taken the place of the aggressive negotiator. The interviewed sellers answered that many

customers were offering lower prices for properties, believing that the seller was in a vulnerable situation due to the pandemic. Customers also refuse to start negotiations when their offer is denied. According to the comparative analysis, this is attributable to the fact that the situation generated by the Covid-19 pandemic is considered by buyers similar to the global economic crisis of 2008.

Regarding the importance of negotiations in real estate business, the opinions expressed by both sellers and buyers are quite similar, with both parties considering that physical interaction plays an important role in the real estate industry. Also, while for sellers the lack of face-to-face encounters deprives them of the opportunity to examine their clients, buyers instead perceive the lack of physical presence as a factor leading to a decline in the trust potential.

One difference between buyers 'and sellers' answers is "what exactly can be negotiated online." While most respondents argue that all particulars of a real estate deal can be negotiated online according to Figure 23, sellers believe that the specifics of a real estate deal are difficult to negotiate online because of the complexity of this type of business. This difference in perception is given by the position of each negotiating party. In addition, legislation requires the seller in this case to be liable for any defect of the property to be sold, and the legal constraint is actually binding for the seller.

Regarding a hypothetical future, in which real estate negotiations will take place exclusively in the online environment, the answers of both parties are similar. Although there are respondents who believe that advanced technology can offer many possibilities, the majority opinion is that real estate negotiations cannot take place exclusively in the virtual environment.

4. Recommendations

The online environment generates certain blockages to negotiations conducted in the real estate business: lack of trust between buyer and

seller; tense or confusing communication; communication clichés; communication blockage due to complex details.

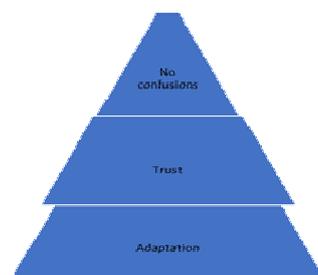
In my opinion, the online environment is detrimental to real estate negotiations on account of the following two reasons: the tradition of negotiating face-to-face; the virtual environment is not yet properly adapted for such businesses.

Most people working in real estate used the online environment only to promote their listed products, and with the pandemic there was a sudden transition from the physical to the virtual environment. Most clients have been accustomed by real estate professionals to negotiate in each other's presence, resulting in a breakdown in communication and negotiating following the pandemic.

Moreover, the online environment has failed to facilitate a close relationship between seller and client and, although a real estate company's website has been improved and updated in the meantime, certain specific needs of the buyer have not been addressed, such as the feeling of trust between client and seller or any misunderstandings arising during negotiations.

Therefore, a client has certain needs that must be met in real estate negotiations and in particular during online negotiations. These needs are more important in real estate business than in other industries, because, as we have already shown, real estate business involves long-term investments, in which the "return" process does not exist or is very difficult to achieve due to several factors (laws, economy, time, stress).

Fig. 1. Analogy between "Maslow's Pyramid" and customer needs



Based on an analogy between "Maslow's Pyramid" and customer needs, the diagram shown in Figure 1 was plotted. According to this diagram, the customer requirements to be met in online real estate negotiations are trust, the capacity to adapt, and the elimination of misperceptions or misunderstandings.

In order to meet these needs in the online environment, persistence is recommended in the use of these negotiation platforms, because the more a client will become familiar with online negotiating, the more the trust placed on the seller will increase and any communication confusions are liable to become insignificant. Helping a client adapt to the online environment can be achieved over time, with the aid of several tools: campaigns to stimulate the use of the online environment in the real estate industry; brief presentations on how a negotiation process should to be carried out, etc.

However, there is currently no platform that ensures efficient negotiating in real estate business in the virtual environment. Although the pandemic that broke out more than a year ago is slowly coming to an end, the future is still vague and the real estate field is liable to be influenced later on by other external elements.

It is also recommended that the online platforms currently used, Google Meet, Zoom, WhatsApp, etc., be further updated and adapted by the seller for the customer. These platforms can be customized and configured in particular forms, and it is advisable to have an ethical or friendly discussion on various topics before the negotiation actually begins, in order to help loosen up the atmosphere.

Consequently, it is recommended to use a hybrid negotiating method in the real estate business (both offline and online), so that customers could gradually adapt to a new working environment in the future and be able to avert any potential setbacks.

Conclusion

The online environment is not yet suitable for real estate negotiations, because a face-to-face meeting is still indispensable for both buyer and

seller. Although the virtual environment shows many advantages in many other fields (food industry, shopping, etc.), the real estate business still faces serious difficulties in the online environment.

Although it seems that the pandemic generated by the Sars-CoV-2 virus will soon end, most economic industries, and in particular real estate firms require a seller to have specific resources available in order to be able to do his or her business regardless of the existing context. Even though the pandemic has not caused major economic losses to all real estate developers, there are indications that a real estate economic crisis may occur at any time if the customer-seller gap continues due to the maladaptation of the online environment to customer needs.

Nonverbal communication is a significant contributing factor for all parties to a negotiation and can be supplemented by verbal communication, provided that the needs of real estate customers are met.

Real estate professionals have to get their customers accustomed to a hybrid way of negotiating in the future and try to adapt the online environment to real estate negotiations, in order to ensure continuity in the real estate business even when personal encounters are not possible.

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Communication in Attracting Employees within Corporations. Case Study: - Analysis of the Way of Communication of 10 Multinationals with Subsidiaries in Romania

Lorena Camelia BALICA

Abstract: *Attracting the right employees for a particular position is becoming more and more challenging for employers. The research aims to obtain a series of recommendations for the benefit of employers who fail to communicate well enough to find candidates for available positions. For shaping this guide, existing research and specialized studies were consulted and the way in which ten employers communicate their available positions, of which eight are considered preferred employers in Romania in 2020, were analysed. The most important and unexpected results obtained from the analysis were discussed in an interview with a communications director.*

Keywords: *communication, employee, employer brand, employer, recruitment.*

1. Introduction

In Romania, in the last two years, in addition to the crisis generated by the SARS-CoV-2 virus or the increase in inflation, the business environment has faced a crisis caused by a lack of labour. To overcome such a period of crisis, a company needs employees who meet the requirements of the job. But what do employers do to get the attention of suitable candidates? How do they communicate their available jobs? Can inefficient communication of the company be a factor in supporting this labor crisis?

The Charter Institute of Personnel and Development explains that all organizations have an "employer brand", whether or not they are aware of it. The employer brand is how organizations differentiate themselves in the labour market, allowing them to recruit and retain the right people as their employees (source: <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/people/recruitment/brand-factsheet#graft>, last accessed on March 24, 2021).

A strong employer brand helps companies compete to hire the most competent employees. Simon Barrow and Richard Mosley (2005) argue that employer branding is a long-term strategy that helps manage the knowledge and perceptions of current and potential employees who are in a relationship with a particular company.

The employer brand is the one that outlines the public image of an organization, which will be perceived by candidates as an attractive place to work, its objectives being to attract the right candidates, to retain these employees, and to highlight the benefits that the employer offers its employees. Birca Alic (2013: 78) explains that "in the opinion of potential employees, the attractiveness of the organization depends on four main elements: the employer's brand, the reward offered, the duties and responsibilities offered and the professional future of the person".

2. Research methods

The methods used for this research are content analysis and individual interview. Gunter (2000) defined content analysis as "a method of

studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective and quantifiable way, for the purpose of measuring variables". Interviews are among the most familiar strategies for collecting qualitative data.

Through the content analysis, an x-ray was performed of the way in which 10 multinationals based in Romania communicate. For a more complete picture, the way in which 10 employers communicate on 3 different communication channels was analysed.

Channel 1: own websites of the 10 companies;

The KPIs included in the research are: "Careers" Section, Section dedicated to specialists, Graduate section, Student section, Language used, Visual elements, HR Department Contact Details, Type of text, Marks of interactivity, Degree of detail of the post, Detail the profile and Benefits.

Channel 2: analyzing accounts on social networking sites (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and LinkedIn) for a period of six months (1 December 2020 – 31 May 2021).

Channel 3: accounts on job pages, especially on the "Hipo" platform.

To find out the employer reputation of the ten multinationals analysed, the UndeLucrăm.ro page was analysed. This is the largest online community dedicated to employees in Romania. On this site, jobs, employee reviews about companies, information about salaries, and details about how to conduct job interviews can be found.

The KPIs included in the research are Opportunities for advancement, Salary package, Time at the office vs. free time, Management, Procedures and values, Overall assessment, and Total rating.

Since universities provide the labour market with candidates, the number of partnerships between the 10 companies concerned and the 47 state universities in Romania was taken into account.

Carrying out extensive communication campaigns of the employer brand requires a wealth of resources and knowledge. Through an online

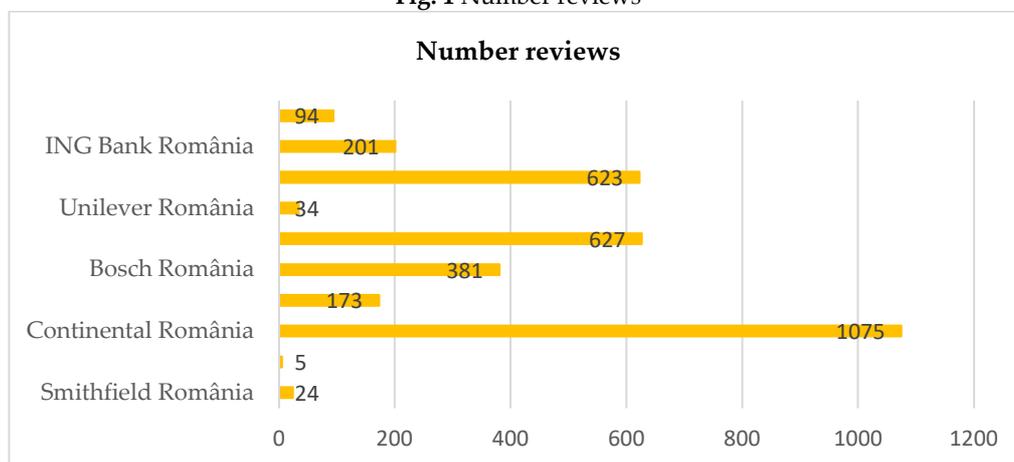
documentation, the purpose was to find out whether the ten companies use employer brand communication services or recruitment.

The most important and unexpected results that were obtained were discussed in an interview with a communications director.

3. Results

The research began by analysing the data on the UndeLucrăm site.

Fig. 1 Number reviews



The 1st place in the top of the number of evaluations is taken by Continental (1,075 evaluations), the employer that ranked the 1st in the top of favourite employers made by Hipo. Analyzing the employees' degree of satisfaction for the salary received, it was noticed that the Continental employer ranks only the 4th out of the ten companies that were analysed. Therefore, it can be concluded that it is not the salary package, but the complete benefits package that counts in the evaluation of the employees. Continental was voted as the one who has a more difficult selection process than the rest of the employers. Two conclusions can be drawn here: either the desire to work for a favourite employer attracted to interviews people who are not sufficiently prepared or the employer is a very selective one.

The employer that has or has had the largest number of partnerships with Romanian universities is Continental (19 partnerships).

Analysing the presence of the companies on social media platforms, it was observed that only 2 of the 10 multinational subsidiaries have their own account on the LinkedIn platform, 4 have a space allocated within the parent company's account, and 4 are not present at all on the platform. The platform is specially designed for creating professional relationships and identifying suitable candidates. This result was also noticed through the individual interview. Cristina Bodea, Director of Communication & Sustainability Smithfield Romania, believes there are two well-founded reasons why not all multinationals have a LinkedIn account: firstly, the corporate communication policy may not allow the management of such an account locally, and secondly, the predominant specificity of the activities carried out in the areas of production requires other channels of communication of available stations.

Analysing the accounts on the social platforms of the ten companies, 17 topics touched on in the posts on social media channels were identified:

- the most approached topics were “CSR actions” and “presentation of products or services offered by the company”. 8 out of 10 companies had such posts.
- 7 of the 10 companies posted materials on the “employment announcements” and “presentation of spaces / work environment” topics.
- 6 of the 10 companies are promoted with the help of a public person, and present statements from the current employees.
- 5 of the 10 employers organise competitions, promote their values, vision, and mission, and offer their followers various useful information and advice.
- 4 out of 10 employers communicate the awards / distinctions received and the benefits enjoyed by the employees.

- 3 of the analysed employers present their work technologies.
- only 2 out of 10 employers promote and implement inclusion and diversity programs (Kaufland and Unilever) and only one employer communicates its presence at job fairs (Hella).

As it was highlighted in the theoretical part of this paper, the amount of information communicated varies from one channel to another. Social channels are not the most favourable environment for long posts of dozens of lines of text. Websites allow you to post larger amounts of information. Considering this aspect, how many of the 10 companies refer to their own websites in the posts on social channels was another topic that was taken into account:

- 6 of the companies make frequent references to the website;
- 3 of the employers rarely make references to the website;
- only one company chose not to refer to the website during the analysed period (Coca-Cola).

Decrypting the way in which they visually present the information from the Careers section on their own web pages, it could be pinpointed that all 10 companies use graphics elements specifically dedicated to the section.

- 8 employers present images with their own employees;
- 5 employers present images with key products, services or operations;
- 5 employers choose to present images with people, but purchased images, not their own;
- 4 employers created and posted videos presenting their employees;

This result was also analysed through the individual interview. Cristina Bodea, Director of Communication & Sustainability Smithfield Romania, believes that "If recruiters want to reach a young audience, which is part of the category of digital natives, then it is appropriate that the messages communicated in a job advertisement be presented in the form of a clip":

- 2 chose to make presentation videos especially dedicated to students or interns (Continental and Bosch).

The degree of detail of job postings can be defining in a candidate's decision to apply or look for another job:

- all 10 employers communicate in the ads placed on their website what the profile of the candidate sought is (characteristics and skills);
- 9 of them mention from the title very clearly what position they are communicating about;
- 8 employers provide a description of the department to which the new employee will belong;
- 7 employers present the obligations from the job description;
- 5 employers develop the benefits of the job.

This result was also described through the individual interview. Cristina Bodea, Director of Communication & Sustainability Smithfield Romania believes that the Human Resources Departments of multinational companies have complex benefit policies that provide many variables on which these benefits are granted. Benefits may vary depending on work experience, experience in the company, position occupied, working overtime if we are talking about the production area. An online platform is not the best environment to communicate such procedures. It is therefore recommended to mention an email address or a recruiter's phone number, and those interested can access these channels to find out the specific information they want:

- 4 employers offer a brief presentation of the possible career development;
- only one in 10 employers has a position in the hierarchy or the number of subordinates (Kaufland), but this may also be since most of the analysed ads did not represent management positions;
- only one employer posted ads with ambiguous wording;
- 4 of the 10 companies did not mention the recruiters' contact details in the Careers section on their own websites.

This result was also examined through the individual interview. Cristina Bodea, Director of Communication & Sustainability Smithfield

Romania considers that "If we are talking about a company with a high reputation, with a strong employer brand, I believe that a candidate interested enough in a certain position should find the motivation and tools necessary to achieve its goal. I do not consider this to be a problem. However, when it comes to a company that does not have a high reputation or a strong employer brand to which candidates aspire, the absence of specific contact coordinates is an impediment and does not encourage candidates to advance in the selection process".

Explaining how the recruitment process is to be conducted and the functionality of the site to allow a CV to be uploaded are methods that can significantly increase the number of candidates for an available position:

- out of the 10 companies, only one does not allow the upload of a CV right before the website (Smithfield Romania);
- 5 out of 10 companies provide details on the selection process.

Conclusion

Both from the literature and after the analysis of the results obtained through the research method, the adaptation was identified as the key to the success of the communication of available positions within a corporation. Adapting messages to the target audience (ideal candidates for a particular job), to the channels chosen for communicating messages, but also to the trends at the time and using the same ad type published on all available channels, but changing the position title, will not attract the search candidates.

Detailed analysis of the candidates concerned will give answers to questions such as: What key messages should be communicated? On what platforms? In what language? With what tone? How detailed? The mix of channels and messages must be the ones that the ideal candidate accesses and understands.

If the content analysis revealed that not all 10 employers communicate all types of messages identified as suitable in a job advertisement, and that they do not use all the channels mentioned in

the theoretical part, the individual interview has provided clues related to the reasons that can be undertaken.

The ease of the process by which a candidate can learn all the information s/he needs to apply for a job is also an essential aspect for attracting employees, especially for employers who do not enjoy a high level of fame yet. Candidates must have recruiter contact details (email, telephone), as well as addresses for websites and social media.

The fact that the Continental employer has the largest number of partnerships with universities may be one of the reasons it is evaluated in so many lines and positive evaluations. Assessments can also come in large numbers from students who had their first contact with the labour market within this company, directly from the faculty benches.

The process by which recruiters learn how to communicate to attract the suitable candidates is a continuous one and, in order to be successful, it must be based on several principles, including that of feedback. Like the learning process between the student and the teachers, where the teacher needs the student's feedback to know how to proceed next (Popescu Mitroi, Mazilescu, Dragomir, Dinu, Vrgovici, 2012) as well as in the recruitment process, recruiters need feedback from the candidates, both from the accepted and from the rejected ones.

All the 17 topics mentioned in the third chapter must be addressed by an employer on social networks if the aim is for future employees to have a clear opinion on responsibilities, benefits, environment, and work technologies.

Another important aspect is the unity of the messages communicated. In addition to the fact that subsidiaries of multinationals must communicate in alignment with the spatial context, they must also follow the directions drawn by the parent company.

The clear outline of the employer's identity, the clear outline of the employee profile needed to achieve the company's goals and the choice of the right mix of channels and messages communicated are thus the elements identified as essential in the successful process of

communicating the available positions in order to attract the searched employees.

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The Effects of the SARS-Cov-2 Pandemic on Consumerism and Online Shopping

Vanessa-Andrada CARABIN

Abstract: *Humanity has been confronted with pandemics all throughout history, but the SARS- Cov-2 pandemic has highlighted a series of unprecedented changes in society. The emergence of a health crisis, such as a pandemic, can affect consumer behaviour significantly. This research focuses on the underlying effects of the SARS-Cov-2 pandemic on consumerism and online shopping in the Romanian society. Our main objectives were to examine the potential correlation between a change in consumer behaviour and the pandemic, and to determine what purchases were prioritised before and after the pandemic, predominantly in e-commerce. Our early findings suggest that Romanian people had a rational approach to shopping, by buying strictly essential products. Furthermore, they were preoccupied with their health, choosing to consume healthy products for fear of infection, and also to buy online more frequently due to necessity, comfort and available offers. Although this research is still in its early stages, it seems that Romanian consumers speculate that they will shop more online than before the SARS-Cov-2 pandemic.*

Key words: *consumerism, consumer behaviour, COVID-19, e-commerce, online shopping, pandemic crisis, SARS-Cov-2 pandemic.*

1. Introduction

Society has entered an era in which the modern consumer has gone through an unprecedented crisis, which has led to a shift in attitude towards and in perception of the products placed on the market, which has temporarily taken second place. Although in the past humanity has faced difficult situations with social, political or economic consequences, the juxtaposition of the excessive consumerism characteristic of the 21st century society and the return to the essential needs imposed by the pandemic has created a paradox worth exploring in more depth.

When it comes to consumer behavior, the literature indicates that, until the pandemic, consumers were motivated to purchase for social affiliation and validation, for hedonism and for the subconscious intention to live the same experience as other people who perpetuated consumer culture. With the SARS-Cov-2 pandemic, consumer culture has been curbed, people becoming more responsible in consumption, being restrained and rational, the reasons mentioned previously disappearing from the intention to buy. At the same time, online commerce has expanded on a larger scale with the pandemic, as consumers felt something new towards shopping, namely fear. Whether shopping for utilitarian (comfort, safety) or hedonistic (consumer pleasure) reasons, the fear of buying from physical stores due to the uncertainty triggered by the pandemic has made online shopping a very common tool.

For more complex research, we decided to use both quantitative and qualitative methods, which allow us to explore the topic from several valuable perspectives so as to reach in-depth findings. As a first research method, we chose to use a questionnaire to gather data on consumer behavior from the general public. The questionnaire was uploaded on the [isondaje.ro](https://www.isondaje.ro) website, which is a free online survey platform. The data were collected in April 2021, from 108 responses. The respondents are

Romanian, aged between 16 and 52, the average age being 25.9. The questionnaire consisted of 19 questions, all closed questions, 5 of which being factual questions aimed at collecting demographic data.

Afterwards, we conducted three individual interviews with people who had gone through the experience of the SARS-Cov-2 infection and who had direct contact with online shopping platforms, in order to analyse whether the SARS-Cov-2 pandemic has had an impact on their consumer behavior after going through the disease, and to interpret their personal input so as to find out what online purchases other people made during the pandemic.

After correlating the quantitative and qualitative data to identify the different facets of the issue, we compared our results with the data obtained by other researchers as well as with official statistics and reports on consumer behavior issued by institutions and research agencies. The literature review was an extremely important step, allowing us to obtain meaningful results that would lead to well-grounded findings.

2. Results

Following the quantitative analysis, some general conclusions can be drawn on the impact of the SARS-Cov-2 pandemic on consumerism and online shopping. Generally speaking, during the pandemic, the respondents chose to shop either online or at big retail stores such as hypermarkets. When asked about their reasoning behind the buying process, the respondents claimed that efficacy, product availability and diversity were the three main attributes that mattered to them most as consumers. Thus, it is essential for the respondents that the products they usually buy be available and that they have a plethora of options to choose from. Their consumer behaviour has also changed in terms of frequency, the respondents stating that there has been a decrease in frequency and amount of money spent.

The people who participated in the survey prefer to be thoughtful and prudent in these unstable times and do not shop excessively, most remaining neutral to buying more, while a significant percentage refrains from shopping more often than they can afford. Another conclusion that can be drawn is that the respondents buy rationally rather than out of panic, despite the fear of not having enough supplies during the pandemic. Considering that the experience was strictly individual for each respondent, the fear of infection and shopping nervousness are the two emotions that stand out subtly among the responses. Also, the results suggest a slight tendency to buy both food and cleaning products. There is a noticeable increase in the consumption of over-the-counter medicine, vitamins, health supplements and disinfectants among the Romanian consumers who participated in the survey. Other changes in their behavior include eating more fruits and vegetables, eating more at home and avoiding junk and convenience food because of health worries.

Another aspect worth investigating was determining the effects of the pandemic on e-commerce. When the pandemic emerged, people started to rely considerably more on e-commerce, compared to in-store shopping. There were subtle increases in online sales across all products, clothes and accessories, makeup, gadgets and furniture being some of the highlighted categories that were bought more online rather than at the store. Surprisingly, a significant percentage of respondents did not buy fitness products before or during the pandemic, so their athletic behavior did not change in a positive manner. Making predictions about their future consumer behaviour, the respondents expect to make balanced purchases between the e-commerce and physical stores. Online shopping has become increasingly common due to necessity, convenience and offers available, people adapting to the current health crisis.

Afterwards, we conducted three individual interviews in order to explore the attitudes, feelings and opinions of someone infected with and

subsequently cured of SARS-Cov-2 about the influence of the pandemic on online shopping and consumer behavior. Two of the interviewees are e-commerce professionals, while the third works in the medical field. We chose these three persons because we wanted to see their perspective on the situation both through the personal filter of someone recovered from SARS-Cov-2 and through the professional filter of someone who often interacts with many Romanians. According to their answers, the three interviewees have noticed changes in the way they buy in physical stores, but they have taken different measures: Valentina V. and Ionuț S. prefer shopping online, whereas Adina P. mentions the reduction of costs for non-essential products. At the same time, they mention in passing that some professional aspects are taken into account, the workplace influencing them to be aware of others, to avoid congestion during peak hours and to rely on couriers. The interviewees admit trusting online purchases prior to the SARS-Cov-2 pandemic, but also admit making more online purchases during this period. Safety, convenience and more customer-friendly prices were highlighted as advantages.

Romanians seem to have turned to delivery applications to receive food, hygiene and disinfectant products. This tendency to buy online products that are usually found in supermarkets may reflect the fear and insecurity felt by society as a whole. There was a considerable number of people who used delivery apps, such as Tazz or Glovo, to receive medicine or supplements at home. In short, prioritizing essential expenses and giving up on consumerism were two general trends observed both during the interviews and in the survey answers, which reveals that the information can be correlated.

Last but not least, early studies in this field show that consumption trends have been changing from the beginning of the pandemic to the present. Therefore, a comparative analysis of our results and those obtained by other researchers is required.

Recent literature emphasizes that a perceived shortage of products can significantly affect consumer choice (Hamilton et al., 2019; Laato et al., 2020; Pantano et al., 2020). Pantano et al. (2020: 26) point out that “consumers have revised their shopping habits and at the same time discovered benefits from services they had not used before. For example, some consumers switch to online shopping, discovering the safety and benefits of home delivery, in-store pickup and cashless payments. In addition, these authors noted the fact that unexpected government regulations requiring social distancing have a greater impact for buyers on preferred channels of consumption”.

Laato et al. (2020) argue that “the government’s decision to establish a national quarantine, closing schools, restaurants, some shops and public services, could have caused fears about future disruptions and triggered behavioral responses in people. The intention to self-isolate was a strong predictor of unusual acquisitions, suggesting that a major reason people made unusual acquisitions during COVID-19 was to prepare for isolation and quarantine. In retrospect, the panic buying phenomenon was short-lived, and consumer markets quickly stabilized on unusual purchases and then on the new COVID-19 consumer status quo.”

