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FACULTY OF COMMUNICATION SCIENCES

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Augmented Reality in Marketing: Exploring Applications and Impact with a Focus on Real Estate

Octavian Diaconu

Abstract: *Augmented reality (AR) is an emerging technology that overlays digital information and virtual objects onto the real world, enhancing users' perception of and interaction with their environment. This study explores the application of AR in the real estate industry, focusing on the use of AR in the presentation of interior design options to clients. By integrating AR into the marketing strategies of real estate developers, immersive and interactive experiences can be created, enabling potential homebuyers to visualize and explore different design possibilities in real time. This research is based on a qualitative approach, incorporating an in-depth interview with a real estate developer to gather insights into their experiences and perspectives on implementing AR in their marketing efforts. The interview provides valuable firsthand information on the benefits, challenges, and practical implications of using AR technology in real estate marketing. The findings emphasize the positive impact of AR in enhancing user engagement, improving visualization, and influencing client decision-making processes. This study contributes to the existing literature by offering practical insights into the effective integration of AR technology in real estate marketing, enabling developers to leverage AR to showcase interior design options and to create immersive experiences that resonate with their clients.*

Keywords: *augmented reality, real estate industry, interior design, marketing, immersive experiences, user engagement, visualization, decision-making*

1. Introduction

Augmented reality (AR) is a key component of extended reality and refers to the integration of digital information and virtual objects into the real world, enhancing users' perception and interaction with these elements transferred from the virtual space to the real one. AR typically involves overlaying computer-generated images, videos, or 3D models onto the real world, either through a smartphone or a dedicated device.

According to a study conducted by Du et al. (2022) on the applications and effects of augmented reality in marketing, AR is recognized as an experiential marketing tool that provides immersive experiences to consumers, enabling interaction with virtual objects in real-world contexts. The authors highlight the ability of augmented reality to enhance product visualization, allowing consumers to experience products in a realistic and interactive manner.

Going beyond the limitations of traditional marketing media, AR facilitates informed purchasing decisions, allowing consumers to visualize how products would look or fit in their own environments.

The article emphasizes the positive impact of augmented reality technologies on consumer behaviour. It has been found that augmented reality experiences increase consumers' purchase intention, willingness to pay higher prices, and likelihood of recommending products to others. Additionally, augmented reality contributes to increased engagement, enjoyment, and product and brand satisfaction.

The authors also highlight the capacity of augmented reality to personalize and adapt marketing messages and offerings, thereby enhancing the relevance and efficiency of campaigns. Furthermore, the emotional and sensory appeal of augmented reality is discussed. By incorporating elements such as storytelling and other interactive features, augmented reality experiences evoke positive emotional responses and enhance brand awareness. The authors highlight the viral marketing potential of AR campaigns, due to their innovative nature and entertainment value, leading to increased brand exposure and consumer involvement through social media sharing (Du et al., 2022).

Therefore, the authors emphasize the significant role of augmented reality as a marketing tool that enhances consumer experience, influences behaviour, and establishes a strong emotional connection between brands and consumers. They also suggest that future research should focus on understanding the mechanisms underlying the effects of AR on consumer behaviour, and should explore its integration with all the tools offered by extended reality.

2. Augmented reality in real estate

In today's ever-evolving real estate industry, the effective marketing of properties plays a crucial role in attracting potential buyers. Traditionally, real estate agents rely heavily on physical property visits and tours to engage potential buyers. However, these conventional methods often come with significant constraints related to time, costs, and logistics. In response to such challenges, augmented reality has emerged as a powerful tool to enhance marketing efforts within the real estate sector. By harnessing advanced visualization techniques, AR technology offers immersive and interactive virtual tours of properties, revolutionizing the way real estate agencies market their listings (Boiko, 2022).

AR integration into the real estate domain leverages its ability to provide realistic and comprehensive representations of apartments and houses. Through augmented experiences, potential buyers can virtually explore and interact with properties in a three-dimensional environment, gaining a deeper understanding of their unique features and attributes. This

innovative technology not only saves valuable time and resources but also empowers potential buyers to make well-informed decisions in their property search (Boiko, 2022).

The use of augmented reality in the real estate industry offers significant advantages, particularly in optimizing marketing efforts. By incorporating AR technology into their strategies, real estate agencies can provide potential buyers with captivating and immersive experiences, differentiating their properties from competitors' in a crowded market. The interactive nature of AR engages potential buyers on a deeper level, allowing them to forge an emotional connection with the property even before setting foot inside (Boiko, 2022).

Furthermore, AR technology provides valuable insights for real estate agencies through the analysis of user behaviour data. By tracking customer interactions during virtual tours, agencies can gather data on customer preferences and areas of interest. This information not only dictates marketing strategies, but also enables agencies to tailor presentations that resonate better with their target audience. By leveraging data analysis, real estate agencies can optimize their understanding of customer preferences and deliver more personalized and compelling marketing campaigns (Boiko, 2022).

3 . Expert sources consulted

Expert sources have been selected with careful consideration, aiming to incorporate insights from esteemed researchers who have contributed significantly to the understanding of consumer behaviour within extended reality environments.

One of the key sources I consulted is the study titled "Consumer Behavior Analysis in Extended Reality-Based Marketing" by Alcañiz, Rey, Tembl, Alcañiz and Zaragoza (2019). This study explores the potential of extended reality experiences in analyzing consumer behaviour. It investigates how marketers can observe and understand consumer navigation patterns and exploratory behaviour within virtual spaces. By analyzing user engagement, attention duration, and the effectiveness of different elements within the virtual environment, the study provides valuable insights into consumer preferences, decision-making processes, and strategies for optimizing marketing efforts in extended reality environments. The findings of this study contribute significantly to our understanding of consumer behaviour in the context of augmented reality and extended reality.

Another important source for this study is the research conducted by Hoffmann and Mai (2022), titled "Consumer Behavior in Extended Reality Environments: An Empirical Analysis." This empirical study investigates various aspects of consumer behaviour within augmented reality, virtual reality, and mixed reality (AR/VR/MR) environments. By examining the impact of extended reality experiences on consumer perception, engagement, emotions, and decision-making outcomes, the study provides valuable insights into the cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions of consumer behaviour within extended reality contexts. The research findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how extended reality influences consumer preferences, attitudes, and purchase decisions.

By drawing upon the expertise and research findings in these selected sources, this section aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of customers' perception of augmented and extended reality in the realm of marketing. The inclusion of these expert sources enhances the

credibility and validity of the present study, enabling a thorough exploration of consumer behaviour and informing on the development of effective marketing strategies in extended reality environments.

Extended reality technologies are proven to provide merchants with the opportunity of gathering valuable data and insights into how consumers interact with virtual experiences. By immersing users in extended reality environments, merchants can track and analyse consumer behaviours such as gaze patterns, movements, and interactions with virtual objects. These behavioural data provide insights into consumers' preferences, interests, and decision-making processes when using extended reality technologies.

The study conducted by Alcañiz et al. (2019) highlights the fact that extended reality experiences enable merchants to observe and understand how consumers navigate and explore virtual spaces. By analyzing navigation patterns, merchants can obtain information about consumers' levels of engagement, attention span, and the effectiveness of different elements within the virtual environment. For example, merchants can assess which aspects of the extended reality experience capture users' attention the most, what elements prompt users to interact or make purchase decisions, and which areas of the virtual environment are frequently explored or ignored. This data allows merchants to refine and optimize their extended reality marketing strategies to align with consumer preferences and maximize engagement.

In addition to behavioural observations, extended reality environments enable merchants to track users' preferences and choices within the virtual space. By monitoring interactions with products or virtual scenarios, merchants can collect valuable data about consumers' preferences, prioritization of product features, and potential pain points. This information helps tailor marketing messages and product offerings to meet the target audience's specific needs and desires. For instance, analysing consumers' virtual interactions can reveal popular product configurations, preferred colour combinations, or desired functionalities. Such insights can dictate product development decisions and enable marketing agents to create personalized offers. By leveraging extended reality technologies, merchants can also measure emotional response and engagement level within virtual experiences. This can be achieved through the analysis of physiological data, such as heart rate, along with measurements of subjective experiences. Understanding consumers' emotional response in XR environments can provide deeper insights into their level of engagement, satisfaction, and brand affinity. Marketing agents can identify emotional triggers that generate positive or negative responses, allowing them to refine their strategies to evoke the desired emotional impact (Alcañiz et al., 2019).

The importance of consumer behaviour in extended reality-based marketing is therefore crucial. These technologies offer merchants rich data on consumer interactions, navigation patterns, preferences, and emotional responses within virtual environments. By leveraging this information, merchants can optimize extended reality experiences, adapt marketing messages, and refine product offers to align with consumer behaviours and preferences. Understanding how consumers engage with and respond to extended reality

environments enables merchants to create effective, personalized, and impactful marketing strategies that resonate with their target audience.

Hoffmann and Mai (2022) conducted an empirical study to delve into the complex realm of consumer behaviour in extended reality environments. Extended reality, which encompasses virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and mixed reality (MR), provides a unique and immersive platform for consumers to engage with products and to make informed purchase decisions. The study aims to investigate the impact of extended reality-based experiences on various aspects of consumer behaviour, such as perception, engagement, emotions, and decision-making outcomes.

Through a controlled laboratory experiment, participants were exposed to various extended reality scenarios designed to simulate realistic interactions with products. By manipulating elements such as product attributes, sensory cues, and contextual information within extended reality environments, the researchers sought to understand how these factors influence consumers' perception of products. The study examined whether extended reality technologies could enhance consumers' evaluation of attributes such as aesthetics, functionality, quality, or usability, and how their perceptions subsequently shaped their attitudes and preferences.

Additionally, the researchers examined the role of engagement in extended reality experiences and its impact on consumer behaviour. Extended reality inherently provides an immersive and interactive platform that can enhance user attention and engagement. By assessing participants' engagement level using measures such as presence, flow, and interactivity, the study aimed to show how the engagement level influences consumers' attitudes, emotions, and subsequent decision-making outcomes. The findings reveal that higher engagement levels within extended reality environments lead to more positive evaluations of products, increased emotional arousal, and a greater likelihood of making a purchase or of expressing purchase intentions.

Furthermore, the study investigated the influence of emotions on consumer behaviour in extended reality. Extended reality experiences have the potential to evoke a wide range of emotions due to the heightened immersion and sensory stimulation they provide. By examining participants' emotional responses during extended reality interactions, the researchers aimed to reveal the relationship between emotional experiences and consumer behaviour. The findings demonstrate that the positive emotions elicited within extended reality environments are associated with favourable product evaluations, increased purchase intentions, and a higher likelihood of sharing the experience with others.

In terms of decision-making outcomes, the study explored how extended reality experiences could impact consumers' purchase intentions and actual purchase behaviour. The findings suggest that extended reality-based interactions may positively influence consumers' purchase intentions, by providing them with a realistic and engaging platform to evaluate products. Participants who experienced extended reality were more likely to convert their intentions into actual purchases, compared to those who engaged with traditional marketing channels. The immersive nature of extended reality experiences allowed consumers to feel

more confident in their decision-making, reducing uncertainty and increasing their willingness to make a purchase (Hoffman & Mai, 2022).

Overall, Hoffmann and Mai's study (2022) highlights the significant impact of extended reality on consumer behaviour. Extended reality environments have the potential to enhance consumers' perceptions of products, increase engagement and emotional response, and positively influence purchase intentions and behaviour. By leveraging the immersive and interactive nature of extended reality technologies, marketers can create impactful and persuasive experiences that drive consumer engagement, shape perceptions, and ultimately lead to favourable consumer behaviour outcomes.

4. Research methods

The main research method employed in the present study revolves around an interview with a real estate developer, Mr. Cătălin Idita, on the use of AR technologies in the industry. The interview aims to provide a firsthand experience and insights into the potential of a mobile AR-based application called Furnify, which I created as a tool to enhance the online buying experience within the real estate context.

During the interview, the real estate developer had the opportunity to explore and interact with the features and functionalities of Furnify. This direct interaction with the application allowed him to assess its effectiveness in providing a seamless and immersive experience to potential buyers.

Furnify allows users to overlay 3D furniture models onto their own spaces, enabling them to virtually visualize and explore different interior designs. The discussion explores the benefits of Furnify in bridging the gap between online browsing and visiting physical properties, offering a novel and interactive way for potential buyers to envision and customize their future living spaces.

Furthermore, the interview includes the interviewee's experience with Furnify, considering aspects such as ease of use, interface intuitiveness, and overall functionality. His remarks and feedback as a real estate developer have provided valuable insights into the app's performance and its potential impact on customer engagement.

By conducting this interview with Mr. Cătălin Idita and by his exploring Furnify, I aimed to gather firsthand feedback and insights on the app's effectiveness in enhancing the real estate buying experience. His perspective as a real estate professional has contributed to a comprehensive understanding of the application's strengths, limitations, and opportunities for improvement.

The insights gained from this interview and from a real estate developer's experience with Furnify will contribute to the advancement of AR technologies in the real estate industry. These insights will provide valuable information on possible future developments and updates to the application, ensuring its alignment with market needs and enhancing its ability to revolutionize the online real estate buying experience.

The interview conducted with the real estate developer as well as his experience with Furnify serve as a valuable research method to explore the potential and challenges associated with integrating augmented reality into the real estate industry. The insights derived from

this interview will foster growth, innovation, and continuous improvement in utilizing AR technology for the real estate sector.

5 . Results and discussion

During the interview, Mr. Idita, an experienced real estate developer, shared valuable insights and perspectives on the use of augmented reality technologies in the real estate industry. Mr. Idita expressed his interest in using digital channels, particularly online platforms and social media, to promote his business. He emphasized the importance of targeted advertising on platforms like Facebook and posting ads on industry-specific websites to reach a larger audience and increase the visibility of his projects.

The interviewee's experience with popular social media platforms like Snapchat and Instagram confirmed his knowledge of AR technologies. He acknowledges the interactive nature of augmented reality and values its potential to provide captivating user experiences.

Mr. Idita highlighted the ability of the Furnify app to provide potential clients with realistic visualizations of interior design options, ultimately saving time and resources for both buyers and himself. He emphasized the unique experience offered by augmented reality and its potential to enhance buyer engagement.

The real estate developer recognized the potential of augmented reality, especially in the pre-sales phase of a project, where clients often struggle to visualize the potential of a property and its interior design possibilities. By incorporating the app as a marketing tool, he believes Furnify could improve the marketing process, increase buyer engagement, and accelerate the sales cycle.

To further enhance the app's value in the real estate industry, Mr. Idita suggested including options for furniture customization and collaborating with different merchants to provide more realistic and localized options. Such customization would offer users a sense of personalization and would make the app more relevant to their specific needs.

The interviewee acknowledged the potential challenges some users may face due to limited technical knowledge. He suggested addressing this issue through in-app tutorials and intuitive guides. Additionally, Mr. Idita expressed his willingness to personally train clients in using the app, given its user-friendly nature.

When discussing the challenges related to implementing the app in real estate projects, Mr. Idita mentioned the importance of precise placement of 3D furniture models and the need for an extensive library of options in terms of style, dimensions, and materials. He also emphasized the importance of optimizing app performance and ensuring compatibility with different devices.

Looking into the future, Mr. Idita believes that augmented reality will play an important role in the real estate industry. As technology continues to advance and become more accessible, he anticipates augmented reality becoming a standard tool for property visualization and marketing. By offering interactive experiences, augmented reality has the potential to enhance buyer engagement and streamline the decision-making process.

Overall, the interview with Mr. Idita highlighted his understanding of the benefits of augmented reality in the real estate industry, as evidenced by his interest in using digital

channels for promotion and his positive assessment of the interactive and captivating experiences this technology can offer. His feedback has shed light on the potential of augmented reality in the industry and on the importance of addressing usability challenges to ensure widespread adoption.

6. Conclusions

This comprehensive and multivalent approach has facilitated a deep understanding of the implementation of augmented reality in marketing strategies. The interview conducted for this study has provided valuable insights into the practical implications of and opportunities for integrating augmented reality technology in the real estate industry. Additionally, the focus group allowed for an in-depth exploration of users' perceptions, experiences, and challenges related to augmented reality in the context of furniture purchases. The combination of these research methods and the inclusion of participants from diverse backgrounds have enabled a thorough examination of the findings, offering a holistic perspective on the potential of augmented reality in marketing.

Future studies could further investigate user behaviour, by conducting extensive research on user experiences with augmented reality. These studies should aim to explore users' preferences, motivations, and decision-making processes when interacting with augmented reality applications. By understanding the factors that influence user behaviour, such as realism, interactivity, and usability, researchers can provide valuable insights to optimize augmented reality experiences and increase user engagement.

Furthermore, exploring the long-term effects of augmented reality experiences on consumer behaviour, such as purchase intentions and brand loyalty, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the potential impact of augmented reality in marketing. This could be achieved through longitudinal studies that track user behaviour and attitudes over an extended period.

Incorporating artificial intelligence and machine learning algorithms into augmented reality applications holds great potential for enhancing user experience. Future research could explore the integration of artificial intelligence techniques to enable advanced functions, such as object recognition and recommendation systems within augmented reality environments. By leveraging these technologies, AR applications could provide users with personalized recommendations, real-time information, and contextual insights, creating a smarter and more intuitive shopping experience.

Future research should also encourage collaboration between the fields of marketing, design, and technology to harness the full potential of augmented reality in marketing. By bringing together professionals from different disciplines, such as marketing specialists, UX designers, application developers, and content creators, innovative augmented reality solutions could be developed, which seamlessly integrate marketing objectives with user-centred design principles. Such collaborative efforts can lead to the creation of comprehensive experiences that communicate messages effectively, captivate users, and achieve satisfying outcomes.

Augmented reality possesses immense potential as a transformative tool in the field of marketing. As technology continues to advance, augmented reality can revolutionize how brands connect with their target audience. By overlaying virtual elements onto the real world, augmented reality offers a unique and immersive experience that captivates users and enhances interaction with the brand.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this research. As the study focuses on a small segment, it may not fully capture the diverse perspectives and preferences of all consumers. Additionally, technological constraints, such as device compatibility and challenges related to augmented reality implementation, can affect widespread adoption and the effectiveness of augmented reality marketing strategies.

Further research is needed to explore the long-term effects of augmented reality on consumer behaviour to optimize augmented reality experiences for different industries, and to develop robust frameworks for measuring the success of augmented reality marketing campaigns. As technology continues to evolve, continued exploration and innovation in augmented reality-based marketing will be essential for brands to stay ahead of the competition.

This research and the development of the Furnify application serve as contributions to the understanding and implementation of augmented reality in marketing. By harnessing the power of augmented reality, brands can create captivating and memorable experiences, establish stronger connections with their audience, and stimulate consumer engagement. With careful consideration of limitations and ongoing research efforts, augmented reality has the potential to reshape the marketing landscape and to unlock new opportunities for companies across industries.

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Promoting technical innovation. Case study: the Salvamont - Vodafone application

Andrada Maria Nemțoc



The author presenting the Salvamont app

Abstract: *After the end of the Covid-19 pandemic, mountain sports lovers resumed their habits of practicing both hiking and snow sports. However, only few realize how important it is to also consider safety in addition to the momentary pleasure offered by the activity itself. Salvamont (the Romanian Mountain Rescue Service), together with Vodafone (one of the leading mobile service providers in Romania), have developed a special location tracking application to increase safety and enhance rescue efforts in case of risky situations in the mountains. The present study aims to highlight the benefits of this application to smartphone users. The study concludes that, despite the aggressive promotion of the application and of the Salvamont-Vodafone partnership, the news had a rather low public impact. The promotional campaign should be restarted and, according to the findings in this study, both online (e.g. on official social media pages) and offline (e.g. posters, leaflets, in-store) methods should be used.*

Keywords: *promotion, technical innovation, Vodafone, Salvamont application, safety, 5G*

1. Introduction

The global growing interest in innovation, especially in technology, goes hand in hand with increased competitiveness and the need to design new consumption models. In the present paper, I aim to examine the importance of technological innovation in telecommunications, with special emphasis on the application of new technologies in projects capable of positively impacting human life. In this context, the implementation of technological innovation in various fields and collaboration with organizations in diverse sectors, such as Salvamont, bring solutions to problems that could not be solved in the past. Such innovations are possible due to corporate concern on intensifying research and development to expand the applicability of present technologies and to find advanced technological solutions.

In the age of technology, the concept of innovation is no longer limited to the invention of new products or processes; it now also includes the improvement of existing ones. The cumulative effects are as important as the initial ones.

As early as 1934, J. A. Shumpeter published “The Theory of Economic Development”, which is still a reference book on economics, in general, and on the innovation process, in particular. The distinction between invention and innovation comes much later. For instance, Malerba (1997) defines invention as a new idea, a new scientific discovery or technological novelty, while innovation is the commercial application of an invention. Innovation, in this view, is the materialization of a novel idea.

My being part of the “Vodafone family” played an important role in choosing the topic of this study. The three years spent in this company have helped me understand and acclaim the implementation of the 5G network and its further improvement. Initially promoted publicly in Romania as an enhancement in the entertainment industry, the 5G network has found real-life solutions for life-saving activities, previously impossible to imagine. One such solution is the partnership between Salvamont (the Romanian Mountain Rescue Service) and Vodafone, one of the leading mobile service providers in the country. This partnership has led not only to an increase in the quality of the GSM network, but also to a revolutionary activity within Salvamont: the possibility of saving people’s lives by means of the location coordinates on their phones.

Given the importance of the Vodafone - Salvamont partnership at national level, I decided to conduct a research survey on the topic, with a focus on the Vodafone – Salvamont application. On this occasion, I had the chance to share the information about the app to the target audience. The received feedback shows that both technical innovation and promotion are equally important.

2. Research methods

The field research was carried out in-store, on the Vodafone premises at the Auchan Nord Hypermarket in Timisoara, Romania, where I work. The research consisted primarily in face-

to-face conversations over a two-month period, exclusively on weekends. I used the 5G devices available in the store. The presentation was intended for all Vodafone service users, both individuals and organizations. The purpose of the presentation was to promote the new technologies within Salvamont, but also to promote the Salvamont - Vodafone application. I used the questionnaire as the main research method to find how many of the one hundred clients asked had knowledge of the new technologies implemented and of the Salvamont application.

3. Results and discussion

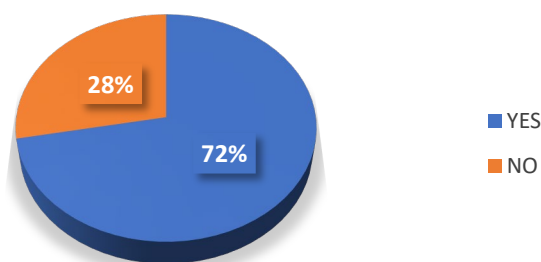


Fig. 1. The results of the question: “Are you familiar with the Salvamont - Vodafone application and its functionality?”

An important step in promoting the application among customers was to discover the extent to which the Salvamont application was known among mobile phone users. The Salvamont - Vodafone app is an application in continuous development, which has been promoted intensely. Currently, it has over 200,000 downloads in Play Store and AppStore (Statistical data 2023 for App Store and Google Play). However, 28% of the respondents had not heard of this application and did not know anything about it. In such cases, I had to present the application from A to Z, from the download stage, to creating an account and explaining the apps’ benefits. Many customers were impressed by the app’s ease of use. On the other hand, 72% of the respondents were very familiar with the application, activating it when hiking either always or usually. In such cases, I only had to provide some additional information, to make them aware of features they did not know. It is noteworthy that, when introducing the application to those who had not heard of it, the respondents who thought video drones were more useful than signal drones slightly changed their mind, because they noticed that having the app and having a signal can improve and ease the intervention of Salvamont rescue teams in case of emergency.

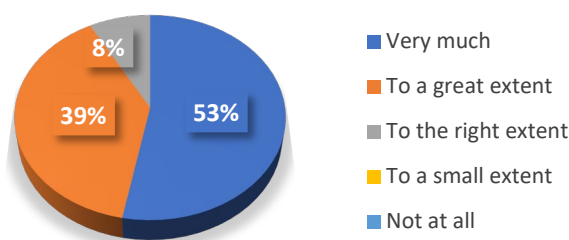


Fig. 2. The results of the question: "To what extent would you recommend the installation and use of the Salvamont – Vodafone application to your friends?"

As expected, the people who use the app and are aware of its benefits are also those willing to pass the information on. 92% of the respondents would recommend the installation and use of the Salvamont - Vodafone application to their relatives "very much" and "to a great extent". The conversations I had with the respondents suggest that mountain enthusiasts are more open to using an app designed to help people increase their safety during hiking.

8% of the respondents would recommend the application to their relatives "to the right extent", because they think that, while it is good to have it there in case of risky situations, it is not necessarily useful, since their relatives are not passionate about winter sports and hiking.

The results of the in-store survey mirror Everett Rogers's (2003) considerations on the diffusion of innovation: those who are fond of novelty (technological, in this case) lead the way, while those who are not are tied to tradition and hesitate to even try something out of their range of experience. Also, the survey has shown that the proposed application is still in the diffusion stage and needs extra effort to reach the adoption stage. Otherwise, novelty may slide into what Rogers (2003) describes as "failed diffusion". He describes failed diffusion as diffusion that does not reach or approach 100% adoption due to its own weaknesses, competition from other innovations, or simply a lack of public awareness. Hence, communicators need to carefully examine the communication channels involved in such a campaign for social change and use them according to their inner potential to reach the target audience. Much of the effort falls on the public relations specialists, who should develop appropriate communication strategies to support the promotion of innovation (Cernicova-Bucă, 2016).

Promoting the Salvamont application



Fig. 3. Vodafone-Salamont application interface

Ever since its launch in January 2013, the application has undergone continuous development. The app was last updated in June 2022, when the "My Routes" section was

added to allow users to track their location history. Also, battery consumption decreased with the development of the app.

The findings of the survey on the Salvamont - Vodafone application have allowed me to come up with a proposal for the company to continue the promotion more intensively, both online and offline. Since the app was designed to improve the safety of hikers, users should be informed about the existence of the application. It is noteworthy that, although the promotion of the partnership was intensive in the beginning, the information did not have a large-scale impact. By promoting the app only during the winter season, the communication effort failed to reach desired targets.

Conclusions

Since 2004, Vodafone Romania has joined the rescue activity of the National Association of Mountain Rescuers, and in 2019, the funding of the Salvamont National Dispatch was taken over by the Vodafone Romania Foundation, Vodafone thus becoming a "technology partner". With the implementation of the "Salvamont counts on Vodafone" project, various public information campaigns have been carried out, with emphasis on the new technologies implemented (e.g. the signal drone, the video drone, the data analysis centre) as well as on the Salvamont - Vodafone application, which is in continuous development.

Drawing on the findings of the present study, it can be concluded that, although the promotion was aggressive for a short while, via many channels, it unfortunately failed to go as far as expected. Out of the 100 respondents, 28 were not even aware of the app's existence, let alone its functionality. The goal of the campaign was straightforward: to let customers know that Vodafone is more than just a phone company; it is also focused on developing interesting solutions that improve customers' lives.

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The Impact of Storytelling in Advertising Videos. Case study: Nike and Adidas

Andreea-Ioana Dodon

Abstract: *Communication has always played an important role when it comes to the long evolutionary journey that created modern humans. In the last centuries, people have started studying this concept to create meaningful and impactful messages, so they can draw the attention of others. One of the most used strategies throughout history has been the art of telling stories. Today, storytelling is used everywhere. Nowadays, people use storytelling not only in their personal lives, but also in professional contexts. Given that people have feelings and emotions, more and more companies have started to use storytelling as part of their advertising campaigns. The main aim of this paper is to reveal the strategies used by big companies in their advertising videos to capture peoples' attention. In addition, the paper will also focus on the impact of storytelling in advertising videos.*

Key words: *storytelling, impact, narrative strategy, verbal message, visual message*

1. Introduction

In this paper, I would like to highlight a concept that is quite used in communication, namely storytelling. The main objective of this paper is to reveal the impact of advertising videos that use storytelling, the strategies used in these videos, as well as the effects of the stories presented. To that end, I have analysed eight videos from Nike and Adidas, which are the biggest sports brands in the world.

“The art of telling stories” goes as early as the eighth century in Ancient Greece, when Homer started telling people stories to make them listen to him. Given that they have feelings and emotions, people tend to pay attention to the emotional, soft part of a message. After so many years, people still use storytelling, and companies use this strategy to gain people’s trust

and loyalty. If one identifies with the message that is presented, there is a much higher chance for them to become clients/customers for those companies, as they share certain values. It is important for companies to know their target audience and its characteristics, so as to create meaningful messages (Martin, 2023, p. 2).

In storytelling, both the verbal and the visual messages are equally important. When it comes to the verbal message, it is essential to point out that we are talking about discourse. From a structural point of view, discourse can be classified into three categories: descriptive, argumentative, and narrative. These three types of discourse are also highlighted by Daniela Roventă-Frumușani (2004, pp. 76-77), who argues that, in storytelling, it's all about the narrative discourse. A narrative discourse should have following elements: initial situation, plot, tension, evaluation action, outcome, and final sentence.

Despite popular belief, visual messages are not recent arrivals. On the contrary, they have always existed and have been used almost as much as verbal messages. Throughout time, people have started to realize that they do not have only one sense, i.e. hearing, but they also have sight. And hence, they have started to pay more attention to the visual side, in an attempt to find out how it could improve a message (Bargan, 2016, p. 22).

Ross (2014, p. 5) emphasizes the fact that verbal messages and visual messages are strongly connected even though they seem completely different. Although they may not be aware of it, people have always used both verbal and visual messages to express what they feel or to inform others about something.

According to Farcaș (2022, p. 77), some of the most important features of a persuasive image are: a short and well-defined message on it, the existence of a strong element to capture attention, a well-defined audience, the call to an explicitly stated action, and a unitary form that combines all these elements into an attractive presentation.

Another important concept that needs to be highlighted when it comes to storytelling is influence. McQuail (1999, pp.148-149) points out that influence is a symbolic means of action that determines people's decision to act in a certain way, as they feel that the aspect presented is a good thing for them. In other words, according to McQuail, attitudes and opinions are generated by influence when the interaction process is deliberate. It can also mean that following the communication process, people make a certain decision because they feel it would be best for them.

2. Methods

As mentioned previously, the aim of this research paper is to reveal the storytelling strategies and the effects of the stories used in the advertising videos of the best sports brands in the world: Nike and Adidas.

I have chosen this research topic because the concept is quite common when we talk about big multinational companies. These companies usually want to get as close as possible to people. They use innovative stories to capture people's attention and try to make people identify with the message and buy their product.

Two qualitative methods were used to reveal the advertising strategies and the effects of the stories presented in the Adidas and Nike videos. First, a comparative content analysis

was performed to identify the strategies used by the two companies. Four Nike videos and four Adidas videos were analysed and compared to figure out which strategies they have in common, and which differ.

The second method involved individual interviews with five people to find out the effects of the stories. Each person answered the same six questions after watching each video, which allowed me to learn about their general opinion, the emotions transmitted, if they were tempted to purchase the products and if they wanted to share the videos with other people.

3 . Results

First of all, it should be emphasized that both sports brands have the same goal, which is to make their products known and to convince people that they share the same values. As a result, people would automatically think about wanting to support them, or at least know that their brands are a good choice when it comes to sports shoes or clothes. That is why there are usually little or no differences when we talk about similar brands.

As already stated, two qualitative methods were used to identify the advertising strategies of Nike and Adidas, and the effects of the stories presented in their videos.

The first research method has shown that there are no differences in the strategies they use when it comes to storytelling. Both Nike and Adidas focus on diversity in their videos. We can see people of different cultures, ethnicities and contexts, people with disabilities, women from the Middle East, etc. All the videos try to be inclusive, targeting as many groups of people as possible. Some videos feature only women, as the message is about women fighting for the right to play sports or to play sports safely. However, Nike and Adidas use women from all around the world to highlight that women should stand together no matter the distance, culture, or ethnicity.

Moreover, the stories are very well chosen and reflect problems that people have faced in the past and continue to face today. For example, the analysed videos highlight racism, social and gender inequality, etc. These problems are the kind of problems people still must work on to make the world a better place. Such strong messages and stories put forth by Nike and Adidas try to raise awareness, educate people or change beliefs.

Another important aspect is that both brands use not only sports celebrities in their videos, but also lesser-known athletes. For example, we can see Mariam Farid, Khadija Hegazy, Mo Salah, Amal Mourad, Zahra Lar, Balquees Fathi, Fencer Ines Boubakri, Arifa Bseiso, LeBron James, Serena Williams, Kevin Durant, Megan Rapinoe, Dalilah Muhammad, Gabby Douglas and Victor Cruz in the videos. Some of them talk and tell the stories, while others just simply participate in the video. Also, the narrator (a celebrity) tells the story and is a character in the video.

What is more, the structure of the narrative discourse is observed closely in the videos: there is an initial situation, a plot, tension, evaluation, a resolution, and a final sentence. While these structural elements are present in all the videos, their order is different in some of them.

Finally, simple language is used, together with some strong words, especially expressions, such as “we fight together”, “nothing is impossible”, etc. All the strong words

and expressions are meant to catch the attention of the target audience and make them aware of the message and problem put forth in the video.

The second research method, i.e. the five individual interviews, highlights the effects of watching the eight Nike and Adidas commercials. All interviews had the same goal: to find out people's general opinion about the videos, the emotion/feeling transmitted by each video, and their reaction after watching the videos.

The answers to the interview show that all the interviewees believe that the videos are well made, diverse, and focused on people and on the main problems the world is facing today. That is why the interviewees described the videos as high-quality, the emotional string being one of the most important aspects they highlighted.

They also mentioned that the pace of the videos and songs was generally quick to capture their attention and provided ground for deeper feelings. The interviewees also mentioned that the videos were structured, well-organized, and that celebrities presented the story logically. The videos are short and every second is well used to point out the crucial message.

In terms of emotional appeal, the interviews show that the Nike videos predominantly evoke a strong feeling of courage, determination and fight, while the Adidas videos, sadness combined with courage and determination. Both brands focus on feelings, but the feelings are partly different.

As for the temptation to buy Nike and Adidas products, the interviewees did not particularly feel tempted to buy the advertised products, but most mentioned that they would take these brands into account the next time they wanted to buy sports shoes or clothes. Some of them mentioned that they felt somehow tempted to buy the products after watching the videos about women fighting for equal rights.

It is also interesting to point out is that almost everyone wanted to share the Nike and Adidas videos, because of the creative way in which today's problems were highlighted.

4. Discussion: Research implications and limitations

There are some limitations to this research study. First, the individual interviews were conducted on a very small group. Although the interviewees have a degree in Communication studies, a larger group would have made the study more accurate.

Another limitation was the lack of resources available for the theoretical part of the research. Even though there are a lot of books and articles about storytelling, not many are available online.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, storytelling is one of the oldest strategies used in communication to transmit a message and to make sure to catch people's attention. People have feelings, and with a good, creative, meaningful story everybody can convince others of something or make them identify with a specific situation. Usually, the stories presented by big companies are impactful, as they highlight various problems that we currently face all around the world or in certain parts of the world.

The storytelling strategies identified in the present study focus mainly on the social, cultural and gender diversity of people, as well as on related contemporary problems. The more diverse the people depicted in a video, the larger the target audience of that video. Another important strategy is to use celebrities to promote the brands and to play complex characters in commercials, in order to enhance the advertising message and to stir stronger feelings in the audience.

Also, if a video targets a large number of people, there is a higher chance that the people will buy the advertised products. It should be emphasized, however, that this works only if those people truly think that the product is good for them, that it will help them. So that is why the way a message is presented is important.

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Aesthetic and Functional Particularities in the Design of Graphical User Interfaces for Mobile Devices

Cristina-Maria ECOBICI

Abstract: *Graphical interfaces can be defined as a form of visual communication. They establish a link between creators and the audience by using different graphic components to convey ideas, opinions and messages. The goal of this study is to analyse the relevance of mobile UI/UX design in the context of scientific research by reviewing and interpreting the literature in different fields. At the same time, the focus is on UI and UX design components and principles. Best practices of these design components and principles are analysed with the help of designing a mobile graphical interface for a café: Coffee for Everyone.*

Keywords: *mobile applications, graphical interfaces, user interface, user experience, design principles, UI components, UI/UX design process*

1. Introduction

Among one of the multiple branches of graphic design, the graphical interface for mobile devices has evolved significantly (Putra and Shalaimanda, 2022).

According to Putra Dicky Dwi and Shalannanda Weryan, Mobile Applications are defined as “applications of a software that in operation can run on mobile devices such as

Smartphones, Tablets, iPods, and others, and has an operating system that supports software on a standalone basis”(Putra and Shalaimanda, 2022). They also serve the scopes of communication and socialisation between numerous groups, stand as emergency or help triggers, and can be developed in numerous domains such as, e.g., health, education or commerce based on the public's needs (Astuti et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2021).

The transition between the app's functionality and viewing it on the device screen is provided by the user interface - UI. It acts as a pathway to guide the individuals through the process of obtaining the required information or completing the desired task by using several components and principles of UI (Nugroho et al., 2019; Putra and Shalaimanda, 2022). These components, such as buttons, icons, fonts, and colors, help developers design an intuitive and user-friendly structure (Yusaliano et al., 2020).

On the other hand, during the development process, what needs to be considered is the user experience or - UX. It focuses on user interaction and behaviour with the app design. Also, in this case the focus is on the person themselves as well as on the overall experience. This should be a pleasant one and delivered to users according to their preferences. UX components are creative tools themselves, used throughout the development process (Astuti et al., 2021; Naapuri, 2018).

2. Research questions and methodology

The research questions underlying this study are the following:

Q1 - Is the design of graphical user interfaces for mobile devices relevant, in the context of scientific research?

Q2 - What are the components and design principles used by researchers to design graphical user interfaces for mobile devices?

Q3 - What are the best practices in applying specific stages of the UX/UI design process for mobile interfaces?

In order to answer the research questions Q1 and Q2, I have conducted an analysis of the scientific papers corresponding to the chosen field by using the following research methods: *Data collection methods, Selection Procedure and Identification*.

I have collected scientific articles from the three different databases, IEEE Xplore, Science Direct and Google Scholar. I have examined the paper titles, keywords and abstracts. I have briefly reviewed the full-text articles while employing the inclusion and exclusion criteria to filter the studies. The process is also visible in the Figure 2.1 presented below.

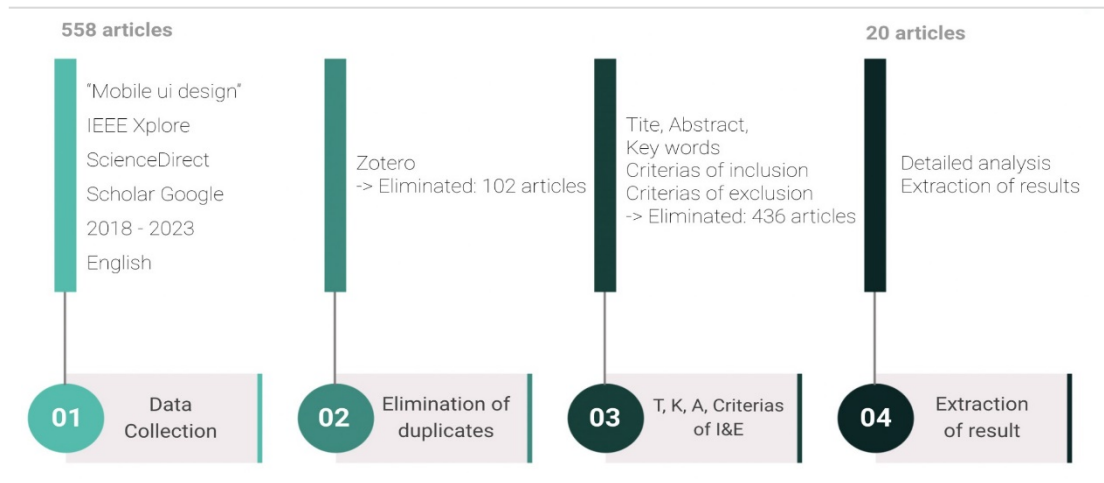


Figure 2.1 : Data collection, Selection procedure and Identification

For research question Q3, I have passed through some steps specific to the design process of UI/UX for mobile devices. I have chosen to conduct a questionnaire for coffee consumers and future app recipients, and I have used the competitive analysis method, all being specific to the research stage of the design process. I have continued by making a user flow map and wireframes, specific to the information architecture stage. Building a visual guide, individual design of the application pages and prototyping, specific to the visual design phase, were the next choices. And finally, I have tested the prototype with the observation method specific to the testing phase.

3. Relevance of mobile interface design in the context of scientific research

The use of new technologies is becoming increasingly widespread around the world in a variety of fields. They are gradually being incorporated into ordinary users' everyday lives through personal mobile devices. Convenience, accessibility and an abundance of tools are now within reach thanks to mobile applications. They give users access to a wide range of materials and information. As an overview, results gathered from the scientific articles, concerning different uses of mobile applications and their varied aims have been summarised in Figure 3.1 below.

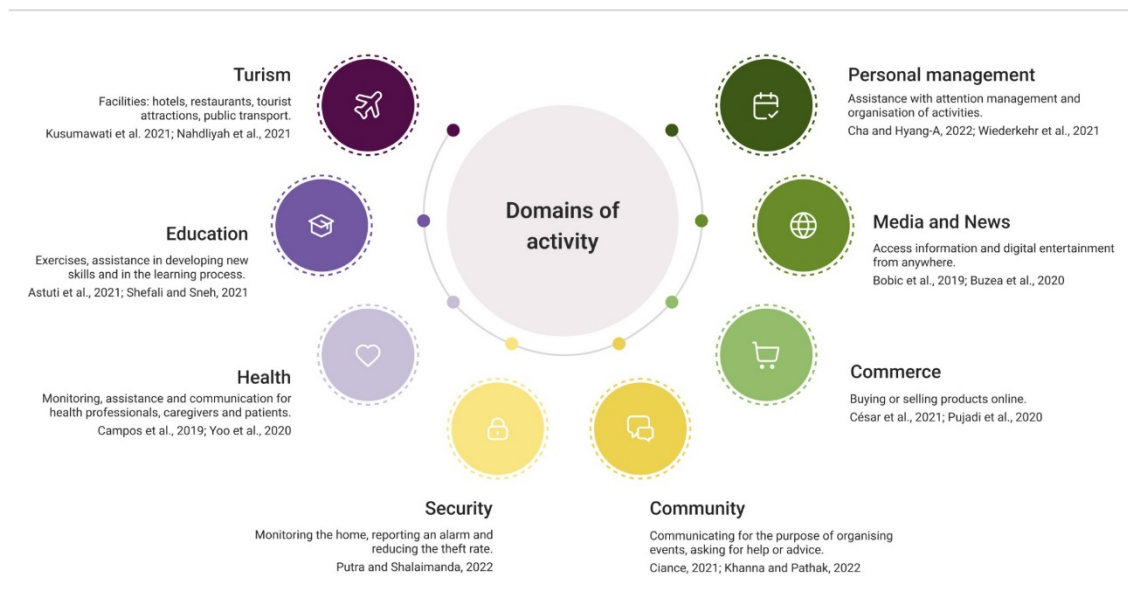


Figure 3.1: Diagram - Applications domain of activity

Mobile interfaces are used and offer multiple benefits for a variety of industries such as healthcare, education, communications, tourism, food and finance. User interfaces for mobile devices offer people an accessible, fast and simple way to receive information, perform tasks and communicate with others. In addition, mobile apps offer more opportunities for socialisation or remote support for outlying groups.

As well as being integrated into everyday life, they are also tailored to the specific needs of the individual recipients. Examples are the simple and easy-to-understand interfaces that have been observed in the healthcare department, with design principles adapted to a specific target group, e.g. the elderly.

In order to prevent pressure ulcers for the elderly or bedridden, an app was designed to improve the overall quality of well-being of patients and their caregivers by Jéssica Campos et. al, 2019. During the design process, accessibility requirements for elderly people were integrated as a main objective, by providing simple functions, messages, and contrasts (Campos et al., 2019). Among the functions, they also provided an emergency button for both the patient and the caregiver, in this way, at any time, they have the possibility to request the assistance of a doctor at any time and in any place (Campos et al., 2019).

With the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, new demands and opportunities for mobile health technologies have been generated. A group of students has developed an app with the aim of containing the chaos and fear caused by the pandemic, offering help with social distancing. It is able to map hotspot locations across the city. In addition, it offers options to choose a specific area such as a grocery store, displays the risk of infection relevant to it, offers the possibility to preset the schedule according to the crowding at certain times of the day. In this way, users are able to keep the required distance (Häkkinen et al., 2021).

Combining the functions of health, communication and aid, reference can be made to the video-based donation app D-Eazy, created by Khanna Manan and Pathak Dhruv, which addresses a separate but closely related topic. This specific app has been developed with the initiative to establish connections between donors and recipients or to contact points, in terms of any type of donations starting from food to fight hunger, birthday wishes, cakes and gifts (Khanna and Pathak, 2022). The aim is to bring a sense of happiness to as many people as possible. In other cases, one can also discuss the functions of high-need contributions such as providing medicines, medical assistance to the underprivileged and those in need, or even focus on blood donations in emergency situations (Khanna and Pathak, 2022).

Education-related mobile apps have also been developed. Here, we see a number of apps made with the intention of providing a blended learning solution by merging conventional learning methods with newly evolved technologies (Astuti et al., 2021).

E-commerce is an area that has grown in recent years and is now increasingly used through mobile apps. Shopping online with mobile requires a practical, organised, easy to access and easy to follow design and layout. In addition, it was considered that people should be able to use the interface with one hand (Jinxian, 2020). Gestalt principles have in turn been exploited to establish a close link between graphical interaction and the functionality that will be made available to the users of these apps (César et al., 2021).

Further applications created for more industries have been shown and investigated in Table 3.1 below, in order to provide some additional information based on the accomplished research and the results that have been obtained.

Table 3.1a: Mobile interface development across different domains of activity

Author(s)	Domain of activity	Scope	Keywords
Yoo et al., 2020	Health	Developing a mobile app for people with epilepsy to interact positively with their mental and physical health, providing daily diaries, stress relief exercises, medication and seizure monitoring, and patient details for doctors.	<i>Epilepsy, Seizure, Medication, Mobile application, Electronic medical record</i>
Putra and Shalaimanda, 2022	Security	A security app for a smart home, providing real-time notifications, using video monitoring of human gestures, and also offering a SOS button in case of emergency with a pre-selected list of contacts.	<i>Theft, Mobile app, Smart home, Warning system, User interface, User experience</i>
Ciance, 2021	Community	Designing a mobile app for the university during the Covid pandemic where students on campus can safely interact with each other, share their issues, fears and concerns, and create social events and gathering	<i>Covid-19 Pandemic, Social interaction, Mobile application, University campus</i>

Table 3.1b: Mobile interface development across different domains of activity

Author(s)	Domain of activity	Scope	Keywords
Shefali and Sneh, 2021	Developing of skills/Education	An application that has been developed to provide its users with training and exercises for ambidexterity and better hand coordination.	<i>Ambidexterity, Hand-switching, Hand dominance, Mobile Application, Prototype, User Interface, Design Thinking</i>
Pujadi et al., 2020	Commerce	A mobile app developed to combine coffee producers' communication with farmers and stakeholders as well as consumers by providing separate functions and options for each party.	<i>Application, Information Systems, UML, Supply Chain</i>
Buzea et al., 2020	Media and News	Development of a mobile news app that adapts its content and filters information according to user preferences.	<i>Adaptive Mobile News Platform, Romanian Corpora, Graphical Representations</i>
Cha and Hyang-A, 2022	Mental health	Developing a mobile application focused on improving mental health among young people, offering engaging stories, mediation opportunities and an interactive reward system to increase participation and concentration.	<i>UX/UI Design, Mindfulness meditation, Self-harm behavior, Youth self-harm, App Development</i>
Wiederkehr et al., 2021	Personal management	Designing an app that will help users manage their attention and productivity through the use of their daily mobile screen time.	<i>Application software, Behavioral science, Human computer interaction,</i>
Nahdliyah et al., 2021	Tourism	The mobile app meets the needs of tourists in balance with the practices of the Islamic Halal religion, such as: gender-segregated accommodation, halal food, prayer facilities, etc.	<i>Halal application, Halal tourism, Design interface, User-centered design, Usability evaluation,</i>

4. Design components and principles

UI components are the graphic illustrations, which resulted from the UX process used throughout the design cycle. Buttons are used to start activities. Images, colours and graphical elements, such as icons and illustrations, help to make information more understandable and intuitive while drawing attention to it (Campos et al., 2019; Jinxian, 2020). Animations, which provide a more dynamic message to the interaction itself, are another option. In addition, fonts play an important role in balancing the coordination between functionalities, priorities, and the overall look and feel of the interface (Naapuri, 2018). The features of navigation bars, drop-down menus, and sidebars all contribute to increased task attributes and performance, promoting the ultimate goal of the application flow (Shefali and Sneh, 2021).

In addition to the use of UI components, the desirability, accessibility and clarity of an interface are also achieved by following several important principles or rules that are used

during the development process. Design principles include symmetry, proximity, unity, consistency, repetition, alignment, hierarchy, visual balance, white space/negative space and contrast (Khanh, 2022).

The distribution of attention according to the visual hierarchy depends on how significant the data are. In order for more important information to stand out, it may be presented at a larger scale or as the first view at the top of the screen, with less important information appearing later (Khanh, 2022).

The use of contrast is a way of drawing attention to a particular element. This can be done by using different font sizes or colours to draw the reader's interest to, for example, one of the headlines or icons. Colour contrast can be used to emphasise the most important information that is provided on the screen (Jinxian, 2020).

People have traditionally associated symmetry with visually appealing patterns. In everyday life, people are attracted and seek more symmetrical visual features and elements; therefore, symmetry is used as one of the design principles to maximise the user's intentional capture and intuitive power of the design (Khanh, 2022). It is assumed that symmetry presents more stability, which is very useful when it comes to navigation elements (Khanh, 2022).

The use of proximity or, in other words, unity, allows a relationship to be established between elements present on the same display, whether they are positioned at a certain distance from each other, or close together or far apart at an angle. Even though the elements under consideration might have a different colour, assembling them together will indicate that they belong together (Khanh, 2022). A design with a similar style of icons, fonts used, or a repetitive location of elements such as navigation bars will not only make it easier for the user to achieve their goals, but will give the entire app journey a sense of security as an overall picture (Naapuri, 2018).

All these so-called "norms" for UX/UI design can help the app work best and support all the essential features, while being understandable, well organised and appealing to the eye. The information extracted from a part of the scientific articles can also be viewed in the Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1a: The use of UI/UX design components and principles

Author(s)	UX design phases identified	UI components	Design Principles
Shefali and Sneh, 2021	Research Information architecture Visual design	Animations Illustrations Icons Buttons Logo Typography Navigation Menu bar - bottom Navigation buttons – top	Balance Proximity/Unity Alignment Repetition/ Consistency Symmetry Contrast White Space

Table 4.1b: The use of Ui/Ux design components and principles

Author(s)	UX design phases identified	UI components	Design Principles
Pujadi et al., 2020	Research Information architecture Visual design	Images Icons Button Top navigation features Bottom navigation bar Typography Illustrations Graphics	Balance Proximity/Unity Alignment Repetition/ Consistency Contrast White Space
Jinxian, 2020	Information architecture Visual design	Buttons Icons Illustrations Images Scrolling menu Navigation bar Typography	Balance/Visual hierarchy Proximity/Unity Alignment Contrast White Space Repetition/Consistency Symmetry
Naapuri, 2018	Research Information architecture Visual design Testing	Logo Buttons Illustration s Icons Typograph y Top navigation bar Bottom navigation bar Search bar Images	Balance Proximity/Unity Alignment Repetition/Consistency Symmetry Contrast

After reviewing the different articles, some made full use of the design principles and UI components, which improved the testing results. On the other hand, other applications only partially used the set of guidelines, which led to the identification of possibilities for future development and improvement. It can also be observed that the main UI components, such as buttons, icons, menus and navigation modules, are repeated in most cases.

Another link that can be established from these articles is that animations are frequently used in conjunction with action monitoring tools, such as timers or mechanisms for user reactions or opinions, such as the cheerful movement of the illustration or explosions of confetti after a task has been successfully completed (Cha and Hyang-A, 2022).

Certain UI elements and principles change depending on the particular industry for which the application is designed. At the same time, the target audience for which the application is designed is also taken into account. This is also reflected in the UX stages of the process, but also in the design of UI elements. For example, many health-related apps that target the elderly, carers and patients with various medical conditions place a strong emphasis on the UI principles of consistency, visual hierarchy, contrast and white space. In many cases, the interfaces of these apps become more focused on functionality

than on aesthetic features. As a result, they become less visually pleasing for some people (Campos et al., 2019; Yoo et al., 2020).

Tourism, e-commerce and even education applications are visually connected. Apps in these fields tend to focus on a particular topic and provide a large amount of information. E-commerce applications need to incorporate and repurpose most of the features of a website into a single user interface, while tourism applications need to provide not only descriptions and potential tourist attractions around a city, but also restaurants, hotel reservations, locations, and occasionally public transportation options (César et al., 2021; Kusumawati and Renanda, 2021). To represent data as accurately as possible from a single visual interaction, they primarily use a large number of images, but also provide users with clear navigation paths for training, such as top and bottom navigation bars and occasionally even a sidebar for additional features (Jinxian, 2020; Nahdliyah et al., 2021).

Reference can also be made to applications in the educational sphere. In addition, they use built-in video-based options for detailed tutorials or more in-depth explanations, as well as communication tools such as student chat groups or online conferencing options. These types of information apps frequently include search functions, represented by icons or search bars, to help users and point them in the right direction (Naapuri, 2018).

Overall, by stating the above points and having carried out the analysis of the various articles, the broad relatability, high relevance and impact of the various UI components and principles can be expressed in terms of distinguishing the different areas and functionalities of the applications, as well as the opportunities for detail that they provided for each specific industry.

5. Specific stages of the UX/UI design process for mobile interfaces

Designers adhere to a design process that incorporates UX/UI principles to develop an intelligible mobile interface (Astuti et al., 2021). The UX/UI process consists of the following design stages: Research, Information Architecture, Visual Design and Testing (Yusaliano et al., 2020). To answer the third research question of my paper - What are the best practices in applying specific steps of the UX/UI design process for mobile interfaces - I have chosen to go through the steps of this process. For example, I have chosen the particular context of designing a mobile app for a coffee shop. I have decided to do this because, on a brief passing through the entertainment and leisure areas of Timisoara, I have noticed that these businesses have become numerous. Talking to some of the managers, they stressed the need for such an app and see it as beneficial for their businesses.

5.1 Research

An important aspect of app design is to understand the preferences and needs of potential users. Following the research stage of the design process, I have conducted a questionnaire, assigned to a target group of people over the age of 18. It aims to obtain relevant information about the audience's preferences in relation to the desired application of a café. When creating

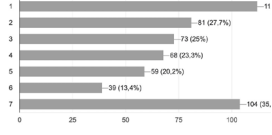
this questionnaire, I have taken into account different aspects of the user experience. The questionnaire consisted of 15 questions.