Eger et al. (2021) conducted a study in the Czech Republic on consumer behavior and their research indicates that “medicines, pharmaceuticals and food products were bought more both in brick-and-mortar stores and online stores. The frequency of purchases was statistically significant related to health concerns for the following items: pharmaceuticals and hygiene products, medicines and medical supplies, while there was a decrease in the purchase of sporting goods and hobbies. Due to economic fears, there was a decrease in purchases of two items, electronics and household equipment.”

The results of Fanelli’s (2020) study on consumer behaviour in Italy

indicate “an increase in home cooking during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants began to prepare more food at home, reduced their purchases and consumption of ready-to-eat food. At the same time, they strictly adhered to the Mediterranean diet and ate healthier, including more fresh fruits and vegetables in their diets. A good diet has always been important for respondents, but during this pandemic, it was given even more importance.”

A study issued by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNTCAD: 2020) indicates that the share of online sales has increased in all sectors, especially pharmaceuticals and health (especially at the beginning of the pandemic), food and electronic products that are used for work at home and home entertainment. Average consumer spending, however, has declined as those on low incomes have turned to online shopping. Many consumers report postponing more expensive purchases until revenues become more predictable.

At the moment, studies on consumer behavior and e-commerce are constantly evolving globally, but the data collected so far is similar to our own study in terms of the results obtained. Regardless of region or culture, people bought in a similar way, reducing excess shopping and stocking up on essential products. The research is promising and indicates a potential to continue the analysis of this topic from an economic, social and political perspective.

3. Discussion: Research implications and limitations

There are some limitations to this research study, as it deals with a novel subject. First of all, the study was conducted in the context of the pandemic in Romania in April 2021, which indicates what the Romanian society thinks at that moment. Further investigation should be carried out as the pandemic evolves. Also, the number of respondents for the quantitative analysis is not evenly distributed across all age groups, the

average age being 25.9 years, which presents the information from the perspective of a predominantly young audience. Finally, as the SARS-Cov-2 pandemic is still ongoing, data need to further investigated in the future and confirmed by studies conducted on a larger scale. Subsequent research should show whether consumers will permanently change their buying behavior at the end of the pandemic, or they will return to their old habits.

Conclusion

The measures imposed by the government, such as the national lockdown and social distancing, as well as the fear of the unknown have changed Romanian consumer behaviour. We have entered an era in which the modern consumer has gone through an unprecedented crisis. Consumers were previously motivated to buy for social validation, out of hedonism and due to the intention to live the same experience as other people who perpetuated consumer culture.

In conclusion, with the SARS-Cov-2 pandemic, consumer culture has been curbed, people becoming more responsible in consumption, being reserved and rational, the reasons previously presented disappearing from the intention to buy. At the same time, online commerce has boosted with the pandemic, as consumers developed a new feeling about shopping, namely fear. Whatever utilitarian (comfort, safety) or hedonic (consumer pleasure) reasons were present, the fear of buying from physical stores in the uncertainty generated by the pandemic has made online shopping a tool used very often by consumers. The negative feelings felt during the pandemic were panic, fear of infection and anxiety, which can be the source of the changes in consumer behavior. Health concerns have caused a spike in e-commerce, especially among people who have been infected with the virus, despite the fact that all the participants in our study took care of their health, taking vitamins and

medicine and eating more healthy food and less junk food. The fact that many consumers have been financially affected by this pandemic may provide a further motivation for changing long-term consumer behavior, with some studies showing frugality as a new buying attitude.

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Improving Communication. Case study: Anti-COVID Speech for Young People

Anuta IVANCUS

Abstract: *The paper “Improving Communication. Case study: Anti-COVID Speech for Young People” focuses on the contemporary discourse generated by and addressed to the young generation, with emphasis on the digital setting, the public discourse and the current pandemic. The aim of this paper is to identify up-to-date communication techniques meant to facilitate communication with young people. At a time when young people feel at home in the virtual world, communication needs to adapt and communicators need to assess how to best convey information so that the intended message is received correctly. Moreover, given that we are currently experiencing an unprecedented pandemic, it is even more important for communicators to find the right way to be heard. In order to assess best practice when communicating with young people, we first need to ascertain their own specific way of interaction. To this aim, in this paper we shall first analyse several articles written by and for young people according to an analysis grid, in order to identify specific communication features. Then, we shall discuss the findings of a quantitative analysis of anti-COVID communication during the pandemic, which we performed by means of an anonymous questionnaire addressed to young people aged 18-35. The results of these two research approaches will determine what young people expect from public discourse and the best ways to convey information efficiently to this age group, especially in a time of crisis such as the current pandemic. Therefore, this paper addresses a present-day issue, in an attempt to identify efficient communication methods that reach the young generation and improve overall public discourse.*

Keywords: *communication, young people, pandemic, public discourse.*

1. Introduction

The main objective of this paper is to establish an efficient way of communicating with young people in a public speech setting as well as in other settings where information needs to be accurately conveyed. The young generation has strayed from traditional interaction and lives in a fast-paced, ever-changing world of instant communication through digital and virtual means. This means that the already established ways of conducting public discourse will not attract young people's attention and will likely fail in having the information promoted further by this age group. Therefore, in this paper we will try to identify the communication methods preferred by the young generation and the ways in which interaction with young people can be improved in times of crisis.

2. Expert sources consulted

The corpus for this paper consists mainly of electronic sources, as the topic of the COVID-19 pandemic is novel and has not yet been covered in recognized published, printed books. However, the theoretical part of the paper has been based on printed sources on the topics of communication, public discourse (mass-media) and the digital setting.

Fârte (2004: 139) defines communication as "a collective act governed by a set of rules" which leads us to assume that, if we abide by the rules we should achieve efficiency. He also states that the concept of communication is based on the act itself which "is related to change in the world" (Fârte 2004: 139). This means that we should regard efficiency in communication as a responsibility that could impact our world and it is thus imperative that we make the right choices in terms of context, meaning and use of language. However, these choices will be dependent on the type of communication we wish to create. Although the areas of choice widely remain the same, particular consideration needs to be paid to the context as it determines the

evolution of our discourse. Public communication will have a different framework to the average interaction between two people, as it lacks the possibility of immediate feedback. Information comes from a single source and is transmitted to a large audience through means that do not allow feedback (Agabrian, 2008). Moreover, the context that surrounds public communication relies heavily on the means used to convey the message. So, if the means of transmission change, as media tends to do quite rapidly, the framework changes. For example, public communication that used to be delivered only through television, can now be transmitted online and offers the possibility of live interaction, users making comments during transmission. New technologies are now available to anyone, but in public communication only the issuing body is able to control access (Popa, 2002). More often than not, public communication tends to be mistaken for mass media, showing how powerful the means of transmission are in the public perception. However, the term mass media explains its own meaning through the origin of the words – media comes from Latin and means tools and mass refers to a large audience, therefore the significance of this term lays in the instruments used to communicate a message rather than a type of communication. Agabrian (2008: 86) explains this term as “an array of instruments through which communication takes place in modern society”. This paper has focused on this type of communication as well as mass media due to the target group of people it attracts. The continuous development of technology has been very well received by young people and continues to be used to seek information and to interact with others. This leads us to the next theoretical aspect we explored, that of the digital setting for communication. Badău (2008: 1) compares this setting to the likes of the industrial revolution in terms of development and impact as basically another world has been created on top of the real one and the consequences are global. Within this new setting, social media seems to be most popular, with statistics showing a staggering 3.2 billion users in 2020, in Romania

only (<https://www.businessdays.ro/blog/tehnologie-inovatie/25-statistici-privind-social-media-in-2020>, last accessed on 03.05.2021). Furthermore, for young people, the daily use of the Internet and the virtual world is not only a choice nowadays, but also a necessity. The dominant status of digitalisation is mainly determined by the multi-tasking features of technology, which can achieve more than one function at the same time, with no human errors (Stănciugelu et al, 2014). Therefore, the professional area of our lives is now placed in the digital setting as well and it can only stand to reason that communication processes should now take this aspect into consideration.

3. Research methods

I. Article analysis: the aim of this research method is to establish how young people convey information to one another, which are their preferred narrative elements and what they use to draw attention to the topic. This analysis relies on a framework presented in the table shown in the Results section, which illustrates how many elements are found in each text. The aspects that we looked at are the following:

- The display of information – is information summarized or detailed?
- The meaning – is there denotation or connotation? Is the relayed meaning close to reality or is it used figuratively?
- The language – some articles are written entirely in Romanian, others in English, whereas some use both languages
- The purpose – narrative text (it relays a succession of events), descriptive (it describes objects or people), informative (it conveys ideas and facilitates understanding), argumentative (it presents a point of view), and procedural (it provides scientific description)
- The choice of using paragraphs or not
- The use of visual elements and images
- Elements of coherence: clarifying, referential, interpersonal, subjectivity and attitude-wise

- The use of dialogue
- Functionality of the text: subjective, neutral, emotional, impersonal, motivational.

This analysis grid allowed us to identify the most common aspects and highlight their importance in young people's communication. This will provide a benchmark for the way discourses addressed to this age group should be formulated in order to achieve an efficient response.

II. Quantitative analysis: A questionnaire was used to ascertain young people's perspective on communication during the current pandemic. The questionnaire comprises 16 questions of different types (open and closed questions, multiple choice questions, rating scale questions), addressed to young people aged 18-35. First, we focused on some demographic data, which gave us an idea of where the respondents stood in the pandemic setting and how they could be affected by it. This, in turn, helped us assess the importance of appropriate and effective communication for this category of people. Then, we looked at various aspects of public pandemic discourse to determine how it was received by young people and if the information had been accurately relayed. Lastly, we wanted to find out where young people seek information in times of crisis and what suggestions they could make to improve current communication.

The findings arrived at following these research approaches allowed us to compile a set of suggestions meant to improve communication for young people and withstand the current issues surrounding the COVID 19 pandemic.

4. Results

The first research method consisted of analysing nine articles on cyberbullying, written by young people. They have been selected from the website mediadigitala.ro and assessed according to a grid of narrative aspects detailed in the table below and applied to each text. The titles of the

articles are provided at the top and the analysis grid in the left pane. Each aspect in the grid that has been identified in one or more texts is marked by an “x”.

Titles/ Analysis grid	What is cyber bullying & how do we face it?	Cyber bullying	Online haters	Online harass ment	Youth & children. cyberbul lying victims	Haters & cyberbul lying	Cyberbu llying or virtual violence	Victims' online blaming & its effects	Hate speech (cyberbu llying)
Summarised	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Extended							X		
Denotation	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Connotation									
Romanian	X	X		X	X		X	X	X
English									
Ro + En			X			X			
Informative							X		
Expositional	X	X	X			X		X	
Explanatory				X					X
Argumentative		X	X		X			X	X
Narrative									
Procedural	X								
Paragraphs		X		X	X	X		X	
Lack of paragraphs	X		X				X		X
Verbal		X		X					X
Imagistic									
Visual	X		X		X	X	X	X	
Explanatory						X			X
Referential				X					
Coherence	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
Interpersonal			X		X				
Attitude-wise									
Subjectivity									
Relational	X	X			X				X
Rhetorical					X			X	
Dialogue									
Motivational	X							x	
Orality						X			
Emotional			x			X			
Subjective									
Neutral					x		X		X
Impersonal		X		x					
Motivational	X								

At first glance, it can be noticed that most articles are summarised, with no other connotations than what was intended and are predominantly written in Romanian, although some include the use of English words that have been adapted to the Romanian language by the use of the indefinite article. This shows a desire to emphasize how important it is to have a correct understanding of the message. The information presented has been obtained from different sources but has then been relayed concisely, so that the reader is not lost in irrelevant details. The lack of connotation and the choice of language ensures clarity, leaving no room for misunderstanding. Moreover, the texts are mostly informational, providing accurate data from trustworthy sources. This, as well, conveys trust and shows that young people do take information seriously. However, the most striking aspect is the vast use of visual elements and images to enhance the message and facilitate understanding. As the subject matter of these articles is cyberbullying, which is a big issue for today's youth, it has to be graphically represented as well in order to truly show the suffering it causes and to develop a feeling of empathy in the reader.

In terms of discourse analysis though, these articles have brought to light a series of aspects that appear to be commonly used by young people and can serve as a benchmark for public discourses addressed to young people in the future. These are listed as follows:

- The use of English words in combination with Romanian ones or adapted to the Romanian language, such as *speech-ul* and *cyberbullying-ul*. These are used as keywords and are part of the titles. Young people are used to speaking this way and they often do so when interacting online.
- The display of a shocking image before the text to draw attention to what is about to be told and to illustrate the seriousness of the topic.

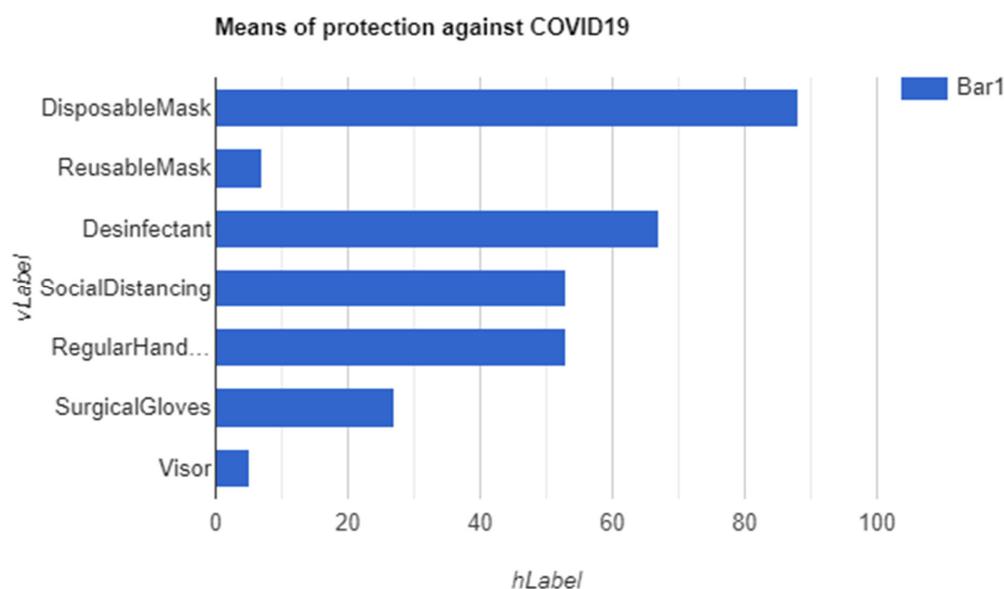
- The use of exhortations, urging the reader to do the right thing, such as: *Stand up for yourself! Don't allow your child to be the victim of cyberbullying!*
- The use of rhetorical questions, such as: *Are you sure you haven't caused this in any way?* This type of questions are not intended to get answers, but solely to illustrate a stereotype in victim questioning.
- The use of bold and italic fonts to highlight certain terms and ideas.
- The use of keywords in paragraphs.
- The use of charts to illustrate statistical data.
- The clear and concise display of information through bullet points.
- The use of storyboard-type images to create a framework.
- The use of bright and intense colours to highlight words; predominantly used colours tend to be red, blue, green and yellow
- The use of hashtags - in order to make a message stand out, young people use the hashtag symbol in front of it. They are widely used on social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram and their meaning is very clear to this age group.

All these techniques have the purpose of creating a big impact on the reader, who will have a good understanding of the information relayed and will quickly identify the intended message.

The second research approach was quantitative and consisted in a questionnaire addressed to young people aged 18-35 in order to ascertain their perception of current anti-COVID communication. The questionnaire comprises 16 questions and has been answered by 85 young people. The first questions concerned the area they live in, gender, employment, marital status as well as their professional background. Their answers were used to establish the impact that the current pandemic could have on the respondents as it could influence their answers. We could conclude that most respondents were single, unemployed, with a medium level of education and living in the urban area. This points to their lack of dependents, such as children, and suggests that the threat of COVID-19 and

the restrictions imposed by the government during this pandemic have not affected them greatly. This is, however, good news for research as their answers are not influenced by their personal experience and their view of the current situation, and thus there is a higher chance that they will be objective in answering the questionnaire.

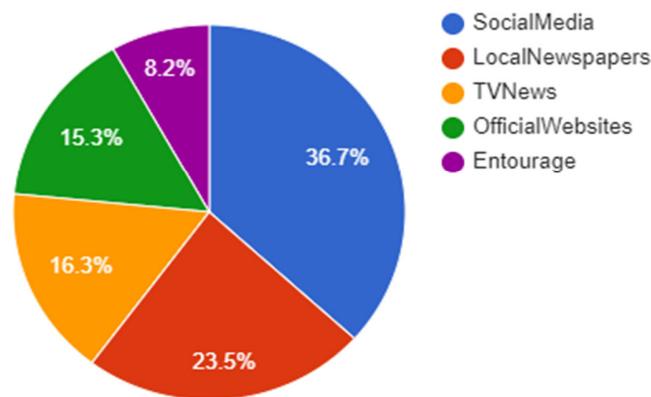
In our questionnaire, we focused mainly on three key aspects: the means of protection chosen by young people, where they seek information regarding the ongoing pandemic and what suggestions they have to improve the current public discourse. The results of the questionnaire have been turned into percentages and illustrated through graphs and pie charts to provide a visual representation and hence, a better understanding of the data.



As shown in the graph above, the respondents have chosen the disposable mask as the most used means of protection from the virus, closely followed by disinfectant and social distancing. The multiple-choice answers also included the use of reusable masks but it seems that young people are not keen on using them, preferring disposable masks instead. These results point to an association with the medical environment where the disposable mask is used daily, sometimes hourly, and they suggest that young people trust scientifically proven means of protection rather than creating their own or straying from the norm.

As for the choices young people make when it comes to finding information on current issues, especially in times of crisis such as the current pandemic, the results illustrated in the following pie chart indicate that the go-to place for young people is social media, even for important information. This is due to the immediate access to information provided by social media platforms and, of course, to their interactive character, which makes them a lot more appealing compared to traditional communication. The second choice is local newspapers, which also trend online nowadays so they offer the same speedy response to the information needs of young people. TV news channels unfortunately have only made it to third place in terms of preference, with many respondents stating that they feel confused by too much information offered on the news. Even though, in times like these, most people turn to the news channels for up-to-date information, it seems that young people do not find these reliable sources of information.

Information Sources



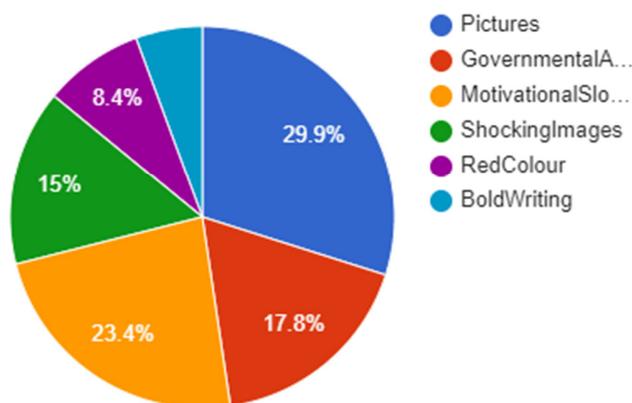
We also asked the respondents to choose, out of six possible answers, a maximum of two suggestions for improving public discourse on anti-COVID communication. This was aimed at determining the most important elements communication should have in order to be effective. According to the results shown in the pie chart below, it seems that young people believe that graphic images/pictures should become an integral part of pandemic communication. The visual representation of a message facilitates understanding and helps the reader remember the information as s/he relates it to the image. Next, the respondents suggested motivational slogans to draw attention to the content and to relay the message clearly. These are normally catchy and easy to remember and pass on to other people. The choice was, however, governmental authenticity, which strays from the marketing view that the first two choices seem to relate to. This suggests that, although young people wish to receive information in a concise and interactive manner, they also want it to be official and reliable. They do not want to be misguided in their beliefs and they also do not want

to sift through an abundance of information to find what is relevant and what not.

As with the analysis of the articles, the questionnaire has also highlighted a few findings that should be taken into account when communicating to young people:

- Exposing young people to an abundance of information leads to

Suggestions for presenting COVID19 Information



confusion; when they become overwhelmed, they are unable to process the message accurately.

- Misguiding and misinforming is very frustrating for young people but they tend not to get involved in arguments over what they consider right or wrong.
- The most important elements for an anti-COVID discourse to be effective are images, motivational slogans and governmental authenticity.
- The main source of information for young people is social media.
- Young people seek clear and concise information.

- Young people wish to be informed from official and accurate sources, so they can be sure that the information is correct.

Overall, our research proves that, in order to gain the interest of young people, communicators have to address certain aspects that ensure the desired impact. The results of both research methods we applied are fairly similar, which suggests a pattern in the way information should be transmitted to this age group.

Conclusion

The theoretical findings of this paper have provided insight into the way the communication process should be conducted in order to be effective and have provided us a better understanding of public communication as well as of the digitalisation of interaction nowadays.

The research part of the dissertation paper will not only consolidate the theoretical findings but will also identify new techniques to improve current communication. With a focus on young people, I will analyse texts written and addressed to youth so I can have a clear picture of what elements of the communication process are important to them. I will then continue research, though a questionnaire that will narrow the focus to young people's perception of the pandemic communication, in particular the discourses that urge people to protect themselves from COVID-19.

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From Face-to-Face to Digitally Supported Communication: Insurance Company Consultants' Reflections on their Activity in the Conditions Imposed by the COVID-19 Pandemic

Livian R. HOTICO

Abstract: *The paper deals with the shift in the activity of selling insurance policies in Romania during the restrictive conditions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Financial consultants had to adapt to the social distancing measures and to experiment with digital tools of communication to contact, persuade and perfect the sales in unfamiliar conditions. The qualitative approach to the topic capitalizes on the results of a questionnaire, applied in a Timisoara-based agency of a reputable insurance company. Results show that consultants, irrespective of their level of studies, lengths of work experience and personal predispositions could continue their activity in the digital formats. Their prediction is that at least part of the accumulated digital experience will be part of the post-pandemic sales process, customers sharing the conviction that digital solutions are convenient and save time.*

Keywords: *insurance company, COVID-19 pandemic, digital tools, client behavior, online communication.*

1. Introduction

The health crisis triggered by the 2020 pandemic took society by surprise (Cernicova and Palea, 2021). The undertaken measures, such as an initial lockdown, followed by social distancing, mask wearing and a strong recommendation to resort to digital solutions wherever possible caused a disruption in the “business as usual” model. A year later after the outburst of the COVID-19 pandemic economy is still adapting to new conditions and tries desperately to develop the set of rules fitting for the multiple challenges. This paper deals with the way a company that has risk prediction as a motive for business adapted to the conditions of the imposed restrictions and not only survived the pandemic challenge but remained relevant on the market: Metropolitan Life Romania (MLR, Sales policy 2020).

Although they are aware of the risk they are exposed to daily, some clients do not see insurance as an opportunity to deal financially with events that may take them by surprise at any time. The level of financial culture in Romania is low, still in the process of development, which was and still is affected by the "financial cannons" of the 2000's, which created a certain state of mistrust in some financial instruments. The perception of potential clients is influenced by the consultant's ability to persuade and his ability to create a clear image of the client's real needs. The lack of practical, concrete, and correct information on the role of insurance in their lives often leads to decisions that they regret when unforeseen events occur. The superficiality in analyzing the cost-benefit ratio is another side of not completing the sales process, the costs being considered palpable and concrete, while the benefits are considered only hypothetical.

The health crisis and the state of the Romanian medical system accentuated the clients' fear regarding the hospitalization, and the economic instability led to an increase of the clients' unavailability regarding some expenses. Although personal savings

grew during the pandemic due to reduced spending on food, clothing, footwear, transportation and especially holidays, customer behavior also became more cautious about spending due to uncertainty about the duration of the health crisis, as discussed in MLR during emergency training for consultants.

There is also a segment of worried customers, people concerned about financial security in extreme situations, the statistics providing enough examples that the risk does not consider age, occupation, or health. This segment not only took out insurance, but, if it already had existing policies, decided to update its benefits according to the situation. There is also a segment that obtains information from former customers of insurance companies, who have formed some expectations, but were disappointed by the level of benefits received, given that they did not understand exactly all aspects at the time of contracting, they manifested a dose of panic at critical moments and acted under momentary impulse. This segment is the one whose main objection is distrust in insurance, citing the lack of time needed for discussions.

The most used objection was the postponement of the decision to contract a policy, a decision influenced by the fear of insecurity of the economic situation. With the economic recovery, the behavior of this type of client has undergone a change in a positive direction.

Many clients avoided face-to-face meetings with consultants during the pandemic, preferring remote ones for health precautions, as shown by analysts and the global media (Somers, 2020; Hill, 2021, Diebner et al., 2020). Online communication, however, has proven its limitations, almost completely excluding non-verbal or gestural communication, important components of the persuasion process. After returning to normal, online communication can be used depending on the wishes and availability of customers. It will be the solution in the case of remote customers, increasing the selection area of those interested.

Insurance companies, as well as other economic agents, had to adapt to the situation and introduced procedures for carrying out the sale process exclusively online and correlated the benefits of the new social conditions. The present paper is based on the author's own experience as a financial consultant in an insurance company, supplemented with the opinions shared by consultants in a Timisoara-based branch of MLR, aiming to highlight the perceptions of the financial consultants on the experience of online work in the three semesters of 2020 stricken by the pandemic. After developing skills pertaining to face-to-face interaction in their professional life, these consultants had to switch to remote interactions exclusively. 2021 debuted with a partial return to face-to-face interactions, but only for some segments of the insurance sales process. Therefore, the digitally facilitated communication is here to stay. How much of the sales process will remain an online one, and how much will be retained as a physical presence event is still difficult to predict.