For starters, potential app functionality has been integrated, such as options to check for open spaces and reserve a table in advance, select a drink before arriving at the café, in-app or in-cash payment methods, My Profile option or potential forms of socialising directly from the app. I have then focused on the visual design of the app, for instance font types, colours, preferences in using explanatory images and illustrations, choosing a minimalist or complex design or logo type. Finally, the questionnaire also consisted of 2 open questions, in which different new suggestions and aspects that users would like to benefit from were expressed. Some of the questionnaire results are visible in the Table 5.1 below.

Table 5.1a: Selected questionnaire responses

Question	Response	Results
Would you like to have the option to check the free tables before entering the cafe?	<p>Vrei să ai opțiunea de a verifica mesele libere înainte de a ajunge la cafenea? 292 răspunsuri</p> <p>95.4% 4.6%</p> <p>Da Nu</p>	Yes – 95.4%
Do you find the "My Profile" option beneficial, where you can embed your café loyalty card to receive points and rewards?	<p>Consideri benefică opțiunea de "Profilul Meu", unde să poți încorpora cardul de loialtate al cafenelei, pentru a primi puncte și premii? 292 răspunsuri</p> <p>87% 13%</p> <p>Da Nu</p>	Yes - 87%
How would you like to pay?	<p>Cum dorești să plătești comanda? 292 răspunsuri</p> <p>52.7% 47.3%</p> <p>Direct din aplicație Plătește la casă, numerar sau</p>	By card -52.7% By cash -47.3%
What should be used in the design of the application? (Representative images ; Illustrations; Both)	<p>Ce crezi că ar trebui în designul aplicației? 292 răspunsuri</p> <p>32.9% 58.2% 8.9%</p> <p>Fotografii reprezentative Ilustrații simbolice Ambele</p>	Representative images -32.9% Illustrations- 8.9% Both -58.2%
What type of Logo do you prefer? (Wordmark, Symbol or Pictorial or Combination)	<p>Alege tipul de logo pe care îl preferi pentru aplicație. 292 răspunsuri</p> <p>48.6% 27.1% 24.3%</p> <p>Logo bazat pe text (Wordmark) Logo bazat pe simbol grafic, pictogramă (Symbol or Pict) Logo bazat pe combinație</p>	Wordmark-27.1% Symbol or Pictorial-24.3% Combination-48.6%

Table 5.1b: Selected questionnaire responses

Question	Responses	Results																								
Choose two of the given color palettes	<p>Alege două dintre paletele de culori, pe care le preferi a fi utilizate în designul aplicației: 292 voturi</p>  <table border="1"> <caption>Chart Data</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Option</th> <th>Count</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Option 1</td> <td>81</td> <td>27.7%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Option 2</td> <td>59</td> <td>20.2%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Option 3</td> <td>48</td> <td>16.4%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Option 4</td> <td>39</td> <td>13.4%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Option 5</td> <td>29</td> <td>10%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Option 6</td> <td>14</td> <td>4.8%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Option 7</td> <td>73</td> <td>25%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Option	Count	Percentage	Option 1	81	27.7%	Option 2	59	20.2%	Option 3	48	16.4%	Option 4	39	13.4%	Option 5	29	10%	Option 6	14	4.8%	Option 7	73	25%	<p>Option 1:38.4% Option 7:35.6% Option 2:27.7%</p>
Option	Count	Percentage																								
Option 1	81	27.7%																								
Option 2	59	20.2%																								
Option 3	48	16.4%																								
Option 4	39	13.4%																								
Option 5	29	10%																								
Option 6	14	4.8%																								
Option 7	73	25%																								

In addition to the audience preferences translated and identified in the aforementioned questionnaire, I have decided to continue my research process with a method where I can focus on visual design, namely a competitive analysis.

In order to extract the information in a structured manner, I have created Table 5.1.2, which can be seen in Appendix 1. All of the reviewed apps offer an intuitive and user-friendly interface. Representative images and suggestive icons are common in the design of all. The preference for the combination of the two in creating a café app was also confirmed by the results of the questionnaire. Also, the following basic functionalities were identified from both research methods as necessary or desired: quick pre-order, payment system integration and drink customisation options, "My Profile" page and including the award system.

5.2 Information Architecture

I have started the second design stage, information architecture, in the context of the Coffee for Everyone app, by generating a user flow map. This is shown as an overview in Figure 5.2.1. This method has enabled me to create a visual structure for the actual content of the app and its navigation. In addition, it has allowed me to group and organise the different actions that users will engage in, keep track of the information on display, and arrange everything in an understandable and coherent manner.

Following the progression of this design stage, I have created wireframes, after establishing the user flow and navigation structure of the application. It builds a smooth transition between the user flow map and the final design of the app. In general, this method can also be done in a program, such as Figma, but it can also be sketched manually, even on paper. Personally, to keep a more private but clean touch for better communication, I have decided to create it as a manual sketch, and I have drawn it digitally on my own tablet, visible in the below Figure 5.2.2.

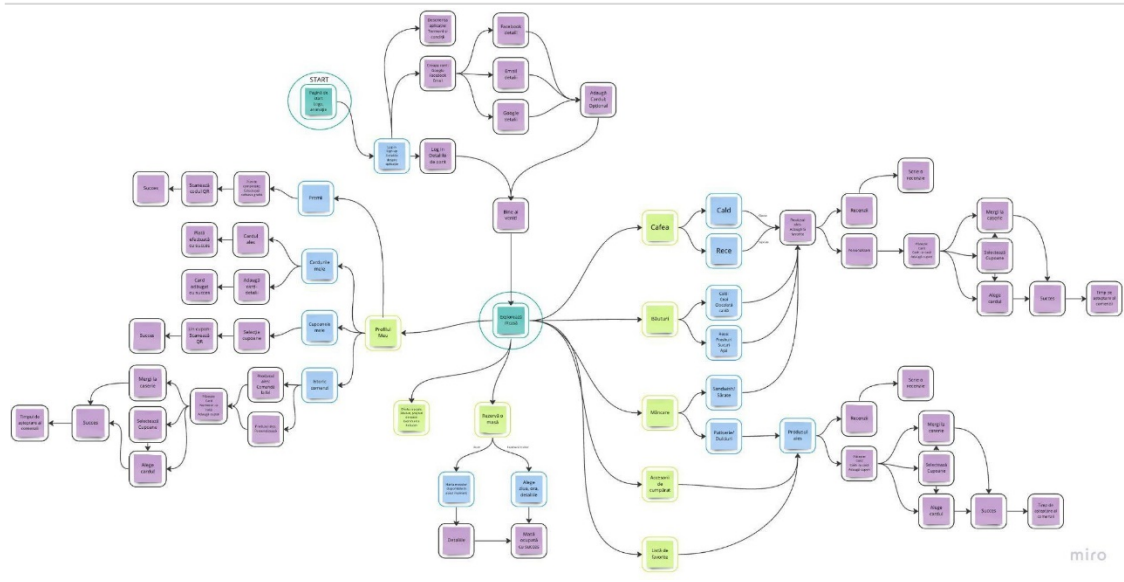


Figure: 5.2.1: User flow map

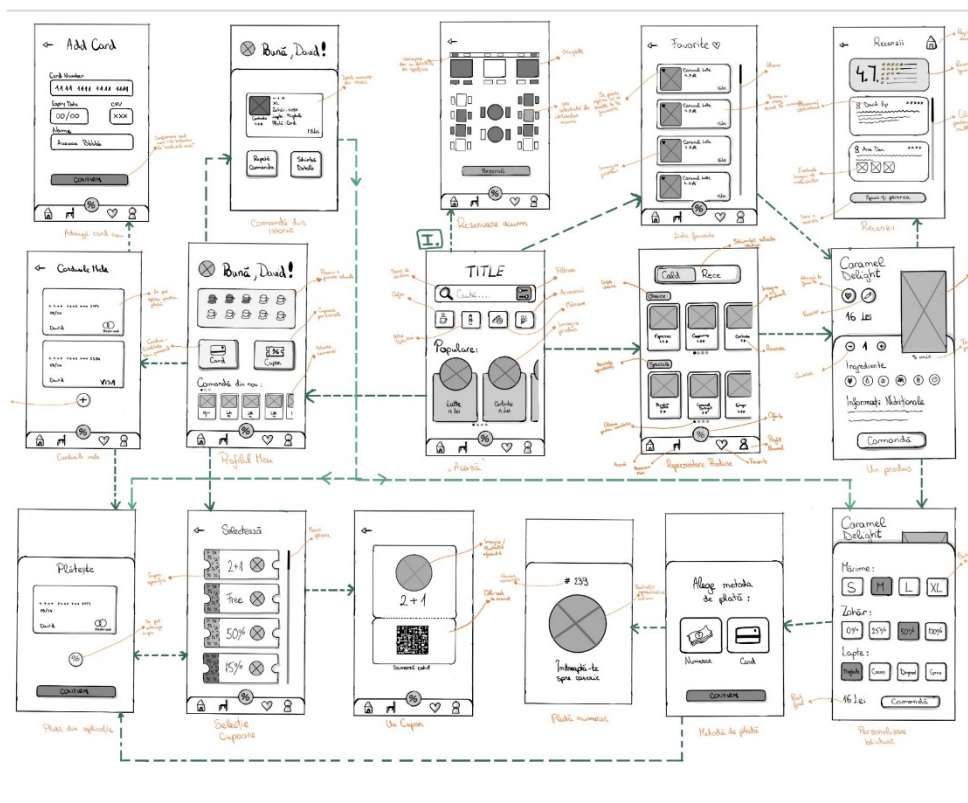


Figure: 5.2.2: Wireframes

With the help of the wireframes, I have integrated the UI components studied and researched in the previous chapter of my paper, and represented them in a simplistic visual way. In order to give people the chance to always have the security to suddenly change their location in the app or to quickly change their target, they have been designed with accessibility and intuitiveness in mind.

5.3 Visual Design

Following the above process, I have reached the visual design phase, where the described graphic elements will finally be designed. With the help of the previous information, inspiration and suggestions that were collected from the audience during the questionnaire, I have developed a suitable visual guide. This will be used as a so-called instruction manual for application. All the provided elements will be combined and used during the development of the individual pages.

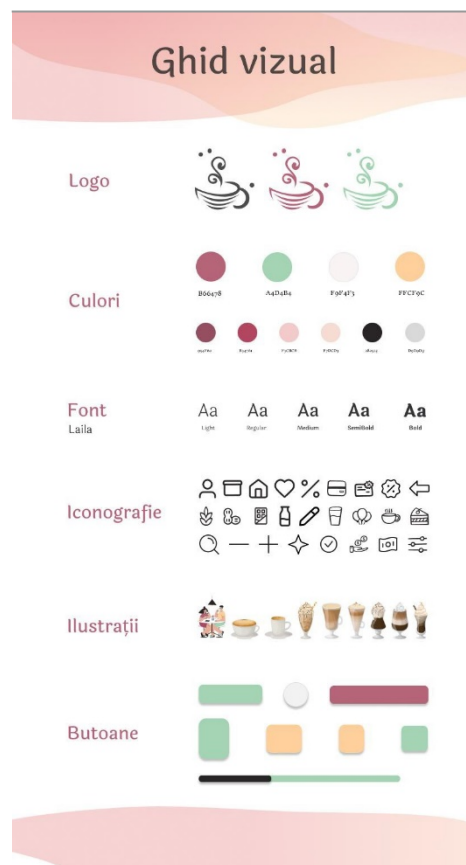


Figure: 5.3.1: Visual Design guide

Based on the UI elements presented above, the individual page designs of the application were created using Figma. Figure 5.3.2 has shown the overview of the UI design that has been developed so far.

The design principles extracted from the analysis of the scientific papers in the previous chapter were used in the creation of the graphical interface design of the Coffee for Everyone app. These can be noticed throughout each page, e.g. all similar elements have been grouped

together or are of an identical colour, such as the rectangular shapes in which the coffee products are presented or the buttons for the options to choose the amount of coffee, sugar and milk. The action buttons for order, write a review or customise were all aligned in the center of the page. Repetition has also been used throughout the button shapes and their



locations for better navigation.

Figure: 5.3.2: Individual design of the application pages

The feedback and response elements have been integrated, e.g. during the card payment option to this particular section, a green tick icon from the design guide is used to assure the user that the transaction made has been successfully completed.

As for the reserving table options, it can be seen that, from the colour palette, the most suggestive colours have been chosen to create the map, taking into account the reddish tint, which represents the stop action or, in this context, the fact that the table is occupied. The green colour was used to signify an empty table.

The specific prototype for this application was created with the help of Figma. The aim is to represent the interactions and connections that will be offered by the application to its users. The figure below shows an overview of a part of the prototype of the application that I have developed at this stage. In Figure 5.3.3, the focus is on the Explore/Home page of the application and on the related connections. I have chosen to show it only in this way, as it is the main page, because, due to the amount of connections exposed on the screen, if it were shown in its entirety, the image would have become completely imperceptible.

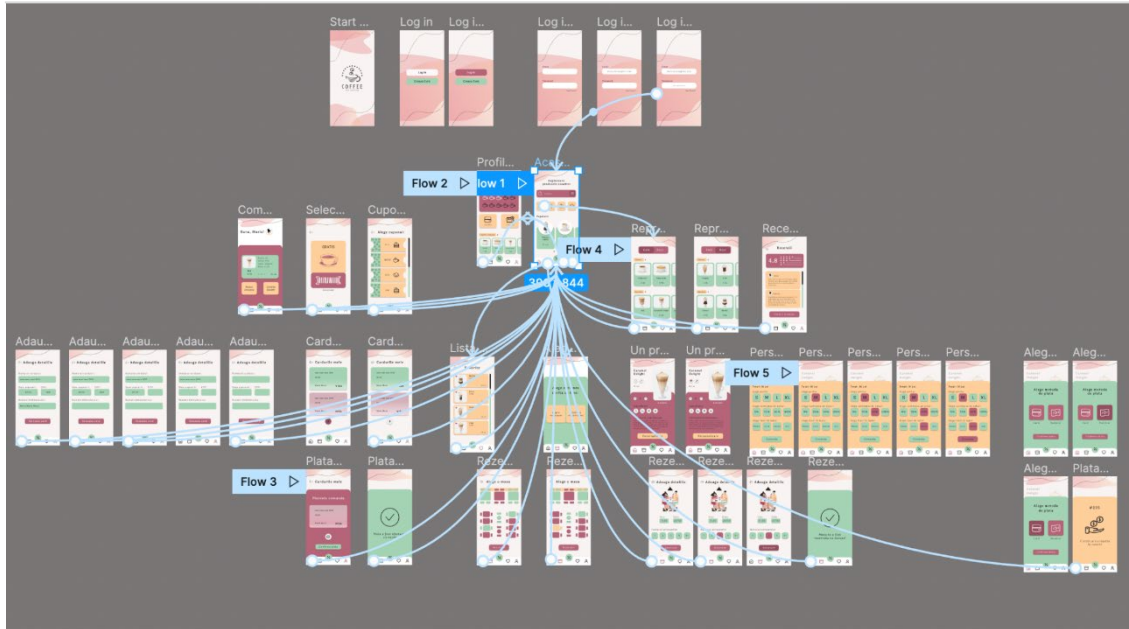


Figura 5.3.3: Application prototype overview- Explore page

Detailing some of the interactions created, I am able to discuss the scrolling features that can be achieved with Figma. Figure 5.3.4 shows the two menus for hot and cold coffee products. However, in the background there are actually many more coffees that are not visible at first glance. These have been grouped and added into a separate frame, being presented as the selection framed with blue borders.

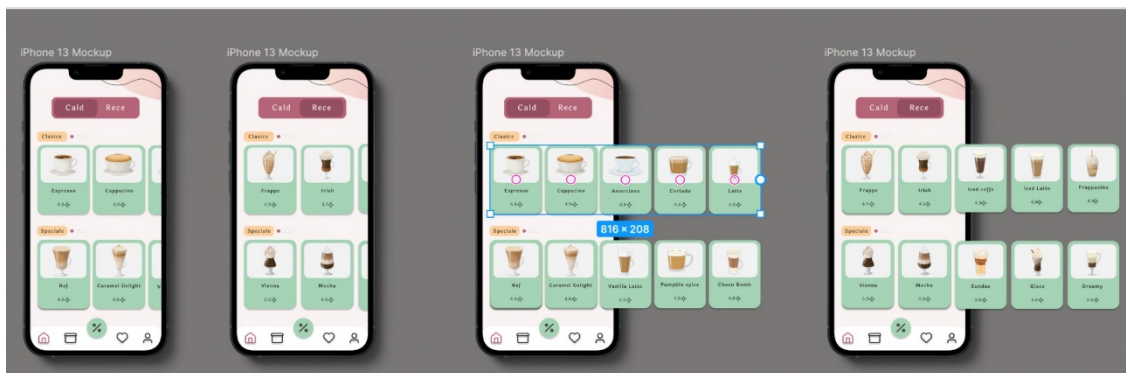


Figura 5.3.4: Scrolling feature creation

The frame can still be embedded within the page as a component. Once it has been embedded into the screen page, using the keyboard 'Ctrl' command, elements that are only to be visible after the scroll action can be hidden inside the frame and adjusted to the screen size. Once the action is complete, Figma offers a function called "Scroll with parent" in the prototyping area. This will trigger the scrolling of the created coffee products and keep them in place along with the so-called parent page, which is the initial home screen. Many such interactions, as exemplified in this chapter, were used during the prototyping phase for the Coffee for Everyone app.

5.4 Testing

As part of the testing phase, specific to the UX/UI design process, I have decided to use observations as a testing method. The reason this method was chosen was to monitor the users' interaction with the developed application design, especially in terms of the level of intuitiveness and accessibility of the actions and information presented.

I have paid high attention from the familiarity of the representative icons, to the most evocative information that stood out and also to how users will go through the process of ordering the desired drink. Will participants check the reviews first before ordering, or will they also read the ingredients? Also, will they be able to understand the buttons and their placement on the screens, will they use the navigation bar at the bottom throughout the process to move through the flow of the app? These were all points I sought to answer during my testing session. I have created Table 5.4.1 shown below to track and summarise all the information from the test session and the data collected.

Table 5.4.1: User Testing

Participant	Observations	Positive experiences	Negative experiences
Lungu Mădălin	Tried the search bar Before ordering a coffee clicked on reviews Read the ingredients Paid with card Added a new card Ordered from the favourites list	Used the navigation bar Scrolling was intuitive Successfully added order to favorites list. Drink customization was done extremely quickly Coupon scanning is intuitive Successfully selected a table	He missed the payment confirmation button and hit the card select button twice before he figured it out. The representative icon for reserving a table in the menu bar created a slight confusion in gestures.
Craia Andreea	Tried to use the search bar. Read the reviews didn't read the ingredients Decided to pay with cash. Booked a table using the map	Scrolling was intuitive Representative icons were understood. Used the navigation bar correctly Added drinks to favorites successfully Chose the free table successfully. Coffee customisation was quick.	The representative icon used for the accessories category created slight confusion. The representative icon for booking a table in the menu bar created slight confusion in gestures. Used the back arrow only once, otherwise only used the navigation bar.
Takacs Alexandru	Went straight for the coffee category icon. Checked all the coffee options Read the reviews Added the coffee to favorites. Paid by card	Used the scrolling without hesitation Used and understood the order history section Successfully added a coupon during payment The coupon was intuitive. Free table was successfully selected	The representative icon used for the accessories category created slight confusion. Within the success response screen, tapped the middle several times to return to the app. After a few attempts, he noticed that that action was done using the navigation bar at the bottom of the screen.

6. Conclusions

I will be concluding this work by presenting below an answer to each of the research questions that were raised.

Q1 - Is the design of graphical user interfaces for mobile devices relevant, in the context of scientific research?

Mobile UI design is relevant in the context of scientific research because with the help of the aesthetic and functional components it offers, it can be adapted to the needs of different domains such as education, health, commerce, etc. At the same time, the UI can be designed taking into account multiple users or multiple parties that are involved in the domain itself and individually serve the purposes of each.

Q2 - What are the components and design principles used by researchers to design graphical user interfaces for mobile devices?

The design components used by researchers can be listed in the following categories and more: illustrations, icons, images, animations, fonts, buttons, menus, media, search bars, navigation, swipe, logo. The design principles used when designing graphical user interfaces are the basis of the visual hierarchy or balance. These are created using the principles of: proximity, symmetry, contrast, whitespace, alignment, and repetition.

Q3 - What are the best practices in applying specific steps of the UX/UI design process for mobile interfaces?

In this UX/UI design process, the following stages can be found: Research, Information Architecture, Visual Design, Prototyping and Testing. For each stage, there are different methods to achieve the desired results. For example, in the case of the research stage, questionnaires, interviews or observations can be carried out to gather audience preferences in the given context. In the information architecture stage, all the data and messages that the application needs and wants to convey are built and structured, starting with methods such as flowcharts, mindmaps, up to the construction of wireframes to get an overview of the information in the pages of the application. Based on these during the Visual Design phase, a visual guide will be developed. Using the guidelines: colours, fonts, icons, chosen illustrations, and also the previously created wireframes, the individual page designs will be projected and finally the prototype of the application will be designed using different programs such as Figma or Adobe XD. This prototype will be tested in the final stage of the process, using various methods e.g. observations, focus groups, A/B testing.

In the context of my work and the design of the Coffee for Everyone app, I have encountered some limitations in the UI/UX design process. The prototype was developed in a short time frame and for an app that serves multiple uses and products. I was not able to fully design the prototype for all the pages that would be included in the final version of the app, but I have limited myself, due to the context and this work, to focus

on the branch for coffee products. An entire user flow was still developed, with the aim that it could be presented for testing purposes. However, in the future, other product categories and functionalities of the application can be adapted and added, based on the same design and structure I have created for the coffee branch.

At the same time, it is important to point out that, only common potential users of similar ages participated in the testing phase of the UX/UI design process. In the future, for more detailed testing and results, I would also suggest testing conducted with UX/UI people, who could provide more insight into details that are not visible to non-professionals. I would also use a focus group method instead of observations for this procedure, to trigger a more open discussion and collect more results.

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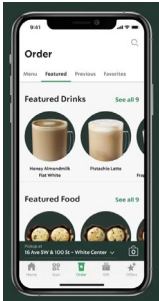
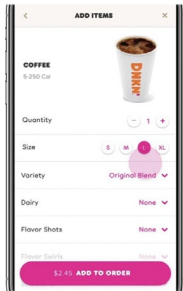
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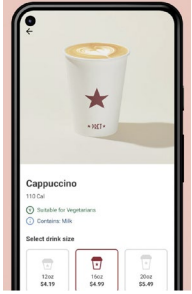
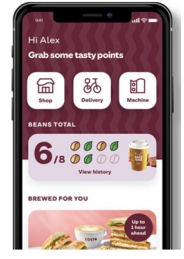
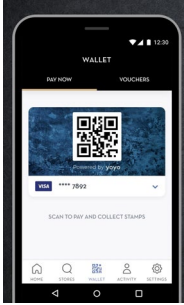
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Appendix 1

Tabel 5.1.2a:Competitive Analysis

Application	Design	Key functionalities	Feedback	Accessibility	Reviews
<p>Starbucks</p> 	<p>Modern and clean design</p> <p>Representative images</p> <p>Intuitive icons</p> <p>Colours in line with the brand</p>	<p>Fast and pre-order drinks</p> <p>Starbucks Rewards loyalty program</p> <p>Personalised drinks</p> <p>Integrated Starbucks Card for in-app payment</p> <p>Option to add products to favorites</p>	<p>Direct interaction after pressing buttons</p> <p>Notifications in case of offers or full reward</p>	<p>Navigation bar menu for quick access</p> <p>Intuitive search icon for direct interaction</p>	<p>Positive ratings</p> <p>Small issues that are more related to the communication of the app with the cafe itself: wrong order etc.</p>
<p>Dunkin' Donuts</p> 	<p>Colourful and vibrant design</p> <p>Representative images</p> <p>Suggestive icons</p>	<p>Separate menus by category: drinks, food, donuts</p> <p>Integration of personal card and payment directly from the app</p> <p>Rewards and offers system</p> <p>Option to customize the drink in the details of each ingredient</p> <p>Pre-order from the app</p> <p>"My Profile"</p>	<p>Prompt interaction.</p> <p>Order preparation notifications</p> <p>Notifications of offers and discounts</p> <p>Error messages in case of problems</p>	<p>Provides options to enlarge text</p> <p>Navigation bar menu</p> <p>Provides voice assistance</p>	<p>Positive reviews with minor complaints about the system</p>

Tabel
5.1.2b:Competitive
Analysis

Application	Design	Key functionalities	Feedback	Accessibility	Reviews
<p>Pret a Manger</p> 	<p>Simple and friendly design in line with the brand</p> <p>Representative images</p> <p>Suggestive icons</p>	<p>Menus structured according to food preferences: vegetarian, vegan, etc.</p> <p>Integrated reward system</p> <p>Varied payment options</p> <p>Quick pre-order</p> <p>Easy personalisation of drinks</p>	<p>Visual response</p> <p>Notifications about offers or order</p>	<p>Navigation bar menu</p>	<p>Positive reviews with minor complaints about the system</p>
<p>Costa Coffee</p> 	<p>Brand consistent friendly design</p> <p>Representative images</p> <p>Suggestive icons</p>	<p>Menu navigation</p> <p>bar Personal order history</p> <p>Integrated award system</p> <p>"My Profile"</p> <p>On-location booking options</p> <p>Integrated payment system</p> <p>Drink customisation</p>	<p>Direct interaction</p> <p>Confirmation messages</p>	<p>Navigation bar menu</p> <p>Filter options</p> <p>Search options</p>	<p>Positive reviews with minor complaints about the system</p>
<p>Caffe Nero</p> 	<p>Design using predominantly black and white with a tinge of blue</p> <p>Representative images</p> <p>Suggestive icons</p>	<p>Category-structured menus: drinks and food</p> <p>Integration of personal card and payment directly from the app</p> <p>Rewards and offers system</p> <p>Save your favourite drinks</p> <p>Quick pre-order "My Profile"</p>	<p>Fast interaction</p> <p>Confirmation messages</p>	<p>Provides options to enlarge text</p> <p>Navigation bar menu</p> <p>Provides voice assistance</p>	<p>Positive reviews with minor complaints about the system</p>

Graphic processes in 3D character design

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Abstract: 3D design involves creating three-dimensional objects using specialized software. These objects can then be used in a variety of media, such as films, video games, animations and advertising. This paper aims to show the relevance of 3D character design in scientific research by reviewing the literature and highlighting the specific steps in and features of the 3D character design process. A series of best practices in 3D graphic design are also described and the whole creative process is exemplified through the creation of two characters: Astronaut and Rayming.

Keywords: Graphic design, 3D graphics, Character Modelling, Modelling, Animation, UV, Rendering

1. Introduction

3D graphic characters or 3D characters are three-dimensional models of people, animals or fantasy creatures. Usually, 3D graphic characters are designed to be animated. According to Kunkhet et al. (2019), a “3D character is created from static polygonal surfaces. In general, a polygonal surface can be moved by moving its components: vertices, edges and faces. The rigging technique groups these components together and moves them simultaneously to any desired position”. Animation is the process of creating movement and change of states in a series of static images or objects. This movement can be created through various techniques such as 2D animation, 3D animation, stop-motion or computer animation.

3D graphic characters can be used in different areas such as films, animations and video games to add an element of realism and to make the story more engaging and easier to follow. They can also be used in advertising to promote different products or services and to attract the attention of the public.

2. Research methods and methodology

This paper aims to show the relevance of 3D character design in scientific research by reviewing the literature and highlighting the specific steps in and features of the 3D character design process. I used the literature review method, relying on different means of data collection, as well as on a selection and identification procedure.

In this paper, I will answer the following research questions:

Q1 - Is 3D character design relevant in the context of scientific research?

Q2 - Which are the specific steps/details in making a 3D (animated) character?

Q3 - Which are the best practices in a creative 3D (animated) character design process?

To answer research questions Q1 and Q2, I conducted an analysis of the scientific works corresponding to the chosen field, following the steps described in the subsections Data collection methods, Selection procedure and Identification.

Data collection methods

The following data collection method was chosen:

Search field: "3d character modelling"

Databases: IEEE Xplore, Science Direct, Scholar Google

<https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/>, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/>,

<https://scholar.google.com/>

Publication date: 2015 - 2023

Sort by: Relevance

Language: English

Selection procedure

At this specific stage in the process, I examined the titles, keywords and abstracts of the articles. I briefly reviewed the full-text articles while using the inclusion and exclusion criteria in Table 1.

Table 1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Articles from scientific conferences and journals Work relevant to 3D graphics Work relevant to 3D character design Work including keywords for 3D characters or 3D graphics Work including 3D character screenshots	Work irrelevant to 3D graphics Work not including keywords for 3D characters or 3D graphics Work not including processes that violate the principles of 3D character creation

Identification

For each digital library, I have got different results: 302 articles for IEEE Xplore, 169 for Science Direct, and 268 for Scholar Google (my search was limited to the first 20 pages). The total number was 739. I used Zotero as my personal research assistant, which helped me collect and organize the articles, and eliminate duplicates. As a result, 583 articles remained. After selecting the title, keywords, abstract, inclusion and exclusion criteria, I got 20 articles. The next steps were to read these articles in detail, to select the ones from which I could extract data, and to analyse them in order to answer the research questions Q1 and Q2. I have additionally included three scholarly web articles from blogs specific to the field of graphics.

For the research question Q3, which concerns good practices in 3D character creation, I have considered the information gathered from the analysis of scientific works, as well as from my own experience in creating 3D objects and 3D character modelling through influences from specialized forums and YouTube tutorials.

Each individual character is used for different purposes: one is made for a short animation, while the other is made for integration into different digital materials. Both characters are similar in process with minor exceptions.

The methods used for modelling are categorized as polygonal modelling and digital sculpting, followed by UV mapping, texturing with the processes needed to achieve it, optimization using certain techniques, rigging, animation and rendering. As for software, I mainly used Blender, but also Substance Painter and Character Creator 4.

3. Relevance

In the literature, 3D graphic design has many implications in culture, entertainment, video games, animation and so on. Following the analysis of the workflow for modelling a 3D character, using a 3D K-Pop dance animation as a case study, one can observe the procedural process of 3D character creation as well as of animation creation, which is limited because “different activities and features require different character modelling and configuration. The number of segments is kept to a minimum” (Kunkhet et al., 2019).

For film and animation, 3D offers limitless possibilities in the creative process, the limit being the human mind and one’s experience in using 3D graphics. At the same time, 3D animation offers diverse benefits, from the ability to create complex 3D models that can be detailed in ways that would be impossible in the real world, to the flexibility of creating, using and reusing 3D characters. One example in terms of animation is the short film made with 3D CGI and live action by Augustina Ina, Fauziah and Utami Maulina. This computer-generated imagery (CGI) process is used in the global film industry. According to the authors, “the director chooses to use 3D CGI instead of real objects in order to optimize costs and create a scene that is currently impossible to achieve in reality” (Agustina et al., 2017).

Another well-known branch of graphics, whose end product is consumed daily in almost every part of the world, is video game design, which involves the creation of 3D objects as well as of 3D characters. Games are an incredible component of the digital age, from competitive games to single player, educational computer games or integrated VR or AR. All these games require advanced coding and 3D skills, as well as making optimized 3D components to work well when completing the game as a creative process. Parab Aaryan et al. (2022) developed a video game with the theme of Mahabharata, designed for operating systems such as Windows, in which a “player can learn about Indian mythology and respond to the game's difficulties while playing the shooter game”.

Obviously, there are still areas and fields where the creation of 3D objects and characters is useful, but the research involvement to develop the processes of using 3D graphics is also useful, giving designers the opportunity to create complex and efficient models that fit the field of use at the highest level, using methods and techniques discovered and developed. A case in point is Ismail et al. (2015), who describe “a technique for deforming different motion styles, from normal mode to strong mode and even exaggeration, by deforming specific positions in the motions of 3D characters introduced into the computer animation system”.

4. Stages and particularities

The first step in 3D character creation is to develop a concept or an idea for the character. The inspiration for the character's design and story can come from pure imagination or from references from several sources of inspiration (images). Finally, a sketch is made that can act as an incipient model of the character in 2D graphics to be translated into 3D. An example is the work of Aubrey Galindez, who made 3 digitally illustrated characters in some scenes. The author used different games such as Bayonetta, Soul Caliber and League of Legends as references. She explains that, when creating a character, she aims for some kind of indication, words or aesthetic that she wants the character to embody (Aubrey, 2022).

The second step in the creation of a 3D character is the actual modelling of the character. For example, Kovanen (2015) argues that “3D character modelling is mainly based on polygonal modelling methods. The other, less popular method is NURBS (Non-Uniform Rational B-Splines) modelling”. The first method is more common in 3D character modelling, being more optimal to use, texture and animate, because it does not break on deformation, while the second method is more common in manufacturing and engineering, being formed from curves (Kovanen, 2015).

The third step is known as UV mapping, which is a complicated process depending on the complexity of the 3D object. UV refers to two-dimensional coordinates. This step “is the process of mapping the polygons of a 3D model onto a two-dimensional surface so that it can be textured” (Terävä, 2017). Thus, a two-dimensional UV map is made from each polygon of the 3D model. When colour or different textures are applied to an area on the UV map, the polygons that align with the UV coordinates

inherit the texture or the corresponding colour, being later found in the 3D space. In a much more simplified way, the UV mapping process is “model unwrapping, by taking the surface and placing it in UV space” (Kovanen, 2015). Settling refers to the fact that the object can be positioned in pieces using the seam process to achieve good distortion.

The fourth step is optimization - a process in which attempts are made to minimize the computing power requirements of hardware components. This optimization process is particularly necessary in the gaming industry and beyond. Considering that a scene has several objects displayed simultaneously and rendering is done in real time, it is necessary that the objects look good visually, but also include little polygonal information. The way “to have a model that is low in polygon count (low-poly) and looks like it has a lot of surface detail is to cheat” (Kovanen, 2015).

The fifth step is texturing. 3D texturing refers to the process of adding visual details to the surface of a 3D model to create a more complex and realistic image, with the information being projected two-dimensionally onto the UV map. These details can include textures, colours, patterns and other visual information, which are applied to the 3D model to enhance its appearance and realism. Even though texturing can be done directly in Blender, which has functions to add colours and materials, textures can be added in any 2D art or specialized texturing program, such as Substance Painter. As Heikkilä (2017) argues, “some games need realistic textures made from real photos, while others need stylized hand-painted textures”.

The sixth step concerns the most important process in terms of character animation and posing. In general, the polygonal modelling process allows the movement of components: edges, faces and vertices. Rigging “groups these components together and moves them simultaneously to any desired position” (Kunkhet et al., 2019).

The seventh step is animation - a process that uses all the previous steps to bring the 3D character to life. Agustina et al. (2017) describe animation as the process in which one makes “an object move or change shape over time, and it can be animated in a variety of ways”. The animation process comes incipiently with a script outlining the key moments of the animation. 3D character animation methods are diverse, but Keyframe Animation, Motion Capture, and Simulation Animation are among the most popular.

The last step is rendering. 3D rendering is the process of transforming a 3D model into a 2D image or video clip. This process involves calculating all the light properties, object colour and environment of the 3D scene so that realistic looking images are created. According to Larson and Semwal (2016), “rendering involves taking every aspect of the model (geometry, textures and lighting) and using these to calculate the final image”. Rendering time is directly proportional to the computational components and the totality of properties included in the rendered scene. Thus, rendering, especially rendering an animation, is a game of patience, time being the greatest asset in this circumstance.

5. Good practices

In this section, I will use all the knowledge gained and combine it with my experience with 3D objects to create two 3D characters to be used for two different purposes, namely, animation and integration into digital materials. As explained above, the steps to be followed in the creation of a 3D character are complex and diverse, ranging from concept development, modelling and UV mapping, to optimization, texturing, rigging, animation and finally, rendering. Moreover, post-processing aims at enhancing various visual aspects and adding special effects.

5.1. Concept

For the first 3D character, I decided to make an astronaut, which would then be animated. This astronaut is somehow atypical, but follows, to some extent, the traditional elements of an astronaut, such as the helmet, the equipment, the backpack and the tubes (cf. Figure 1). In terms of animation, I decided to keep it simple: a short scene in a cave, where the astronaut walks forward with a helper next to him emitting light.

For the second 3D character, I wanted to make something more interesting, which could be integrated into different digital materials, but which would also have my artistic signature. As a result, Rayming comes from a future world, and is depicted in a Cyberpunk style (cf. Figure 2). In addition to clothing and helmet, I also built a weapon for him to use in certain stances specific to a fighting style.

5.2. Modelling



Figure 2. Astronaut Moodboard

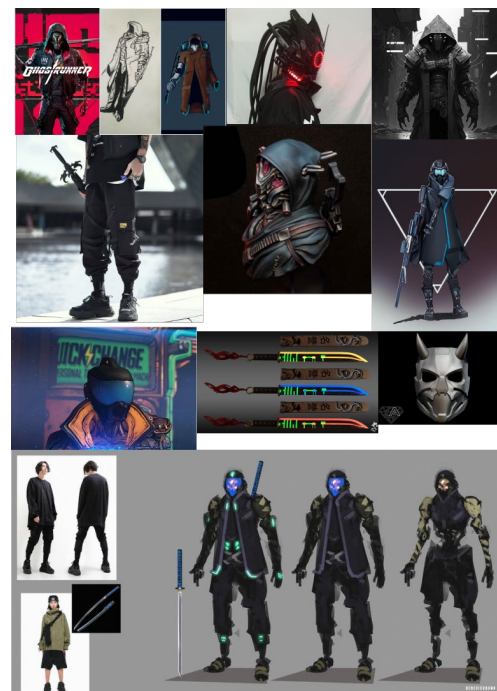


Figure 1. Rayming Moodboard

To model the characters, I used a basic body made in Character Creator. Then I relied on polygonal modelling (the process of influencing the faces, edges and tips of a primitive shape) to gradually create the specific elements of the characters, from the helmet to the shoes. To streamline the process, I used modifiers, such as the mirroring modifier, which allows the geometry on an axis to be translated based on the origin point of the model. In addition, the solidifying modifier was used to add thickness to clothing and equipment, while the hi-res modifier was used to bring more influence on the character details based on digital sculpting.

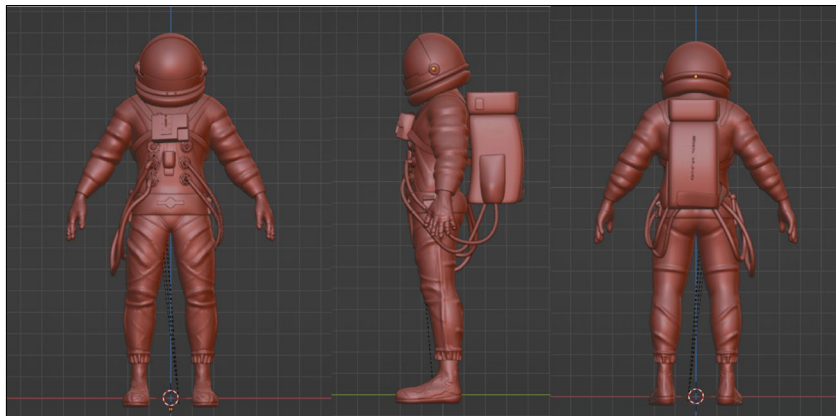


Figure 3. Astronaut Modeled

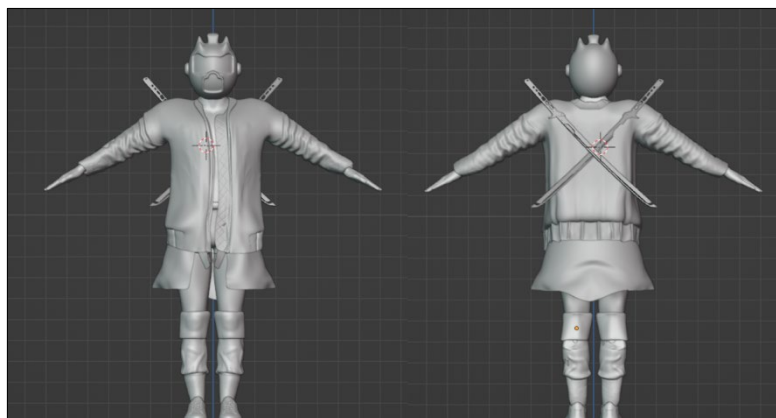


Figure 4. Rayming Modeled

5.3. UV mapping/Optimization/Textures

UV mapping is the transposition of three-dimensional information into two-dimensional information to generate different textures. The transition from 3D to 2D is achieved by stitching. To get an overview of how the 2D texture will look on the 3D character, a UV grid node can be made. Based on the live mapping function, stitches can be made in real time. Individually made shapes are called islands and are placed in a UV map. An important step after stitching is to straighten the islands and arrange them in the map so that texture density is as high as possible.

For Astronaut, I used knotted texturing in Blender, while for Rayming, I used Substance Painter, which is a texturing dedicated software and is, therefore, much more effective. I made different textures based on previous mapping, such as normal, colour, emission, gloss, brightness and occlusion maps.

5.4. Rigging/Animation



Figure 5. Astronaut and Rayming Textured

For rigging, I used an addon called Riggify to directly generate a humanoid skeleton. I superimposed it on the character line, resized it and mathematically applied the scale. After that, I rigged the skeleton to match the body and parented the body to the skeleton with automatic weights. Then, I painted by hand the influence of the bones on the body, where still needed.

Next, I created special IK bones, which can be conceptualized as controllers for different areas of the body influencing several bones at once. The animation was created through gradual movements with the application of rotation and scale in the animator to generate key frames.

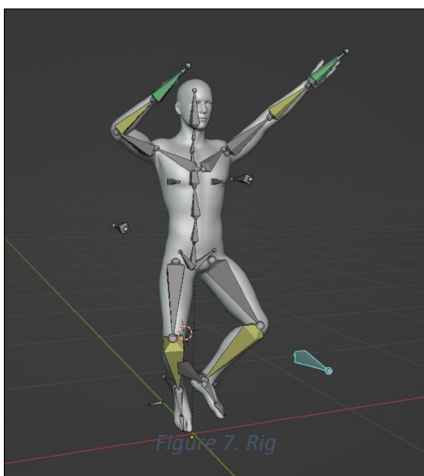


Figure 7. Rig

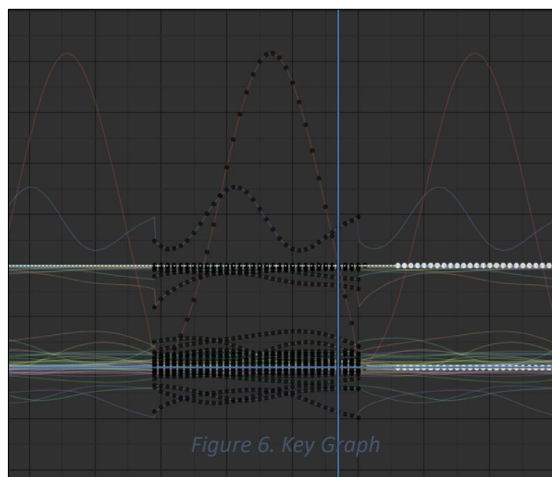


Figure 6. Key Graph

5.5. Rendering

For rendering, I used Cycles, as it can generate more realistic images by complex light calculation, even though it consumes more resources. I also used the colour manager to add contrast. For the animation rendering, I aimed to make a short animation of a few seconds, the fluidity being 30 frames per second with 500 samples. As for Rayming, I used 4k quality resolution and 4098 samples, and integrated it into different media.

Finally, here is a table with general best practices that should be followed at each stage in 3D character design.



Figure 9. Sample from animation

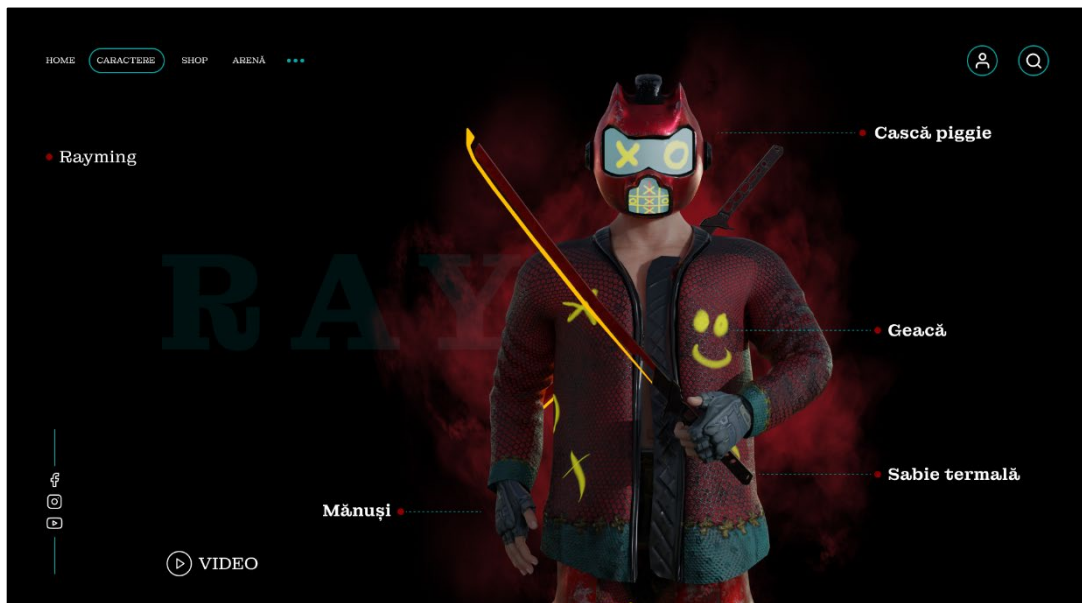


Figure 8. Rayming on a web page

Table 2a: Good Practices

Stage	Good Practices
CONCEPT	Documentation Information Outline (if feasible)

MODELLING	<p>Overview of the interface Knowledge of basic commands Naming each component in the collection Clean geometry (quads) Constant application of scale, rotation and location Orientation of faces Using face sets (digital sculpting)</p>
UV MAPPING	<p>Live mapping P - for fixing faces Face straightening (active face tracking) Islanding</p>
OPTIMIZATION	<p>Clean geometry = Possibility to quickly make a low poly High/Low poly overlay with application of scale, rotation and location Use of specialized software High/Low poly overlay with application of scale, rotation and location Use of specialized software</p>

Table 2b: Good Practices

Stage	Good Practices
TEXTURING	Use of specialized software
RIGGING	<p>Using extensions Applying the skeleton scale Bringing the skeleton to the foreground Making bones</p>
ANIMATION/POSE	<p>Relaxation of the frameworks Cyclic repetition</p>
RENDER	<p>Number of samples Using the sound elimination function Using contrast from the Colour Manager GPU rendering (Cycles) PNG rendering (Animation)</p>

6. Conclusion

The present research contributes to deepen the knowledge of 3D character modelling and of the different steps leading to its completion in terms of texture, animation and rendering. It also provides insights into 3D modelling best practices needed to obtain a result that can be integrated into different scenes. The theoretical contribution consists in a literature review, where various sources have been analysed focusing on various methods of using 3D graphics in different fields of application such as culture, film and animation, video games, as well as on the development of 3D graphics by enhancing different functionalities. At the same time, based on the information obtained from the literature, a step-by-step 3D character design process was obtained, which can be summarized as concept development, modelling, UV mapping, optimization, texturing, rigging, animation, and rendering.

The practical contribution of this paper lies in the whole process of designing a 3D character from concept to rendering, using Blender, Substance Painter and Character Creator, and in the inclusion of best practices in each step.

The research presented in this paper has also led to the answers to the research questions presented in the introduction:

Q1 - Is 3D character design relevant in the context of scientific research?

3D character design is relevant in the context of scientific research due to the discussions about and implications of 3D characters in different fields and scientific research.

Q2 - Which are the specific steps/details in creating a 3D (animated) character?

The specific steps for creating a 3D (animated) character are concept development, modelling, UV mapping, optimization, texturing, rigging, animation, and rendering, which can be compressed into 3 main stages: pre-production, production and post-production.

Q3 - Which are the best practices in a creative 3D (animated) character design process?

For each stage, there are different methods that can be included in the concept of best practice. For the character concept, emphasis can be put on documentation from different environments (real/virtual) and 2D sketching of the desired model. For modelling, it is important to know the interface and basic commands, and to name each object individually so that there is no confusion. It is equally important to work clean, by creating four-peaked faces as much as possible, especially by applying scale, rotation and location of the object. For UV mapping, the model itself must be considered, with the fastest orientation process being live mapping with a UV grid node. As for optimization and texturing, consideration should be given to polygonally clean work to make low polygon material much easier to achieve, and to the use of specialized software to streamline the process. For rigging and animation, one should consider the extensions offered by Blender to streamline skeleton generation. Finally, for rendering, the number of samples, as well as the contrast of the result and

rendering mode with the pluses and minuses of each rendering engine must be considered.

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Social Media Promotion Methods

Larisa-Corina Sima

The aim of this paper is to highlight that social media is not only a communication tool used for fun, but also an important part of business marketing strategies. It can be argued that social media is a new marketing strategy tool used to assess company performance. This paper focuses on a case study of a travel company's social media presence in terms of the number of likes and followers, content quality, customer interaction and language use. The qualitative method is used to assess how the company interacts with its customers online and how it uses social media as a strategic marketing tool. Social media plays an important role in everyday life and in every industry, both personally and professionally. Most of the time it influences our daily choices without us even realizing it. When it comes to travel choices and reviews when choosing a vacation destination, social media has proved to be our top choice (Antoni & Bulican, 2019). In this case, the tourism industry also helps in making easy decisions for travellers through the information available on various social media platforms. This paper provides a conceptual framework of how social networks play a crucial role in establishing individual preferences and choices during travel decision-making, as well as of the importance of trusting influencers and the recommendations they make. It can be argued that social media has provided a great foundation for brand building and recognition, and that social media plays a key role in driving travellers' decisions.

Keywords: *Social media, Tourism industry, Promotion*

1. Introduction

The tourism industry is dynamic and still evolving, and the effective promotion of travel offers is becoming increasingly important in an intensely competitive environment. In the digital age, social media hosts a powerful platform and exerts influence to promote brands and attract the attention of prospective customers. Thus, this paper explores social media promotion methods, focusing on the case study of a travel agency called Travel Planner.

This paper aims to analyse the social media promotion strategies and tactics used in Travel Planner's projects, in an attempt to better understand how social media promotion works in the tourism industry. The analysis of the company's social media promotion strategies, impact and results has provided valuable insights and practical recommendations for other tourism agencies that want to optimize their social media presence and to attract and retain a target audience in the digital environment.

2. Research method

Qualitative research:

In this study, I used a *qualitative research method* to gain a deep and detailed understanding of social media promotion. The qualitative research method focuses on exploring and understanding phenomena and perspectives in depth, allowing me to reveal aspects and nuances that other research methods cannot capture.

The qualitative method allowed me to analyse in detail the strategies, tactics, and experiences of the marketing agency responsible for promoting Travel Planner. In turn, this has led to a better understanding of the motives, perceptions and factors behind their decisions and actions in social media promotion. I was thus able to explore their decision-making processes, their creative approaches and the strategies they implemented to attract and engage the travel agency's target audience.

Interview:

In addition to the qualitative research method, I also relied on an *interview* with the marketing agency to gain direct insights and relevant information from experts in the field. This interview provided an opportunity to explore in detail the strategies, tactics, and results of the social media promotion campaigns for Travel Planner. I gained valuable insights into the process of planning, implementing, and evaluating promotion campaigns, as well as into the challenges and opportunities encountered in this area.

Using the qualitative research method and the interview with the marketing agency, I managed to analyse how social media promotion can influence the tourism industry and its impact on the travel agency Travel Planner.

This approach allowed me to develop practical recommendations and suggestions for optimizing social media promotion strategies for other travel agencies interested in improving their presence and results in the digital environment. Through this *combination of qualitative research and the interview* with a marketing agency, I can hopefully bring a significant contribution to the understanding of social media promotion methods in the tourism industry and to the identification of the most effective practices in this field.

3. Results

One of the main goals of the travel agency Travel Planner is to expand its online presence and establish a strong influence on social networks. To achieve the goal of reaching 150,000 followers by the end of 2023, Travel Planner implemented two key strategies: influencer strategy and content strategy.

Strategy 1: Influencer strategy

The agency recognized the power of influencers in the social media landscape and sought to leverage their social media influence to expand reach and attract a wider audience. They carefully identified and collaborated with well-known influencers who were highly regarded online. Influencers such as Mihai Morar, Ruxandra Luca, Adrian Enache, Andreea Bănică, Lavinia Pârva, Laura Cosoi, Adela Popescu, Barbara Isasi (Mandinga), Miruna Ioani (*Și blondele gândesc*), Mihai Bobonete and Pavel Bartoș were among those chosen for their significant impact and relevance to the target audience.

Strategy 2: Content Strategy

In addition to collaborations with influencers, Travel Planner implemented a content strategy focused on addressing the concerns and needs of potential tourists. Travellers often face various challenges and uncertainties when choosing a vacation destination, and the agency developed a plan to help potential tourists in this direction. About 200 articles were created to provide informative and useful resources to help tourists make useful decisions about their travels, especially to Bulgaria. These articles covered a wide range of topics, including top destinations, travel tips, accommodation recommendations, local cuisine, transport options and cultural information. By addressing potential concerns and providing valuable information, the agency aimed to position itself as a trusted resource for travel-related questions, thereby attracting more potential tourists and establishing credibility within the travel community.

To achieve their goal to sell 15,000 vacations through social media campaigns in 2022, Travel Planner implemented segmentation strategies and focused on differentiation in their communication approach, as follows.

Segmentation strategy:

The marketing agency promoting Travel Planner recognized the importance of tailoring their promotional efforts to specific customer segments. To this end, they performed a thorough segmentation by hotel category. The hotels listed on the agency's website were divided into comfort categories, including premium, superior, comfort, standard and low-cost options. This segmentation allowed the agency to create personalized promotions based on target customer profiles and budgets.

By understanding the preferences and needs of each segment, the agency could develop targeted communication strategies. They acknowledged that the communication approach should vary for each customer and category, leading to a global motto and strategy called "Holiday for All". This approach aimed to ensure that every client, regardless of budget or preferences, would find suitable holiday options and feel valued by the agency.

Differentiation strategy:

In addition to segmentation, the travel agency identified the need to differentiate itself from the competition and shift the attention of potential buyers from price to quality. To achieve this, the marketing agency team created a list of unique selling points and differentiators, which were then integrated into the agency's communication strategy to emphasize the value they offered beyond the price.

By highlighting their differentiators, such as exceptional customer service, exclusive amenities, curated experiences or personalized recommendations, the agency aimed to capture the attention of potential buyers and convey the message that their offers meant superior quality and went beyond just price considerations.

In the Travel Planner case study, one of the key goals for 2022 and 2023 was to increase the number of likes on their Facebook page. For 2022, the agency set out to reach 100,000 likes, while for 2023 the goal was raised to 150,000. At the moment (i.e. July 2023), the agency is very close to reaching its goal, with 147,000 likes.