2. Research method

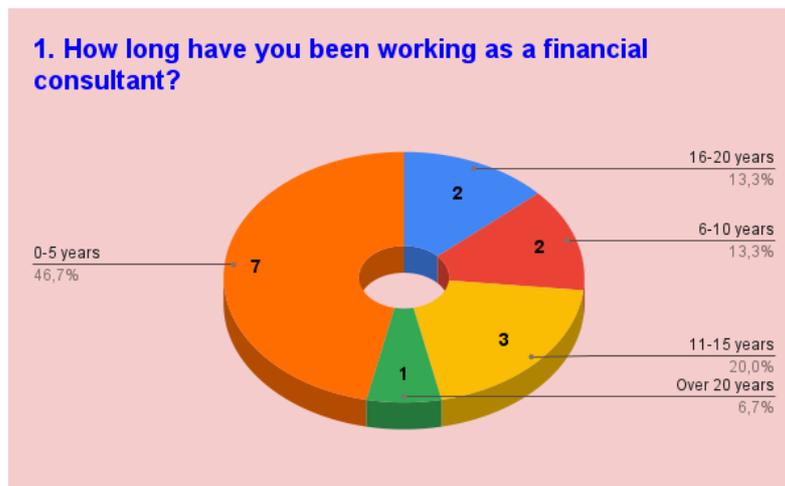
In order to highlight the aspects that occurred during the pandemic in the behavior of clients and potential clients of a life, health and private pension insurance company, we used the method of the Google forms questionnaire, which was applied to a group of 27 consultants of different age, sex and experience, which were able to compare customer behavior, before and after the pandemic. 15 forms were filled in by respondents, under the condition of maintaining their anonymity in sharing their reflections on the topic. The research was conducted between May 1st and 15th, 2021 in a Timisoara-based branch of Metropolitan Life Romania.

3. Results and discussion

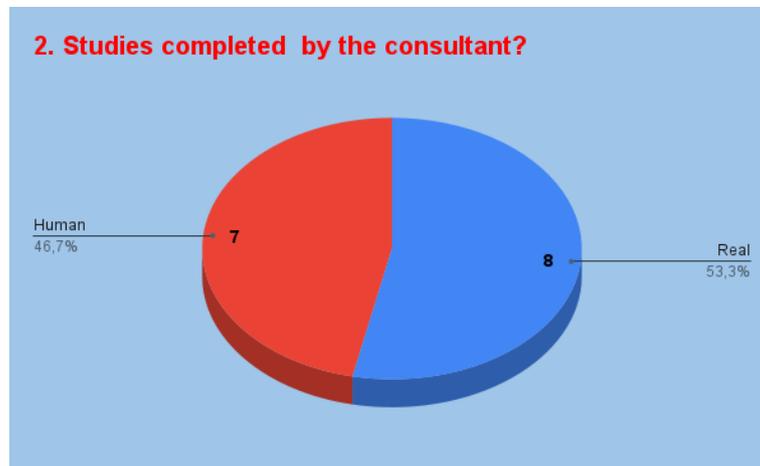
The results present first the profile of the respondents in terms of work experience and studies, then the paper presents the digital

tools employed for acquiring new insurance contracts and the last section is dedicated to the presentation of the insurers' reflections on their activity in the conditions pertaining to the pandemic-related restrictions, with an emphasis on their perceptions regarding the behavior of the clients, the efficiency of contacts, leading to signing new contracts and a foresight regarding the post-pandemic future in the insurance business.

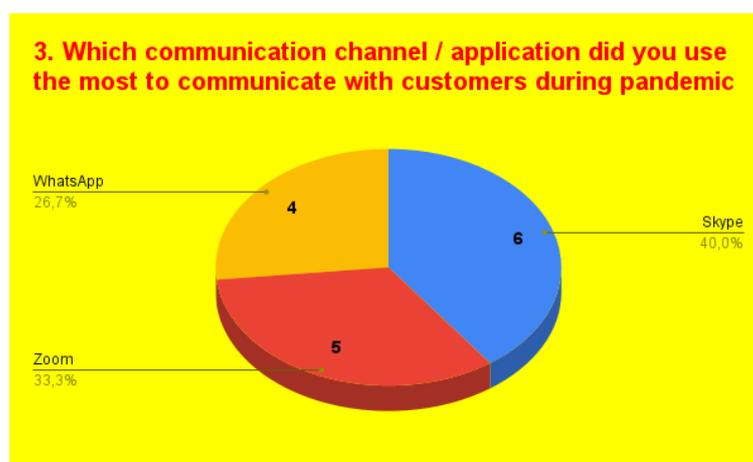
We divided the respondents into groups of 5 years of experience in the consulting activity, the majority of 46.7 % being in the period 0-5 years. A percentage of 20 % were in the range of 11-15 years, while an identical percentage of 13.3 % were in the range of 6-10 years, respectively 16-20 years. The percentage related to the experience of over 20 years is the lowest, being 6.7 %.



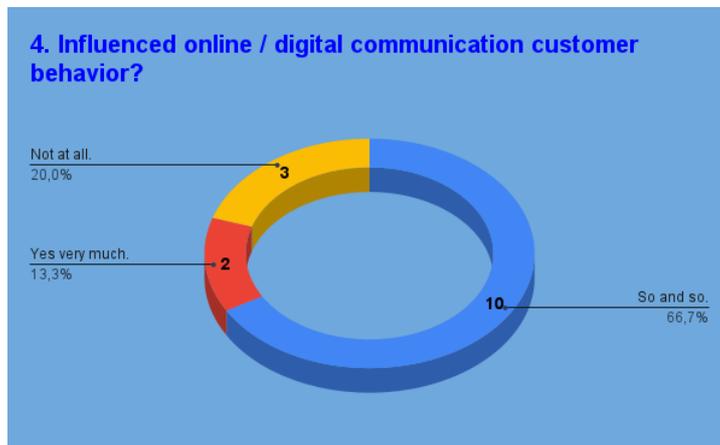
We compared the specifics of the respondents' studies and found that most respondents graduated from real studies (53.3%), compared to those who graduated from human studies (46.7 %), as we might be tempted to expect. This leads to the conclusion that persuasive communication is more about personal skills than specific professional training.



One of the most important changes during the pandemic was the transition from face-to-face activity to "work from home" and the emergence of online meetings. The development of the Internet has led to the emergence of several means of distance communication, applications designed to facilitate access to information. Several platforms have been developed, such as Skype, Zoom, **Whatsapp**, Google meet, Cisco Webex meet, Jitsi meet, etc. The subjects chose according to the clients' preferences. The most used application for online meetings was Skype (40 %), followed by Zoom (33.3 %) and **Whatsapp** (26.7 %). The other applications were used rarely or not at all.



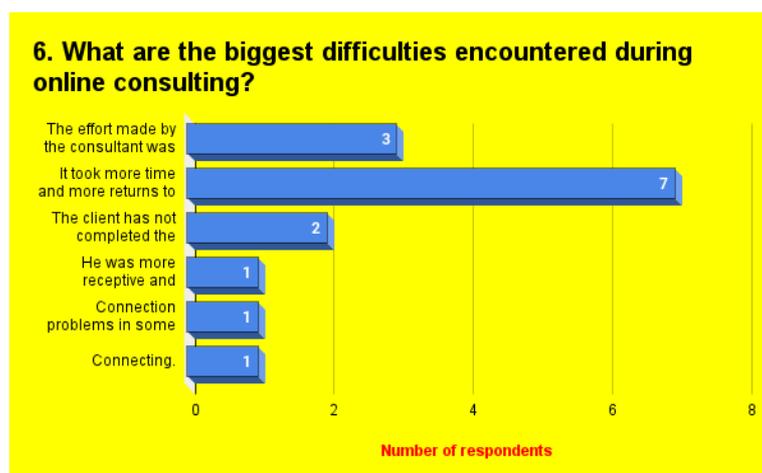
The vast majority of respondents (66.7 %) considered that there were no dramatic changes in customer behavior, online communication not being perceived as a major inconvenience for 20 %. Only 13.3 % of respondents claimed that their relationship with customers was strongly influenced by the emergence of online communication.



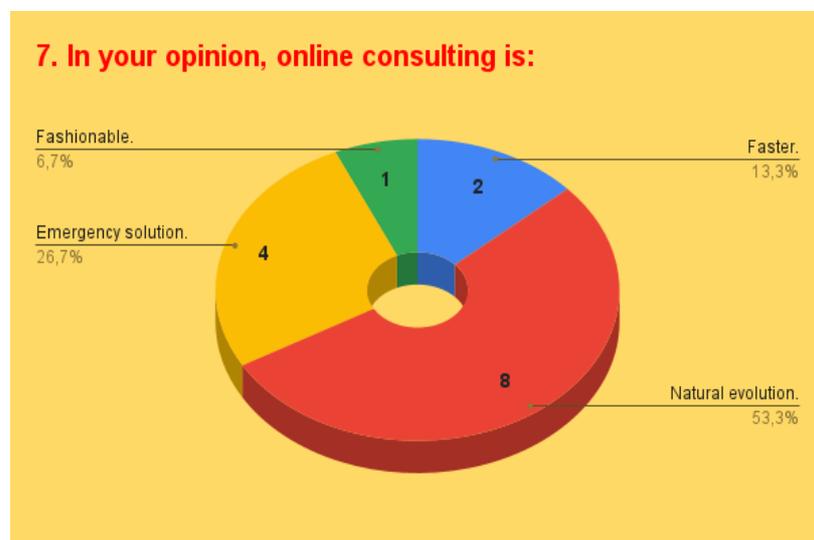
And the attitude of customers towards the introduction of online consulting was appreciated by most respondents as a positive, beneficial (66.7 %), while 33.3 % considered the attitude of customers towards online consulting as a neutral one. Absolutely no respondents mentioned the negative attitude of rejecting online consulting.



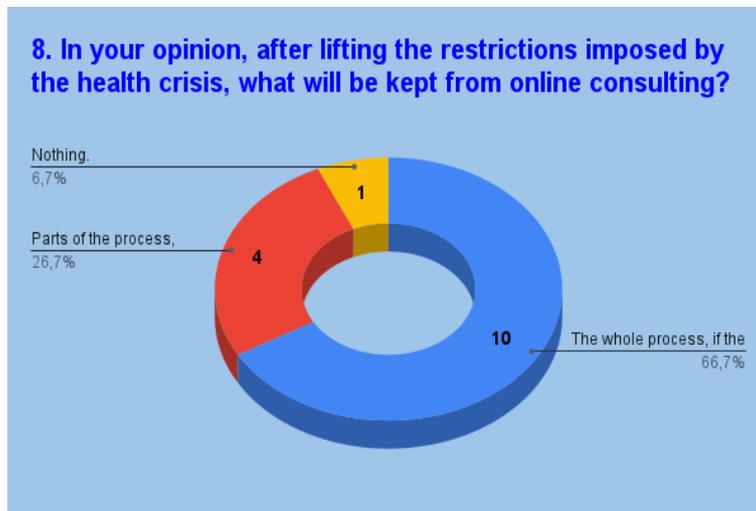
The consultants encountered a series of difficulties in the relationship with the clients, some of them being induced exactly by the online communication. In online communication it is more difficult to maintain the customer's attention and focus on the topic of discussion, which leads to a possible incorrect or insufficient perception of the information provided and thus to the difficulty of completing the sales process. The client can be easily distracted by various activities that take place around him. This behavior can lead to the prolongation of the discussion, which is at one time another impediment, namely the boredom of the client. The consultant's effort to maintain the client's attention and focus on the discussion is much greater. During the discussion, a major impediment may appear, namely the technical problems regarding its connection or interruption in the middle of the discussion. Most consultants (46.7 %) appreciated that they had to devote much more time to consulting and that they needed more returns to complete the process during the pandemic. In the same "key", 20 % considered that their effort was greater online than in the case of face-to-face discussion. An important percentage (13.3 %) considered that due to the online consulting process, the clients did not complete the contracting.



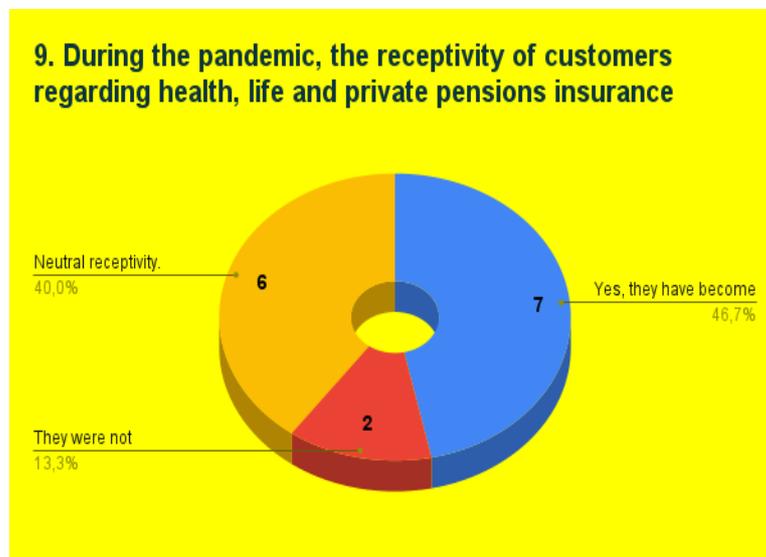
Respondents consider, in an overwhelming proportion (53.3 %), that an online consultancy is part of a natural evolution of modern communication. Others (26.7 %) consider online consulting more of an emergency solution, caused by the pandemic. However, a significant percentage (13.3 %) appreciate the increased speed provided by online communication.



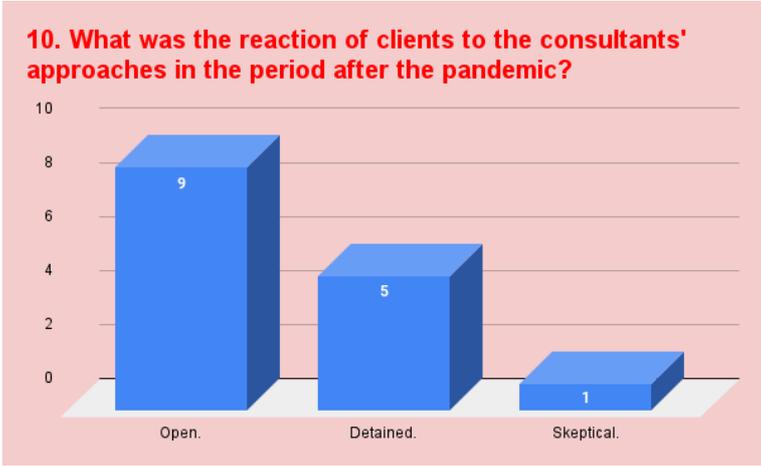
After returning to normal, it is interesting to what extent the online consulting of the respondents in the relationship with the clients will be used. A percentage of 66.7 % of them believe that they will keep the whole process online, if customers want it, while 26.7 % believe that they will use only parts of the process, depending on customer availability. Only 6.7 % of respondents believe that they will not resort to the online communication process after lifting the restrictions imposed by the health crisis.



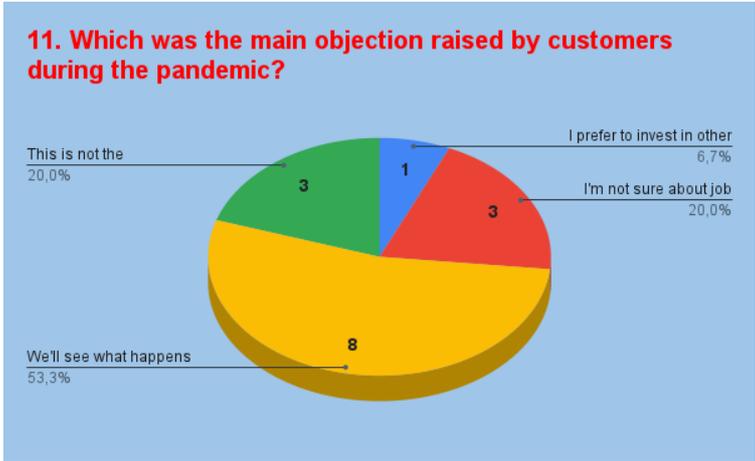
Customer receptivity increased to 46.7 % of them, another 40 % considering customer receptivity neutral, and 13.3% not being influenced at all in this regard.



A percentage of 60 % of the respondents showed an open attitude towards the consultants' approaches, 33.3 % a reserved attitude, only 6.7 % being skeptical about the online approach.

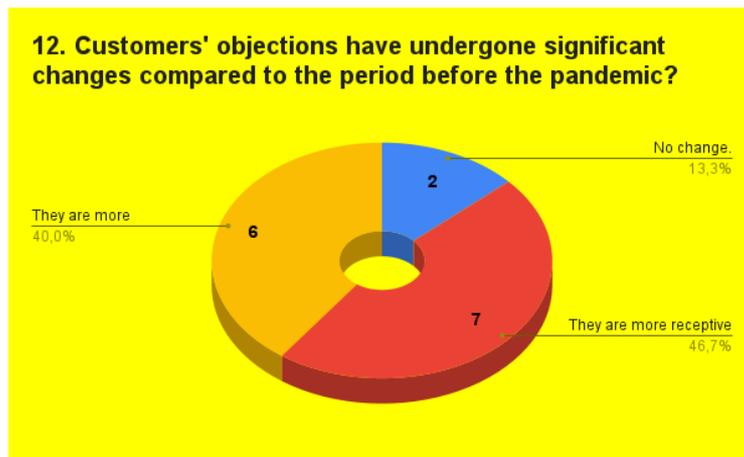


Also, customer objections have undergone some changes. The main reason given by customers (53.3 %) was that they want to wait to see the evolution of the situation before making a decision. An identical percentage of 20 % consider that either it is not the right time to sign a policy, or they are held back by job instability. Only 6.7 % prefer to invest their money in other fields of activity.

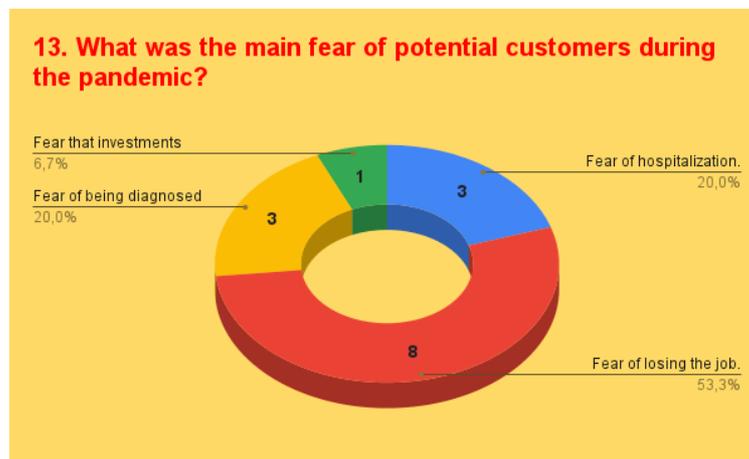


46.7 % of clients have become more receptive to financial protection of health, the focus falling on hospitalization days,

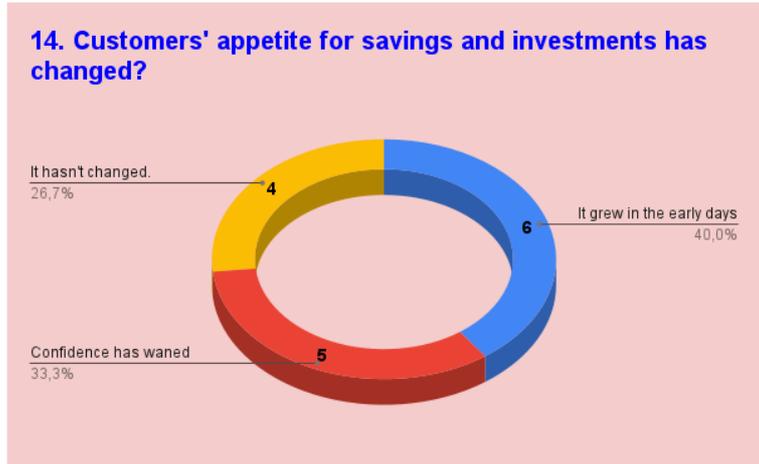
including ICU, 40 % are more restrained on health insurance and 13.3 % do not show any change in attitude towards health insurance.



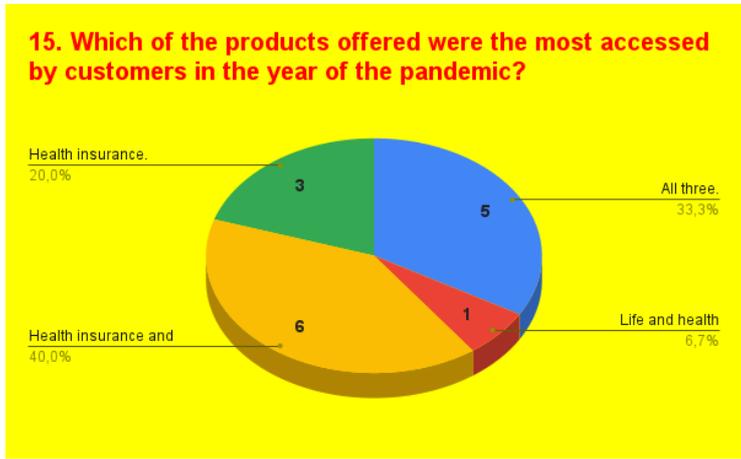
The main fear of customers was the possibility of losing their job (53.3 %). Followed by an identical percentage of 20 %, the fear of hospitalization and diagnosis of a serious illness, respectively 6.7 % fear that their investments could fail.



The appetite for saving increased to 40 % of customers, did not change at all compared to the previous period for 26.7 % of customers, and decreased for 33.3 %.

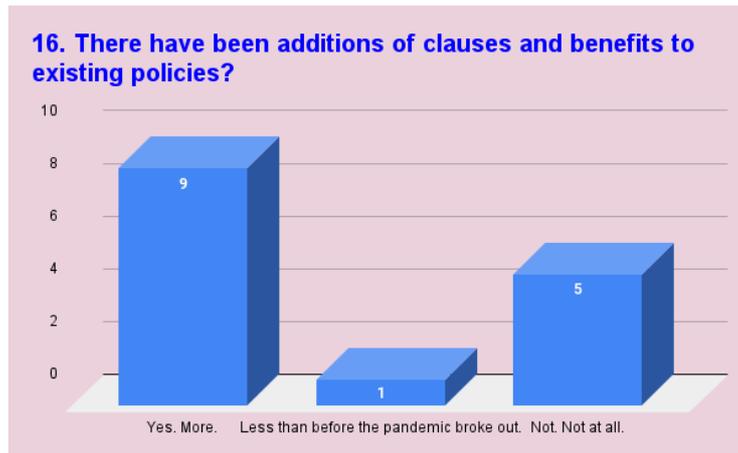


Of the three categories of insurance, life, health, or private pensions, the most accessed by customers were health insurance and private pensions, in a percentage of 40 %, followed by all three types, with 33.3 %, respectively exclusively health insurance, by 20 %. Life and health insurance were accessed by 6.7 % of customers.

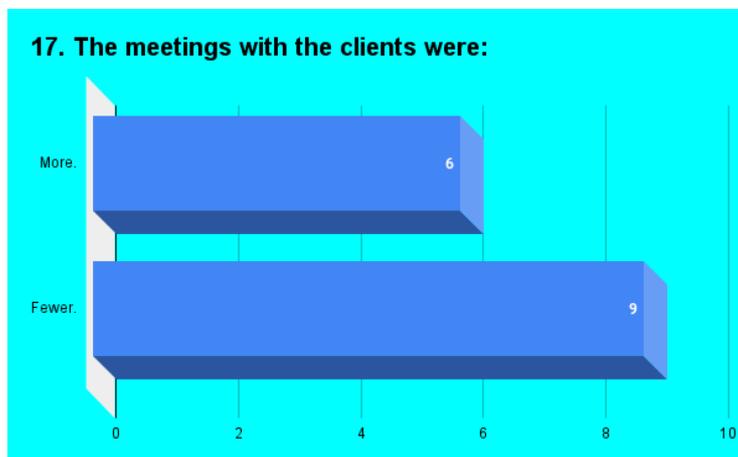


We found out that the vast majority of existing policies (60 %) added additional benefits or updated existing benefits. Only in 6.7 % of cases, customers reduced the number of benefits existing before the outbreak of the pandemic, and in 33.3 % of cases the benefits of

policies remained at the level established before the outbreak of the health crisis.



The effort of the consultants increased, as did the number of meetings with clients (60 %), with only 40 % of respondents accounting for fewer meetings than before the pandemic.



Conclusion

Overall, the group of respondents shared the opinion that, although difficult, online interaction allowed for the sales process to take

place. Potential customers could be lost during the persuasion process, a longer time was necessary to complete the sales, but the insurance business was not... out of business. In the digital age, at least part of the sales process will remain online, some customers declaring that they were satisfied with the timing, convenience, and procedures of (habitual) digital interactions. It can be intuitively stated that the digital skills exercised by customers and consultants alike in other spheres of activity had a strong impact on the development and success of the consultancy activity, but this study did not investigate such aspects and therefore it cannot speculate on the topic. The author of this study recognizes also limitations of the work, since the opinions are collected in a small pool of respondents and might not reflect the "big picture" of the activity in the consultancy business.