After careful market analysis, the agency realized that this goal could not be achieved through organic posts alone, regardless of how they were done. Additional support from influencers and paid campaigns was needed. At the same time, the agency realized the importance of a clear plan for the organic social media channel. To define this plan, the agency had to consider several important aspects. They decided that the ideal number of posts per day would be 4 in season (May-September) and 2 out of season. As for the content, they established that it should consist of 40% offers, 40% value content, 10% testimonials and 10% influencers and other relevant topics.

In addition to the goal of increasing the number of likes, other important aspects related to social media promotion were analysed in the Travel Planner case study.

1. Remarkable results: Following the implemented strategies, the agency got more than 7600 likes and more than 560 comments on the posts promoted on social media. These numbers reflect the audience's engagement and interest in the content provided by Travel Planner.

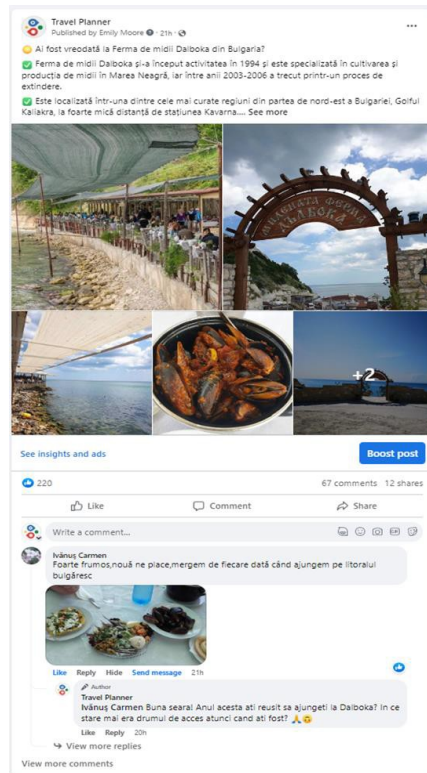
2. Allocation of budget: To promote certain posts, their performance in terms of reach was considered. Posts that had a reach of more than 5000 people were selected to be turned into paid advertisements. The budget allocated for these ads was decided by the specialists responsible for their creation. They also considered setting ads on Bidding Conversions, with a conversion cost below 30 lei per purchase, in order to maximize the efficiency and results of the campaigns.

3. Collaboration with influencers: The travel agency allocated a budget for influencer campaigns. In the summer of 2022, a budget of 100,000 euro was allocated, and for the year 2023, 120,000 euro. Collaboration with influencers was particularly preferred in the form of a barter, where Travel Planner offered a free vacation to the influencer in exchange for promoting the destination. In some cases, influencers also received financial compensation, but such details were confidential.

4. Promotion of locations and valuable content: An important strategy adopted by the Travel Planner agency was to promote locations and relevant content, especially by creating informative blog articles and sharing them on social media

channels. In the summer of 2022, more than 100 informative articles about holidays in Bulgaria were written, and by the end of the year, the number of articles had reached almost 200. These articles strengthened Travel Planner's position as Romania's number 1 source of information about holidays in Bulgaria. In the year 2023, the articles were updated with the latest news and articles for other destinations such as Greece and Turkey were also written.

Here is an excerpt from a Facebook post:



Picture 1. An informative article in a Facebook post (Travel Planner Facebook page)

Travel Planner's paid campaign strategy was structured on three levels, considering the different stages of the digital marketing funnel: top of funnel (TOFU), middle of funnel (MOFU) and bottom of funnel (BOFU).

At the TOFU level, campaigns were developed that targeted cold audiences, i.e. people who were not directly familiar with the brand or product. The aim of these campaigns was to attract users' attention and bring them in contact with Travel Planner. Through these campaigns, valuable content was promoted, providing relevant information about destinations, travel tips and other interesting aspects related to tourism.

At the MOFU level, campaigns targeted warm audiences, i.e. people who had already shown some interest in the brand and had previously interacted with it. The goal was to keep these audiences engaged and convert them into potential customers. These campaigns included special offers, promotions and personalized content to drive purchase intent and strengthen the relationship with the audience.

At the BOFU level, campaigns focused on very warm audiences, i.e. people who were already close to completing a purchase. These campaigns had as their main objective the conversion and completion of a transaction. Personalized messages, special offers and push messages were used to drive purchases and convert leads into actual customers.

By structuring campaigns on these three levels, Travel Planner managed to reach diverse audiences and to provide them with relevant messages and content based on their level of interest and stage in the purchase process. This strategy helped increase the effectiveness of paid campaigns and achieve the desired results in terms of promotion and sales.

TOFU audiences were subjected to a process of testing different campaigns with the aim of attracting and capturing their interest. Depending on the hotel category, customized campaigns were created to address the various preferences and needs of potential customers.

Hotel categories considered in the campaigns include:

1. Premium + Superior: Luxury and high-quality hotels that offer exclusive services and facilities.
2. Comfort: Hotels with comfortable and attractive services and facilities for common people.
3. Standard + Low-cost: Hotels with affordable prices and standard services for those looking for a more economical option.
4. Resorts: Promotion of various holiday resorts in Bulgaria such as Albena, Golden Sands, Obzor, Sunny Beach and Nessebar.
5. Groups: Hotels that are ideal for groups of travellers, such as hotels with an aquapark.
6. On the beach: Hotels located near the beach, offering easy and convenient access to the surrounding sand and sea.
7. Family: Family-friendly hotels with facilities and activities for children and parents.
8. Ultra all-inclusive: Hotels that offer luxury all-inclusive packages with all services and amenities included.
9. Adults only: Hotels exclusively for adults, offering a relaxing and intimate experience.

Also, specific campaigns were implemented to promote offers and promotions, such as last-minute and early booking, to stimulate bookings at the right times.

The outcome has been remarkable, validating the campaigns' effectiveness and impact in attracting interest and generating leads or sales. The success of these campaigns is highlighted in the concrete results below:

Off / On	Ad set	Results	Reach	Amount spent	Cost per result	Website purchases	Purchase conversion value	Purchase ROAS (return on ad spend)
	MOFU - Vans	362	89,984	€6,998.37	€19.05	263	2,230,029.73	118.65
	TOFU - Prospecting All	319	129,648	€6,789.88	€21.28	319	1,722,561.65	207.51
	TOFU - Prospecting All	208	116,416	€4,779.87	€22.98	208	1,261,692.94	263.96
	TOFU - Married	152	40,040	€3,023.87	€19.89	152	912,388.20	258.92
	BOFU - Inlake Checkout - All hotels	164	9,932	€3,260.71	€19.88	164	816,962.73	266.92
	MOFU - Vans & Vans - MC	383	72,785	€4,765.40	€12.44	183	992,899.76	393.04
	TOFU - Vans 2023 - Grid	103	48,576	€4,077.73	€39.60	103	643,393.66	240.28
	TOFU - Prospecting All	111	77,649	€4,654.12	€41.93	111	580,538.99	218.73
	TOFU - Travel - Hotels Single Ads - WGS+	135	83,665	€4,537.48	€33.61	135	752,652.34	226.61
	BOFU - View Content	52	19,040	€1,756.98	€33.79	52	276,192.12	157.20

Picture 2. Travel Planner promotion campaign results

The interview I had with Marian Cristinescu, executive director at Marketos – the marketing agency in charge of promoting Travel Planner, was designed to explore the strategies, tactics and results of social media promotion, considering the peculiarities of the tourism industry and the specifics of the travel agency.

During the interview, I asked a series of questions regarding the goals and strategies of the marketing agency in promoting Travel Planner in the digital environment. We covered topics such as the social media platforms used, adapting the message and content, integrating collaborations with influencers and partners, as well as measuring the success of social media promotion campaigns.

We also explored the marketer's perspective on user trust in social media reviews versus personal recommendations. I wanted to understand how the travel agency Travel Planner manages and capitalizes on this dynamic within its promotional strategies.

Through this interview, I aimed to gain firsthand insights from a social media promotion expert, so as to better understand the processes and decisions behind Travel Planner's promotion campaigns. Marian's recommendations and answers helped me assess the impact of social media promotion in the tourism industry and formulate practical recommendations to improve promotion in the digital environment.

Q1. A brief introduction, who is the man behind Marketos?

CM: My name is Cristinescu Marian and I have been active in marketing for over 14 years. I started with SEO and over time I have also learned Facebook Ads, now Meta ads, Google Ads, Email Marketing, Conversion Rate Optimization.

I've built and participated in very complex campaigns with budgets of hundreds of thousands euros per month.

Due to my vast experience and interaction with over 250 clients over time, I think I am a very good strategist, which allows me to develop innovative campaigns, customized

according to the needs of each client. We have results that exceed any expectations, with a Return on Ad Spend of 300x.

Q2. What are the agency's main goals in promoting Travel Planner on social media?

CM: The main goal is to drive conversions. Secondary goals include interaction with as many people as possible, as well as continuous cost optimization.

Q3. What social media promotion strategies and tactics do you use to attract and engage Travel Planner's target audience?

CM: Our tactics are more about customer experience. This brings a huge advantage in promotion, because in addition to the standard offers, we also bring differentiators that shift the focus from price to experience.

Q4. How do you identify the right social media platforms for travel agency promotion and how do you tailor your message and content accordingly?

CM: The most powerful way to make decisions is to understand your customers and their needs. Marketos has a dedicated team to create advanced customer profiles.

Our experts specialize in conducting in-depth customer, competitor and market research to help companies identify opportunities for differentiation and growth. With a deep understanding of the audience and competitors, more informed decisions will be made, and our team will be able to build customer-centric campaigns.

Q5. How do you ensure that the messages and content promoted on social media reflect the values and identity of the Travel Planner brand?

CM: There is a Brand Book and a communication strategy. The messages observe the established tone of voice, contain business differentiators and carefully thought-out keywords.

Q6. What types of content do you create and share on social media to inspire and inform potential travellers?

CM: All types of content. From content to sell, to content to inform, both in standard format, text and video.

Q7. How do you measure and assess the success of the social media promotion campaigns for Travel Planner? What metrics and performance indicators do you use?

CM: The main two performance indicators are the number of orders and the purchase cost. They are measured at platform level (cross conversions are not taken into account), and the fact that platforms can sometimes report the same orders (their percentage is below 5%, but it happens).

Q8. What are the biggest challenges in promoting a travel agency on social media and how do you overcome them?

CM: The biggest challenges are due to prices. As all prices have increased, including for packages, people comment a lot that the prices are 20-40% higher than last year. This has a negative impact on campaigns. We try to respond to most comments, but if they become very aggressive, we do respond but we hide them (Meta option to hide comments and show them only to people who wrote them).

Q9. How do you integrate collaborations with influencers and partners into the social media promotion strategy for Travel Planner?

CM: When promoting the agency, all influencers have a series of tasks that they must comply with (for example, link to the site, tag the agency, create certain types of content). All their posts are shared with us. We boost organically as much as possible; we cannot promote shared posts because the platform does not allow this, but we use print screens with influencers and what they say about us to create content that we use in future campaigns.

Q10. How do you manage customer feedback and interaction on social media platforms to maintain a positive image of the travel agency?

CM: I answered in Q8. The feedback is generally very positive. Travel Planner is the travel agency with the most positive reviews among the agencies in Romania, with over 28,500 real reviews.

Q11. How do you use emerging technologies and trends in social media promotion to stay ahead of the competition and stay relevant to Travel Planner's target audience?

CM: We use the latest technologies, including AI now, for both content and design. We also have competitive scanning software and data analysis that highlight all kinds of opportunities. It is a very big advantage that we can afford such programs, because for each client we use analysis platforms with business accounts (that is, we can analyse multiple accounts/businesses), which would cost a client a monthly subscription of thousands euro.

Q12. In your opinion, within the travel industry, which do you think people trust more: the reviews they read on social media or personal recommendations? How do you think this perception influences the promotion strategies and reputation of Travel Planner?

CM: Personal recommendations will always beat any review. But of course, reviews matter anyway; in many posts people ask in the comments if anyone has travelled with Travel Planner before, what their opinion is, etc. Thanks to the community and the fact that the agency is well-known on the market, I almost always receive answers from other clients, which is a huge advantage.

4. Conclusion

This section covers the most important conclusions of the study, starting from the assumptions in the introduction of the paper, my personal opinion regarding the results of the study, as well as the potential future research directions related to the topic addressed.

It can be concluded that social media promotion is essential to the success and growth of the travel agency Travel Planner. The effective use of social media platforms allows the agency to increase its visibility, strengthen its brand, communicate directly with clients and promote its offers in an engaging way. By analysing results and constantly adapting strategies, Travel Planner can take advantage of social media promotion to achieve their business goals and differentiate themselves in a competitive environment.

Research Method: The importance of Social Media Promotion - Travel Planner Case Study. To examine in detail the importance of social media promotion for the travel agency Travel Planner, I opted for a qualitative research method. This approach has allowed me to gain a thorough understanding of the experiences, perceptions and strategies used by the agency in its social media promotion. Another important part of this research consisted in an interview with a marketing agency specialized in social media promotion, responsible for the promotion of Travel Planner.

The qualitative research method provides an appropriate framework to explore the topic of social media promotion in a detailed and contextual way. This approach allows researchers to gain in-depth insights into the experiences and perspectives of those involved in travel agency promotion. Interviews can provide direct opinions and relevant information from promotion experts who work in a similar context to Travel Planner.

The interview with the marketing agency specialized in social media promotion has brought multiple advantages to my case study. It has provided an inside look at the specific social media promotion strategies, tactics and experiences of the travel agency Travel Planner. It has also allowed me to explore their results, challenges and perspectives on social media promotion in the tourism industry.

The qualitative research method, in general, and the interview with the marketing agency, in particular, has added significant value to this study on the importance of social media promotion in the tourism industry. This approach has allowed me to gain a detailed understanding of and relevant information about a travel agency's strategies, tactics and experiences in promoting itself in the digital environment. This information is essential to develop solid conclusions and useful recommendations in my dissertation paper.

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The Role of Portraying Businesswomen in Communication. Case Study: Perceptions in the Romanian Business Environment

Ramona Chiseliță

Abstract: *The community of business women, in all its complexity, is a current topic which demonstrates that in order to reach the highest level of development, it is necessary to involve all the pawns that make up a modern society: the state, representative institutions and citizens, but in the speed era, the biggest impact after the legislative one is communication. The central theme of this article is represented by the way in which Romanian business women are portrayed in communication and the impact produced by the way in which their image is presented in society through communication channels. More precisely, the research proposes an analysis of the perceptions expressed in communication about businesswomen, but also of the perception of businesswomen from various fields of activity in Romania. Through the multidisciplinary approach of the chosen topic, the study can constitute a model or a starting point for more advanced research in the field or related fields. It also provides a panoramic view not only of the situation of businesswomen at the national and international level, but also at the specific level of the universe of the 20 people interviewed, an aspect that offers a contribution to the specialized literature that addresses the subject of businesswomen.*

Keywords: *communication; businesswomen; rights; equality; articles, perception*

1. Introduction

Human differences have divided society over time into different areas and under different aspects, a reality which is still visible today. Both distinct perceptions of the

organization of human life and historical contexts have given rise to directions and concepts that have placed the human being in various situations.

Although the way Romanian society, and not only, appears today may seem like a theater scenario, there was a time when society was organised under a completely different model. Several centuries ago, the main activity for finding the necessary food was hunting. War, famine, families with many children, and the supremacy of the church were just a few aspects that characterised long-gone periods, such as the Middle Ages.

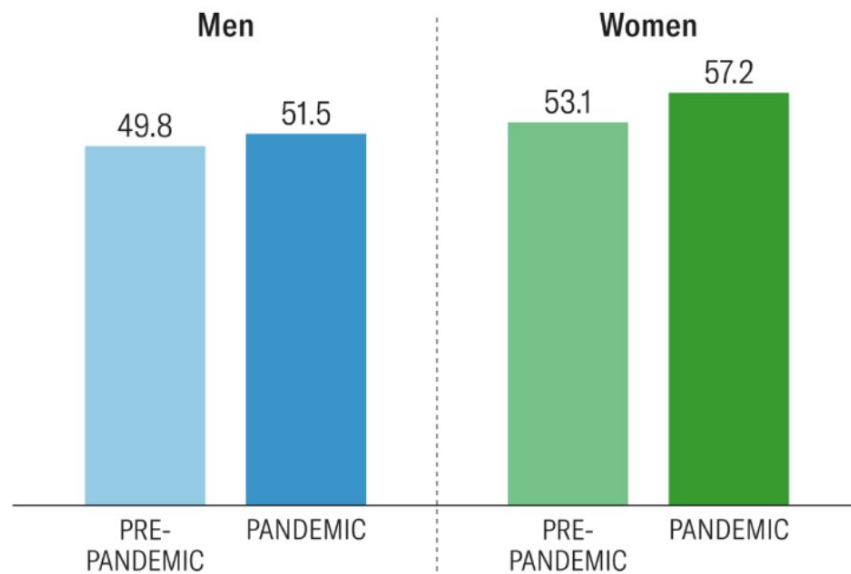
However, these periods, which have remained imprinted in the collective mentality, have led to a distribution of roles in the society based on gender criteria. Men were engaged in physical activities due to their physical build and naturally greater stamina, while women were responsible for household chores and raising children. At that time, considering the functioning model of society, this distribution seemed to be fair.

These periods did not only leave behind pages of history, but also behaviours and imbalances in this distribution. Even though society has evolved today and tasks such as the ones mentioned above are no longer customary, the only thing that has remained from this equation is the difference between genders in terms of roles and responsibilities.

Although today both women and men can equally fulfill the role of provider for the family as well as the caretaker of the house or children, there is still a tendency for an automatic distribution of responsibilities based on gender. Moreover, the difference between men and women in the workforce has become increasingly smaller, with a significant cause being the fact that women often have to choose between a career and their family.

In other words, society's inclination towards a model of organisation where men work and are financially independent, while women take care of household activities and child-rearing, where applicable, is visible. To regulate these preconceptions, there are both legal provisions and societal movements fighting for equal opportunities regardless of gender. However, as it pertains to principles of ethics and morality, monitoring the enforcement of this right is not easy, which is why deviations continue to exist.

Overall leadership effectiveness ratings



Source: Zenger Folkman, 2020



Historically, women have worked in fields such as teaching, healthcare, and secretarial work, which are considered more suitable for women. Many studies have supported the notion that advertisements frequently depict women in stereotypical roles that are not representative of the variety of roles women play in society. "The earliest studies were inspired by the Women's Movement of the early 1970s," Lindner states, "which consistently found that advertisements primarily confined women to traditional roles as mothers, homemakers, or objects of beauty/sexuality" (Lindner, 2004, p.409).

Despite the challenging context, there is a segment of the female gender that has managed to progress and overcome social inequalities. There are numerous successful women representing the business sphere, either as entrepreneurs or through leadership positions predominantly held in various companies. How women are framed and perceived in professional roles in society is influenced by the framing and priming of the mass media. Proper and sufficient media representation of women in leadership roles could help change the way society, especially young women, perceive women in the industry, despite the stereotype that men hold positions of power and leadership.

These businesswomen are an active part of society and, consequently, are often subjects of communication, whether in social media, press articles, television, or even case studies and courses. As for public opinion, views regarding this category of women are divided, and gender equality remains a taboo subject within the Romanian society.

2. Research methods

In order to carry out this study, I have chosen an approach that involves the use of documentary analysis and qualitative research methods. Specifically, the most important research method used is qualitative, based on the interview technique, with the aim of deepening the perceptions of businesswomen in Romania regarding the degree of integration they experience and the quality of life as part of this category. Additionally, I have used articles from Romanian and Western press to have a clear perspective on the current context, as well as data provided by non-governmental organizations and accredited public institutions from conducting various studies.

A qualitative framing analysis of articles from business publications featuring women leaders from various industries was conducted to further investigate the suggested research issues. Business magazines were used as a source for this study as they represent and provide coverage for leaders and professionals in a range of sectors, including the chosen industry in this case, managers. Although there is a clear distinction between managers and leaders, for the purpose of this study, the terms were used interchangeably to increase the study population and include women from a variety of sectors. Business magazine articles are also a good option as they provide relevant material to support the research questions mentioned regarding female executives.

3. Results

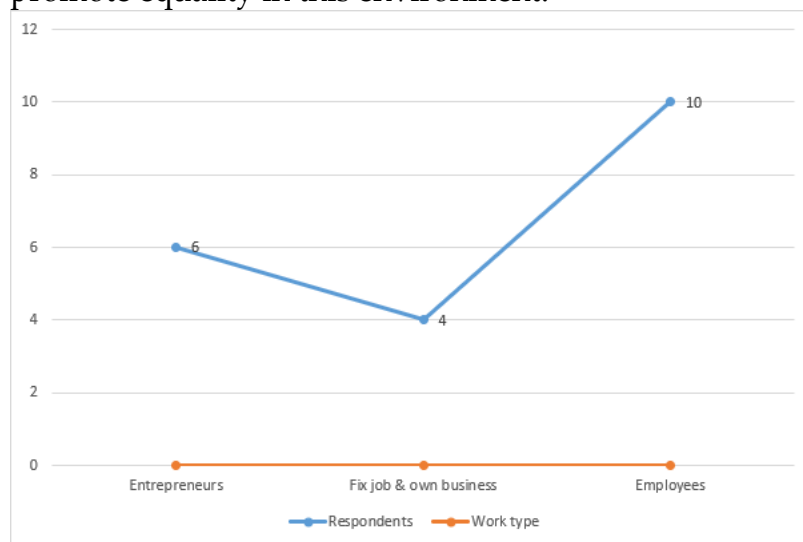
The case study focuses on the community of businesswomen in Romania and aims to gather information and perspectives from them through interviews. The choice of this category is based on the importance of their development and contribution to a closer image to European standards of respecting citizens' rights and freedoms and a world based on equity.

Through guided and semi-structured interviews, the study aims to facilitate the understanding of the perspectives of women entrepreneurs and provide a clearer picture of their situation, including their experiences and challenges. Such interviews allow for obtaining direct verbal information and contribute to identifying the relationships between variables and previously formulated hypotheses. In this case study, particular attention is given to the quality of life of women entrepreneurs in Romania, their perception of portrayal in communication materials, and the discrimination they have or have not faced during their career development.

The interviews address several themes related to the category of women entrepreneurs in Romania. A summary of these themes encompasses the central elements of the research:

Categories of women entrepreneurs: As you can see below, out of the 20 respondents, 6 are entrepreneurs, 4 have a fixed job and their own business, and 10 hold management or leadership positions in various companies. This demonstrates

the diversity of the women entrepreneurs' community in Romania and the need to promote equality in this environment.



Sense of belonging to the women entrepreneurs' community: 18 of the respondents consider themselves as active members of this community, while 2 do not consider gender as relevant and focus on results.

Motivation for belonging to the women entrepreneurs' community: The majority of the respondents consider themselves active members, even if they do not identify specific benefits. Some consider that this membership does not harm them and they support this community.

Portrayal in communication of women entrepreneurs: Opinions are divided. 6 respondents consider the portrayal overall positive, while 8 consider it to be not specifically negative but not positive enough. There is passivity regarding the subject.

Discrimination in communication: Half of the respondents stated that they felt discriminated against by the way they were portrayed or observed discriminatory attitudes in materials about other women entrepreneurs. Examples of discrimination that was mentioned include associating success with the presence of a male figure and insinuating that certain positions are only suitable for men.

Mentions in communication about women entrepreneurs: 4 individuals do not follow the topic, 5 consider that there are enough mentions, and 11 believe there is room for improvement and increasing the number and frequency of such materials. Media coverage would favour the development of the women entrepreneurs' community.

Differences in the portrayal of male and female entrepreneurs: 7 respondents believe that there are differences in the perspective of the approach, and men are more frequently portrayed in the business environment.

Impact of discrimination and lack of equal opportunities: 13 respondents state that they have not felt obstacles due to gender or negative portrayals and have managed to overlook these elements. The general perspective has shifted towards awareness of the importance and difficulties faced by women entrepreneurs

Conclusion

Today, articles, reports and magazines dedicated to women in business are no longer considered unusual, but they are also not a subject that is frequently encountered, despite their importance. The modernisation of the society has created a favourable context for women to rise socially and benefit from the support of institutions that promote human dignity and equal rights. Regarding the promotion of women's rights in business, there are two possible directions: one that supports the creation of a solid legislative framework and greater exposure in the media, and another that opposes these efforts. The standardisation of the standards internationally has facilitated opportunities for portraying women in business in the media, as this category can easily be framed within the context of respecting rights and freedoms.

The research has also explored the ways in which women in business are portrayed in communication to obtain a current and well-founded perspective on how this category is currently presented. The aim of this analysis of communication materials is to highlight the current context and determine whether there is a difference between the theoretically perceived roles of men and women and the manner in which they are reflected in practice in the media.

The persistence of gender inequalities is emphasised in contemporary society, both within companies and in the media, describing that, despite the existence of laws protecting women's rights, there are still economies that do not demand equal pay for equivalent work and even nullify rights acquired through struggle. However, women continue to fight for equality in rights and opportunities worldwide, becoming significant agents of change.

The paper also mentions that mass media, including specialised media, present underrepresentation and misrepresentation of women. This is manifested by the fact that men are discussed more frequently than women in the media, and women are more often portrayed in photographs than quoted as subjects or sources for news. Additionally, women entrepreneurs and female managers receive less attention in the media and are often characterised stereotypically or marginalised.

Despite these issues, the text suggests that more accurate and balanced coverage in the media is feasible and would be beneficial for promoting gender equality. This could involve better gender awareness and increased professionalism in reporting. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of critically evaluating media representations of women, as the media has a significant impact on public agendas, public attention, and perceptions and expectations regarding women entrepreneurs and female managers.

Therefore, the text emphasises the persistence of gender inequalities in women's rights and media representations, highlighting the need for ongoing actions and reforms to promote gender equality and counter stereotypes and discrimination in the society.

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Student Entrepreneurial Societies - Catalysts of Entrepreneurial Culture in Romania. Case Study: The Communication of the Universities of Timișoara SESs

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Abstract: *Student Entrepreneurial Societies (SES) were created six years ago, however there is little research done on them. The objective of this study is to find whether the websites of the SESs belonging to the main universities in Timișoara communicate effectively with the target audience, students and graduates in the first three years after graduation. A short introduction about the SESs, the factors that led to their emergence, will be presented, followed by the factors which determine an effective communication of a website, the premise being that for the communication process between SES and students through the website to take place, it must exist, be visible and be qualitative. The research method involves a qualitative analysis of the online communication of the SES of Timișoara universities, specifically through their online presence and the quality of their websites. To complement this analysis, the criteria of online visibility and a model for analysing academic websites will be used to measure their quality. The findings of the study show that not all universities in Timișoara have a website dedicated to SESs and their activities, nor a presence on social media. The next thing revealed is that SES*

activities are not routinely updated on their websites. Updating information is important on the website, but also on the social media pages, as they work in tandem to ensure an unobstructed flow of communication. The last issues found are that not all SES websites offer resources about entrepreneurship, and that some changes in the website design would positively influence the quality of the website and the communication.

Keywords: *student entrepreneurial society, online communication, website quality, visibility*

1. Introduction

Student Entrepreneurial Societies (SES) are designed to promote entrepreneurial education among students by giving them the opportunity to acquire a new set of skills, secondary to those acquired in the university courses in which they are enrolled. This study aims to uncover some of the ways in which SESs of Timișoara universities communicate their presence and activities with the external environment, consisting of students and other stakeholders, by analysing their online presence through their websites. However, before addressing this issue, it is necessary to introduce SESs and how they came into being.

1.1 The genesis of SESs

The European Union (EU) foresaw a paradigm shift in the labour market as early as 2000, when the effects of globalisation and technological development on European society were discussed at the Lisbon European Council. One of the ideas put forward to cope successfully with the coming change was the development of 'a true entrepreneurial spirit' in Europe (Eur-Lex, 2005).