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Communication of the Social Assistance and Child Protective Services of Timiș County with the Media, during the Sars CoV-2 Health Crisis

Andreea LUKIČ

Abstract. *The communication of public institutions in Romania characterized by transparency, citizen orientation, efficiency and timely information has been subjected to unusual pressure in the health crisis triggered in early 2020 by the COVID-19 pandemic. Expectations of the media and the general public towards public institutions on communication rhythm and transparency have not diminished, even if the institutions that were in charge of protecting public health were mostly in the forefront of the attention. In this context, the Social Assistance and Child Protective Services of Timiș County has adapted to the communication style by quickly developing those communication tools that it has created since 2019 - social media page on Facebook, groups on WhatsApp application, website, etc. Tools that did not seem urgent before the measures of social distancing and electronic services that the state of necessity has imposed have emerged as new everyday realities for the entire Romanian society. This article analyzes the innovative way of communication adopted by the Social Assistance and Child Protective Services of Timiș county in the context of the pandemic and the new means of communication used to meet the institution's objectives.*

Keywords: *communication, institution, media, pandemic.*

1. Introduction

At the beginning of the 21st century, Cernicova (2003) stressed that a feature of the Romanian services sector was that it offered a “narrow range of available services”, in other words “few for many”, even after 1989. The classic methods, namely sending a press release or holding a weekly or monthly press conference, proved to be insufficient or outdated. Videoconferencing via the Zoom platform took the place of face-to-face meetings, and digital tools such as WhatsApp have become, from occasional ways of communication, current practices in contact between the Office for Communications, Registry and Public Relations within the Social Assistance and Child Protective Services of Timiș county, and media representatives.

This article presents the way in which the journalistic community of Timișoara perceived the communication effort of this public institution during March 2020 - March 2021.

The journalists' opinions were collected through a questionnaire of 9 questions, distributed through the www.isondaje.ro platform to 44 local journalists (Timișoara and Lugoj) who write articles or broadcast news about the protection of minors in particular, but also on social assistance in specialized institutions.

Unlike the individual interview - the collection of data based on the questionnaire facilitated the collection of a significant number of opinions in a relatively short period of time. These opinions can be analyzed and important conclusions can be drawn regarding the optimization of the communication strategy and the substantiation based on tangible information of the future strategy.

2. New communication strategies implemented by the Office for Communication, Registry and Public Relations during the pandemic

The Social Assistance and Child Protective Services of Timiș County is a public institution, subordinated to the Timiș County Council, established by HCJ 64 / 22.11.2004, regarding the reorganization of the Timiș Child Protection Directorate and the Timiș County Social Assistance Directorate.

This institution is responsible for promoting, coordinating and monitoring the child protection, but also it sees to the wellbeing of people who are alone, the elderly, those with disabilities and any other person who has difficulty in making a living because of sickness or disabilities.

The Social Assistance and Child Protective Services of Timiș County performs the following functions:

- ✓ **strategy**, which ensures the development of the social assistance strategy and of the social assistance plan for preventing and reducing the social exclusion, as well as the anti-poverty action programmes, which it submits for approval to the County Council
- ✓ **coordination** of the activities of social assistance and child protection at a county level
- ✓ **collaboration** with the decentralized public services of the ministries and institutions with responsibilities in the field of social assistance, with the local public social assistance services, as well as with the representatives of the civil society carrying out activities in the field
- ✓ **implementation**, by providing the human, material and financial means necessary for the implementation of strategies on anti-poverty actions, prevention and reduction of social marginalization, as well as for solving individual and collective social emergencies at county level
- ✓ **representation** of the Timiș County Council internally and externally, in the field of social assistance and child protection. (Cojocaru et al., 2009)

According to wan.anfp.gov.ro, "The essence of the bureaucratic apparatus is related to how officials manage public services through the connection between citizens' needs and documents written and issued by them, with internal and external documents and procedures created by the public organization to solve problems".

Some institutions have set up Citizen Information Centers, others have a Public Relations Department or work with Citizens Advice Bureau, the latter being guided and supported by the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureau (ANBCC).

The Office for Communication, Registry and Public Relations has, according to the organizational chart, 7 employees who, in their job description, must ensure the activity of document registration and communication with the press, they also have to write the press releases, organize press conferences, and maintain an efficient communication with the citizens who write or come to the institution, but also to improve the communication relations with other institutions / legal entities and re-drafting the answers on law 544/2001 on free access to public information.

With the Decree of the State of Emergency on 16.03.2020, even if it imposed the restriction or even the cease of interaction with the public in almost every public institution, the management of documents had to be ensured further. Information on legal regulations, protection measures and restrictions, as well as information on the work schedule, on how to obtain and submit forms continued. "Beyond the obvious requirement of citizens to be informed, there are also the needs of administrations to inform and educate the public about special aspects of the activity", shows the Guide of the civil servant.

For most civil servants working in social assistance, the home office method was not an option, although in most private companies this way of working has been adopted and encouraged.

The amount of information necessary to be, or clarified, to the beneficiaries of Social Assistance and Child Protective Services of Timis County or mass media services increased with the onset of the health crisis, but it was necessary to change the method of transmission and adapt it in compliance with the Law of transparency. This, which should not be confused with the Law 544/2001 about the free access to information of public interest, involves a collaboration between two partners: public administration and recipients of regulations developed by it (citizens, non-governmental organizations, business associations. (Transparency International Romania and Pro-Democracy Association - Decision-making transparency in public administration).

As a first step, for a better accessibility of the information regarding the decisional transparency, the web page of the institution, www.dgaspctm.ro, has been updated, so that the sections regarding this aspect can be easy to access (Law 52/2003 on decision-making transparency in public administration). At the same time, the Office for Communication, Registry and Public Relations showed flexibility and streamlined its communication mode by adapting it to the dynamics of the technology evolution.

In order to keep in touch with the media representatives, who were waiting for real-time information from the institution's spokesperson, the communication was moved quickly from e-mail to dedicated groups, on social networks, on the institution's website, on blog and on WhatsApp. The interviews given to the radio and tv media were made via skype or the zoom platform.

The registration of all documents was done strictly online. Additional e-mail addresses were created to make it easier for the people to send in all the required papers. Dedicated telephone lines were put in place so that people facing problems due to restriction measures imposed by the pandemic could call in and ask for help or advice.

3. Visibility of child protection services on social media

Prevention campaigns, meant to bring to attention sensitive topics such as violence in schools, bullying, domestic violence, school dropout, etc., were also done online. If in the pre-pandemic months these campaigns were organised monthly, in schools, in a partnership with the Timiș County Police Department and the County Education Board, now they were limited to paid posts on Facebook or meetings on Zoom /Google Meet / WebEx, but with a much smaller audience and a lesser impact.

The Facebook account of the institution, active since February 2019, was created to promote the achievements and to present its strategy. It also made it easy and effective to let the followers know what was happening in the residential centers for adults and children. In the community, even after the intense information campaigns in recent years, most citizens do not know the duties and even less the achievements of Social Assistance and Child Protective Services of Timiș County. Therefore, the development of this communication channel was imposed both by the trend and also by the need to explain and show transparency in the evolution and achievements in the child protection services.

Within the Office for Communication, Registry and Public Relations, a person has been appointed to provide dynamic and interesting content. The goal is to grow the number of followers, and also to provide real-time feedback to any person who contacts the institution through this communication channel.

Since March 2020, the number of daily posts has gradually increased, as did the interest of the public and of the media representatives in the activity of the institution. If in December 2019 the Facebook page of Social Assistance and Child Protective Services of Timiș County had 2560 followers, obtained after 8 months of moderate activity on the account, this number increased to 3260 in March 2020.

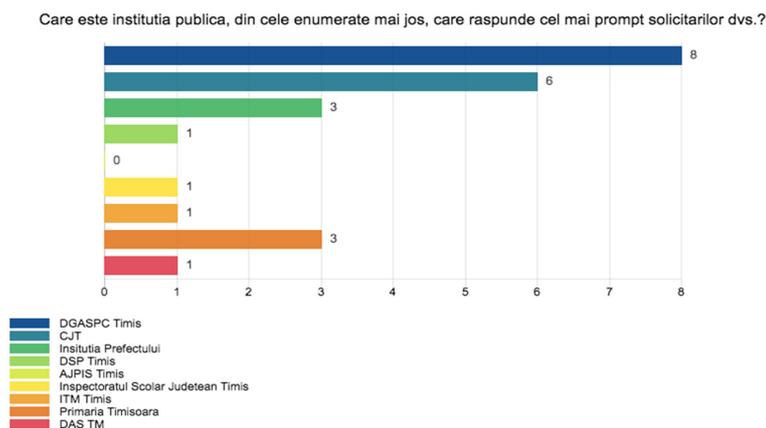
4. Feedback from the media

To see if the local journalists appreciated the innovative way of communication of the Social Assistance and Child Protective Services of Timiș County in comparison with other public institutions, a questionnaire, consisting of only nine questions, was created. The maximum amount of time required to answer them was no more than 3 minutes.

The questionnaire was answered by 26 journalists, who know the local public administration well, who have been working in the field for several years and who have had the opportunity to collaborate with several spokespeople or communication officers, on countless occasions. All of them qualified to evaluate and to assess the way in which communication was made by public institutions during the health crisis.

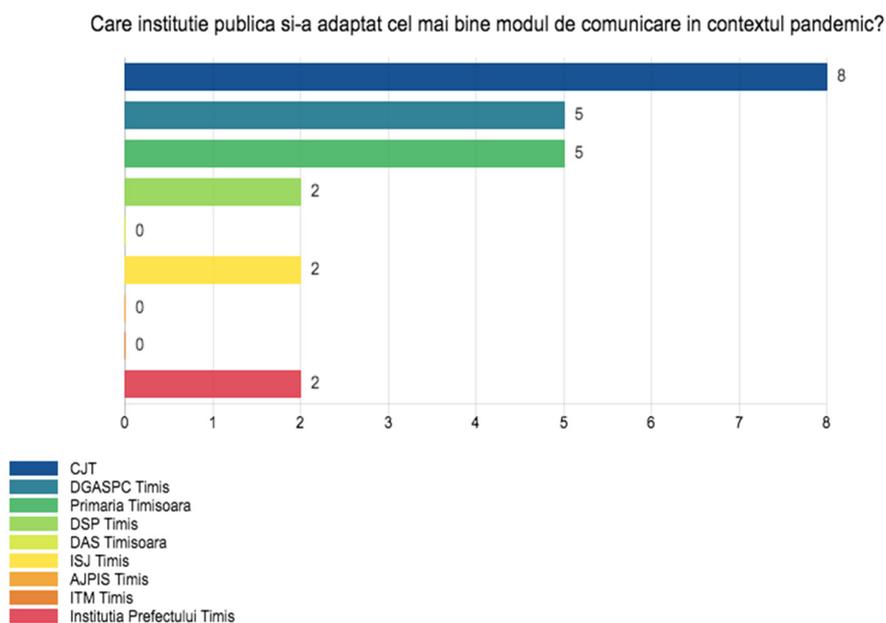
Most of the respondents believe that Social Assistance and Child Protective Services of Timiș County is the public institution that responds most promptly to media requests, even more efficiently than the Institution of the Prefect of Timiș, Timișoara City Hall or Timiș County Council (Fig.1).

Fig. 1 Which public institution from the ones listed below responds the quickest to your requests?



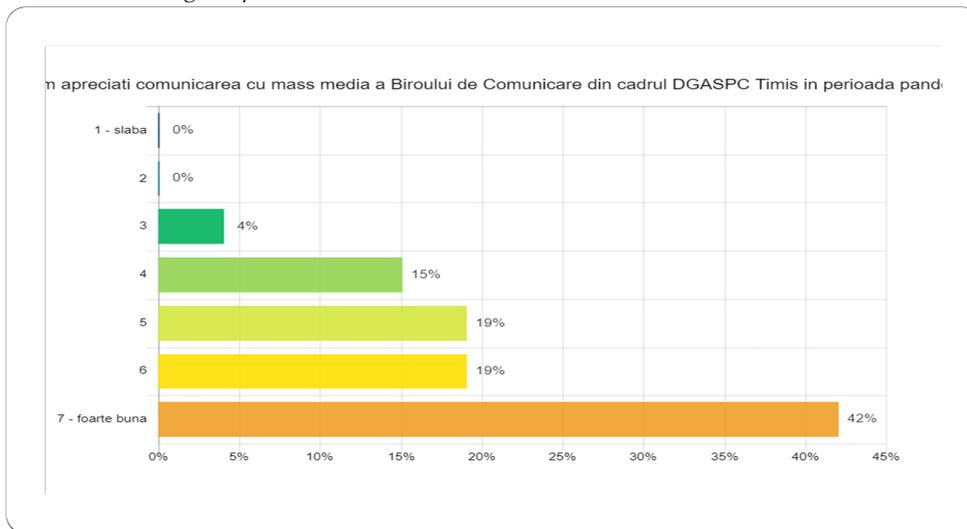
In terms of adapting the communication to the necessities imposed by the pandemic period, the Social Assistance and Child Protective Services of Timiș County ranked second after the Timiș County Council, according to the journalists (Fig.2).

Fig. 2 Which public institution adapted its communication the best during the pandemic?



In order to find out how the journalists assessed the activity of the Office for Communication, Registry and Public Relations during the pandemic, especially with the spokesperson, and taking into account the experience with other public institutions from the county, the respondents were asked to grade it from 1 (very poor) to 7 (very good). The conclusion is presented below (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3 How would you assess the activity of the Office for Communication, Registry and Public Relations during the pandemic?



Conclusion

As Cernicova (2003) puts it, “The direct effect of this development, relevant for the transition period, is that there is a wide disparity between the expressed needs of the population and the available services (this being the basis for a rapid, even spectacular, development of services), as well as a lack of experience on the part of consumers to pay adequately for the provided service (this being the limiting factor for expanding the sector)”.

It is expected that, after the end of the health crisis, digital communication skills will be perpetuated. They have been proven to save time and resources that can be directed to other innovative events.

An important factor in maintaining and developing digital communication methods in the future is the positive feedback of the media, but

also the appreciation from the beneficiaries of social services, who thus have quick access to any information of public interest within DGASPC Timiș.

However, regarding the activity of promoting and protecting the children's rights, the methods developed and perfected during the pandemic, such as Zoom, WebEx, Google Meet platforms have shown their limits. The representatives of private organizations, the institutions and the citizens directly involved in the process would rather have face-to-face meetings, group discussions and debates, where projects aimed at defending the minors' best interests can be approached and applied.

In conclusion, civil servants, regardless of the institution in which they operate, have only to keep up with this trend, use and apply the best communication tools to achieve the expected results. Innovative and efficient communication is, without a doubt, the key to success in public administration.

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A Debate on the Role of Social Media in Business Communication

Raluca CODREAN

Abstract: *People's interest in social networks has been increasing steadily in recent years, influencing people of all ages. In the era of technology, everyone is connected to these platforms, whether they are used for personal or professional needs. Instagram is one of the most popular social media platforms for people who want to market and promote their enterprises in this social environment. As a result, the platform on which I focused in my research is self-evident. Since 2016, when business accounts were launched, Instagram has provided the possibility of creating extremely effective online promotions, using modern and easy-to-use tools and technologies, in order to help a brand to become known to as many people as possible, to acquire and keep customers, as well as to increase sales. The purpose of this article is to highlight the importance and usefulness of the Instagram platform itself, as well as of all the tools that are available for users and that help them in identifying and achieving the biggest and finest advantages that can be obtained from a well-developed marketing strategy. In particular, the goal of this article is to highlight how crucial and easy it is to promote a business through Instagram.*

Keywords: *social media, online communication, marketing strategy, Instagram, entrepreneurship, promoting business, marketing tools.*

1. Introduction

Nowadays, social media plays a significant role in almost every aspect of people's lives. Whether you are looking for a career, running a business, keeping in touch with friends and family, seeking inspiration and motivation, learning new skills or developing others, social networks are there to help. They have changed people's daily lives and have boosted efficiency in communication, making it easier and faster than ever before. Then they added the additional features that have revolutionized social media and have transformed it into what we know and use today.

Several definitions have been assigned to social networks and to the concept of communication, with relevance to many domains, such as public relations and the media. In my opinion, those who have managed to highlight the importance of this concept and to define it as clearly as possible are Iacopo Casadei and Andrea Bilotto (2016), who argue that social networks "are a group of online applications that grow on the ideological and technological foundations of WEB 2.0 and allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content". Thus, today, "users turn from consumers to content creators."

The connection between social networks and promoting a business is very simple. As users of social platforms spend a lot of time watching and searching for online content (studies show that users spend an average of 2 hours and 24 minutes on social media), specialists and entrepreneurs running a business saw an opportunity to promote products and services through them. According to a Sherpa Marketing survey, more people follow businesses on social media than celebrities, with 80% of Instagram users following at least one business.

Therefore, e-commerce has recently become the largest online shopping platform, which helps not only shoppers to buy, but also sellers to sell their products and services. Businesses have grown thanks to online marketing and social networking sites, because people use them frequently and for long periods, as well as because they are constantly expanding - day by day, new features are added that can help

people in ways they have never imagined and, of course, because the information is "delivered" much faster and to a larger audience.

Instagram is the platform that introduced the business account option in 2016, with the goal of assisting businesses in making their products known to a large audience more quickly and easily, utilizing resources that this platform makes available to everyone. The platform has become efficient for online promotion in a very short period as it is appreciated by everyone and is easy to use, as well as because it can deliver noticeable results in a fairly short time. The studies published in existing specialist publications, as well as the research studies that I have conducted using two distinct methodological approaches, demonstrate the growing user preference for this application and the experience derived from following a brand. I was also able to obtain the perspective of an entrepreneur who promotes her business mostly through Instagram.

2. Research methods

Two research methods were used to determine the importance and effectiveness of Instagram in terms of promoting brands, products and services: a survey entitled "Expectations from brands promoted through Instagram" and an interview with a young entrepreneur who explained to me how Instagram had helped her expand her business through a rather difficult year (2020).

When it comes to gathering information and impressions from as many people as possible, the questionnaire is one of the greatest research approaches. Therefore, the survey was administered, using the Isondeje.ro platform, to 80 active Internet users aged between 18 and 33. According to their answers, most of them use Instagram as the main platform for communication, education and entertainment.

Some of the questions in the survey were taken from a similar study by Ahmadinejad, B. and Najafi Asli, H. (2017), entitled *E-business through social media: a Quantitative Survey (Case Study: Instagram)*, which

allowed me to compare their answers to mine in order to see how much people's perception of Instagram and its business side has changed.

Regarding the interview, I had the chance to talk to Ms. Adriana Popescu, who is the founder of a candle business called "Iz de poveste" (which translates as "the whiff of a story" in English). We talked about the strategies she uses to promote her business, what made her start this business, the risks that came with the launch, her daily tasks as a business owner, as well as about entrepreneurial abilities and her future goals.

3. Results

The findings derived from the two research methods used reveal the importance of Instagram to online promotion and users' appreciation of brands that employ this way of promotion.

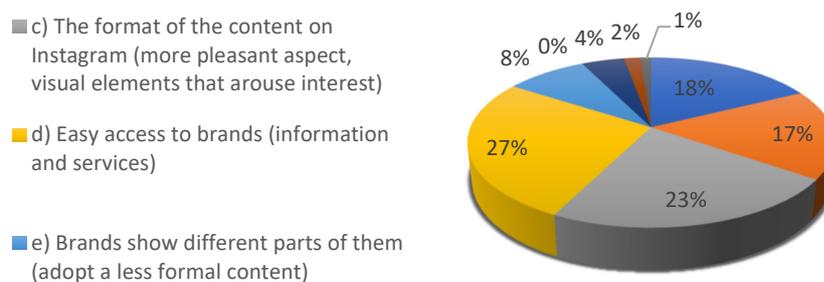
Thus, based on the results, the majority of the 80 people who took the survey are Instagram users, both for personal use (posting photos, communicating with friends) and for more advanced use - if we may call it like that (collecting information provided by specialists in innovative ways or even browsing product and service catalogues, which frequently leads to purchase). As shown in Figure 1, most respondents follow more than five Instagram pages of their favourite businesses in the fields of fashion, sports and entertainment; they follow and analyse their postings, participate in giveaways or leave feedback on the products purchased.

Fig. 1 How many brand pages do you follow on your personal Instagram account?



A quite interesting question in the survey (provided in Figure 2) concerns the things people perceive as the best about following a brand on Instagram. The results shown in Figure 2 reveal that, from the several answer options, the one that ranks first is the ease of access to information and services, everything being a click away. Next comes the appearance of the posts, the visual elements that arouse interest and curiosity, followed by the friendliness of the brand.

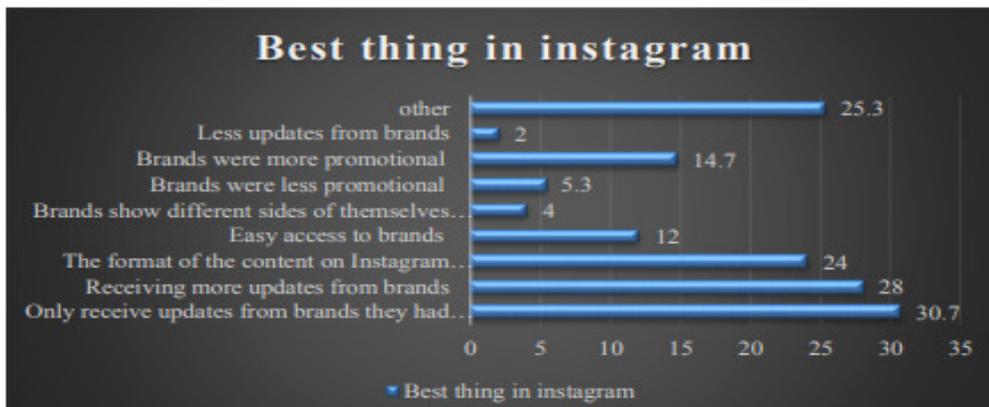
Fig. 2 What do you think are the best things about following a brand on Instagram?



With all these factors, a strong bond may be formed between the customer and the brand, which can enhance brand loyalty.

Figure 3 illustrates the findings of the 2017 study conducted by Ahmadinejad and Najafi Asli, which differ slightly from the results of my 2021 survey. The best thing about following a brand on Instagram in 2017 was that users only got information from the brands they chose to follow (now, users get ads from brands similar to those they already follow), followed by the constant updates (which still happens today, because there is a strategy concerning posts, which companies must follow to expand the business and get sales), and by maintaining a visually appealing format (which is also essential today). Let us not forget that Instagram first appeared as a photo-sharing network, where users could post photos and experiment with the filters provided by the platform so as to create unique and aesthetically appealing content.

Fig. 3 What do you think are the best things about following a brand on Instagram?
(2017)



Turning our attention to the interview with Adriana, she confessed that she launched her business in 2020, during the pandemic, out of the desire to share her passion with people and to help them feel more relaxed during these stressful times. Several topics were discussed throughout the interview, but those in the field of social media served to highlight the major points of this research. Having over 7 years of experience in influencer marketing, Adriana told me that promoting her business by involving the target audience and by making use of secrets is the best approach for her to expand her brand. Thanks to her seven-year experience, she knows which influencers are excellent to cooperate with in order to reach the target audience and enhance sales. The influencers she collaborates with include Ioana Grama, Laura Giurcanu, Alina Gologan, Ramona Olaru and Cudeea.

Adriana never ceases to promote the products she creates. She uses Instagram as the main promotion tool, but also Facebook, where she relies on both organic and paid social media marketing to increase the number of page visits, and hence, the number of users who can turn into potential clients. Analyzing her business profile, I have noticed that she follows all the necessary steps emphasized in specialized studies on how to promote a brand on Instagram: attention to details, establishing a theme, consistent posts, posting when traffic on the platform is quite

high, using her brand hashtag as well as defining Instagram's "store" section. All these points, followed rigorously, contribute to Adriana's success and open up new marketing opportunities, such as a stand at Carturesti Bookshop and at Alist Designers Boutique, as well as participating in Romanian handmade craft fairs.

Conclusion

By writing this article and doing this research, I was able to understand how important it is to use Instagram (an extremely popular platform, especially among young people) in promoting businesses online, as well as why all business owners should turn to this simple and effective method of promoting their products and services. I was also able to observe how much social media influences the way in which people purchase, as well as how their purchase habits might be impacted.

Based on the present study, I can say that Instagram has successfully combined personal life with brand marketing on an unprecedented scale. Businesses can have many benefits from using this platform, which is why its implementation has become part of business practice.

In terms of doing business on Instagram, this area is continually expanding, and I would not be surprised to see that every single business will have an Instagram account in the future.

The world is changing, and so is technology. Everything is in a constant state of evolution and development, which I am eager to witness.

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The Role and Importance of Online Communication in the Business Environment

Antonia Patricia BURDULEA

Abstract: *Business communication has changed in recent years due to the new technologies, the growing demands for intercultural communication skills, the changing person-organization relationship and the global nature of organizations. Both organizations and customers benefit from certain advantages provided by the use of online communication in the business environment, with great possibilities for interaction and individualization. This paper highlights the role and importance of online communication in the business environment, focusing on the way in which online communication between customers and companies takes place. The results of a survey I conducted on this topic suggest that online communication between customers and companies has both advantages and disadvantages, but the positive aspects prevail over the negative ones. The study shows that customers remain loyal to companies with which they have a positive online interaction, more than half of the respondents attaching great importance to the way in which they communicate online with the companies whose customers they are. This article is addressed to any person interested in the role of online communication between a company and its customers, as well as to any entrepreneur who carries out their professional activity in the online environment.*

Keywords: *online business communication; communication with customers; advantages of online business communication; disadvantages of online business communication, importance of online business communication.*

1. Introduction

Communication skills are considered some of the basic components of a successful career, along with teamwork, leadership, planning and organization, among others. At the same time, the modern professional environment is characterized by new forms of organization, efficient communication technologies, frequent changes, shrinking boundaries between professional and personal life, a more diverse workforce and a greater emphasis on globalism. These changes also have an impact on business communication in quite meaningful ways, which any business should consider.

Over time, communication researchers have emphasized the importance of communication skills for career success and business formation. The advertising platform provided by the online environment is of great help to companies, who can use it to send messages with advertising content very easily. Customers also have various benefits, from e-mail and discussion groups to news and social networks. According to Morozan (2011), the most important benefits that technology and, in particular, the online environment brings to the business environment, and that have been preserved until now, are the following:

1. Maintaining an online presence;
2. Promoting a business - through the Internet, essential information about the company is provided to thousands of potential customers and partners, who will find out about the company's field of activity and how they can benefit from its services;
3. Disseminating business information;
4. Serving customers and providing the necessary information about the company, products, offers;
5. Increasing public interest - one can access the company's website from any location, and thus become a visitor to the site created by the organization and a potential customer for the product offered;
6. Accessing important target markets: the socio-demographic profile of online users is favorable to advertising agencies, which can find out

essential information about users, necessary to bring some products to the fore;

7. Answering the most frequent customer questions: employees who hold positions in the call center departments of companies, or who answer the phone calls of customers or potential customers, often face the situation of answering the same questions. Given that there is certain information that potential customers want to know before making a purchase, which would require standard answers from the call center, the company may include the answers to those questions on its website, thus meeting the potential customers' needs;

8. Creating a permanent information service - given that the work schedule is different depending on the time zone of each country, in case the customers or potential customers are located in a country other than the one where the company is located, the web page can always serve their needs;

9. Updating information quickly and easily, whenever necessary: electronic publications are easy to update, they do not require printing and they bring lower costs than printed publications;

10. Receiving consumer feedback with reference to the product / service purchased, a short period after using the product / service, or obtaining consumer opinions about a product to be launched. As the market must be constantly tested until the company identifies what consumers really want, creating a company website or an account on social networks allows companies to request and receive feedback from consumers much faster, without additional costs.

According to Nina Krey and Patricia Rossi (2018), maintaining customer happiness requires a long-term communication strategy, which can include actions that are easy to accomplish, both online and offline. Indeed, the rapid evolution of communication technologies has radically changed the nature of human communication between individuals in the contemporary workplace. The evolution of communication technologies has completely redefined not only the communication channels in the workplace, but also its structures and

organizational design. As Furnham explains, "The speed of development and spread of advanced information technology is for many organizations the issue to consider" (Furnham, 2005, p. 657). Bland (2005) highlighted the human element: "People management is about interaction and conversation; technology should not dehumanize that interaction" (Bland, 2005, p. 63).

This study aims to investigate the context in which communication between companies and their customers takes place nowadays in the online environment.

2. Expert sources consulted

Any type of business depends on the customer, and the product and profit are always influenced by customer satisfaction. That is why every customer must be treated seriously.

Currently, customer satisfaction is a very important issue for the company's product, which measures the level of expectation between the company's product and customer expectations. In reality, customer satisfaction will impact both the company and the product, because a customer satisfied with the price and quality will purchase more products and bring more profit to the company. Therefore, Ali et al. (2021, p. 65) argue that "[t]hanks to research, ninety-nine percent of unhappy customers will never buy a company product again, which means that knowing what satisfies customers is a good way to reduce the unhappy customer and increase profits.". They also emphasise that "[c]ustomer satisfaction is affected by the quality of the product and the services offered by them by companies" (Ali et al., 2021, p. 68). Moreover, Mainardes and Cardoso (2019, p. 6) stress that "[r]esearchers have studied and demonstrated that this communication relationship between companies and consumers on social networks positively influences the trust that increases brand loyalty". Companies are in competition with each other, and customer loyalty will lead to the purchase of a company's products or services to the detriment of its competitors.

3. Research methods

The research was conducted by means of a self-completed questionnaire answered by 107 customers of companies that carry out their professional activity online.

The questionnaire consists of 18 questions related to the theoretical issues presented in the previous sections of the paper, as well as to the advantages and disadvantages that one may encounter as an online customer communicating with a company.

In choosing the respondents, it was taken into account whether they are online shoppers, so as to make sure they had had the opportunity to encounter positive or negative situations in the interaction with various companies during the process of purchasing products or services, which allowed me to outline an opinion about how online collaboration between customers and companies takes place.

4. Results

Based on the answers to the questionnaire on the situation of online communication between customers and companies in the business environment, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Currently, the rate of online communication between companies and their customers has increased;
- The majority of respondents attach great importance to the way they communicate online with the companies whose customers they are. Customers remain loyal to companies with which they have a positive online interaction;
- Very few respondents still choose to physically go to the store to request additional information about products;
- In the respondents' opinion, the following updates to company websites would be an advantage for maintaining their interest: translating sites into all languages spoken in the countries where they sell their products; a clearer description of the products; more technical details about the products.

- 95 out of 107 respondents find it important to have access to the feedback of other customers on the company website;
- For 45 respondents it is very important to have the possibility to order products on the company website from companies based in other cities / countries;
- 86% of the respondents are interested in receiving emails on their personal email address from companies, which shows that they are interested in and open to maintaining online communication with companies.
- Strengths of online communication:
 - Time saving;
 - Access to feedback from other customers;
 - The customer can communicate with the company from anywhere;
 - Customer problems are solved faster;
- Weaknesses of online communication:
 - Not all customers receive a response to emails sent to companies;
 - Sometimes communication is poor in case of return;
 - Some companies do not communicate effectively in case of delivery errors;
 - Limited program of the online Customer Relations department.

Fig. 1 The importance of how online companies communicate with customers

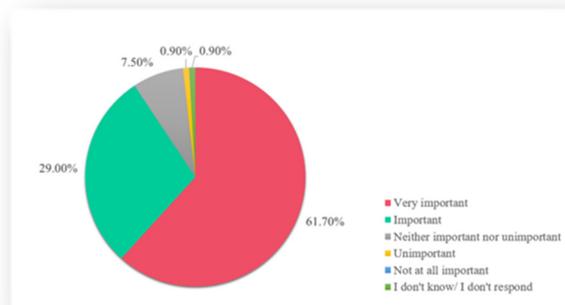
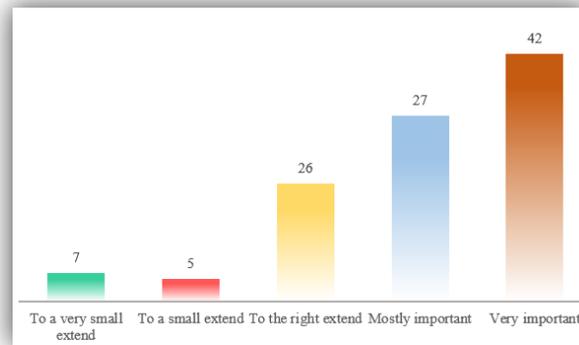


Fig. 2 The importance of viewing other customers' feedback



Conclusion

Today, companies use more devices (and more channels) to communicate with their customers than ever before. Although there are advantages in this approach, companies still face a number of difficulties in organizing and coordinating communication with customers, but these difficulties are not significant. According to research, instead of adopting more communication platforms, companies should strengthen their centralized communication systems and focus on needs.

Given the communication issues mentioned by the respondents to the questionnaire, I believe that, where possible, companies should also synchronize their communication platforms with their systems for recording the information transmitted. The growth of communication channels and devices has added to the complexity of communicating with customers, and companies need to be prepared to attract customers through multiple communication channels. An improvement has been noticed in the field of email communication, the results of the survey showing that customers are becoming more comfortable with the use of email to communicate.

In order to communicate better externally, companies must first improve their internal communications, because the companies that communicate best internally will have the greatest success communicating externally.

The following initiatives can be used by companies to improve online communication:

- introducing a setting that allows marking emails as resolved. If an email is not marked as resolved, the operator will receive a reminder to return to that email.
- rewarding the staff at the online Customer Relations department based on positive customer feedback related to interaction and support in solving the encountered problems.
- extending the online communication service for customers to 24 hours/day.
- investing in the online infrastructure and making regular information updates on the products and services offered.
- moving data concerning communication with customers in the cloud is a move that smart companies in the business environment can address to proactively solve centralization issues.

In conclusion, all the improvements that can be made to strengthen the relationship between the customer and the company must be considered, because online communication between customers and companies is extremely important to the success of any type of business.

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Symbolism in Visual Communication

Andreea-Constantina SAVA

Abstract: *Given the power of images to express feelings, to call to action, to create and use experiences, among others, in this paper, we aim to identify and analyse the various symbols and signs present in a set of photographs. First of all, we will discuss the concepts of nonverbal and visual communication, as well as some ideas regarding symbolism in communication. Then, we will focus on two qualitative and one quantitative research methods. On the one hand, we performed a visual analysis of images. We only used photos from the personal collection of one of the authors, which capture various aspects, in a specific way, from the author's own perspective. On the other hand, to meet the research objectives, we used the focus group - a research method based on free collective discussions that explores a particular question or set of questions. Subsequently, we also conducted a self-administered questionnaire, as we considered it necessary to use qualitative research techniques, followed by some quantitative analysis such as the survey.*

Keywords: *photography, visual communication, symbols, signs, interpretation.*

1. Introduction

This paper examines the use of visual methods in research. The purpose of this paper is to identify symbols in visual communication, more precisely, in a set of given photos. The analysis of the identified signs, symbols, ideas or memories, each with its own particularities, allowed us to find out how specialists and non-specialists in visual arts rendered and paraphrased a specific message that appeared in front of their eyes. The overall aim of the interviews was to collect, synthesize and then analyse participants' understanding of their own past experiences and present beliefs.

We conclude this paper with a summary of the strengths of visual analysis in communication, of lessons learned and memories unfolded.

2. Expert sources consulted

The topic addressed in this paper belongs to the field of nonverbal communication and symbolic communication. In addition, we considered it essential to consult bibliographic sources related to photographic art.

The whole process of communication involves a variety of forms of manifestation. One of the features that distinguishes verbal from nonverbal communication is the code. The formal aspect of the nonverbal message is represented by images and sounds, and not by articulate language, as in the case of verbal communication. L. Suci (2014, p. 89) thus defines the code as the "demarcating feature" (our translation) between the two types of communication mentioned.

The entire set of nonverbal communication features is often called "metacommunication" (the Greek word "meta" means "extra"). "Metacommunication" is, therefore, something in addition to communication, and we must always be aware of its existence.

Along with verbal, paraverbal and nonverbal communication, symbolic communication can be admitted as a form of independent communication. It is not verbal communication, but it is not purely

nonverbal communication either, because it is defined as "a language of images that are meaningful in themselves, but which can also be translated into words"; thus, a nonverbal language that can be reduced to verbal language, explains Abrudan (2013; our translation). She also emphasizes an essential fact: "the symbol itself is, in a sense, a sign, but while the sign in the strict sense is completely arbitrary and has an immediately identifiable meaning, the symbol is more than just a sign" (Abrudan, 2013; our translation). Thus, the symbol has something more than a sign and more than that, the symbol has the function of recognition and exhortation, not just that of denoting something already determined.

We note that the great semioticians and researchers in the field agree with the idea that images convey visual messages, so "a synonymous relationship can be established between image and visual representation" (Dâncu, 2009, p. 90). Furthermore, Dâncu (2009, p. 90) argues that "the image is a universal language", but the fact that people recognize certain elements in images does not automatically mean that they have understood the meaning transmitted by their creator.

Any act of communication involves signs and codes. Signs are acts or artifacts that refer to "something other than oneself", according to Abrudan (2013; our translation). She identifies codes as systems in which signs are organized and which determine how they relate to each other. Since the appearance of Homo Sapiens, we have found symbols in almost everything. A drawing becomes a symbol that evokes a certain object, idea, feeling or image. We could thus say that the symbol becomes part of a system of signs that constitute information.

Another interesting fact derived from the definition provided above is that the symbol is generally perceived as a kind of intermediary between the sign and the image. From this perspective, the symbol becomes a synthesis of opposites, because "the image is the inverse of the sign", as Lester (2014, p. 43) points out. The sign shows an intentional reference, while the represented content in the image conceals the intention, adds Lester. Each symbol is a microcosm, it can be perceived

as the expression of a macrocosm, because each incorporates, reflects and connects the dynamic structure of the cosmos and the human mind.

By virtue of these considerations, any image can be analysed from a semiotic point of view, which would facilitate our entry into what lies beyond the first sensations and appearances, that is, into meaning.

Sandu and Tudose (2008, p. 37) argue that "photography is a powerful means of expression." When used properly, it can become "a real force of charity and understanding" (Sandu and Tudose, 2008, p. 37); used incorrectly, it can "cause many dangerous fires" (Sandu and Tudose, 2008, p. 37). It can thus be inferred that the interpretation of any photographic image depends on both the intention of the viewer and the intention of the creator. Given the various levels of understanding, their coincidence implies the "cancellation of the relative" (Sandu and Tudose, 2008, p. 37), because subjectivity is present "without claiming the universal-valid" (Sandu and Tudose, 2008, p. 37).

3. Research method

In the present research, we used two qualitative and one quantitative research methods.

First, we have performed a visual analysis of a set of photographs taken by one of the authors of this article. We started from the assumption that photography is one of the most powerful means of expression. Moreover, we believe that interpreting a photographic image depends both on the intention of the person looking at it and also on the intention of the person who created it.

Second, we have used the focus-group technique, which is a research method based on free collective discussions that explores a set of questions. The focus group was divided into two "working groups": the group of professionals in the field of visual arts / photography and the group of non-specialists / people working in completely different fields. For the optimal development of the focus group and in accordance with the set of four open questions, we prepared a set of nine photos, which the participants inspected and analysed carefully.

Table 1 Pictures used in the focus-group and in the survey

No.	Picture	No.	Picture
Picture 1		Picture 6	
Picture 2		Picture 7	
Picture 3		Picture 8	
Picture 4		Picture 9	
Picture 5			

Based on their answers, we received practical examples and learned more about their opinions. We encouraged the interviewees to go into as much detail as possible, allowing them to be free and honest in expression, so that we could get an image as close to the truth as possible. As for the actual location of the focus-group, it was carried out online, using the Zoom meeting platform. Unfortunately, due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, we could not do the interview face to face.

Last, the quantitative analysis was carried out by using a questionnaire-based survey, administered exclusively online, via a specialized platform. There were 102 respondents to the survey. The questionnaire aimed to identify the respondents' opinions and thoughts regarding the given set of nine images. We believe it is important to mention that the survey was based on the same four questions that were used in the focus-group, but at a larger scale in terms of respondents. The data collected, processed, analysed and interpreted in this research are exclusively visual.

Table 2 presents the above-mentioned nine images used in our research.

4. Results

Experiencing the world behind the camera lens encourages the creation of inner experiences, as it allows us to exercise control over what we consider worthy of being seen and transmitted. In our study, we relied exclusively on photos from the personal collection of one of the authors, which capture various aspects, in a specific way, from the author's own perspective.

In the process of collecting, editing and reframing the dozen photos we used as source material, we constantly asked ourselves the following question: "What is the meaning of this image?" We selected and organised these photos according to the meanings and symbols behind each.

It was interesting to search and find, in our own memories, how much meaning a simple image could evoke, be it a hesitant look, a

landscape, a couple or a crying baby. Each photo communicates a message and was created with a specific individual intention. In choosing to make a family portrait, for example, there are a number of factors in creating the desired moment. Family members must be arranged in appropriate positions, expressing the desired emotions and engaged in a special, structured embrace.

The first question in the focus-group, which asked the respondents to define a "good" photo, was created so as to set the tone for the discussion, giving respondents a brief introduction to the topic of the interview. The next question required an explanation of the method used to facilitate the interview. The three questions had as subject the nine images, which offered the respondents the opportunity to relate situations and reasoned ideas. This group of questions explicitly and directly brings back the subject of the interview, aiming at determining the respondents to reveal facts, to reveal themselves and to make clarifications. The set of questions was carefully designed and oriented in such a way as to allow the interviewees to convey ideas through argumentation. Both the questions and the answers converge semantically in the same direction. We also consider that the transparency of the questions highlights the moderator's strategy, based on the knowledge of the subject, the interviewees and the social context.

The discussion about photos no. 3, 4 and 5 focused largely on positive experiences. These photos seemed to stimulate deeper thoughts and to engage the interviewees in conversation. They were eager to talk and freely discussed new topics, with examples of confusing situations and stories from shared experiences. The new stories evoked by the photos were shared willingly by the participants. The resulting discussion had an impact on our understanding of the participants, as it provided a closer look at what they considered important. The discussions around photos no. 2, 7 and 8 highlighted the negative experiences that the participants had had until then.

While the specialists in visual arts focused predominantly on the technical aspects, we noticed the interest with which the non-specialists

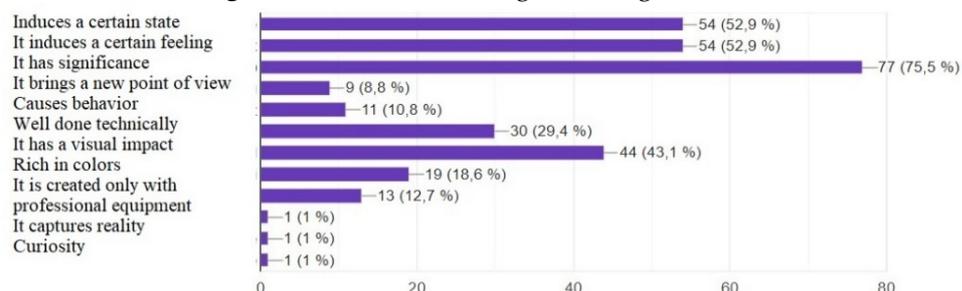
treated the subject and each image in a much more authentic way, trying to give each one a meaning. There was, however, on the part of the laypeople, a tendency to answer in the same way as the previous participant in the focus group. As expected, the specialists offered technical suggestions, related more to the composition, shadows, contrasts and less to the unseen side of each photo.

The focus-group allowed the collection of information in a discreet way, resembling a conversation with a well-defined purpose. The whole discussion was guided, so as to provide the targeted information. The use of projective and facilitation techniques allowed the moderator to build relationships with the respondents and to obtain in-depth responses. We believe that such an approach channeled the attention, maintaining the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewees.

In what concerns the survey, it was important to identify the respondents' views on the three most important features of a "good" photograph. As shown in Figure 1 below, the three most important characteristics in this respect are the following:

- "It has meaning (a story / message)" - 77 answers (75.5%)
- "It induces a certain state" - 54 answers (52.9%)
- "It induces a certain feeling" - 54 answers (52.9%)

Fig. 1 Characteristics of a "good" image



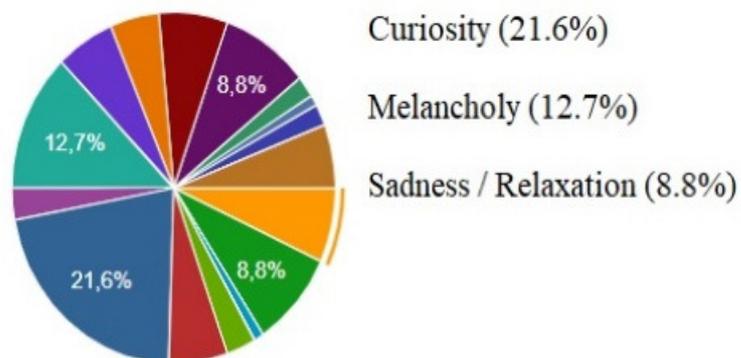
In the photographer's opinion, the picture below is one of the most striking images ever captured, being a snapshot of the cruel reality of that place. In order to better understand the symbolism of this image,

which at first sight seems to depict a nice landscape scene, we want to highlight a historical fact: the village of Geamăna, now buried under the tailings lake shown in the image, was a particularly picturesque area until 1977. Then, it was decided to relocate that village. The locals were forced to leave their homes, graves and birthplace, to leave the tailings site. According to the survey results presented in Figure 2, this picture predominantly evoked "relaxation" and "curiosity" in the respondents. It is noteworthy that, in the interview, only one person from the group of non-specialists recognized the place.



Fig. 2 Feelings/moods expressed by the picture above (picture 8)

Feelings/ moods expressed by the picture

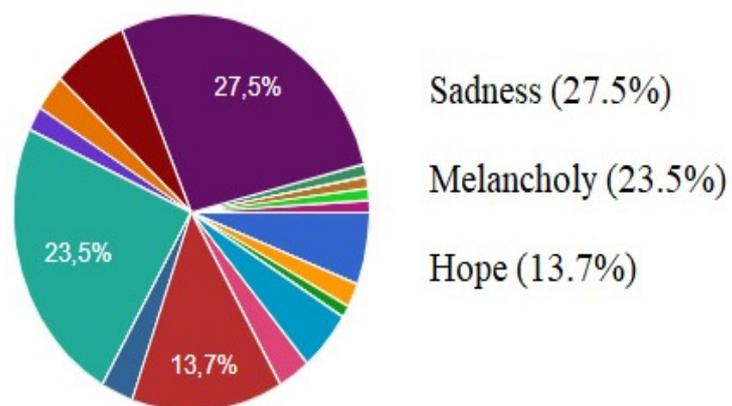


The photo showing the joined hands of an elderly man in close-up elicited different opinions from the two groups: non-specialists expressed mostly positive moods, whereas specialists felt sadness and nostalgia.



Fig. 3 Feelings/moods expressed by the picture above (picture 9)

Feelings/ moods expressed by the picture



We noted that, in general, the respondents would not suggest changes to the images under analysis. This is mainly due to the fact that we provided pre-determined answers in the questionnaire, not open-ended questions.

Conclusion

Based on the theoretical background resulting from the various sources we had consulted, we conducted an exclusively qualitative research of a corpus of photos.

In the paper, on the one hand, we performed a visual analysis of a collection of pictures by identifying, describing and comparing the symbols, signs and codes used in a visual message. On the other hand, we used the focus-group technique, in which participants negotiate meanings, create new ones and give rise to diversity and divergence of opinions, as well as to consensus.

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The Digitalization of Organizational Communication

Aurica ANDREESCU

Abstract: *The new communication technologies implemented in the organizations has challenge the workplaces and had an impact on the organizational communication. However virtual and mediated communication is need it to increase the economy and at the same time to sustain a business on the market, during this Covid 19 pandemic situation. Therefore, there is a change in the employees' organizational cultural behaviour as it needs an adaptation to the digital transformation to fulfil the need for real time communication that has not changed. The emergence of new digital concepts and applications offers employees new methods of communication, optimises ways for work processes but at the same time increases the demand for new skills and digital abilities. These new technologies change the way employee collaborate and communicate and at the same time facilitates the creation of digital revenue, standardizes organizations to integrate new services that can be managed more efficiently, securely and provides an easier way for individuals to collaborate to access the road to digital business transformation. The new communication technologies allow organizations to offer employees new ways of working on standardize platforms and efficient communication tools however these will depend on employee's continuous skills development and motivation. The aim of this study is to identify some essential elements of the impact that digital transformation has on organizational communication. Every person in the organization could be efficient but for overall employee's communication to be effective, the organization needs to adapt quickly to the new wave of accelerated digitalization change. The company needs to identify the sections that are adapting more slowly to the new system. In this paperwork, we are bringing into discussion several elements, in order to observe the impact of digitalization on the organizational culture, identifying preferences for the type of communication and the new technologies and the employees' level of digital skills and abilities.*

Keywords: *organizational communication, digitalization, digital skills, digital abilities, digitization.*

1. Introduction

The main objective of the study is to highlight the impact of the digitalisation process on organizational communication, some elements that bring changes in the organizational culture and at the same time to emphasize few elements that promote cooperation between employees. As a result the organization can identify some elements that decrease the efficiency of digitalization withing the company.

2. Methodology

To fulfill the objectiv of this analysis, a case study is performed on a number of 65 respondents where we use the study panel as the method in colecting data. To reach to some conclusions, we consider few methodological aspects:

1. Choosing the subject
2. Identifying the area of interest
3. Reviewing the bibliography
4. Choosing the search method
5. Evaluating, colecting and procesing data
6. Interpreting the rezults
7. Drafting the research report

2.1. Objective

The aim of the research is to observe the impact of new tehnologies on organizational communication, employees' digital skills, abilities and social media preferences in order to reach to an answer in regards to the aspects of interest.

Therefore, in order to better understand the phenomenom we consider the use of quantitative and qualitative methods.

For the qualitative method interview guide, with 9 questions based on the chosen bibliography, was elaborated

and 3 individuals were interviewed; all of the employees work at the same organization.

For the quantitative research we compiled a questionnaire with 23 questions to which the respondents answered :

- Employment position,
- Preferences for communication,
- Choices of technologies used,
- Preferences for social media,
- Employees' digital skills and abilities evaluation
- Interest and trust in the new technologies

In order to highlight the impact of digitalization on organizational communication where the above mentioned factors will be considered, a case study will be performed.