However, the idea of creating SESs crystallised following Communication C17/02 of 2015, published in the Official Journal of the European Union. One of the key points of this communication is the EU Council's call to Member States to introduce entrepreneurship education at all levels of education. Furthermore, at university level, the EU Council specifies the following ideas for Member States: to support and promote "student entrepreneurship initiatives" (p. 3, 2015) by providing conducive learning environments; to provide professional advice and find entrepreneur-mentors to share their experiences and know-how in the field and, furthermore, to offer "on-the-job learning opportunities, internships and apprenticeships" (p. 3, 2015); and, last but not least, to facilitate access to business incubators for students with entrepreneurial aspirations.

These ideas were introduced in the text of the Ministry of Education (MoE) order no. 3262/2017 published in the Official Gazette in 2017, which defines the concept of a student entrepreneurial society, how it should be organised and its operating parameters (lege5.ro, n.d.). Thus, every higher education institution,

accredited on the Romanian territory, has the legal obligation to create a student entrepreneurial society, whose purpose is to educate and support students and graduates in their first three years after graduation, regarding entrepreneurial education.

The duties of SESs, according to Article 3 of the order, are to create teaching materials to help students design business plans and financing projects, mentor students who want to start their own businesses, especially so that they can acquire entrepreneurial skills, providing feedback on business ideas and start-up projects, facilitating the obtaining of funding and acting as a coordinator for other entrepreneurial activities within the university, such as stimulating enterprises.

SESs are coordinated by an executive board, made up of university teaching staff and tutors, as well as students and local business people. Members of the executive board are approved by the senate of the university to which the SES belongs.

1.2 Online communication

Universities are actively investing in online forms of communication in order to be visible to young people, to facilitate their access to information and to create a positive image of themselves (Tănase and Ciacu, 2013).

According to a survey conducted by Tănase and Ciacu (2013, p. 49), this effort on the part of universities is appreciated by students, who actively use the following means to inform themselves about university activities: website (37% of respondents); information directly from the professor or secretariat (23%); Facebook page (20%); notice board (12%) and other methods of information - email, phone or from other colleagues (2-3%). It is obvious from the above figures that the university website is the most frequently used source of information and should, therefore, be one of the main methods of communication of the university with students, but also with the external environment.

The same study highlights the fact that the most searched information by students on the university website are: timetable (73%), exams scheduling (67%) and events organised by the university (40%) (Tănase and Ciacu, 2013, p. 51). In light of these results, it is relevant to mention that SESs and the events organised by them should be visible and accessible to students visiting the university website. Another relevant information of Tănase and Ciacu's (2013, p. 52) study is that 80% of the respondents believe that the university Facebook page is a good source of communication on university activities, having a dual role of socialisation and information. This perspective should also be taken into account by SESs to promote their existence and activities.

2. Research method

The premise of this study is that in order to have an effective communication with students, the website of the SESs of Timișoara universities must meet two conditions, namely, to be visible online and to be qualitative. To see if these conditions are met, a

qualitative research method was chosen, analysing the websites against the criteria of online visibility and Devi & Sharma's (2016) model factors for a quality website.

In this regard, to satisfy the visibility criterion, SESs' websites must meet three conditions:

- the existence of a dedicated section for SES on the universities' main website, with a link to the SES's own website;
- the existence of an obvious promotion of SES actions on the website launch page;
- the existence of SES's own website, visible and easily accessible either from the main university website or from a popular online search engine such as Google.

The model proposed by Devi & Sharma is used to analyse the quality of academic websites. It is based on five quality factors: usability, reliability, functionality, content and presentation; where the first three factors are part of the ISO 9126-1 quality model (Devi & Sharma 2016, p.236). As it can be seen in Figure 1 below, each of the five quality factors have a number of sub-factors that allow for a more detailed analysis of the quality of academic websites.

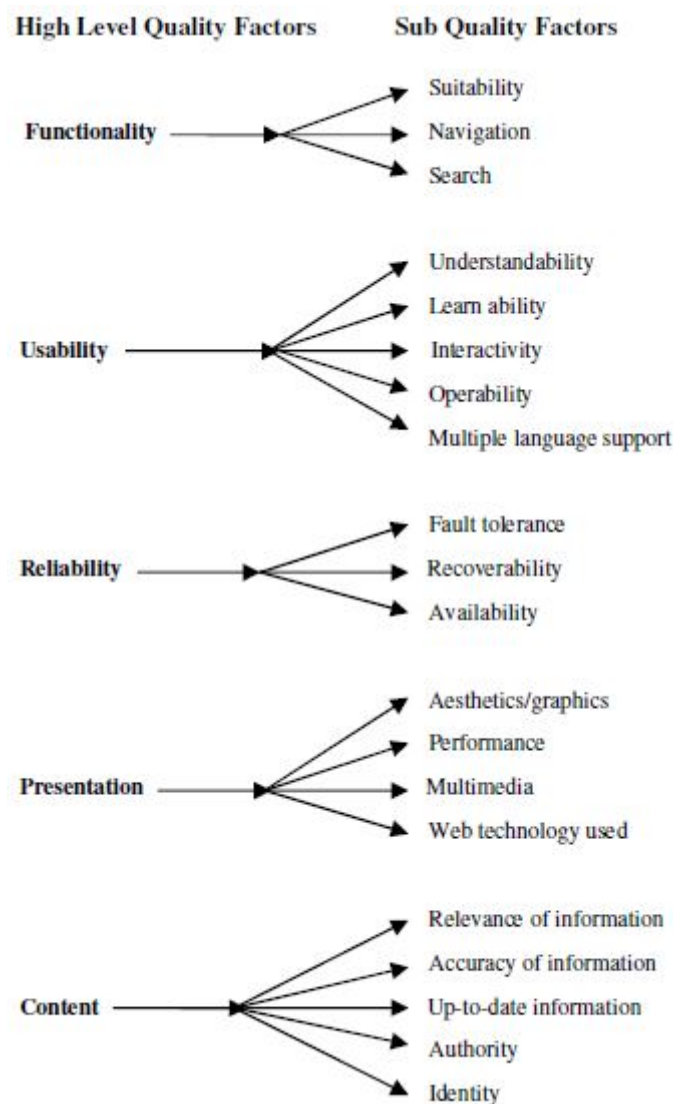


Figure 1. Framework for assessing the quality of an academic website (Devi & Sharma, 2016, p. 236).

3. Results

3.1 Student Entrepreneurial Society of Politehnica University Timișoara

The first criterion that the SES must meet to ensure communication with students and alumni online is a visible presence on the websites of the university to which it belongs and the existence of its own webpage.

Accessing the website of Politehnica University of Timișoara (UPT) and searching among its pages, we do not find any reference to the SES of the university. In the section "Students", subsection "Student organisations", there is no reference to the existence of a SES within UPT. However, in the website menu there is a special section called "Entrepreneurship", from which we can infer that there is a specialised department dealing with the development of students' entrepreneurial skills, but there is no mention of the university's SES here, either.

The next step in validating visibility was a search for the keyword "student entrepreneurial society" using the search option on the main UPT webpage. This search returned no results.

SESs need to have their own websites to be visible online. A search for the keywords "UPT student entrepreneurial society" on the Google search engine produces a number of results, along these lines. The first result is the InoHub UPT website, but only the 4th result mentions that InoHub UPT is related to SES UPT. Accessing the InoHub UPT webpage, this is still not clear, finding the first reference to InoHub UPT actually being the SES of UPT, if we scroll down the initial page to the "News" section and the Facebook widget. Also, InoHub UPT is clearly defined as SES of UPT, if one clicks on the "+" button at the top right of the screen, unfolding a pop-up with this information. With its own website, the UPT SES partly meets the visibility criterion.

Although online visibility is a decisive factor for initiating communication, the communication itself, using a website, is dependent on its quality. Using Devi & Sharma's (2016) model, we can see that the InoHub UPT website partially fulfils two of the sub-factors of functionality, and completely fulfils the third one. Thus, the InoHub website has a good navigational structure, which is evident by the logical and clear way in which the website menu has been created. The sub-sections of the "Students", "Alumni" and "About" pages are also well defined, and the nature of the information that students and alumni can find if they access these pages is obvious. As for the other two sub-factors of functionality, the InoHub UPT website has only one

method of searching for information, individually accessing each page of the website, and the Alumni section is not complete and the information on the website is not updated with SES activities.

The usability factor of the InoHub UPT website is almost fully satisfied, except for the sub-factor of translation into several languages, this website does not have this option. However, this is an easy fact to remedy. Otherwise, the information on the website is easy to understand, using familiar language, respecting the comprehensibility sub-factor. The design of the website is classic, easy to grasp and operate, with hidden sections having written prompts such as "Click here!", the website meets the sub-factors of learnability of a website and operability. As for the interactivity sub-factor, the InoHub UPT website has a sub-section dedicated to SES contact details in the "About" section of the menu, but it also offers students the possibility to contact SES members via a Facebook Messenger web chat, which can be found at the bottom right-hand side of each website page.

We will consider that the InoHub UPT website meets the reliability factor, as we have not encountered any technical difficulties in any of its multiple accesses and navigations.

The presentation factor of Devi & Sharma's (2016) model is fully satisfied, with each of the four sub-factor criteria being met. Aesthetically, the InoHub website has a simple and pleasing design, using shades of blue and grey on a white background, mirroring the design of the main UPT website. The performance of the website is fast, a fact that is constant during several navigations of the website, and the sub-factor type of web technology is fulfilled by the fact that this website can be accessed correctly using the Google search engine. In terms of the multimedia sub-factor, the InoHub UPT website is littered with multiple such media: images from conferences, interactive content present via the Facebook Messenger web chat, a Facebook widget on the website launch page, and user-generated content through student and alumni testimonials present on various pages of the website.

At the bottom of the InoHub UPT website, social media buttons to Instagram and Twitter can be found, in addition to the Facebook one, as well as access to a dedicated SES app. It is important to note that InoHub UPT has an active presence on Facebook, which is relevant due to the popularity of this social media channel among students as a source of information on SES activities. The society's Twitter page is active but not updated, and the Instagram page no longer exists, although its corresponding button still exists on the SES website.

The last factor that will be used to analyse the quality of the InoHub UPT website is the content, which is particularly important in the context of communication. The SES website fulfils almost all the criteria of the content sub-factors. Starting with the sub-factor relevance of information, all the information provided by the InoHub UPT website is relevant to the topic of entrepreneurship education. In particular, the sub-sections "Useful Resources" and "Guide" in the "Students" section contain abundant and well-structured resources for students interested in starting their own business.

The information on the website is grammatically and spelling correct, thus meeting the accuracy of information sub-factor, but the information is not up-to-date and complete as required by the up-to-date information sub-factor. The copyright and identity sub-factors are met. The InoHubUPT website has a dedicated contact page, which gives students multiple possibilities to contact SES members: contact form, exact address, phone number and email address. The InoHub UPT logo is present at the top left of each page of the website, linking the SES to the university to which it belongs, not only by adding the UPT acronym initials name, but also by integrating the university logo into the SES logo. Although I have tried to treat each factor and sub-factor individually and separately, they actually work together, each influencing the outcome of the others. Thus, in order to enhance the effectiveness of the communication of the InoHub UPT website, it is necessary that all the factors and sub-factors of Devi & Sharma's (2016) model are fulfilled. In the case of the UPT SES, this objective is relatively easy to meet: the SES must be presented on the university's website, and this must be linked to the SES website; the InoHub UPT page must be constantly supplemented and updated, including social media buttons, and search and translation options in other languages of circulation must be added to the website.

3.2 Student Entrepreneurial Society of the West University of Timișoara

The SES of West University of Timișoara (UVT) is mentioned on the university's main webpage in the "Education" section, sub-section "Facilities for Students". Accessing this link automatically opens a new page, the SES UVT webpage. A search for the keywords "student entrepreneurial society", using the search option on the main UVT website, leads to a series of articles about SES UVT activities. SES's activity is promoted on the university's main webpage. The first result when searching the terms "UVT student entrepreneurial society" on the Google search engine takes us directly to the SES page, which is described as such in the presentation displayed by Google. Thus, in terms of visibility, the SES website is well represented.

Analysing the SES UVT website through the functionality factor, it can be seen that the website has a good navigation structure, the menu is well defined and clear, and the pages are linked by a series of buttons that take the user directly to the desired web page section, thus fulfilling the requirements of the navigation sub-factor. On the other hand, the search and suitability sub-factors are not met, as the website has only one option for finding information, page-by-page navigation, and the information on the website is not up-to-date and accessible to all users.

In the case of the usability factor, the SES UVT website complies with all factors except for the multilingual translation factor, as this option is not present on the website. The terms and links use familiar language, and the website design is easy to understand and operate, thus meeting the requirements of the sub-factors comprehensibility, learnability of a website and operability. In terms of the

interactivity sub-factor, there is a Contact section in the website menu, which contains a contact form through which students can initiate a conversation with SES members.

The SES UVT webpage functioned perfectly during each access and navigation of the webpage, thus meeting the requirements of the reliability factor.

The second to last factor of the SES UVT website analysis is the presentation. In terms of aesthetics, the website is attractive, mirroring the website of the university it belongs to by using similar colours, shades of blue, grey and black on a white background. Browsing the website, there is no noticeable delay in its response to user requirements and the SES UVT website opens correctly when accessed using the Google search engine, respecting the sub-criteria of performance and web technology type. In terms of the multimedia sub-factor, there is an interactive animation on the launch page, a promotional video of an event on the website in their dedicated section, various images are on all pages of the website, and the social media buttons are present at the bottom of the website launch page. In terms of social media channels, SES UVT uses three: Instagram, Facebook and YouTube, all of which have corresponding buttons on the SES website. Both the Instagram and Facebook pages are more up-to-date than the YouTube channel, although posts are made sporadically, they are done consistently. SES UVT's YouTube channel is the least used, with only three videos added two years ago, one interview and two promotional videos.

The content factor of the model used in the analysis is not fully met, which influences the effectiveness of SES UVT's communication with its target audience, students and alumni. The information found on the website is only a series of articles, in the form of a blog, about the field of entrepreneurship, the last one having been added three years ago, satisfying the requirements of the information relevance sub-factor, but not those of the up-to-date information sub-factor. However, in order to access more information about the field, users have to become members of SES UVT, which might discourage students who do not have a clear interest in entrepreneurship. The other three sub-factors of content, accuracy of information, copyright and identity, are met. The information on the SES UVT website is grammatically and spelling correct, there is a dedicated contact section with a form created for this purpose, and the SES UVT logo is present on every page. The logo communicates the SES membership of the university by integrating the UVT logo into it.

3.3 Student Entrepreneurial Society of the University of Life Sciences "King Michael I" of Timișoara

The SES of the University of Life Sciences "King Michael I", called SES-USA-TM, is visible on the main page of the university, being placed in the "Departments" section of the page, through an image with the logo of the society. The logo image is actually a link to the SES website. SES-USA-TM does not have a separate website, it is integrated into the university webpage. A search for the term "student entrepreneurial society" on the university's webpage yields two results: a link to the SES-USA-TM

launch page and a link to the "About Us" section of the society's webpage. Using the Google search engine to search for SES-USA-TM, we are directed to the "About Us" section page of the SES website. It is important to note that the Google page description clearly and specifically defines what SES does and why it is of interest to students. Taking these results into account, it can be argued that SES-USA-TM complies significantly with the criterion of online visibility, as defined in this study, even though there is no information about SES activity promoted on the main university web page.

Of the three sub-factors of functionality, only the navigability sub-factor is partially met, as the SES-USA-TM webpage has a simple menu that is easy to understand. The reason why the navigation sub-factor is not fully met is due to the fact that under the menu is a banner about this year's university admissions, the same one that exists on the main university webpage. The presence of the banner is not relevant to SES activity and may confuse the user. In terms of the suitability of the website, the information on the website has not been updated for four years, and the search sub-factor is not met either, as the SES website is actually a sub-section of the university's website, and an attempt to search for information about SES does not produce specific results, but some general ones about the university itself.

As for the usability factor, the website uses easy-to-understand language, has a classic structure, is not difficult to navigate, and provides students with a contact email address of SES-USA-TM members. Thus, the SES-USA-TM website meets the requirements of the sub-factors of comprehensibility and learnability of a website, interactivity and operability. The only sub-factor that is not satisfied is the multi-language translation sub-factor. Although the button for this option exists, probably due to the fact that the SES website is linked to the university website, once accessed, the user receives an error message saying that the page searched for is not available.

With the exception of the error mentioned above, the SES-USA-TM website did not offer any other technical difficulties during several accesses and navigations of the website, thus partially meeting the reliability factor.

Being part of its university's website, the SES-USA-TM website is built in the same image as the university's website, thus meeting the criterion of the aesthetics sub-factor of presentation. From the perspective of performance and type of web technology, the SES-USA-TM website did not show any delays in meeting the required requirements and could be accessed using the Google search engine. As for the multimedia sub-factor, there is only one image of the university used on the launch page, and otherwise no other multimedia appears on the website. Searching for SES-USA-TM's presence on the most popular social media channels, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube, no results were found.

The requirements of the content factor were partially met, with the information provided on the website being grammatically and spelling correct. There are also two sub-sections, "Careers" and "Contact", which provide the possibility for students to initiate a discussion with SES members, and the SES-USA-TM logo can be found on

all pages of the website, satisfying the sub-factors of accuracy of information, copyright and identity. In contrast, the sub-factors of relevance and timeliness of information are not met. Although there is information describing the SES mission, events and some projects, it is described very briefly and it has not been updated for over four years.

3.4 Student Entrepreneurial Society of the University of Medicine and Pharmacy "Victor Babes" in Timișoara

The Student Entrepreneurial Society of the University of Medicine and Pharmacy "Victor Babes" (UMFT) does not have a visible online presence. Only one activity of the SES is presented on the main webpage of the university. On the same page, there is also a presentation of the results of this project. To find this information, students should search for the acronym "SES" on the university website. Otherwise, no other clear information about the university's SES can be found on the UMFT website, as it does not have a special section on the website. The UMFT website has been re-created, recently, and is still under construction, so some sections still have no information. There is such a sub-section, called "Entrepreneurial University", where information about SES and its work could be added in the future. SES UMFT does not have its own webpage resulting from a Google search, nor does it have a social media presence. Instead, on Facebook, a form of organisation within the university, that is involved in entrepreneurial education activities, called the UMFT Entrepreneurial Advisory Board can be found. However, there is no mention of whether this council has a link to the university's SES.

4. Conclusions

The present study may be the first in the country to investigate communication within SES, specifically communication via websites. In order to ensure effective online communication, SESs need to have a quality website that is visible. Thus, we discovered that not all universities in Timișoara have a website dedicated to SESs and their activities. In terms of online visibility, this is the first thing that needs to be achieved. Also, social media presence increases the online visibility of SES and their websites, so SESs need to build a presence in this direction as well, if they don't already exist. The next thing revealed by the study is that SES activities are not routinely updated on their own websites, which can work to the disadvantage of SES as it ignores a popular communication channel among students. Updating information is also important for social media pages, with these and the website working in tandem to ensure an unobstructed flow of communication. Another aspect, found in this study, is that not all SES websites offer resources on entrepreneurship, which could spark student interest if they had access to them. Also, some changes in the website design, as modelled by Devi & Sharma (2016), such as introducing the search function or offering users the possibility to view the page in multiple languages, would positively influence the quality of the website, and at the same time communication.

Concretely, to ensure effective communication, InoHub UPT needs to be defined as SES of UPT in a clear way on its webpage. It also needs to create a presence on the university's webpage, update information about its activities, as it does on Facebook, and on its own website, but also on other social media channels, and last but not least, work a bit on the webpage design, adding search and translation options in several languages. In the case of the website, InoHub UPT needs to make sure that the Alumni section is completed, being the only one of the SESs studied to have a dedicated alumni section on the website, which is an advantage as the SESs are also targeting them, not only as beneficiaries of their activities in the first three years after graduation, but also as possible mentors for the next generations. Another example of good practice in InoHub UPT communication, which is not shared by the other SESs studied and which it is recommended that they adopt, is that they have a "library" of resources on their website about the field of entrepreneurship in general and, specifically, about how to open and run a business.

Although SES UVT is visible online, its website is linked to the university's website and easy to find, it needs to be updated with information about its activities, as do the society's Facebook and Instagram pages. Like the InoHub UPT webpage, the SES UVT website would benefit from adding search and translation options in multiple languages. Websites are sources of information for users, accessing the information they are looking for in an easy and structured way ensures their interest and future use of the website. From this point of view, I believe that restricting access to information about entrepreneurship to SES members only is a disadvantage for SES UVT, which may cause disinterest among students who access the page. The strengths of the SES UVT website are its aesthetics and ease of navigation, with pages linked to each other by buttons that ensure a fast browsing experience.

SES-USA-TM does not have an individual website, their webpage is linked to the university website. From this point of view, SES-USA-TM is easy for students to find, but the downside of this arrangement is that the settings of the university's main page interfere with those of the society page, which can cause confusion and affect the communication process. Of all the SESs studied, SES-USA-TM is the most visible online when the society is searched on the Google search engine. Thus, I recommend that SES-USA-TM build its own website, taking into account the criteria of a quality website. SES-USA-TM should also create social media pages dedicated to the company, which should not be ignored when it comes to online communication. SES-USA-TM needs to work on the content of its website, as the information on the website is vague and the information about activities is not up-to-date. In light of these observations, students who turn to the website for information about SES-USA-TM may be discouraged into thinking that the society is not active. To avoid this and to ensure effective communication, I recommend that SES-USA-TM add information about its current activities and resources about the field of entrepreneurship.

Of all the SESs studied, SES UMFT is the only one without visible online communication. An advanced search on the UMFT website reveals that the society

exists and is active, but the information is scattered and difficult to find; the website does not have a section dedicated to the society. SES UMFT does not have its own website or presence on socialmedia channels. From this perspective, students who are interested in SES UMFT activities and want to search for information online will not find any mention of it. In order to communicate effectively online, I recommend SES UMFT to create an online presence through its own website, which is also visible on the university website and through the social media channels.

In conclusion, in order to ensure effective communication, it is recommended that SESs have their own websites, but their presence should also be promoted on the websites of their universities. Social media presence should not be ignored, as it and the websites work together in the communication process. The information on the SES website should be up-to-date, relevant, interesting and complex enough to support their mission of educating students and graduates in entrepreneurship. Some care should be taken in the way websites are designed, small aspects that facilitate the communication process.

The communication of universities' SESs with the external environment is not an extensively researched topic, so there is the possibility of creating many other studies in this direction. The following examples are just a few possibilities for study: social media presence and communication of SESs; the impact of online communication on students, but also on alumni; but also effective methods of communication of SESs with alumni.

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The Impact of Leadership on Organisational Productivity

Alexandra Dennisa Munteanu

Abstract: *Many scholars have been interested in organisational performance since it is thought to be one of the most important elements for effectiveness and successful outcomes in determining a company's status. There are various factors that affect performance in public organisations, according to numerous research. In this study, four of them were considered: management, work environment, training and development, and corporate culture. This paper presents employee satisfaction rate in the context of two distinct leadership styles, performed by two distinct types of leaders/managers. This research aims to prove that leadership as a whole, but also leadership styles affect employee performance through employee satisfaction and work drive. The study outlines that the best results are obtained when democratic leadership is performed, yielding better outcomes regarding employee perceptions. Workers perform their tasks better, displaying a better attitude, and contributing to the organisation's overall productivity and results, when their opinions are considered, when they feel like their work makes a difference in the company they work for and when they are being supported and motivated by their leader. The methodology used to obtain the results presented in this paper were the interview and a survey, which were conducted with a local entrepreneur and leader, and his employees.*

Keywords: *leadership, management, organizational performance, productivity, democratic leadership, leadership styles*

1. Introduction

The impact of leadership on organisational performance is a direct and causal relationship. Leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping organisational values, culture, adaptability, and employee motivation. Organisational approaches are influenced by

them, impacting both their effectiveness and execution. It is imperative to underscore that individuals who exhibit leadership qualities can be identified at various levels within an organisation and are not limited to those in managerial positions.

Hence, the influence of leaders extends to all individuals to facilitate the attainment of team and organisational goals. At any given moment, it has been observed that the implementation of an appropriate leadership style serves as a means of enhancing organisational performance. The importance of leadership in any organisation cannot be overstated, as it serves as the core and essence of the company. According to Armstrong Sofi (2015), a leadership style refers to the approach adopted by managers to fulfill their leadership responsibilities. Leadership behaviour in a corporate setting is often perceived as a deliberate approach taken by a leader to enable employees to attain the predetermined objectives of the organisation. This style of leadership holds significant importance in contemporary business operations.

According to Iqbal (2015), certain leadership styles have the potential to impact an employee's level of job fulfillment. The relationship between leadership style and job satisfaction has been established by researchers. The statement suggests that the way leadership is exercised can impact the level of job satisfaction experienced by employees, as well as their inclination to remain or depart from an organisation. It is noteworthy that the appropriate leadership style implemented at a particular juncture, irrespective of remuneration, has the potential to motivate an employee to perform optimally within the organisation.

The absence of effective leadership is likely to result in a higher likelihood of errors occurring, thereby diminishing the likelihood of achieving success. Leadership, in conjunction with incentives and opportunities, facilitates individuals' motivation to achieve goals, thereby playing a pivotal role in the development, dissemination, and alteration of organisational culture. Given the inherent association between leadership and power, the act of rallying others to fight for shared objectives is often regarded as a manifestation of leadership. The achievement of outcomes is intrinsically linked to leadership. In the present-day globalised economy, leaders encounter a formidable task as businesses confront perpetually evolving surroundings.

2. Research methods

This research has been conducted using the interview and the survey as the main research methods. The interview is a widely used technique for data collection and serves as the foundation of qualitative methodology. According to McCracken (1990), the use of the interview method enables researchers to acquire a comprehensive understanding of individuals, including their perspectives on the world or group ideologies.

According to Băban, there are two primary rationales for a researcher to opt for an interview as a means of inquiry. The primary focus lies in the subjective interpretations that the participants attribute to the subject matter or issue being examined. Additionally, there is a comprehensive examination of certain topics that

are deemed too intricate to be explored through quantitative approaches (Băban, 2000, p. 319).

The interview was conducted with a successful, local entrepreneur, having well over 30 years of business experience, with the purpose of learning about an opinion on leadership and employee performance from a person who learnt these aspects through continuous trial and error. Surveys were also conducted to serve as support to the interview, aiming to learn how the entrepreneur's interview answers coincided with his employees' survey answers. Moreover, a number of 28 surveys have been divided and shared amongst two distinct categories of employees: a number of 15 surveys have been given to employees working directly with the interviewed entrepreneur, while the other 13 were given to workers coordinated not by the entrepreneur, but by someone with a lower position on the managerial ladder. This was done with the purpose of concluding whether the leadership style adopted by the experienced entrepreneur yields different attitudes and results from employees, compared to the styles adopted by the managers.

2. Results

Interview results

The local entrepreneur was asked questions regarding his leadership style, attitude towards employees, ways of motivating his internal and external associates, and how he situates himself in the context of leadership. The leader declared his leadership style as being a customised one, since no leadership style fits everybody, and there is no such a thing as fitting into a pre-determined theoretical style. The leadership style, according to him, is something that highly depends on the situation and performance. In some contexts, one should be democratic and social, while in others, one should adopt a more autocratic style, depending on factors such as employees, working domain and performance. According to him, the most important quality a leader can possess is the ability to adapt to new situations and act accordingly. He declared himself more democratic than any other style, which will serve in the analysis that follows, stating that he is very preoccupied by his employees' well-being, which is why he constantly holds meetings to ask for their input, brainstorming sessions, and activities to encourage bonding and harmony, such as team-buildings.