The interpretation of the results will give an objective overview on the impact of the process of digital transformation on organizational communication.

2.2. Results and Discussions

2.2.1. Education level - Job level Crosstabulation

Ranking of education level was performed using the job levels within the organization (see Fig.1). Employees with university degree remain at top positions, 56.9%, followed by employees with college degree, with 20%, then by employees with highschool degree, 13.8% and, only 9.2% has post university degree.

These results show that the majority of employees have university degree which means there is a higher level of education within the organization and the employees possess more hard and soft skills for a competitive environment.

Fig. 1 Crosstabulation - Level of education based on job position

1) Educational level		2) Job level		Total
		Executive	Subordinate	
Highschool	Count	1	8	9
	% within 1) Level of education	11.1%	88.9%	100.0%
	% within 2) Position in the organization	12.5%	14.0%	13.8%
College	Count	1	12	13
	% within 1) Level of education	7.7%	92.3%	100.0%
	% within 2) Position in the organization	12.5%	21.1%	20.0%
University	Count	3	34	37
	% within 1) Level of education	8.1%	91.9%	100.0%
	% within 2) Position in the organization	37.5%	59.6%	56.9%
Post University	Count	3	3	6
	% within 1) Level of education	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
	% within 2) Position in the organization	37.5%	5.3%	9.2%
Total	Count	8	57	65
	% within 1) Level of education	12.3%	87.7%	100.0%
	% within 2) Position in the organization	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Fig. 2 Level of education based on job position – Grafic representation
Job position level - Education level

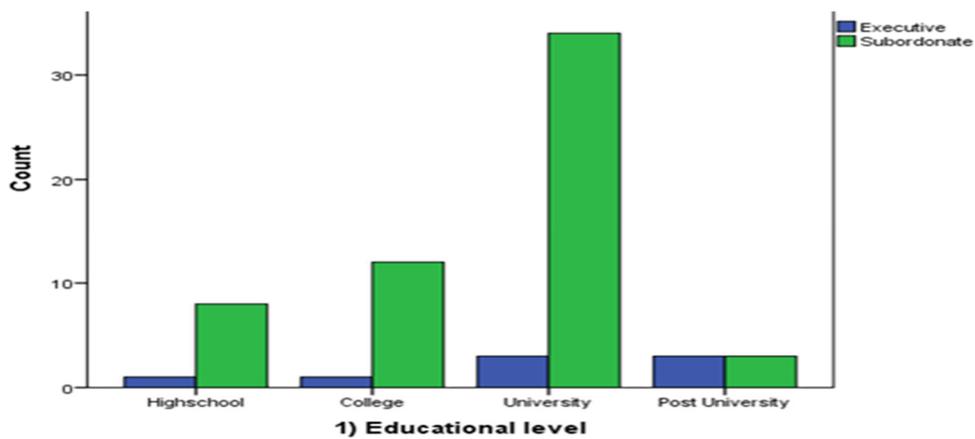


Figure 2 shows the score of employees' positions within the organization. Majority of employees with executive positions have

university degree or post university degree, ranking equally at 37.5% , followed by employees with executive position who have college or highschool degree, ranking equally at 12.5%. These results show that a structured company which has leaders can influence the employees' efficiency and the working processes.

2.2.2. Communication efficiency

Employees' preferences for the most efficient communication was performed using the questionnaire results. Figure 2 indicates that the majority of respondents, 30%, consider Face to face communication as the most efficient type of communication within the organization, followed by Direct communication with colleagues, 21%, Email/intranet mediated communication, 19%, Telephone mediated communication, 17%, and video calls, 13%. Employees feel the need to return to the previous way of working. They tend to turn to direct interpersonal communication when there is a sense of urgency or crisis, same the pandemic situation. There is approximately 3% difference between electronic devices mediated communication and interpersonal communication therefore employees are aware of the new technology's advantages but for some reason they need more support with the new change.

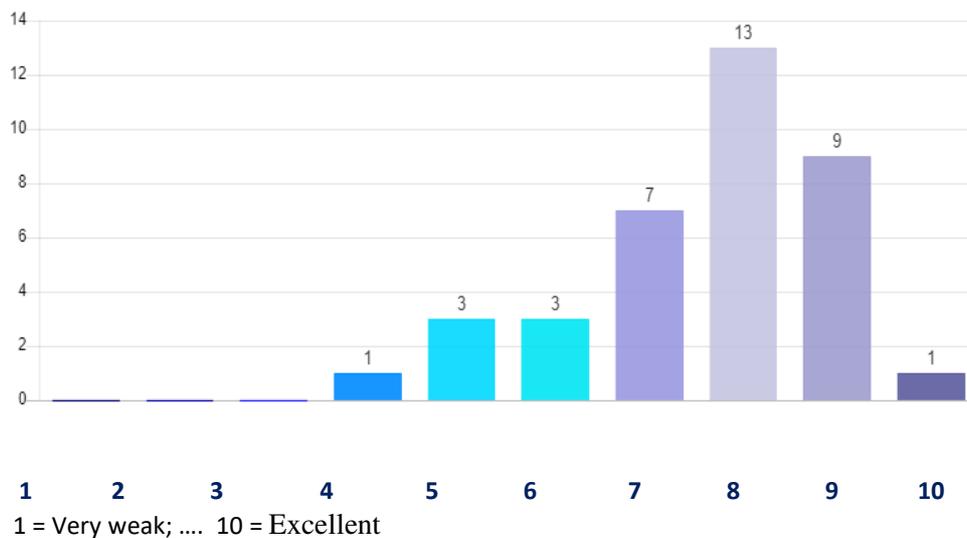
Fig. 2 Preferences for the most efficient communication



2.2.3. Employees' digital knowledge

According to the ranking in Figure 3, the level of Digital knowledge of employees within the company is above average, 8 points and it is represented by the majority, 13%, followed by 9% with 9 points and 7% with 7 points, which shows that majority of employees are above average. However there are few employees with minimal digital knowledge, 1,2 or 3 points but at the same time there are employees with excellent digital knowledge, 10 points. These results show that only some departments are using the digital system; only some members are good digitally literates and ready for digitalized work environment and have the necessary skills to achieve the company's goals.

Fig. 3 Employees' digital knowledge

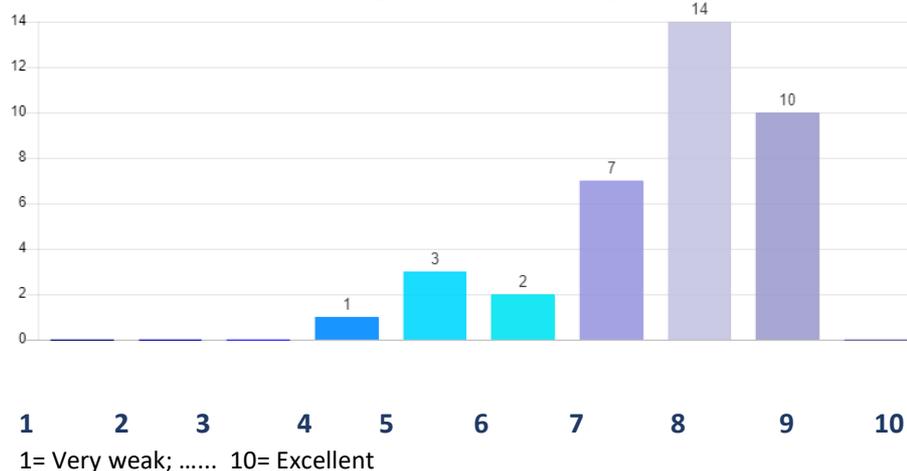


2.2.4. Employees Digital Competencies

From the figure 3, the rankings show the Employees' Digital competencies that are above average on majority of employees, 14%, have 8 out of 10 points; 10% of them have 9 out of 10 points; 7% have 7

out of 10 but there are few that score below average points. These results indicate the fact that some of the employees are initiated in the informational system, can create digital content, communicate and collaborate with the use of technologies and at the same time to follow instructions within the cyberspace. However there are few employees that rank below average which means that some areas within the company required more support in learning the new technologies in order to progress evenly.

Fig. 4 Employee Digital Competencies



Conclusion

This analysis contributes to a better understanding of the impact of digitalization on organizational communication. The findings emphasize the fact that the digitalization process is a long term project and the organizational digital culture is highlighted and influenced by the information, technologies and the digital skills and abilities of employees. These enhance communication and cooperation between employees and departments and include new forms of digital services that transform the way business is conducted.

As workplaces become increasingly dependent on digital technology and communications, companies expect their employees to be

digitally literate, to have digital skills and abilities that can help businesses transition successfully to an e-commerce world.

The focus of the digital transformation is on adding the new technologies and having digital skilled and competent employees. There is certainly a need in acquiring new communication technologies but at the same time information needs to be accessed in the shortest time. This means that digitalized organizations has leaders that lead and control people in a dynamic way, encourage them to use the digital technologies and learn more new things and at the same time create less fear and economical instability .

With the use of new technologies, organizational communication changes in the way of carrying out profesional activities but also in the relationships between employees that generate income. Internal communication has become a top priority for many organizations so they are willing to invest in keeping their employees connected. Even thogh digital communication empowers employees with faster, efficient communication, getting everyone to adopt it can be chalenging. Based on our analysis we can say that, this can be from various reason, from lack of urgency or managerial guidance in getting comfortable with technologies or just employees who do not like changes. Employees who are not prepare for a new vision, for new limits, they are aware that in addition to success, innovation, agility and ambition, they have to be prepared to act, a continuous interaction with the world where the consumer is the point of interest and colaboration. When they think about the future of the organization, they look with optimism but they are aware that this change can be volatile even it has multiple opportunities. However they have to adopt and use different new technologies and applications and concepts even though they have some doubts about the robotization and they need more encouragement.

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The Influence of Emotional Intelligence in Leadership. Case Study: Barack Obama

Ana-Maria VLĂDESCU

Abstract: *Today's interest in personal development is growing. The influence of emotional intelligence on leadership is not a common topic, which is the reason for addressing this topic. This topic is categorised into the field of leadership and personal development. This paper presents both the theoretical and the practical part through which one of the most beloved leaders of our time was analysed. The theoretical part is based on the best possible definition of emotional intelligence and leadership, proving that leadership cannot be done effectively without emotional intelligence. The case study was based on Barack Obama's analysis in terms of emotional intelligence, as a methodology using articles from the American press with screenshots, interviews with Barack Obama and speeches given throughout his career. With their help, it was shown that Barack Obama has a high level of emotional intelligence by identifying the characteristics that demonstrate this.*

Keywords: *emotional intelligence, leadership, leader, media analysis, Barack Obama.*

1. Introduction

It is well-known that, in order to be successful in life, it is not enough to have a high level of mathematical intelligence or high IQ. Many times, we see that people who do not shine through the logical reasoning whom they achieve, or who have not been exceptional students, are good in the fields in which they work or are respected and loved by the people around them. But for a long time, the questions did not find their answers in a cohesive form until, in 1995, the author Daniel Goleman wrote the work whose subject made him famous, i.e. „Emotional Intelligence“.

Based on the information from his books and research from various studies, the characteristics of a leader with high emotional intelligence could be identified. These are the following: the leader is seen as empathetic by those around him, he is not afraid to say what he feels, even if this makes him vulnerable, he is a good listener, he can relate very well with various people in different contexts, he has the ability to solve problems quickly, he is not afraid to admit when he is wrong, is self-motivated, is able to set limits and is not afraid to refuse things, is able to overcome negative events, and he accepts constructive criticism without finding excuses or blaming those around him.

There are several methods of measuring emotional intelligence, e.g. the self-assessment method, the skill tests, the observer assessment, the Bar-On coefficient measurement of emotional intelligence inventory, the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso emotional intelligence test and the 360 degree view of emotional intelligence. These methods are tools designed to help people to better understand their own emotions, strengths and weaknesses.

2. Research methods

For the application part, articles from the American press related to Barack Obama, his interviews and speeches he gave over the years have

been used. For these articles, speeches and interviews, sources from the specialized press such as The New York Times, NBC News, The Guardian and CNBC News have also been cited. This part of the case study has been divided into three parts so that they could be better identified, commenting on each article separately.

Barack Obama is a charismatic leader who proved that he has emotional intelligence through his spontaneity. Spontaneity is the strongest argument of emotional intelligence. In his election winning speech in 2008, Barack Obama showed his gratitude to the people and praised their efforts to vote. In this speech, he did not discriminate, trying to include all types of people when he thanked the American people for choosing him, which proves that he has diplomacy, kindness and emotional intelligence. Also, in the speech he gave on the election night, he showed that the American people mattered to him and that they would be informed of any situations that might arise in his election years.

Image 1 Screenshot of an excerpt from the victory night's speech

It's the answer spoken by young and old, rich and poor, Democrat and Republican, black, white, Latino, Asian, Native American, gay, straight, disabled and not disabled – Americans who sent a message to the world that we have never been a collection of Red States and Blue States: we are, and always will be, the United States of America.

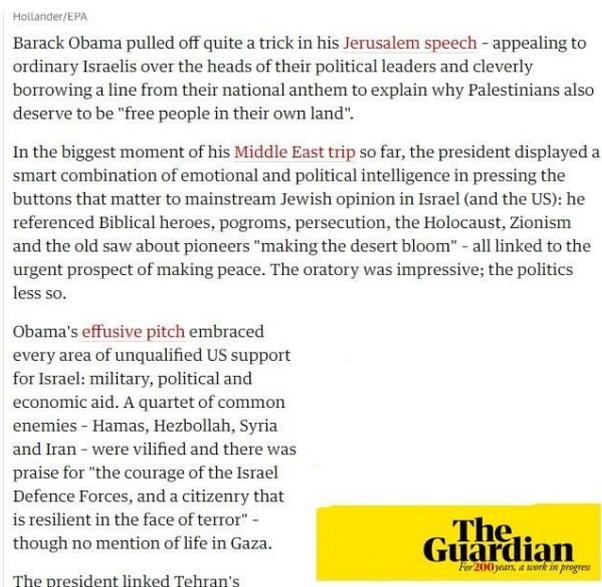
It's the answer that led those who have been told for so long by so many to be cynical, and fearful, and doubtful of what we can achieve to put their hands on the arc of history and bend it once more toward the hope of a better day.

At the same time, through this speech, Barack Obama tried to raise the mill of the people, promising them that he would make America great again. This proves that he is an assumed leader, who is not afraid to express his feelings in front of people. Concluding the speech, in which he uses the famous phrase "Yes, we can!", strengthens the idea of change, with his election as president. This message is also meant to reinforce the

idea that anything is possible, and you should not give up when times are difficult.

With the help of the article about Barack Obama, related to the event in Israel in 2013, it could be shown that he is a leader with a high level of emotional intelligence. He discussed an important issue, namely, the freedom of the Israelis, which disturbed the leaders of Israel, showing courage and care for the people. Offering political, military and economic help, he proves that he is a leader who believes in peace and wants to avoid wars at all costs, and even more, he comes to the rescue with solutions. Needless to say, he also attracted criticism, many people saying that the solutions he came up with were far too unrealistic, but a feature of emotional intelligence is that the leader expresses his opinion, without fear of criticism and this was shown by the former American president.

Image 2 Screenshot from the article about the event in Israel



Another important article that showed the level of emotional intelligence that Obama has is the article where he talked about the mistakes made by leaders. When you are able to admit your mistakes and reveal them to those around you, emotional intelligence comes to the surface. The former president has met some of the most powerful people in the world and has seen both good and bad people when it comes to leadership and he believes that one of the most common mistakes is the fact that leaders always think about how to dominate and stay in power in front of other people. According to him, if leaders have this type of approach, their organization will not be as good as it should be, because it will prevent the leader from building connections with employees and colleagues, which is necessary when things are not going well. This shows that Barack Obama has always had close ties with his employees and colleagues, in order to solve problems as efficiently as possible. In his book "A promised land", he talks about the White House gardener with whom he had daily conversations, which shows that he was close to his employees, even to those who did not have decision-making power in a critical situation.

Image 3 Barack Obama on the mistakes leaders made

Having a mindset to dominate will prevent any leader from creating tight bonds with employees and colleagues, which is needed when things go wrong, according to Obama.

Instead, the key to leadership, he said, is figuring out to how to empower the people around you and to help them succeed. Their success is good for you, too.

Image 4 Barack Obama on teamwork

"Whether the team is a basketball team or a business or an administration. What are the values in which you are organizing yourselves?....Being clear about what your values are as an organization, that's part of leadership," he said.

The former president has revealed that he was not perfect as a leader either, but while in power he realized that the best thing you can do is to establish some values in terms of teamwork. From these statements written in the article, it can be seen that Barack Obama has always tried to involve his team in the decisions that were made, a thing that was obvious when he was president, thanking his team members for the winning. He was not afraid to give all this advice and make personal statements, even if this makes him vulnerable, proving his emotional intelligence. Most leaders do not acknowledge their mistakes, but Obama has talked about them on every occasion in order to teach others about what was wrong.

Conclusion

Analyzing, observing, and commenting on Barack Obama's articles, interviews and speeches, the conclusion that was drawn was that he has all the qualities necessary for a good leader, who leads the people and the team in the best possible way, without trying to put himself first. He is also a tall man, who demands respect, his education and the fact that he came from a poor family, helping him to empathize more with those around him. His experience as a senator and the volunteering he did for the less fortunate, helped him to always give the best emotional speeches, through which he made the people who listened to him feel heard and loved.

Obama is a charismatic man, who made people feel part of his team and journey, always being honest with them, even if some did not agree with him or criticized him. At the same time, his interviews show that he was aware of the opinion that some people had about him and the criticism that certain actions drew on him, but he assumed them as any leader should do. Obama is a spontaneous leader, who always gave answers based on feelings and did not try to learn a text, but he wanted to be honest. He was not afraid to show his feelings and did not hide anything from the world, that is why he was and still is so beloved.

All in all, Barack Obama showed amicability and diplomacy when he revealed that, although he often disagreed with his colleagues in the opposition, he wanted to respond to them on an impulse when he heard that they offended him, but he still treated them as he would have liked to be treated and always spoke respectfully to them, trying to solve problems without quarrelling. This thing shows that he has a high level of emotional intelligence, and these acts are the sheer proof of that.

Image 5 Obama dancing in Kenya



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Promotion Actions in the Activity of a Sports Start-up

Bianca-Gabriela HORGA

Abstract: *This article is about two important branches in the social-economic field: entrepreneurship and sports. Therefore, a few ideas about how to open a company, how to maintain the quality and some ideas about start-ups will be presented in what follows. The important information that you need to know if you consider becoming an entrepreneur will thus be explained shortly. First, the paper deals with organizational communication and how one can improve the relationships between members. Second, it discusses entrepreneurship, the steps to follow and start-ups and, last but not least, it presents the author's vision about one specific start-up- the author's business.*

Keywords: *business, entrepreneurship, organizational communication, start-up.*

1. Introduction

This article presents useful information to open and promote a new business. Wanting to open a new business in the field of sports, a club for both children and adults, the author started by researching information in this regard and, later, after an analysis of the market by creating a questionnaire, making a business plan and a communication plan. This information should be helpful when starting a business.

I. Organizational Communication

The communication process in organizations is always a challenge, even for members, but we should always remember the purpose: sustaining the long-term and prosperous business. Streamline communication process should always be an objective for managers and members.

According to Pânișoară (2015), the level of communication within the organization must be measurable by efficiency and the qualitative and quantitative results obtained. The organizational communication process is a very complex one, being the sum of the studies of several specialized fields such as psychology, educational sciences and communication sciences.

The connection between the members of the organizations, regardless of their status in the organizational hierarchy is a definite factor in the prosperity of the organization. Because the precarious emotional connection between members of the organization can pose a serious threat of the goal of a long-term business, this threat can be combated by various methods such as team buildings, organizing joint dinners or lunches, expressing feeling, empathy and social interest, making friends in a relaxing environment, supporting one another, listening carefully and providing feedback.

In business communication, there are three types of communication: internal and external, one-way and two-way, ascending and descending.

- Internal and external communication refers to the public we are addressing, the internal one such as members of the organizations or the external environment, i.e. those who are not part of the organization;
- One-way or Two-way refers to the level of interactivity in the organization, such as when a sender sends a message to the receiver or receivers, or a sender sends a message to the receiver or receiver, respectively, meaning that the roles can be reversed;
- Ascending and descending communication refers to the members' hierarchical positions. Ascending is when a person with an inferior role in organization addresses to a person who has a superior role and the descending one is the one-way around, when a member with superior function is addressing to a member with a lower hierarchical position.

II. Entrepreneurship

First of all, in order to become a successful entrepreneur, the organization's objectives must be clearly defined. These objectives must also obey some standards points such as:

- meeting the needs of the target audience;
- creating jobs;
- being actively involved in improving the global socio-economic environment;
- being flexible;
- having high quality standards;
- being competitive.

Start-up Nation is a Romanian national programme that provides help, without payback, to the greatest and the most creative ideas and helps people to fulfill their dream to open a business with a few conditions:

- to create at least 1 job in the first year;

- to create social responsibility campaigns;
- to help the technology development.

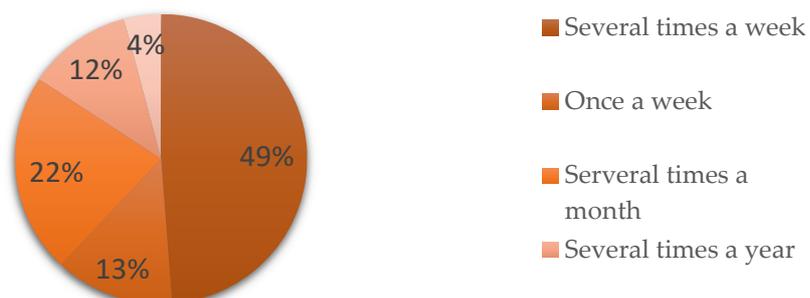
Start-up Nation programmes finance projects with a maximum of 200,000 RON, with a reimbursable value of 0, regardless of the ownership of the business. As stated on their official website, Start-up Nation mission has the objective to turn the concept, the idea of a business into reality.

For a company to be successful, it also needs to communicate with the external environment, an action that is carried out according to a communication plan. This plan must be made according to the purpose and objectives of the organization at that time. For example, the organization wants to make itself known for the product/ service or to stand out from the competitors, it wants to change the life of the product or to improve the image of the organization.

III. Sports Start-up

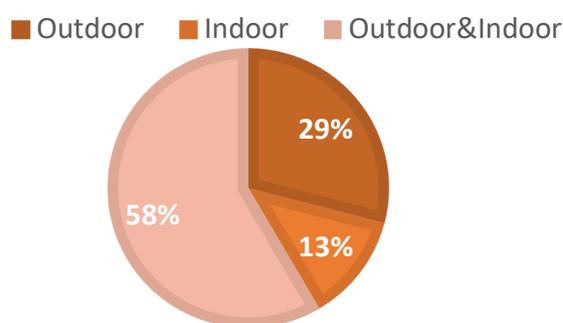
After a detailed study of the market, a business plan for setting up a sports Start-up in Timisoara was created. In what follows, some of the statistics on which the business plan was created are presented.

Fig. 1 Graphic representation of how often respondents practice sports activities



According to the answers to the questionnaire, most respondents practice sports quite often, at least once a week, which puts them in the category of active people.

Fig. 2 Graphic representation of the respondents' opinion regarding the environment in which they prefer to carry out sports activities



This chart provides very essential information about our target, where they feel good to practice sport activities. According to their answers, the majority (58%) prefers outdoor activities, 30% prefer both indoor and outdoor activities and 12% prefer just the indoor ones.

Fig. 3 Graphic representation of the respondents' opinion regarding the type of advertising they appreciate

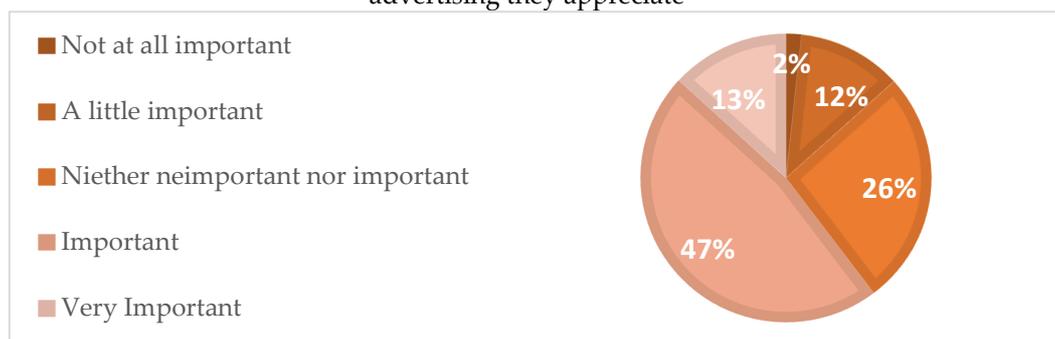


Figure 3 presents the way in which the target audience can be reached. 47% of the respondents are interested in promotional materials

online and offline and only 12% believe that this type of advertising is not important. On the other hand, according to the chart below (Figure 4), the respondents tell us that the best advertisement is the recommendation.

Fig. 4 Graphic representation of the importance of the recommendations according to the respondents



In this case, the majority of the respondents tell us that the recommendations are more important. 35% vote for very important, 50% vote for important, 12% are neutral, and just 1% and 2% consider the recommendations a little or not at all important.