Survey results

For a better understanding of the context, a sample of the summarised data collected will be analysed. The questions included in this paper have been chosen based on the answers' relevancy to the impact of different leadership styles on employee satisfaction and motivation.

TESA Employees (Employees working directly with the interviewed entrepreneur)

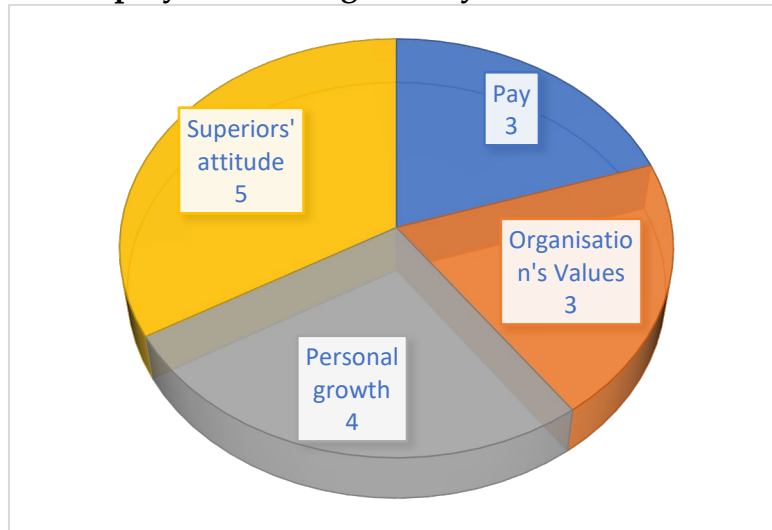


Figure 1: TESA Employees answers regarding motivational factors in the workplace

When asked what the motivational factors for them are when it comes to their work, most of the TESA workers declared the factor that most motivates them was their superiors' attitudes towards them, followed by personal growth, the organisation's values, and lastly, the remuneration.

Non-TESA Employees (Employees coordinated by other superiors)

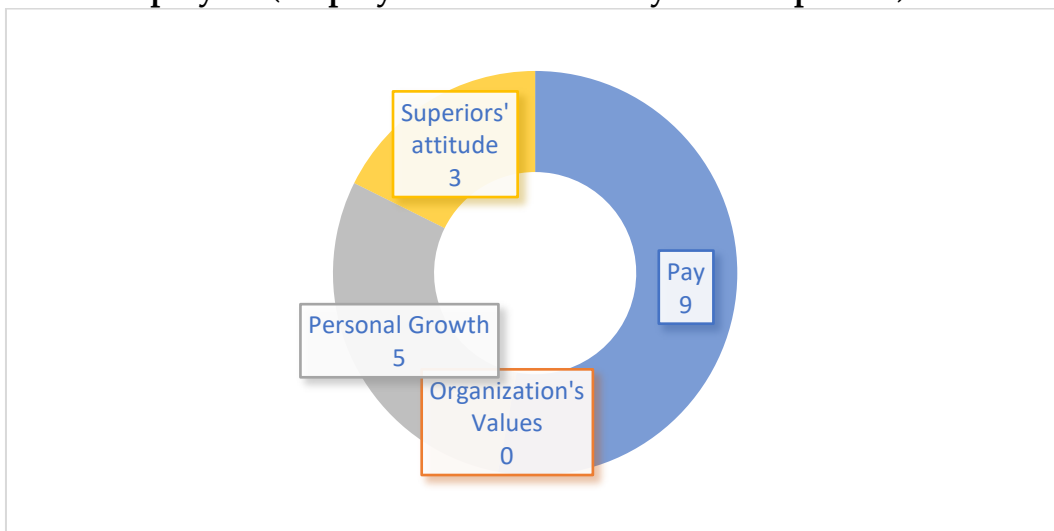


Figure 2: Non-TESA Employees answers regarding motivational factors in the workplace

Compared to the previous employees, non-TESA workers declared that the most motivational factor for them when it came to their work was the remuneration, followed by personal growth, and then superiors' attitudes, none choosing the organisation's values.

TESA Employees

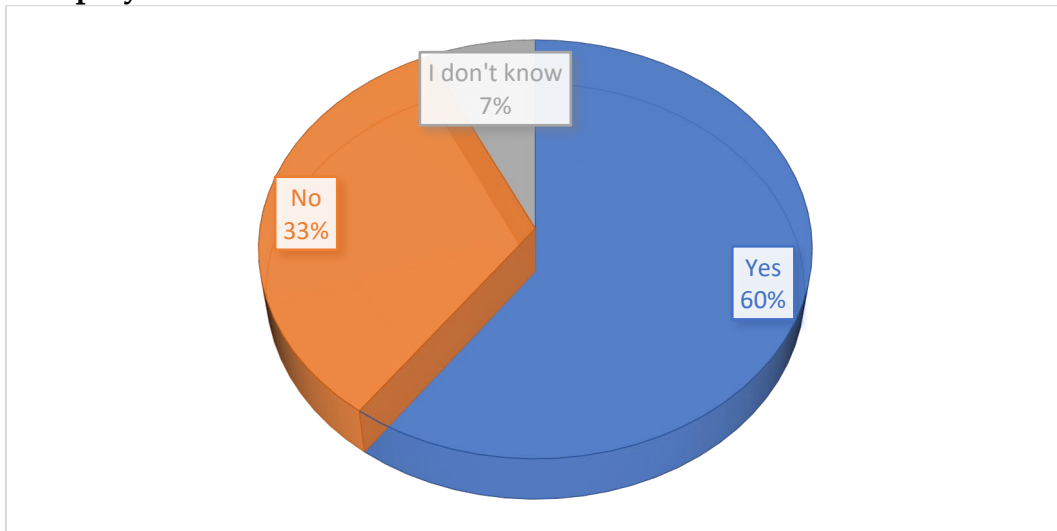


Figure 3: TESA Employees answers regarding their participation the the company's decision-making process

When questioned about whether they felt like they were being considered in the decision-making process of the company, 60% of the TESA personnel declared they felt their opinions were being taken into account, while 33% percent negated the statement, and 7% of the workers said they were not sure whether their opinions were being considered.

Non-TESA Employees

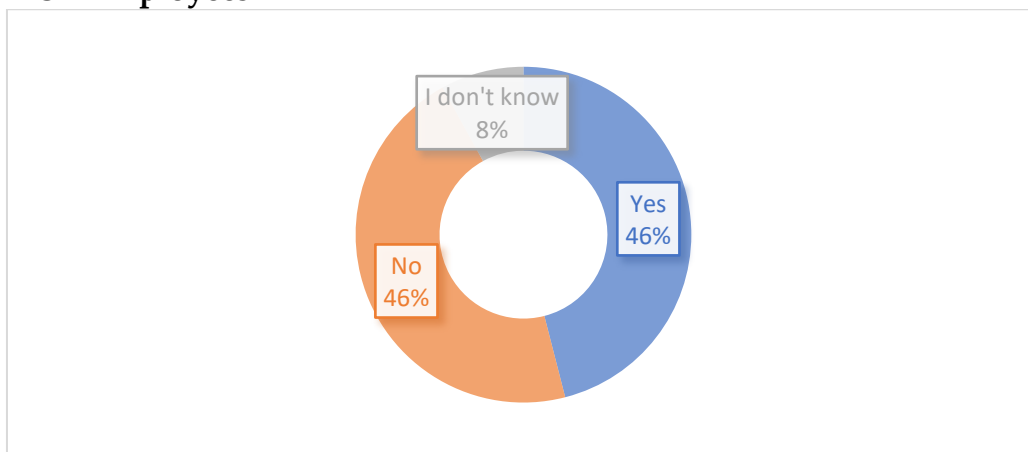


Figure 4: Non-TESA Employees answers regarding their participation in the company's decision-making process

Conversely, when asked the same question, 46% of the non-TESA employees said they felt like their suggestions were being considered, 46% said they did not believe they had a say in the decision-making process, and 8% declared they did not know.

TESA Employees

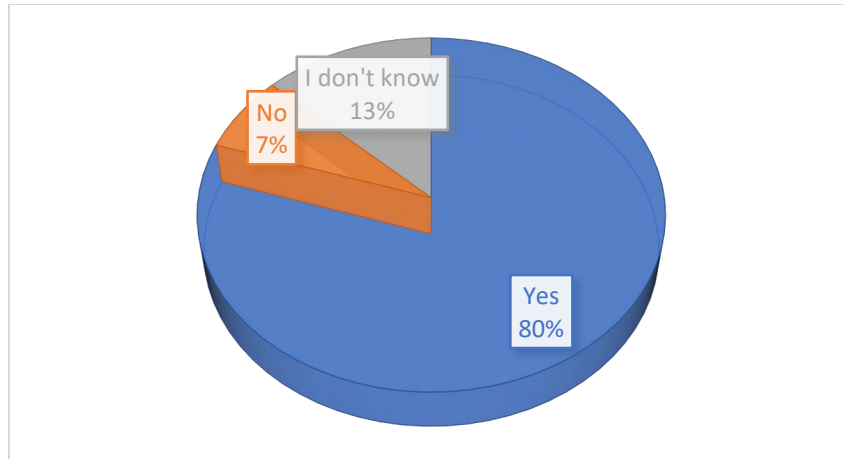


Figure 5: TESA Employees answers regarding the impact of the leadership style chosen by their superior

As for the leadership style, the workers were asked if they felt like the leadership style adopted by their superiors fit the organisation's and their personal needs. When asked this, 80% percent of the TESA personnel declared the leadership style adopted by the interviewed entrepreneur aligned with their personal needs and the organisation's well-being, 7% said they did not feel the same, and the remaining 13% stated they did not know.

Non-TESA Employees

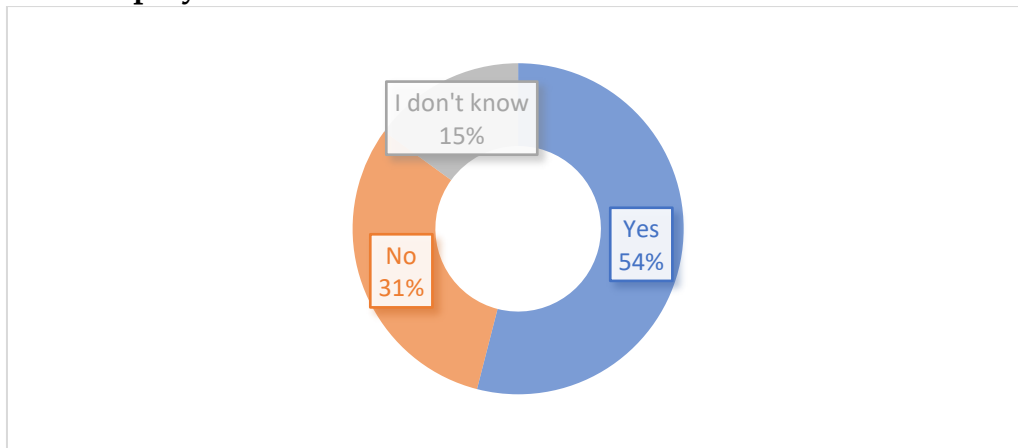


Figure 6: Non-TESA Employees answers regarding the impact of the leadership style chosen by their superior

Compared to TESA employees, only 54% of non-TESA workers stated they felt like the leadership style chosen by their superior fit the organization's and their needs. This difference can also be seen in the number of employees declaring they do not feel like their needs align with their superiors' chosen style of leading, while 15% of workers state they are not sure.

The leadership style adopted by the interviewed entrepreneur seems to give his employees the impression that they make a difference in the company they work for and that they are treated fairly, they consider that their needs align with those of the

organisation and tending more towards getting motivated by factors unrelated to the salary level.

On the other hand, non-TESA staff seem to be more demotivated, considering that their personal impact on companies is not as great, stating that the crowd element is not as much manifested as in TESA staff and the leadership style chosen by the manager does not align as much with personal and company needs. These employees also tended towards values that boil down to salary as the most motivating factor.

It can be thus concluded that the leadership style chosen by the interviewed entrepreneur for his employees bears fruit and positively influences their mentality and behaviour towards the organisation, while the leadership style chosen by the superiors of the non-TESA staff has room for improvement. It can be also noted that the statements of Mr. Darius Jumanca, entrepreneur, regarding his leadership style and concern for employees coincide with the statements of TESA staff. In other words, judging by the data obtained, it seems that the leadership style would have an impact on the organisational productivity and satisfaction.

Recommendations

There currently exist multiple strategies for implementing effective leadership styles within a professional setting. Among the three commonly discussed leadership styles, the democratic leadership style is deemed as the most effective one. The democratic leadership style is widely adopted by organisations in the contemporary working environment due to its efficacy in facilitating the achievement of organisational goals and objectives.

Due to the absence of a universally applicable leadership style, it is recommended that the management employs diverse techniques and approaches to address varying circumstances that may need increased effort from individuals to attain organisational objectives and enhance overall performance. In addition, it is imperative for the upper part of the organisation to undertake measures aimed at identifying the pivotal factors that affect the achievement of organisational members and the corresponding measures (such as training, motivation, and performance evaluation) that can be implemented to address them. Corporate managers should implement an array of leadership styles, taking into consideration the circumstances and complexity of the roles assigned to their employees.

Conclusion

The primary focus of this paper is on the three prevalent leadership styles, namely autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire. The democratic leadership style is considered superior to the other two styles, as it has the potential to improve the performance of both team members and the organisation overall.

The impact of leadership styles on the organisational performance is noteworthy within this context, and it is incumbent upon managers to select the appropriate style.

To effectively influence an organisation through leadership development, it is necessary for such programs to be sustained within the organisation through ongoing, reflective practices that involve setting and reviewing objectives that are aligned with the leadership role and the organisational strategy. Despite the literature highlighting the lack of a universally robust evaluation of leadership development programs, particularly with regard to identifying the effectiveness of long-term outcomes on the investment made, it is imperative that such programs are upheld within organisations. In the contemporary global context, a crucial element of effective leadership and management enhancement is to inspire, incentivise, authorise, and guide followers or group members with empathy towards accomplishing organisational goals. This requires a visionary, adaptable, and change-oriented leader, who has a broad perspective on things.

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The Role and Importance of Communication in the Recruitment Process

Nicola-Caius Agavriloae

Abstract: *Effective communication plays a critical role in the recruitment process, serving as a vital bridge between recruiters and candidates. The present paper highlights the role and importance of communication in recruitment, with an emphasis on its impact on attracting and selecting suitable candidates and promoting a positive corporate image. In the recruitment process, clear and coherent communication is essential to convey job requirements, corporate culture, and expectations to potential candidates. Recruiters must articulate such messages accurately to create an attractive image of the vacant positions and generate candidate interest. Moreover, active listening and understanding candidates' needs and aspirations contribute to a deeper mutual understanding, enabling recruiters to assess candidates' skills, experiences and potential more effectively.*

Keywords: *recruitment; communication; candidates; higher education; unskilled labour; organization.*

1. Introduction

In a constantly evolving world and an increasingly competitive environment, the recruitment process has become vital to the success of an organization. In this context, communication plays a central role in identifying, attracting, and selecting the right candidates for vacant positions. Effective communication between recruitment specialists and candidates is essential to ensure an optimal match between job

requirements and candidates' skills, as well as to promote the organization's image to potential employees.

Throughout history, communication has been and will always be a fundamental pillar for social development. From the earliest forms of social organization, people have understood that the effective transmission of information and ideas is crucial to collaboration, evolution, and progress. Thus, in the context of the recruitment process, communication proves to be an indispensable tool for the appropriate selection and attraction of talented and motivated candidates.

Effective communication in the recruitment process begins with a clear and coherent message. Recruiters should be able to accurately articulate the requirements and expectations related to the vacant position, as well as to provide clear and relevant information about the organization and its culture. Through effective communication, they can create an appealing image of the opening to stir potential candidates' interest.

Another crucial aspect of communication in the recruitment process is the ability to actively listen to and understand candidates' needs and aspirations. Through open and empathetic dialogue, recruitment specialists can identify candidates' skills, experience and potential, and provide additional information about the opportunities and advantages offered by the organization. This two-way communication facilitates a deep and mutual understanding between recruiters and candidates, and contributes to making an informed decision regarding the hiring process.

For the practical part of my research, presented later in the paper, I have used the survey as a research tool to investigate the role and importance of communication in the recruitment process. The survey was administered to recruitment specialists, in order to explore their opinions and perceptions of communication effectiveness in attracting and selecting candidates, as well as of its impact on the outcomes of the recruitment process.

This research instrument has allowed me to obtain relevant information regarding current communication practices in recruitment and to identify possible challenges and necessary improvements. These findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of the role and importance of communication in the recruitment process and will provide a solid foundation for future recommendations and strategies in the field.

2. Research methods

To gain a clearer and deeper understanding of communication in the recruitment process, I decided to conduct a case study focused on recruiters.

Data collection was performed through the sociological quantitative survey method, and the questionnaire was used as a research instrument. This method was chosen because it allows for information collection from a large number of respondents, leading to more statistically significant data. The questionnaire consisted of 22 close-ended questions, two of which concerned factual data, while the remaining

20 focused on the participants' interest in recruitment and the role of communication in this process. 80 questionnaires were administered online to Romanian recruitment specialists, regardless of age or gender.

Data collection lasted seven days, from May 24th to May 31st, 2023, and proved quite challenging due to its specific focus on recruitment specialists. To overcome this challenge, I joined various dedicated groups on social networks to reach the target audience.

The responses were grouped into two categories, according to the recruiters' area of activity: job openings that require a higher education degree and respectively, unskilled labour. This allowed me to compare the responses from the two groups and to identify the similarities and differences.

I tried to maintain an objective position during the analysis of the respondents' experiences, refraining from any personal opinion on the answers. The only comments I made are meant to confirm or refute a hypothesis.

The first hypothesis is that recruitment specialists believe that effective communication is crucial to attracting and hiring suitable candidates. This hypothesis suggests that recruitment specialists understand that effective communication plays a vital role in the recruitment process. They recognize that clear, coherent, and personalized communication is essential to attract quality candidates and enhance selection efficiency. Thus, they can dedicate themselves to building well-structured, tailored messages at each stage of the recruitment process to convey relevant information and attract the interest of potential candidates.

The second hypothesis is related to the fact that recruitment specialists pay special attention to non-verbal communication and body language of candidates during interviews. This hypothesis emphasizes that recruitment specialists understand the importance of non-verbal communication and body language in the candidate evaluation process. They are aware that these aspects can provide relevant clues about a candidate's level of confidence, communication skills, and cultural compatibility. Therefore, recruitment specialists also pay attention to candidates' non-verbal signals, such as eye contact, facial expressions, and body language, to get a more comprehensive and accurate assessment of a candidate's potential.

The third hypothesis is linked to effective communication between recruitment specialists and hiring managers. My intention was to check if this was essential to ensuring a smooth recruitment process and achieving successful outcomes. This hypothesis suggests that recruitment specialists understand the importance of effective communication with hiring managers. They acknowledge that close collaboration and clear communication between the two parties are key to efficient recruitment and successful outcomes. Effective communication between specialists and managers allows for the proper transmission of requirements and expectations related to vacant positions, fosters objective candidate evaluation, and facilitates informed decision-making regarding hiring.

3. Results

When asked whether effective communication could impact candidate quality, the two groups provided slightly different perspectives. In the unskilled labour group, all the 16 respondents who completed the survey believe that effective communication can have a significant impact on the quality of recruited candidates. This indicates a unanimous understanding of the importance of effective communication in the recruitment process.

On the other hand, 87.5% of the participants (i.e. 56 respondents) in the higher education group support the idea that effective communication can significantly influence the quality of recruited candidates. This majority also confirms the importance of effective communication in the recruitment process. However, a considerable 12.5% (i.e. 8 respondents) do not support this idea. This may suggest individual different perceptions or may be the result of other factors influencing the respondents' opinion.

When it comes to prompt communication with candidates in the initial stages of the recruitment process, the two groups show some differences of opinion. Recruiters in the unskilled labour group are unanimous in their belief that a diversified approach is necessary to ensure prompt and effective communication with candidates. They understand that providing clear information about the recruitment process, using alternative communication channels and responding to candidates' questions promptly are key elements in this stage of the recruitment process. By providing clear, accessible information and being readily available to communicate promptly and efficiently, recruiters can convey confidence and respect to candidates regarding their needs and inquiries.

By contrast, in the higher education group, recruiters' opinions are divided regarding prompt communication. 43.8% (i.e. 28 respondents) believe that prompt responsiveness to candidates' requests is enough to ensure effective communication. These recruiters place great importance on being responsive and quick in addressing candidates' questions and requests, so that candidates feel appreciated and engaged in the recruitment process. 37.5% of the participants in this group (i.e. 24 respondents) think that a diversified approach, similar to that in the unskilled labour group, is necessary to ensure effective communication in the initial stages of the recruitment process. These recruiters understand that providing clear information about the process, using alternative communication channels, and responding to candidates' questions promptly are essential to promoting open, effective communication. Lastly, 18.8% (i.e. 12 respondents) believe that providing clear information about the recruitment process and timeliness are enough to foster prompt and effective communication with candidates.

These different opinions may be influenced by the specific requirements of each recruitment sector, on the one hand, and by the preferences and experiences of each individual recruiter, on the other. In conclusion, irrespective of the recruitment sector,

prompt and clear communication, tailored to candidates' needs, is essential to foster a positive experience of the recruitment process.

Furthermore, recruiters' answers show that non-verbal communication in candidate evaluation is also important. In the unskilled labour group, 50% (i.e. 8 respondents) of the recruiters consider it very important, because non-verbal communication can provide additional clues about a candidate. These recruiters pay attention to facial expressions, body language, and gestures to gather additional information about candidates. The other 50% believe that non-verbal communication is important, but they place greater emphasis on verbal communication. They focus more on candidates' verbal communication skills.

As for recruiters focused on candidates with a higher education degree, an overwhelming 62.5% (i.e. 40 respondents) think non-verbal communication is very important in candidate evaluation. These recruiters acknowledge that non-verbal communication can provide clues and additional information about someone, allowing them to gain a more comprehensive picture of the candidates. Additionally, 25% (i.e. 16 respondents) consider non-verbal communication important, but not as important as in the case of those with higher education. These recruiters may focus more on candidates' skills and experience, placing less emphasis on non-verbal communication. Interestingly, 12.5% (i.e. 8 respondents) do not consider non-verbal communication important and choose to focus mainly on skills and experience.

It should be noted that recruiters' perceptions of non-verbal communication may vary depending on the specific context of each recruitment sector as well as on the individual preferences. However, the figures highlight that most recruiters acknowledge the importance of non-verbal communication in candidate evaluation, considering it essential to gaining a more complete and detailed understanding of candidates during the selection process.

The survey results also reveal the recruiters' opinion about the effects and outcomes of effective communication. In the case of recruiting unskilled personnel, half of the recruiters (50% / 8 respondents) reported multiple positive effects. They state that effective communication facilitates understanding, leads to a more precise and efficient selection, improves the candidates' overall experience, and enhances corporate image. The other half mentioned either better understanding or an improved overall candidate experience, with 25% (i.e. 4 respondents) for each option.

When it comes to recruiting personnel with a higher education degree, the majority (62.5% / 40 respondents) agree that effective communication has multiple positive effects. These include facilitating understanding, a more precise and efficient selection, improving the candidates' overall experience, and contributing to a better corporate image. 18.8% (i.e. 12 respondents) believe that better understanding is the main positive effect, while 12.5% (i.e. 8 respondents), a better corporate image. Only 6.3% (i.e. 4 respondents) regard effective dialogue as the primary positive effect on candidate selection.

These results suggest that recruiters acknowledge the importance of effective communication in the recruitment process. They believe that clear, concise, and appropriate communication can facilitate mutual understanding, enhance selection efficiency, and improve candidates' experience. They are also aware that effective communication can contribute to a positive corporate image. Recruiters are therefore encouraged to pay increased attention to developing their communication skills and to using them effectively in the recruitment process to achieve better outcomes and to guarantee a satisfactory experience for both the candidates and the company.

In light of the above, it can be concluded that Romanian recruiters attach great importance to effective communication in the selection of suitable candidates. This is due to their awareness that clear, coherent, and personalized communication plays a crucial role in attracting high-quality candidates and enhancing recruitment efficiency.

The present case study has revealed that recruiters understand the importance of effective communication during all the stages in the recruitment process. They are dedicated to creating well-structured and tailored messages that convey relevant information and attract the interest of potential candidates. Effective communication leads to mutual, clear understanding between candidates and recruiters, and facilitates the precise and efficient selection of suitable candidates.

Another important aspect highlighted in this study is the increased attention recruiters pay to non-verbal communication and the body language of candidates during job interviews. Most agree that these provide relevant cues about candidates' confidence, communication skills, and cultural compatibility. Recruiters therefore take notice of non-verbal signals, such as eye contact, facial expressions, and body language to get a more comprehensive and accurate assessment of a candidate's potential.

Moreover, this study has emphasized the importance of effective communication between recruiters and hiring managers. Close collaboration and clear communication between the two parties are key to a smooth recruitment process and to successful outcomes. Effective communication between recruiters and managers facilitates the proper transmission of requirements and expectations related to vacant positions, enables an objective evaluation of candidates, and contributes to making informed decisions about hiring.

Conclusion

This study has highlighted the importance of communication in the recruitment process and its evolution over time. Effective communication between recruiters and candidates plays a vital role in identifying and selecting suitable candidates, and promoting corporate image in the eyes of potential employees.

This study has pointed out that effective communication in the recruitment process requires a clear and coherent approach to the messages conveyed by

recruiters. Recruitment specialists need to articulate job requirements and expectations accurately and provide relevant information about the organization and its culture. Proper communication of these aspects contributes to creating an attractive image of the vacant position and to generating interest among potential candidates.

Additionally, the study has shown that active listening and an understanding of the needs and aspirations of candidates are crucial to communication. Open and empathetic dialogue facilitates the identification of candidates' skills, experience, and potential while providing them with additional information about the opportunities and advantages offered by the organization. This two-way communication contributes to a deep and mutual understanding between recruiters and candidates, leading to an informed hiring decision.

The results of survey used as a research tool in the applied part of the study has provided valuable insights into recruiters' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of communication in the recruitment process and its impact on the outcomes. These findings can be used to identify existing challenges and to propose improvements and more efficient strategies in the field of recruitment.

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated that effective communication plays a central role in the recruitment process and is essential to the success of an organizations in identifying and attracting suitable candidates. The recommendations and strategies developed based on this research can contribute to optimizing the recruitment processes and enhancing an organizations' performance in selecting and retaining the most talented and suitable candidates.

This study paves the way for further research in the field of communication in the recruitment process, aiming to develop improved practices and strategies that address future needs and challenges. By understanding and valuing the importance of communication in recruitment, we can contribute to building a qualified and motivated workforce that supports the development and success of organizations in a competitive global environment.

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Analysis and Optimization of Event Management. Case study: PoliKids Fest 2023

Raluca Ilisie

Abstract: *The planning and execution of successful events are crucial to various areas of activity, ranging from business conferences to cultural festivals. This paper explores the intricate world of event management, focusing on the analysis and optimization of the processes involved. By studying existing methods and implementing strategies for improvement, this research aims to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of event management. Given the impact of well-organized events on the economy and society, this study provides valuable insights for both practitioners and researchers in the field.*

Keywords: *event management, conferences, process, organization, improvement, optimization*

1. Introduction

In today's world, event planning and execution have become an integral part of various sectors, from corporate conferences and trade exhibitions to cultural events, sports gatherings and kids' events. Events, in their diverse forms, serve as powerful platforms for communication, connection, and engagement, and have become a cornerstone of modern society. Whether aiming to convey a message, celebrate culture, foster innovation, or drive economic growth, events demand careful orchestration, strategic planning, and flawless execution. The efficacy and success of events hinge on the proficiency and wit of event managers.