Table 1 Representation of the respondents' preferences for sports

Criteria	Not important (answers)	A little important (answers)	Neither important nor unimportant (answers)	Important (answers)	Very important (answers)	TOTAL ANSWERS
Athletics	38	30	29	20	4	121
Zumba	44	20	15	24	18	121
Pilates	45	21	15	24	16	121
Aerobic	31	23	19	28	20	121
HIIT	33	15	30	28	15	121
Functional Training	15	19	20	40	27	121
Martial arts	21	11	19	21	49	121
Cycling	19	15	34	34	19	121
Swimming	12	14	16	46	33	121
Tennis	28	17	21	29	26	121
Volleyball	36	22	23	22	18	121
Basketball	38	29	29	16	9	121
Yoga	39	19	22	18	23	121

A very important question for the creation of the entire activity is the sports that the respondents prefer. For this situation, a table (Table 1) was created in which the sports proposed by the authors were recorded, more specifically the votes received from each respondent.

The last question mentioned in this article is about the respondents' expectations from a sports club. They provided the following open answers:

- "To motivate me to have better and better results."
- "To make me love the sport, to discipline me more, to help me expand my group to people I know / are friends with."
- "To support you in the activity."
- "Always adapt to the needs of the participants."
- "I would appreciate the professionalism and mastery of the staff in organizing sports activities, as well as their involvement in the development of each individual."
- "Atmosphere, organization"
- "Team collaboration" etc.

As it has been mentioned above, following the research and the favorable results, a business plan to start the sports start-up was created. Energy Club Timișoara is an association that carries out its activity in the field of sports, more precisely it includes karate, aerobic kickboxing and functional training, intended for both children and adults, benefitting from wellness assistance.

The company's mission is to mobilize families to practice sports and physical education, to push to overcome their own physical and mental limits and to create a community where the atmosphere is relaxed, fun and, at the same time, educational and energetic.

Objectives of Energy Club Timisoara:

1. After 2 years, to add classes and diversify them according to the needs of the target audience;
2. To expand the club by organizing camps for children and adults;

3. To participate in local, regional, international, national, European and world competitions.

In the plan designed for the development of sports activities within the Energy Club, the need of the members is at the core. Any activity is built on the Energy members' requirements and needs.

Energy club members can choose to do performance sports or maintenance sports (called sports for all in sports theories).

Conclusion

This article demonstrates how a business can be analyzed before it is opened and how it can be a prosperous one. The documentation objectives that were set at the beginning have been reached. The concept of the business that was implemented, according to the detailed analysis, can become a profitable business. Therefore, the courage to get involved is the last piece to be completed in the puzzle of opening a business.

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Art and Science in Leadership

Daiana LUPU

Abstract: *The year 2021 finds us in an area of leadership not only developed, but also extremely promoted at the level of society, public institutions or corporations; the title of leader is easily bestowed within them, and this aspect only cuts them off from the aura of the true leader. This paper presents the main traits a leader may have in order to obtain success, through some expert sources that were consulted, but also through a research study.*

Keywords: *leadership, communication, motivation, perspectives*

1. Introduction

Leadership is the science that cannot exist without an art component, this is the idea that most people are fascinated and captivated about, because in all groups, whether we are talking about personal or professional organizations – either with the objective of profit or public-service organizations, this concept of leadership is essential to have expected the results.

Starting from this premise, the first question that may arise when you start a research is "why this topic?". In addition to the importance of the presence of a leader in the groups we belong to, as social animals if we think about the philosophy of the Greek philosopher Aristotle, around the leader there are some controversies - can leadership be framed as science? If so, what is the winning formula? What is the theory

that guarantees our success as leaders? Whether we are passionate about this area and study it, or we have only heard of this concept, there is no doubt that we cannot point out that generally valid theory, we cannot even say in unison what is the most important element in obtaining success as a leader. For this reason, the presence of "art" in addition to science is obvious. However, when does this art intervene? Is it an integral part of the leader's personality, can s/he be called that only if s/he has innate traits, or can the art of leadership be learnt and practiced over time?

These fascinating questions, which can lead in so many directions, are the topic of this paper, where the main answers or directions in finding success as a leader can be given. Going into the depths of the subject and looking at the socio-economic context of our country today, we can certainly place the two areas - the public and the private - in two completely different worlds. There is no need for elaborate sociological research to put next to the two environments some concepts that define them. When we think of the private sector, the world automatically goes with the thought of the area of meritocracy, of performance, of a clear and efficient way of working, of a transparent communication that supports the "light" of all processes and procedures. On the other hand, the public / administrative sector in Romania is linked in the minds of many of us to the stain of nepotism, a total lack of transparency, excessive bureaucracy that falls like a heavy cross on the shoulders of citizens, whose relationship with it is deficient, cumbersome, far behind current technological trends of time, energy and good efficiency. For this reason, due to this much too large gap between the two sectors of Romania in 2020-2021, the orientation of research towards the public environment seemed even more interesting and challenging.

Of course, a true leader to propose as an empirical study is hard to find, the true leader being in himself a special, particular character, singular in large groups of people.

Because in the last year we had local elections in Timisoara, a new figure, a new energy, a new name began to appear in the public space: Dominic Fritz. He will be the analyzed leader in this study in order to find out what elements he promoted in order to gain the sympathy and trust of the people of Timisoara.

2. Expert sources consulted

Having a view over more resources, it can be said that leadership can be analysed mainly from 3 points of view:

- **Successful communication as a leader**

Communication plays an essential role in acquiring the attribute of a leader, being indispensable in any area or professional or personal activity. We encounter it every day, we use it at every step, and precisely because of this, we tend to underestimate it and take it as a natural skill. In fact, communication is much more than the ability to create sounds, which we can turn into words and then into sentences. Scientific definitions, more precisely in Osgood's book (1957), quoted by Denis McQuail / Sven Windahl (1982), explain that „ communication takes place whenever a system - source - influences another system - the recipient - by using the various symbols transmitted through the channel linking the two systems " (Bârgăoanu and Dobrescu, 2001, p. 12).

According to Gerbner, another simple definition of communication can be "social interaction through messages" (Bârgăoanu & Dobrescu, 2001, p. 12).

What is remarkable in both theories is that this process of communication is not only defined by the messages and the participants, but that through communication an influence takes place. With this element the art of leadership can be reached, an art which cannot exist without the part of social influence. However, one important area of communication in which a leader should excel is public speaking.

- **The leader as a motivational factor**

Motivation of employees or staff that the leader is surrounded by is an important element, it is part of his/her activity, regardless of the type of organization in which s/he operates, and if these elements do not naturally behave, s/he can use various motivational theories. developed over time. However, before moving on to explain some of them, some psychological elements that appear between the individual and the organization, or between the individual and the leader, a science that has been developed under the concept of organizational-managerial psychology will be presented. Starting from short definitions, organizational psychology is “the science that studies the relations between man and organization” (Mielu, 2008, p. 33). In the literature, more complex definitions can be found out, e.g. “the organization and the individual are linked in a complex set of interactions. The untying of threads in the case of these intertwined relationships is the object of organizational psychology” (Dunette & Kirchner, 1965, p. 182). Going into more detail, Mielu explains in his paper that “organizational-managerial psychology deals with the study of individual recruitment, selection and socialization in organizations, with the study of how people are rewarded and motivated, ways of structuring of the organization in groups, sections or teams, of the way in which leaders appear and manifest. It also examines how organizations influence the thoughts, feelings, and actions of all people through the actual or imagined behavior of other members of the organization” (2008, p. 34).

In conclusion, the importance of motivation at work and the role that the leader has in this process, which is psychologically explained and intervenes at the level of each individual, need to be emphasised. A true leader must have as his/her main goal the human being, to care about the condition of his/her employees and to use all the methods at his/her disposal to improve it on every level of needs and desires.

- **The art in the leadership – psychological facts**

When we make decisions, the rational part and the emotional part intertwine, and what prevails in the end is given by the context - this is

where the true leader intervenes in my opinion; intervenes when it manages to persuade people to listen to it, to follow it, to support it, to vote for it (if we think of political leaders); when it actually manages to overcome the rational barriers of people and society and reaches the emotional side of people and thus manages to become, unconscious for those around them, their "intuition".

There are two main perspectives here. The first one is the perspective of self-image/ self-esteem. The importance of the image, in detail, is explained to us by Nicolae Valentin Vartan in his work *Self-image*: "[...] A good self-image cannot replace a professional qualification, but you have certainly noticed that sometimes there are unfulfilled careers, poor services, invisible performance, misunderstood speeches and all this because of personal image. The quality of an individual or a product is denied by the devaluing contradiction of appearances" (1999, p. 11). Therefore, the leader must pay attention to his/her general image, which includes behavior, non-verbal communication, manners and dress.

The second perspective is the perspective of intuition and unconsciousness that occurs whenever we choose to follow or not a certain leader. According to the most accessed and common site of definitions, www.dexonline.ro, intuition is an "ability of consciousness to perceive the essence of a phenomenon or an object spontaneously, without using reasoning" (accessed on 23.05.2021). What it can be noticed here is the mention of the recognition of a "phenomenon", not only the recognition of something real or palpable and also the lack of the service of previous objective reasoning or analysis. However, what should be mentioned here is that human intuition actually springs from our human desire or need to resemble or approach individuals who we think resemble us - we look for them in crowds, and to relate to the experiences of others based on their own experiences: "When we talk about man, everyone understands his ego - that is, his personal disposition, insofar as he is aware of it - and when we talk about others,

we assume that they have a fairly similar constitution with ours " (Jung, 1997, p. 85).

More information about this phenomenon can be found in the psychological field, but the focus of this paper is not on those elements. It is important to emphasise, as a conclusion, that leadership is a complex field and, based on the bibliography studied for this paper, it cannot be learned as an exact science, but also requires the integration of an "artistic" area in order to have applicability and success.

3. Research methods

The research has been conducted in two main directions – both of them focusing on the applicability of the theory in real life; for the first part, an analysis of the main actions of the chosen leader-model, in a specific period of time was made, while the second one tried to find out the way the public perceived all his actions in order to validate the leader's success.

The types of methods used for this research are content analysis and statistical analysis. They were combined in order to make a parallel analysis between the actual actions and the perception of the public about them.

4. Results

4.1. Content analysis

For a better understanding of why Dominic Fritz was validated by the public as being a leader (once he won the election for the role of mayor of Timisoara), the research was started by analyzing the main activities he did during his campaign, while finding some main components that defined his campaign such as:

- **Transparency**

The first element identified in the mode of communication and leadership style adopted by Dominic Fritz is transparency. Some actions that sustain this element are the ones described below.

As in any other political election, you may or may not agree with a particular candidate; you may or may not agree with a certain political plan; you may or may not support a certain ideology; all these decisions are subjective and are made based on several factors that are, to a larger extent, independent of external factors and, rather, dependent on us as individuals. However, regardless of where we are, we cannot say that any information about Dominic Fritz and the proposed projects could not have been found. The answers were collected from the website that was mentioned above to the direct discussions with the citizens, being accessible on all channels.

Of course, these things should be in the realm of normalcy, but back to our basic needs, our political shortcomings - throughout recent history, we have heard only demagogic plans, only goals that were outlined in the light years by the theory of SMART objectives, which at a simple reading could easily be identified as only electoral promises. Dominic Fritz came not only with a new approach, but with a professional and, ultimately, normal approach.

The website www.dominicprimar.ro (accessed on 06.03.2021) was accessed in order to exemplify all these arguments. No. 5 of the government plan, "Building a city for all generations", was taken as an example.

Fig. 1 – www.dominicprimar.ro



At the bottom of the page, there are smaller objectives behind it, i.e. the transparency of how this objective will be implemented.

- **Authenticity**

This element was the most visible in the way he managed the relations with the different stakeholders involved in the election process, e.g. volunteers, mass-media, citizens of Timisoara.

As an example, the main element, the most fertile ground in this campaign, which was managed in the same authentic way - Facebook. Impeccably adapted communication to the target audience, on a channel that came to support all his actions during the campaign, Facebook became the *lait-reason* for the candidate's communication, although, as presented above, it was certainly not the only channel that was used. Authentic here too, are answering to comments, interacting with people here, answering questions.

Fig. 2 www.facebook.com/dominic.fritz



- **Social intelligence**

Social intelligence is defined in the literature as the ability of a person not only to interact with others, but rather to become aware and adapt

to the conversational level and to the present context. Shortly, social intelligence is reflected when the person is able to fully understand social dynamics and act in such a way that interactions with others are positive (Kihlstrom et al., 2000, pp. 359–379).

Starting from this premise, two main points in the social relations that Dominic Fritz built in a way that reminds us of the social intelligence that was presented above came, of course, from his center of interest in the position of candidate for Timisoara City Hall, i.e. Timisoara's electorate. He successfully reached it and created with them social relations in two ways:

- Directly - by interacting with them
 - ♣ This part was achieved through his promoted visits to neighborhoods
- Indirectly - through the media
 - ♣ Needing the support of this essential part of the society, he created a very good relationship, through various actions

4.2. Statistical analysis

For this analysis, an online survey, on a public of 97 participants between 19 and 79 years old was used, the diversity being visible also as far as the jobs were concerned. Thus, it can be said that this occupational and age diversity covers the characteristics of the citizens of Timisoara, and the results of the questionnaire can be extrapolated to the level of local elections in September 2020.

The questionnaire was structured according to the model of the normal pyramid, starting from questions of general interest, going to the particular. The first questions were intended to help us outline the general profile of the respondent, to see if the answers can be considered as revealed in this analysis. During this analysis, the questions were created to find out if the elements identified during the content analysis were also perceived in the same way by the public.

In the content analysis not only the social media part, which was the core of the candidate's campaign, was discussed, but also the fact

that the impeccable communication was the source from which all the other characteristics attributed to him emerged. This idea is confirmed, once again, by the question number 12 - If we were to refer to the electoral campaign led by the candidate Dominic Fritz, which were the elements that you liked / attracted your attention in his personal approach?

His way of communicating was among the most appreciated elements, a respondent considering that through his “different” way of communicating, he manages to give the feeling that he is close to the citizens. On the other hand, these elements also aroused negative reactions among the respondents (“the way he manipulated the young electorate”).

Fig. 3 Perceived highlights during the campaign

12. Dacă ar fi să ne referim la campania electorală dusă de candidatul Dominic Fritz, care au fost elementele care v-au plăcut/ v-au atras atenția în abordarea personală a acestuia? (mai multe răspunsuri posibile)



Alte răspunsuri

- modul în care a manipulat electoratul tânăr
- Nu am urmarit
- Știe să fie aproape, cumva, un mod diferit de a comunica
- Nimic
- Nu cunosc campania
- Nici una
- nimic
- Personalitatea

Openness and transparency are two elements that not only Dominic promoted, but were also the elements that formed the basis of the party he belongs to; more than elements of communication, they come as a promise made to the electorate – in the same way the campaign was approached, the party promised to carry out the activity in the same open and transparent way, a way that was also observed by voters in its way of communication. Almost 64% of the responses consider openness as a feature of communication to a large and very large extent, and as regards transparency, the percentage towards these responses is about 54%.

Fig. 4 Communication type – Transparency

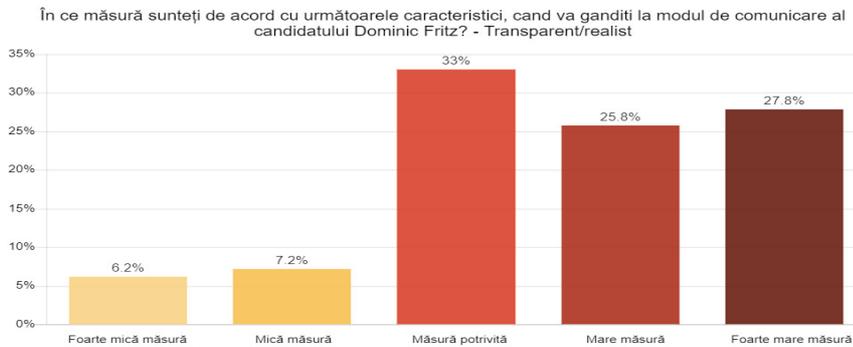
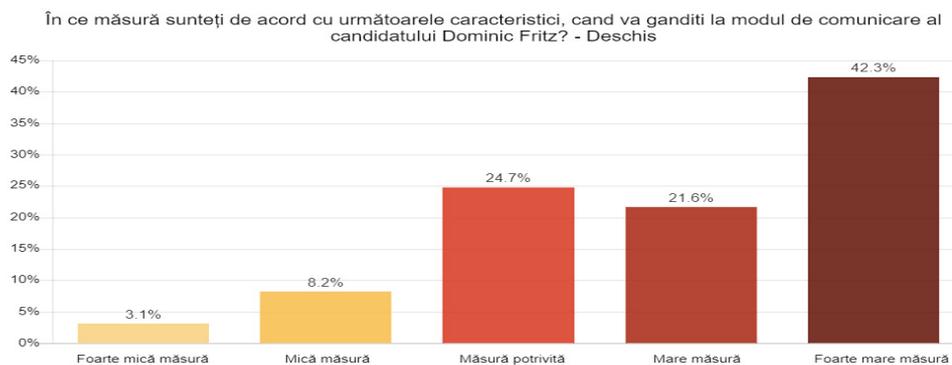


Fig. 5 Communication type – Openness



From the voters' perspective, collected through the above questionnaire, the portrait of candidate and leader Dominic Fritz is built around the notions of authenticity, sincerity, professionalism, originality, transparency, elements that were also mentioned in the content analysis.

Conclusion

The year 2021 finds us in an area of leadership not only developed, but also extremely promoted at the level of society, public institutions or corporations; the title of leader is easily bestowed within them, and this aspect only cuts them off from the aura of the true leader. We end up with false leaders, false values, false examples that we take as landmarks; we come to consider that being a leader is something we can all do, something we can easily replace without too much effort. Without

having a negative tone, even the well-known theory, in all its complexity, is just a starting point in this journey of a leader. The biggest challenges for him/her appear when s/he not only has to implement them, systematically or mathematically, but s/he must be able to rally the theory to the context in which it is, to the needs of the people around him/her, to the specifics of the society and of the community.

Of course, the first step in standing out as a leader is his/her ability to gather people around him/her, people who support his/her values and ideas, who trust him/her and who follow him/her. Regarding the case study, which analyses a current leader, through his experience, the qualities, the components that a leader must have to receive, in the first phase, this title - authenticity, sincerity, originality, professionalism - can be observed.

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Offline and Online Coffee Promotion. Case Study: Starbucks

Laura COLȚIȘ

Abstract: *The present paper aims to present the promotional strategies employed by Starbucks to promote an American model of coffeehouse in the Romanian context. Both offline and online promotional activities are undertaken by the company, which succeeded in maintaining the consumers' attention and love even during difficult times, such as the impossibility to serve customers indoors at the peak of COVID-19 pandemic. Communicational strategies are interesting both for identifying the specificity of Starbucks as a brand, and for the business communication in general.*

Keywords: *brand, coffee, online and offline promotion, Starbucks, unique.*

1. Introduction

This topic was approached as promotion, both offline and online, is constantly present nowadays. Promotion has a history that will be analysed in this paper and which will show that it has had a significant evolution. Throughout the time, it has been considered that promotion consists of price reductions, highlighting the qualities of the new product or service, convincing the consumer that s/he needs that

product or service, but Philip Kotler, in his book *Marketing Management* (1997: 756), brings forward an innovative idea, according to which, through promotion you have to "communicate in a real way with both current and potential customers". From this perspective, promotion even means creating a close link between the consumer and the new product or service's company. At the same time, until the advent of the Internet, the public was targeted by promotional activities through television, print press and radio. Moreover, Malcolm McDonald (2010) argues that promotion is extremely important for a brand and is a strategy through which "the organisation tries to achieve its goals". Another author who supports this idea is Mihai Coman. In his book, *Introduction to the Media System* (2007: 59), he states that "it [promotion] urges a certain action, which responds to the interests of those who proposed it".

Another thing that underlied this study was the fact that the promotion is presented as "a useful and necessary action". In other words, it can be said that promotion is one of the methods that should not be missing from a brand's strategic plan. Nowadays, online promotion wreaks havoc among potential consumers. The public is bombarded with advertisements about products or services with every click and every browsing in the online environment. Social networks work hand in hand with online promotion. Scott (2010: 51) lists some advantages of online promotion, namely, good market coverage, combines image, sound and movement, appeals to all the senses, enjoys a high level of attention, unlimited time and space. On the other hand, he also emphasises the fact that we must be careful not to get oversaturated, because he believes that "many people consider that the growing number of brutal attempts to sell them something is a real nuisance". We may find that the promotion irritates the consumer when s/he no longer reacts to it, avoids it, rejects it, criticizes it or even gives up on that brand. This can be seen as the attention paid to an online promotion means the thin line between success and the loss of the

potential consumer. Confusing desires with real needs is a mistake that big brands use to ensure their sales growth.

2. Research method

To collect the desired results, a questionnaire was used as the research method. First, the questionnaire was applied in order to understand the consumers' preferences. Based on the questions prepared in advance, more details, the consumers' preferences and wants as well as the less positive aspects viewed from the customer's point of view were taken into account.

The tool used for the research was the online questionnaire. The topic of the questionnaire was the "Analysis of several aspects regarding the coffee consumption of a famous brand: Starbucks". It was distributed via Isondaje, a Romanian platform, for a period of 4 weeks (22.12.2020-12.01.2020). It consisted of 23 questions, 5 of which requested general facts. The data were collected in January 2021 and the responses were gathered strictly from the Starbucks products' consumers. This questionnaire reached the respondents through social networks, being sent directly by the author through a private message to those who proved to be active on the social network pages of the brand. As far as the number of the respondents was concerned, there were 60 people involved in this process. The research had two main objectives:

I. To find out the consumers' opinions on several aspects of the Starbucks brand

II. To find out the reasons why consumers choose the Starbucks coffee

The results obtained were grouped, analyzed and interpreted, as it is shown in what follows.

A. First objective

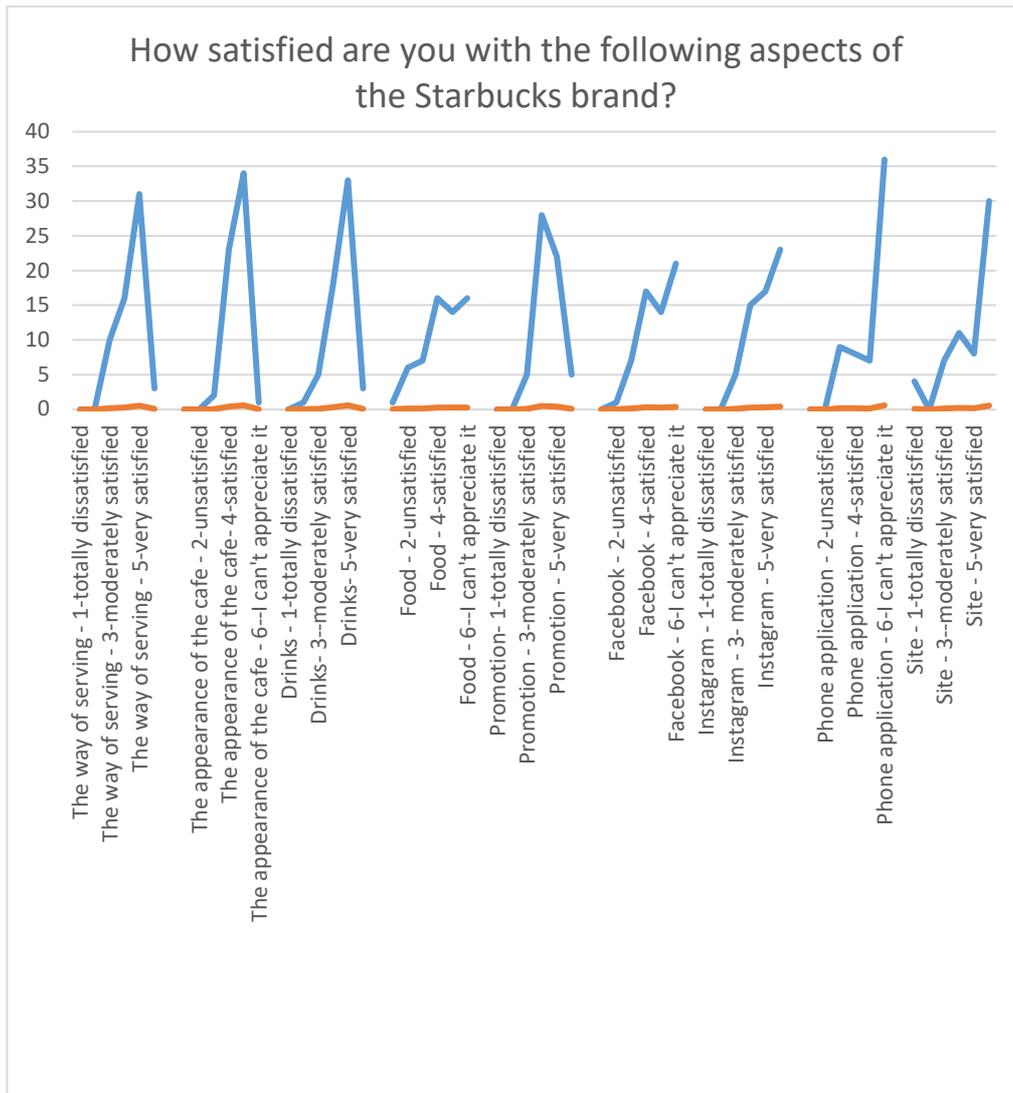


Fig. 1

As regards the provision of a score from 1 to 5 on *how to serve*, 51.7% answered that they are very satisfied, in terms of the *cafe* we have a majority of 56% respondents, who answered that they are very satisfied, the *drink* recorded a majority of 55% for very satisfied, the *food*

was rated with an equal percentage of 26.7% between satisfied and cannot appreciate. For the *promotion*, the majority of 46.7% respondents said they are satisfied, while in terms of *Facebook*, the majority of 35% answered that they cannot appreciate, the *Instagram* page received the same rating as Facebook with a majority of 38%, the *phone application* is not known by a majority of 60%, the *site* is not known by a majority of 50%. Following the answers, it is clear that changes and improvements still need to be made in terms of social networks.

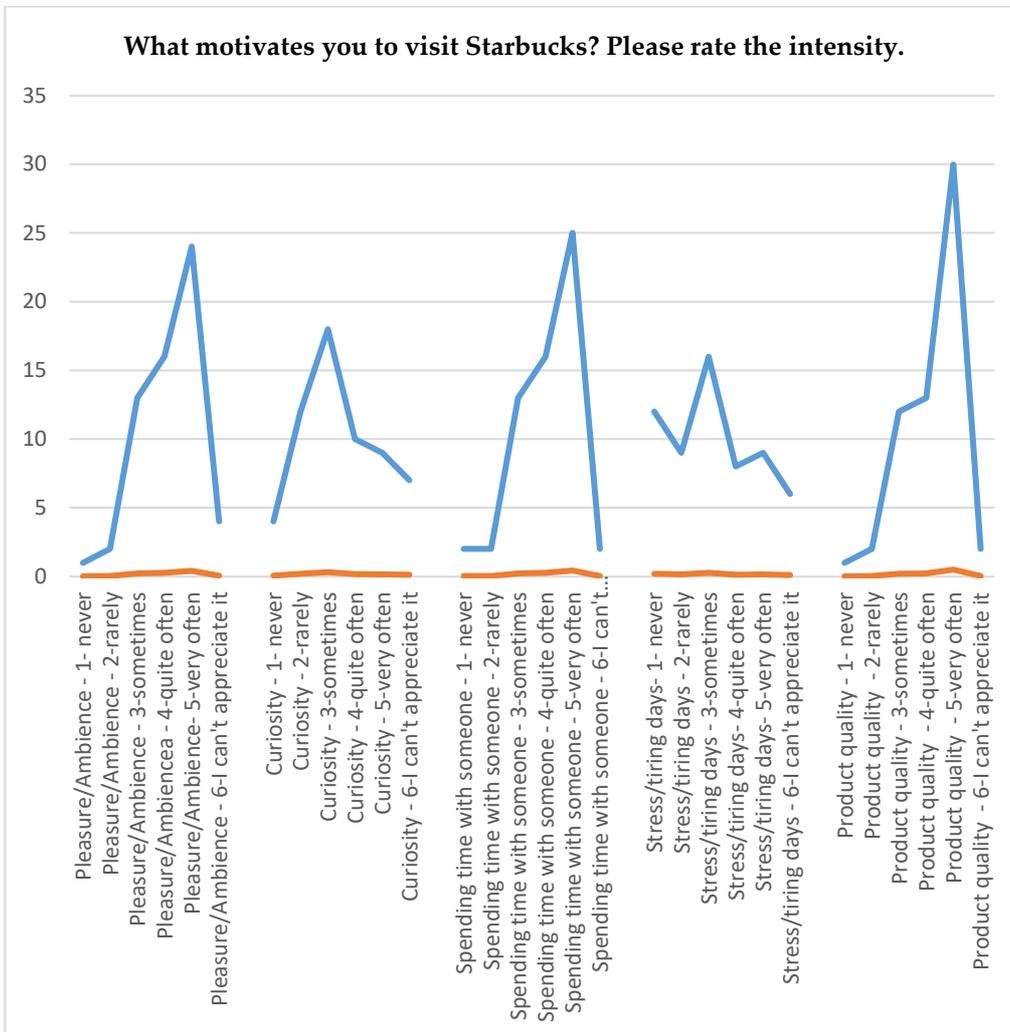


Fig. 2

The reasons why most respondents choose Starbucks, were noted as follows: *pleasure* and *ambiance* 40% very often, *curiosity* 30% sometimes, *spending time with someone* 41.7% very often, *stressful / tiring days* 26.7% sometimes, *product quality* 50% very often. Obviously, most people choose Starbucks because of the quality of the products, the time they spend with someone, the ambiance of the cafe, the curiosity and, last but not least, because of the tiring days.

From the starbucks product range, which coffee do you drink most often?

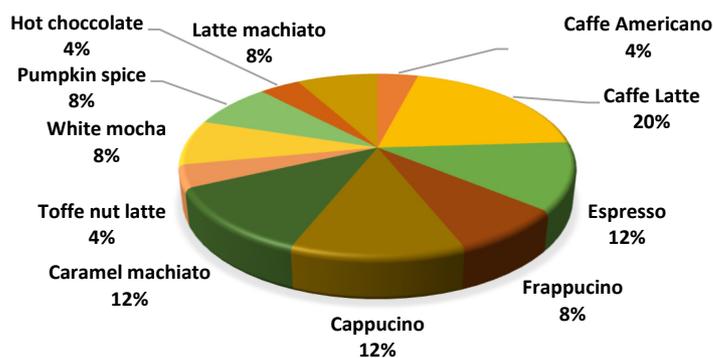


Fig. 3

Out of the desire to have a clear answer regarding the assortment of the coffee consumed most often by respondents, a free question was created, which was answered as follows: 20% consume *Caffe Latte* most often, at an equal percentage of 12% are those who consume *Cappuccino* and *Caramel machiato*, also at the same percentage of 8% are those who consume *Pumpkin spice*, *White mocha*, *Frappuccino*, *Latte machiato*, and the remaining 4% for each assortment consume *Hot chocolate*, *Caffe Americano* and *Toffe nut latte*.

Would you like to see an online or an offline promotion campaign?

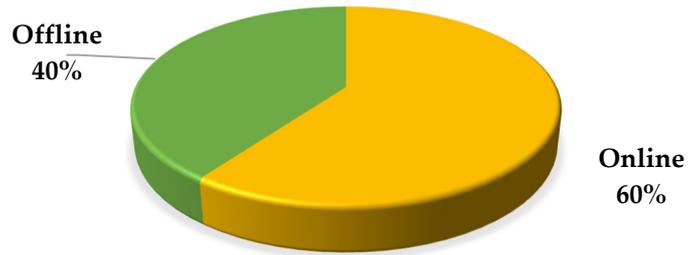


Fig. 4

A predictable response of a majority of 60% is that they want to see a promotion campaign in the *online* environment and a percentage of 40% in the *offline* environment.

B. Second objective

What makes you buy A starbucks coffee at the expense of other brands?

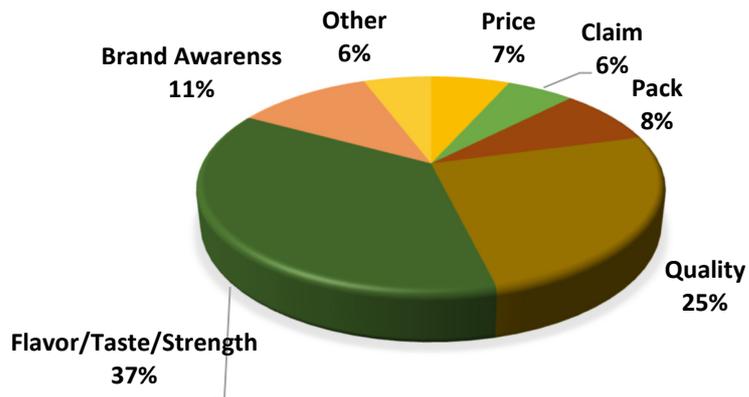


Fig. 5

Analyzing the coffee's uniqueness, the majority of 37% answered that they choose this brand to the detriment of others because they like the *flavour / taste / strength*, then 25% are attracted by the *quality of the coffee*, a fairly high percentage of 11% are attracted by *brand awareness*, 8% by *packaging*, 7% by *price*, 6% are convinced by the *advertisement*, and 6% gave *other arguments*, e.g. they have unique products, variety, the cafe is close to home, the combination of tastes.

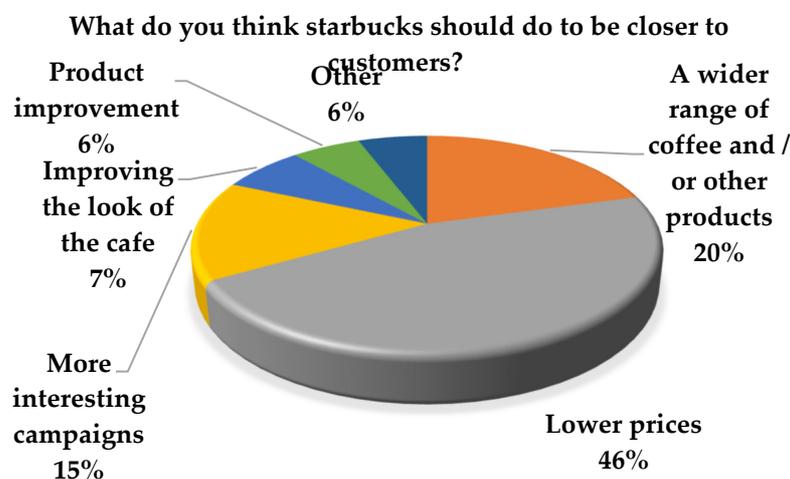


Fig. 6

In order for Starbucks to be closer to customers, the customers believe that the Starbucks brand should first *reduce prices* (46%), then 20% believe that they should have a *wider range of products*, 15% want to see more *interesting campaigns*, 7% are not exactly satisfied with the design of the *cafe*, 6% believe that the *current products should be improved*, and 6% cited *reasons* such as employee-customer interaction, better reward system, the introduction of vegan products, offers and the removal of some products from the menu.

How important is it for you when you buy Starbucks coffee that your name is written on the plastic cup?

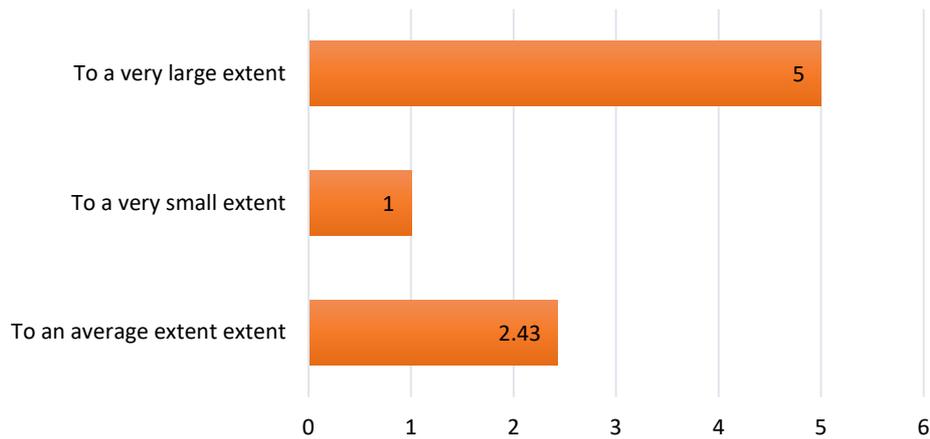


Fig. 7

Wanting to know to what extent *writing your own name on the drink* determines the purchase of a drink, an average of 2.43 was recorded, of which 23% to a very small extent, 12% to a certain extent, 11% to a large extent, 9% to a small extent and only 5% to a very large extent. Certainly, there has been a change over the years; therefore, most consumers have placed this aspect among the last ranking places when they buy coffee.

Do you think that adding different types of coffee for a certain season (E.G. Gingerbread latte for the cold season) is a move that makes you buy a Starbucks drink?

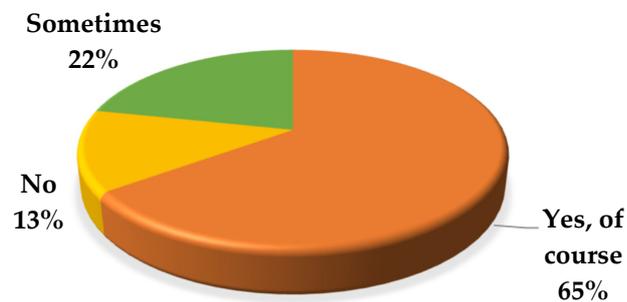


Fig. 8

65% believe that the strategy of *adding different types of coffee for a certain season* is a move that leads them to buy Starbucks coffee, 22% said they sometimes buy coffee for this reason, and 13% said they are not convinced by this move.

3. Results

As for the first objective - to find out the opinion of consumers on several aspects regarding the Starbucks brand -, it was found that the design of the cafe was appreciated by 88.3% as the most suitable place to serve coffee, and at the same time, the atmosphere and ambiance in the cafe make the consumers drink the brand's products. The way of serving was appreciated by the vast majority of the respondents. As far as the social networks, the website and the application on the phone are concerned, surprising answers were recorded. Among those listed, the most appreciated platform was the Instagram page, which enjoyed a higher appreciation than Facebook. It can be thus inferred that the brand should be much more active on the Instagram page, the customers being more attentive to their activity in this application, and a promotion on this social network page would be a beneficial action for the brand. An unsatisfactory response was the one recorded regarding the site and the application on the phone. Both are not known by many customers and the respondents selected the "I cannot appreciate" option in a percentage of 60% for the application on the phone and 50% for the site. Certainly, it can be observed that these two aspects need to be improved, even completely changed, and rebuilt from a different perspective.

Among the reasons why most consumers visit the Starbucks Cafe, the most appreciated reason was the quality of the products. In terms of consuming a favourite range of coffee, the winner was Caffe Latte, followed by Cappucino and Caramel Machiato. Also, as it was expected, asking if they want to see more of an online or offline campaign, most respondents have chosen the first option. In other words, an online campaign is how you can reach a large percentage of potential customers.

From the point of view of the second objective - to discover the reasons why customers choose the Starbucks coffee -, it was found out that the flavour / taste / strength, the quality of the products and the fame of the brand play a very important role. These are the main reasons consumers choose the Starbucks coffee for. At the same time, when asked if they consider that the addition of different types of coffee that are representative for different seasons makes them buy them, they answered in the affirmative. It can be deduced that this action attracts customers, only that the preferred range of coffee, namely PSL, should be present in the environment for a longer period of time. Moreover, Starbucks needs to improve the product design, to lower prices and to introduce a wider range of products and offers, and in addition, to pay more attention to promotional campaigns. On the other hand, the customer's name written on the cup is no longer a big reason to go to Starbucks.

Furthermore, as for the first objective - *the analysis of several aspects regarding the Starbucks brand*, they need to improve the aspects related to the products, the applications through which they reach customers as well as the way of serving. At the same time, in order to attract more customers, they should think about prices reduction and the introduction of new offers, about the cafe and its atmosphere as well as about the online campaign. For the second objective, it can be concluded that *the main reason for choosing the Starbucks coffee* is its quality. Most respondents are heavy consumers of coffee, this aspect being beneficial for the brand. Pumpkin Spice Latte is everyone's favourite and is highly sought after. Certainly, the introduction of this coffee all year round would increase the number of Starbucks customers.

Conclusion

The current and excessive trend of business promotion is a successful method that is used to attract the attention of the target audience. We live in an era where the means of influencing the consumerism of the population are used every day in all possible forms. We talk about TV

commercials, commercials, the flooding of social networks with various commercials promoting trends - what it means to be fashionable, what you need, what you need to do, what represents you, etc.

The promotion has passed in time from paintings on the walls, to people shouting the qualities of their products, to appearing in the newspaper, to advertisements on glass, and to what we now call online promotion. Therefore, it can be seen that promoting means doing something to grow, to become visible among consumers, to make it unique and desired.

All in all, it can be posited that Starbucks is a strong brand, with a well-known and appreciated fame. The consumers of Starbucks products are largely satisfied with this brand, on a general note, but there is still room for improvement.

In other words, Starbucks has earned the trust of customers by being present on the market for many years and by maintaining the core values of the brand, but also by continuously improving itself.

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Ethics and Marketing Policy. Aggressive Advertising

Alina-Dalia NEICONI

Abstract: *Both ethics and advertising are two key elements of a business, whether small or large. Without ethics in a company, there would be no honesty, fairness and positive image of it; without advertising, the market duration of a company would be impossible. I decided to address this particular topic mainly due to the special significance of ethics in today's business world. The paper consists of a theoretical and a practical part. The former provides information about ethics and marketing, with a focus on the reasons why the use of aggressive advertising can be considered unethical. The latter presents the findings I arrived at by analysing instances of aggressive advertising encountered in the online environment. The case study was based on a questionnaire and a content analysis as research methods, in an attempt to find out how aggressive advertising is perceived and why it may be considered unethical.*

Keywords: *advertising, aggressive advertising, business, company, ethics.*

1. Introduction

Nowadays, when most people spend time on the Internet for one reason or another, it is understandable that more and more companies choose to promote themselves online. But what happens when the online environment is overwhelmed by advertising?

Out of the desire to make their products or services known and to attract customers, and this way, to have continuity and a long duration on the market, many companies resort to promotion through aggressive advertising. From an ethical point of view, this type of advertising can be questioned for various reasons. It is well known that ethics deals with the principles and moral issues that may appear in a company. "At first glance, it is easy to understand that 'business ethics' is an area that seeks to clarify issues of a moral nature that currently arise in the work of economic agents." (Crăciun, 2005, p. 24; my translation)

Repeating messages at too short intervals, creating a false image of the product, using superlatives such as "the best", assaulting personal space and the like, can result in a negative public attitude towards the product or company presented. Therefore, companies must highlight the needs of customers and respect their personal space, their desires and their expectations from the company.

However, even though a large number of Internet users find repetitive ads aggressive, annoying and even unethical because the time they appear on device screens is short, this type of paid advertising is absolutely necessary when it comes to the free access of users to various platforms such as Youtube, as it provides an important source of sponsorship.

The topic of this paper is highly relevant as ethics and advertising play special roles in any business. What is more, the virtual environment is very accessible today, making possible the contact between the public and various companies or new products. The public's attitude towards the

aggressive advertising present in the online environment is also important in the company-customer relationship.

The main goal of this study was to find out what people think about this type of aggressive online advertising, whether it is of interest to them, whether they consider it ethical or not, and why.

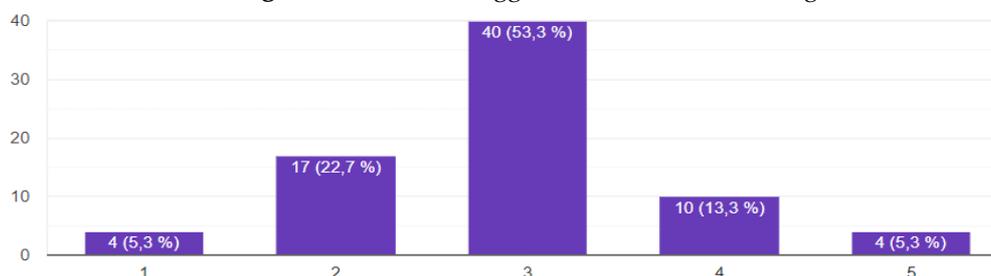
2. Research methods

The questionnaire was the primary research method used in the case study. It was distributed to 75 internet users. I chose this research method to find out the respondents' opinion about aggressive online advertising, people's interest in this type of advertising, and their ethical perception of aggressive advertising.

The questionnaire included questions regarding people's opinion about companies using aggressive advertising as a method of promotion, the reasons why aggressive advertising is not considered ethical, as well as other questions regarding this type of online advertising. Some of the most relevant results are presented in what follows.

For instance, Figure 1 below shows the results for question 16, which asked respondents to rank the extent to which aggressive advertising in the online environment was ethical, on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 - not at all ethical, 5 - very ethical).

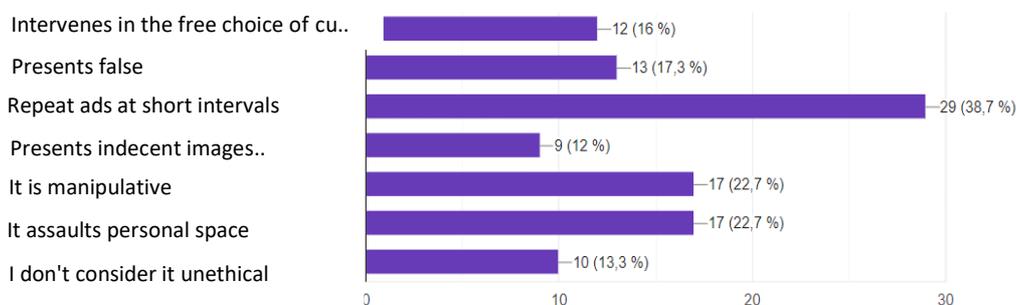
Fig. 1 How ethical is aggressive online advertising?



Number 3 on the scale gathered the most answers (40), followed by number 2 (17 answers), number 4 (10 answers), and numbers 1 and 5 (4 answers each). This means that there are certain reasons why aggressive advertising is considered unethical by most respondents.

Question 17 in the survey asked the respondents to select the reasons why they did not consider this type of advertising ethical. As shown in Figure 2, most respondents (38.7%) believe that aggressive online advertising is unethical because the ads are repeated too often at short intervals. Alternatively, 22.7% of the respondents think that this type of advertising is manipulative and invades one's personal space. Other reasons why aggressive advertising can be considered unethical are: it presents false information/characteristics of the product (17.3%), it intervenes in the free choice of the customer (16%), it shows indecent content (12%). Only 13.3% of the respondents do not consider it unethical.

Fig. 2 Why might aggressive online advertising be unethical?



Content analysis (paid ads)

The fact that the ad frequency ranks as the main reason for online advertising to be perceived as aggressive among the respondents in the survey aroused my interest in choosing a second research method,

namely, the content analysis of paid advertisements. Noticing that paid ads are repeated especially on the audio-video platform Youtube, I decided to spend 2 hours a day on this platform, between June 8 and 11, to examine and analyze some ads in terms of content.

I watched music videos (about 3-4 minutes) and various tutorials, which lasted about 10 minutes. Some of the recurring commercials that I noticed were for the trading company EToro and for the telecommunications brand Telekom. Another company that promotes itself through paid, repetitive ads, is Betano, an online casino. All these companies had several distinct advertisements broadcast during the analysed period, as can be seen in the table below.

Table 1 Number of distinct ads and total number of ads

Company	Number of distinct ads broadcasted on the platform	Total number of ads that appeared in the analyzed interval
EToro	5	32
Telekom	2	16
Betano	3	14

The following table shows the content analysis of the advertisements mentioned above.

Table 2 Content of advertisements

	EToro	Telekom	Betano
Style of expression			
Formal			
Colloquially	x	x	x
Colors	Use the colors of the brand, green (which is considered the color most easily perceived by the eyes) and white. Green expresses <u>calm</u> , and white purity.	Uses bright colors (magenta, which expresses harmony and change/ emancipation, which transmits to the receiver the idea of transformation).	The advertisement uses predominantly orange and white (orange conveys harmony and happiness).
The recorded images presents			
Real people	x	x	x
Animations			
Animals		x	x
Call to action (CTA)			
Verbal	x	x	x
Physical	x	x	x
Words that catch the public's attention	Repeating the idea "0 <u>commission</u> ".	"Everyone is here (expression that shows the public that EVERYONE uses Telekom services)". "Telekom has the biggest increase in mobile subscribers"	"The best mobile platform."

In contrast to the paid ads that appear on Google or Facebook based on our previous Internet searches and on our interests, these Youtube ads seem not to have a well-defined target audience or be related to our previous searches on this platform.

It is noteworthy that the Skip button appears only after 5 seconds of viewing the ads. Therefore, they can be closed only after the viewer has already been "acquainted" with the product/company presented. In terms of duration, all the ads lasted about 1-2 minutes. The paid ads appeared at the beginning of the music videos I watched, whereas in the case of the tutorials, which lasted about 10 minutes, the ads appeared along the way.

The respondents in the survey said that such advertisements, which are part of aggressive advertising, were misleading, even manipulative. As can be seen in the table above, the words most often used in the analysed advertisements are superlatives such as "best" and "largest", in order to induce the idea that the product/service presented is worth trying, guaranteeing benefits from calling the company.

Conclusion

Both ethics and advertising are two basic elements of any business. Any company, small or large, must pay attention to both elements, in order to have a long life on the market today.

The desires of the public, the expectations of customers towards companies as well as their personal space must be respected. The results of the questionnaire show that most respondents feel that aggressive, repetitive or insistent advertisements invade their personal space, which makes them develop a negative attitude towards them.

Another reason why aggressive advertising is considered unethical by respondents is the fact that it presents false information, and that it is

misleading because it induces the idea of a total benefit from the use of the service or product presented. The advertisements I analysed also played on this idea, by using superlatives like "the best".

Although nowadays companies choose to repeat ads very often to promote themselves, which may become annoying or be perceived as unethical, these paid ads are absolutely necessary for us to have free access to Youtube or other platforms and social networks. Paid ads are an important source of sponsorship for various social networks or frequently used platforms. Consequently, whether we choose to pay attention to them or just ignore them, they offer us, in one way or another, free access to the networks we use most often.

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Editura **POLITEHNICA**

ISSN 2734 - 7087
ISSN-L 2501 – 949X