The present article focuses on the complexities of event management and explores strategies for improvement. By examining the core aspects of event

management and identifying opportunities for refinement, this research seeks to provide valuable insights to practitioners, researchers, and stakeholders in the field.

Event management an important endeavour, requiring the harmonious blend of various elements. From setting clear objectives and identifying the target audience to meticulous planning, effective resource allocation, promotion, seamless execution, and post-event evaluation, each stage demands careful consideration and expertise. The pursuit of event management excellence requires an understanding of current trends, innovative practices, and adaptable strategies.

This paper aims to reveal the intricacies of event management. It provides a comprehensive overview of the *PoliKids Fest 2023* event, highlighting both its strengths and its weaknesses. A thorough analysis of the event, focused on the various stages of event management, has led to the identification of its strengths, challenges, and potential areas for improvement. The findings of this study have resulted in some recommendations to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of event management.

2. Research method

My research is based on a thorough analysis and the optimization of event management, focusing on the case study of the *PoliKids Fest 2023* event.



After consulting various specialized documentation sources on event management, I have developed a framework of analysis to assess the *PoliKids Fest 2023*

event. This framework has helped me identify the strengths and weaknesses in the organization of this event.

I have used the comparative analysis as a research method. Comparative analysis allows one to compare the different aspects of event management, to identify effective practices, and to detect potential weak points, as follows:

Aspect	Criterion	Description	Evaluation
Budget	Cost estimation	5.000 €	✓
	Funding sources	Sponsorship from partners	✓
Venue	Location	Știința Stadium The Park next to the Faculty of Mechanics	✓
	Capacity	5.000	✓
Schedule	Date and time	27.05.2023	✓
Marketing	Promotion strategy	Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, posters, LED screens, Notice Board, StudentUPT application, press release	✓
	Target audience	1– 99 years	✓
Speakers/ Entertainment	Selection	Hot air balloon rides, Slides, trampolines and	✓

		carousel, Animation from “Degetu’ mic”, The play “Snow White and more Dwarfs”, magic show, workshops for children, Face painting, Bicycle competition with prizes,	
	Contractors	Degetu’ Mic, Nora Restaurant, Oltenia SKY Team,	✓
Logistics	Transportation	Provided by Politehnica University Timișoara.	✓
	Equipment	-	X
Catering	Menu	Nora restaurant	✓
	Dietary restrictions		X
Registration	Online registration		
	On-site registration	Free admission. Registrations were required only for the hot air balloon rides.	X
Evaluation	Feedback collection	Facebook comments, Face-to-face feedback	✓
	Post-event analysis	Press Review	✓

Safety	Emergency plan	There was a SMURD team on site.	✓
	Security measures	There was a security team on site.	✓
Promotion	Social media presence	Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn	✓
	Media partnerships	TeleUniversitate a Timișoara	✓

3. Results

The assessment of the various aspects related to the PoliKids Fest 2023 event provides a comprehensive perspective on its strengths and areas of improvement.

Budget management was well-coordinated, with cost estimation staying within the allocated budget and secured partnerships for financial support. The choice of the venue (Știința Stadium, in the park next to the Faculty of Mechanics), with a capacity of 5,000, was appropriate, and the set date for May 27, 2023, was also well-timed.

The marketing strategy was extensive, encompassing a wide variety of promotional tools to reach a diversified target audience, from 1 to 99 years old. The selection of speakers and entertainment options was diverse, offering a wide range of activities to participants, and contracts were secured with experienced specialists.

Logistics, transportation, and safety measures were appropriately addressed, with a SMURD team and security personnel present during the event. The promotion strategy through social media and media partners contributed to the visibility and success of the event. Promotion consisted of five Facebook posts, five Instagram posts, three LinkedIn post, two press releases, and three weeks of advertising on seven LED screens throughout the city.

However, there are specific areas that require attention for future improvement. Equipment provision was not implemented very well, which slightly affected the effectiveness of the event. Dietary restrictions should have been considered more seriously, given that it was an event for children. The limited registration options for the hot air balloon rides also caused some inconvenience.

To sum up, the PoliKids Fest 2023 event has highlighted multiple strengths in its planning and organization, particularly in what concerns budget management, venue selection, promotion, entertainment, and safety. To enhance the overall experience of the event, the organizers should approach equipment provision more

seriously, give more consideration to dietary restrictions, and offer more convenient registration options to participants in future editions. The ability to adapt and improve in these areas are essential to the long-term success of the event.

4. Conclusion

This paper has revealed the intricate world of event management, with a particular focus on the analysis and optimization of the processes involved. It can be concluded that the case study of PoliKids Fest 2023 serves as a valuable example of how to identify the strengths and weaknesses of event planning and execution. In particular, this research has provided a comprehensive assessment of the various aspects involved in event management, from budgeting and venue selection to marketing strategies, entertainment choices, logistics, catering, registration, safety measures, and promotion.

The analysis of PoliKids Fest 2023 has revealed a well-organized event with several commendable aspects, including effective sponsorship partnerships, a suitable venue with ample capacity, a diverse array of entertainment options, and strong marketing efforts through various channels. Additionally, the safety measures, the robust emergency plan, and the dedicated security team enhanced the overall safety and security during the event.

Besides these strong points, there are also certain areas that will require more attention and improvement in the future, such as equipment provision, dietary restrictions, and a more streamlined approach to registration. However, successful feedback collection and post-event analysis prove commitment to continuous improvement.

Overall, the findings of this study serve as a valuable resource for event organizers and researchers, providing insights into best practices and areas for improvement in the ever-evolving landscape of event management. As events continue to play a vital role in modern society, the pursuit of excellence in event management remains paramount, and this study provides a roadmap to achieving just that.

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The Revival of Tourism Brands Post-pandemically. Solutions for Economic Actors in the Mountaneous Banat

Paula Peev-Otiman

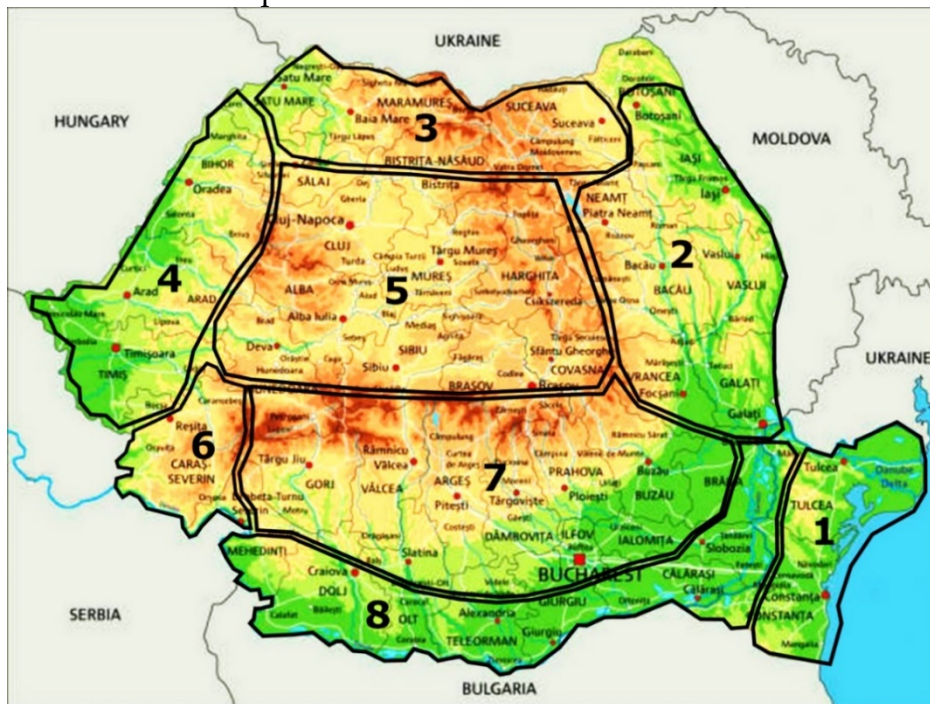
At the moment, Romania is a European country in which the tourism industry is very poorly developed. On the one hand, this has been a blessing in disguise, as the country did not suffer huge financial losses, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as was the case for countries that are dependent on the tourism industry, e.g. Greece, Turkey, Croatia, etc. The post-pandemic era represents a sturdy chance for the Romanian tourism industry, as the needs of consumers have shifted: they are looking for quiet, small groups of people, traditional and cultural heritage and unique experiences. There is a shift from the classical sun and beach and winter tourism, in which consumers invest in more weekend getaways throughout the year, in places with natural landscapes and outdoor activities. All in all, Romania has a lot of these places, that can provide exactly what the new consumers wish to have, but the entire industry needs to be rethought in order to offer qualitative services. The following text provides ideas for Romania and the Mountainous Banat.

Delimitation of Romania's tourist macro-regions

- Surface area of the country.
- The many types of tourism that can exist, depending on the geographical area.
- Unlikelihood of collaboration between all economic players in the tourism industry under a single brand for the whole country.
- Compacting the responsibility of tourism promotion for the whole country in one place has failed in recent years.

Taking into account the experience of other countries, the examples given above and the limitations of the brand proposed by the Ministry of Tourism, I propose that Romania be divided into eight macro-regions, with Romania - Explore the Carpathian

Garden becoming an umbrella brand. A sub-brand can be created for each macro-region delineated in the map below:



Map 1. Romania's tourism macro-regions. (Source: own representation.)

- 1 – Black Sea Seaside – Danube Delta;
- 2 - Moldova;
- 3 - Bucovina – Maramureș Oaş;
- 4 – Western Plain;
- 5 - Transylvania;
- 6 – Danube Bend– Banat Mountains;**
- 7 – Subcarpathian area;
- 8 - The Danube.

In addition, it would be desirable that the two tourism promotion authorities of Romania, the National Tourism Brand Council and the Tourism Advisory Council, become a single promotion office and have a branch for each macro-region. Thus, there will be a main office with the role of coordinator and eight offices that will deal with the sub-brands of the regions.

Delimitation of the Mountainous Banat

The historical Banat, also called "The Land between the Rivers", is bounded to the north by the Mures River, to the west by the Tisa River, to the south by the Danube River, to the east by the Cerna River and the Godeanu and Tarcu mountain range, a boundary that passes through the Gugu peak (2,291 m) and ends at the Iron Gates of Transylvania in the Retezat Mountains. The geographical area of the Banat is 28,526 sq.km (Popovici, Gh.).

After the First World War, the historical Banat was divided by the Treaty of Trianon (1920) as follows: two thirds of the area (18,966 sq.km) went to Romania, the western third to Serbia (9,276 sq.km) and a small area of 284 sq.km, located south of the Mures river, around Szeged, to Hungary.

The Romanian Banat is a distinct geographical region of Romania, with geographical, historical and cultural characteristics that give it particular economic and tourist value. Located at the western gate of Romania, the Romanian Banat comprises the territories of the counties of Caras Severin and Timis, plus the area of Orşovei, belonging territorially to the county of Mehedinţi and partly to the county of Arad up to the river Mureş. The 15 main ethnic communities (Romanians, Germans, Hungarians, Croats, Serbs, Czechs, Slovaks, Ukrainians, Russians, Lipovenes, Turks, Bulgarians, Roma, Jews, Poles and Italians) make the Romanian Banat a multicultural region considered to be the Little Europe. From this point of view, the Romanian Banat is unique in the Romanian and the European space, being a model of interethnic coexistence.

The Mountainous Banat comprises the mountainous area of the Caras Severin county (75%, the largest mountainous county in the country), the Orşova - Cazanele Dunării area (the Mehedinţi county, three communes and the town of Orşova) and five communes in the east of the Timiş county.

The Mountainous Banat, in terms of surface area and population, is one of the most important geographical regions of the Banat, as it comprises about 36.3% of the total surface area of the Romanian geographical Banat and 22% of its population.

Brand for the Banat Mountainous Region

Starting from the premise that the Mountain Banat region, with more than 15 ethnic groups living in this area, is also called Little Europe, I want to emphasise its ability to be a home for everyone. The feeling of "home" will be a main factor in creating the attractiveness of the area, thus I propose the slogan Banat Mountain - Come home. During a time when our lives fly by in an accelerated way, I want the Mountainous Banat to be that place where people stop, rest and recharge with positive energy.

The proposed logo includes the colours of nature, green and blue, shows the typical mountains of the area and a house, representing the home that is the Mountainous Banat. The simplicity of the logo mirrors the simplicity of life in this fabulously beautiful area where time seems to stand still.



The logo of Mountainous Banat (Source: own representation)

The website will be built based on the Slovenian example, with a template used by all eight of Romania's tourism macro-regions. It is very important to have information about accommodation possibilities, transport, tourist routes, gastronomic points, information for emergencies and a map showing all this. The promotion of natural and man-made tourist offers must be in the foreground, so field research is recommended to centralise all current offers. The establishment of cooperation between the Mountainous Banat promotion authority and the area's economic players is of major importance and involves promoting business on the official website in exchange for guaranteeing a level of service agreed between the two parties.

The presence on the major social networks - Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, TikTok - is absolutely necessary. Through these, it is possible to raise the level of direct communication with potential tourists, the possibility of promotion through influencers and journalists, maintaining a constant dialogue with consumers, organising giveaways, encouraging tourists to post their experiences by using hashtags pre-defined by the promotion authority and many other promotional activities.

Another important point to centralise tourism in the Mountainous Banat under the brand of the same name is the creation of promotional and informative materials. Also, by means of field research, all tourist services offered in the region are analysed and the tourist offer of the Mountainous Banat is created. For an easier collaboration, the proposed method is to officially notify all the economic actors of the presence of a new authority for the promotion of tourism in the area and request information related to the actual activity of these businesses. This creates a database and a communication network between the economic actors and the promotion authority. Based on all this information, online and offline tourism promotion materials will be created. Tourist information centres will become major points of interest, where promotional materials will be made available to tourists.

There are ten major events in the whole Mountainous Banat area, according to the author of the Mountainous Banat tourist guide, Gheorghe Popovici, namely:

1. Garana Jazz Festival
2. "Hercules" International Folklore Festival in Baile Herculane
3. The "Serbările cetății" event in Caransebeș
4. Multicultural Resita
5. Resita in ten dimensions
6. Multicultural and musical Oravița
7. Mihai Eminescu Days and George Enescu Days
8. Decade of German Culture in the Mountainous Banat
9. Event Days of Faith and Culture in Banat
10. International Short Film Festival in Reșița

There is currently no extensive promotion for any of these events, at least not beyond the cities where they are held. This is yet another perfect example of a lack of coordination at regional level. All these events will come under the umbrella of Banat Mountain - Come Home and will be promoted nationally and even internationally. They will become tourist attractions in their own right through proper promotion.

In order to outline the clear structure of promotion of the places in the Mountainous Banat under the proposed brand, absolutely all existing information boards need to be redone and new boards created where needed. The logo and contact details of the promoting authority should appear on all of the signs.

Collaboration with various private tourism promotion agencies for different markets is necessary to reach as many consumers as possible. An example of such an agency is Aviareps Tourism based in Germany. They can handle PR and marketing for Banat Mountain - Come home throughout the DACH region. Based on promotional materials provided by the brand promotion authority, they will "sell" the Mountainous Banat tourist destination to travel agencies in the DACH region, and these in turn will add it to the offers they sell. The Marketing and PR Agency also organises trips with journalists to the destinations they market, to then generate content in the various travel publications. They also work a lot with the influencer market and handle the participation of the destination/brand in various travel trade shows.

Solutions for the economic actors in the Mountainous Banat

Next, I will propose three solutions for the economic actors in the Mountainous Banat, which, if implemented, will increase the quality of tourism in the area, increase tourism revenues and create synergies between stakeholders. The aim is to offer something tangible and achievable, since my previous analyses of the Mountainous Banat area have shown that the most important aspects for the development of tourism are infrastructure, quality, the variety of tourism services and people's hospitality. By implementing the following proposed ideas, two of the three aspects mentioned above can be improved.

Ecological mountain dairy farm

Historically, the dairy farm was the summer "residence" of the shepherds in the mountainous areas, because in the warm season they took their sheep, goats and cattle to graze on the mountain pastures. The location of the sheepfold was always in the valleys for protection and there was always a source of water nearby. At the sheepfold, the milk from the animals was processed into cheese and butter. For the people of the mountain area, this was a major part of their income because nature did not allow them to farm on a large scale. The barns were built of wood or stone, had a fairly large yard where the animals had no access and about 2-3 rooms where they lived and processed the milk.

On the plus side, a sheepfold adds value to the mountainous area by having the mountain pastures maintained and fertilised naturally through constant use. It also

provides sanitary premises for processing milk and if cooperatives are set up, milk can be transported directly to market outlets. Last but not least, the dairy farms need people, which means repopulating the uplands, thus bringing back to life the upland countryside, a priority for the current Romanian government.

What is an ecological mountain dairy farm?

In today's hustle and bustle, people are looking for quiet resting places where time seems to stand still, unique places. Recently there has also been a need to make them as uncrowded as possible. At the same time, consumers want traditional, real, quality products. An organic mountain sheepfold meets consumer demands and revives the mountain countryside by combining tourist services such as accommodation and meals with milk processing services and reviving the Romanian pastoral tradition.

Structurally, an organic mountain dairy consists of a main building with a sanitary filter, milk reception room, processing room, warping room, maturing and storage room, shepherd's room and open terraces. In addition to this main building, there are the necessary livestock annexes, parking spaces and technical facilities. Depending on the size of the stable, it may also have some accommodation.

Services offered are:

- Meals with homemade or local products
- Participation in the processing of mountain products
- Outlet for traditional products
- Accommodation

From a business point of view, the National Mountain Area Agency, together with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, has created a list of opportunities for such an enterprise:

- "the millennial tradition of the Romanian people for pastoralism and transhumance;
- the existence of a large flock of sheep in the Romanian Carpathians (approx. 2,753,399);
- fertilisation of meadows with organic fertilisers from sheep;
- the alpine pastures of the Carpathians have a flora with high nutritive value;
- the need to develop the upland area through the creation of associations;
- growing consumer demand for traditional mountain products;
- improving the quality of pastures, especially alpine pastures;
- development of water sources and the creation of water pipelines to the sheepfolds;
- energy independence of buildings through the use of photovoltaic panels;
- increasing the number of high-performance breeds of sheep and improving indigenous breeds;
- creating new jobs in the certified occupations of mountain shepherd and mountain shepherd."

At the same time, the two institutions had an installment of financial support for entrepreneurs who wanted to open such a business. All mountainous counties applied for this project, except Caras-Severin, including the Mountainous Banat area.

Although it is not known whether the Ministry of Agriculture will open another round of support for opening of ecological mountain dairy farms, the Caras-Severin County can use funds from the PNRR or PNDL projects. It is recommended to start with three of such projects to track the success rate and establish a strategy for future implementation.

Co-branding in the Mountainous Banat

According to the International Cooperative Association (ICA), a cooperative is an autonomous association of persons, united voluntarily, to pursue their common economic, social and cultural goals, needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise.

The ICA also argues that co-operatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, cooperative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

Perhaps the most important aspect in areas where tourism is highly developed is the strengthening of the local community. People in that community plan and act in such a way that everyone benefits, from tourists to active locals to retired locals. In this way, synergies are generated, more value is created, the economy grows, and therefore consumption power increases. The following ideas are mainly aimed at bringing the rural communities of the Mountainous Banat together to develop the area, tourism and the local economy.

The first recommendation is that gastronomic outlets source basic foodstuffs - dairy, eggs, meat, honey, fruit and vegetables - from local farmers in the area. Of course, it is also desirable to use own products, for example if the gastronomic point has beehives, it will use honey from its own hive. From a legal point of view, agri-tourism guesthouses are requested to find food from their own household and from local producers, according to Government Ordinance 58/1998.

In order to lead the community towards a complete circular economy, i.e. an economy that does not produce waste, it is recommended that organic waste from gastronomic outlets be taken to local farms where it can be turned into compostable matter or given to animals.

In the Romanian countryside, and therefore also in the Mountainous Banat, there is "roadside selling", i.e. local producers or craftsmen sell their products on the main roadsides. The creation of outlets such as souvenir shops where local producers can sell their products is necessary from several points of view. First of all, it would "clean up" the landscape by not having imposing roadside stalls. Second of all, producers can leave their goods at the shop and just collect the profit, not having to supervise the stall themselves, thus saving time for their own household or increasing the production of products. An example of good practice is the village of Corund in the Harghita county, where ceramic and wood craftsmen have opened an area for selling souvenirs:



Souvenir shop Corund. (Source: Wikipedia)

Another idea taken from a successful Travel Foundation project, the Much Kaab initiative, is for guesthouses and hotels to make hygiene products made by local artisans available in the sanitary facilities. For example, goat milk soap, marigold-based moisturisers, etc. It is important that the products are labelled with the name of the producer and the Banat Mountain - come home - logo. This way tourists know for sure that the products are local, are part of the cooperative between the Banat Mountain brand and the economic actors and know where they can access more information or even purchase the products.

In order to ensure a certain flow of tourists to service businesses, which do not include accommodation and meals, it is recommended to collaborate between different economic actors to create tourist packages, such as:

Pension and rafting organiser on the Nera. If you stay at guesthouse X, you can book a rafting trip on the Nera as part of the room price. Or if you stay at guesthouse Y, you get a 20% discount on a rafting trip on the Nera.

The guesthouse and the shepherd who teaches tourists how to make cheese. The guesthouse that sources cheese from a certain local producer may offer as an activity a trip to the producer's farm where tourists can process the milk into cheese and then buy it.

In the vast majority of villages and communes, there are cultural hostels which are almost unused. It is recommended to use them for organising various activities:

- learning to sew at the sewing war
- cooking classes for traditional dishes (sarmale, mămloigne, fish in walnut leaves, roasting of tuile)
- folk dance classes

These activities will be planned and organised by the tourist promotion authority, together with the representative of the municipality of the commune and service providers who can provide such activities. The persons who will offer these activities may have special training courses.

Analysis of Communications in Solar Energy

Ana-Maria Silvia Oprea

Abstract: *People's preference for online has become increasingly pronounced lately. Companies have adapted to this trend by adopting new online communication channels. This paper presents both organic and paid results of research conducted on the Facebook page and Instagram profile of a micro-business.*

Key words: *online communication; social media; micro-enterprise; strategic communication; solar energy; green energy*

1. Introduction

New technologies have facilitated the rapid development of the online environment, bringing significant changes in communication. Both individual users and organisations have learnt to adapt to the high-speed digital world. These new platforms are constantly evolving, making it hard to imagine what they will look like after each update.

With this freedom of communication in the online space comes the need for continuous monitoring. The consequences are difficult or impossible to prevent. Even if messages are no longer shaped by the media, people have become so sensitive that anything could offend someone. It is, therefore, very important to pay close attention to any distortion of organisational messages that may occur at the individual level. Companies need to learn how to manage (and address) negative comments and complaints on social media. Simply deleting them will not suffice. On the contrary, it will make people even angrier, damaging the company's reputation and driving customers away. A social media response strategy is very necessary for both preventing and overcoming a scandal.

The rapid evolution of technology has affected the entire business environment, but micro-businesses benefit the most from the changes.

2. Research methods

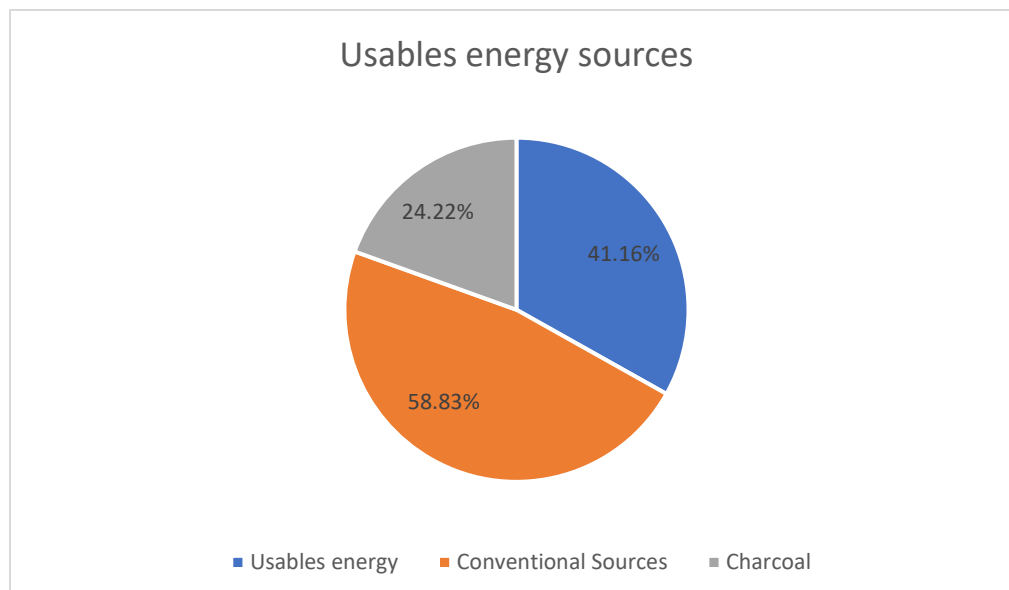
The research was conducted on two of the most popular social networks at the moment, Facebook and LinkedIn, by analysing the text content, graphics, images, audio, video of the posts, as well as some of the key performance indicators for the entire research. While content analysis provides qualitative information, statistical analysis shows what has happened using past data from the platforms' perspectives. Combined, the two methods are used to understand audience preferences.

Active solar techniques include the use of photovoltaics, concentrated solar power and solar water heating to harness energy. Passive solar techniques include orienting a building to the sun, selecting materials with favourable thermal mass or light dispersion properties and designing spaces that naturally circulate air.

The large magnitude of available solar energy makes it a very attractive source of electricity.

In 2020, solar energy was the cheapest source of electricity.

It will increase the energy security of countries through reliance on an indigenous, inexhaustible and largely import-independent resource, increase sustainability, reduce pollution and lower global warming mitigation costs, these benefits being global.



3. Results

Organic results

To better understand the content of the paper, a SWOT analysis was used. I have compared the company where I am currently working with several other companies in the same field of activity.

5 recommendations for choosing your photovoltaic panels

1. See how much energy you use: Look at your last year's energy bills and do a rough calculation to see which are your biggest consumers.
2. Make your consumption more efficient: Not only will this reduce the investment needed for your PV panels, it will also reduce your monthly bill. LED lighting, more energy- efficient appliances can be quick investments to pay for themselves.
3. Find out your roof's solar potential
4. Choose a kit that suits your needs and make sure the panels are installed at the right angle and orientation.
5. Buy them from an authorised supplier, with an invoice and a long guarantee. Also negotiate an annual maintenance package with the same company that does the installation.

In the online field every activity takes place on a certain platform. Some of the companies have chosen Facebook as a target group, others have chosen LinkedIn. None of these companies had activity on all social media platforms.

Solar Global	
<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wide international market opening - Security of development - Financial security of projects - Correct information in energy production 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of support from Romanian authorities in development - Inadequate infrastructure for park access points - Lack of building materials - Attracting a certain social clientele
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public interest in solar power generation - Reducing current energy consumption - Increasing green energy consumption 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - European funds blocked or delayed - Increasing competition in the solar energy market - Lack of distributors - Insufficient stock of materials

Figure 1 : SWOT analysis

It should come as no surprise that the paid reach is influenced by the ad spend, but targeting also plays an important part. What matters is not just how many people

your ad reaches, but also what kind of people end up seeing it. In order to reach the target audience, the micro-business has narrowed its focus to people that were located.

The topic of this paper is part of the field of online communication, but also touches on digital marketing (especially social media marketing).

For such small businesses, social media (as part of their online communication strategy) has many advantages, the most important one being cost savings.

Expert sources consulted

GRAPH OF TURNOVER (2022) Solar Global compared to the companies mentioned in the analysis

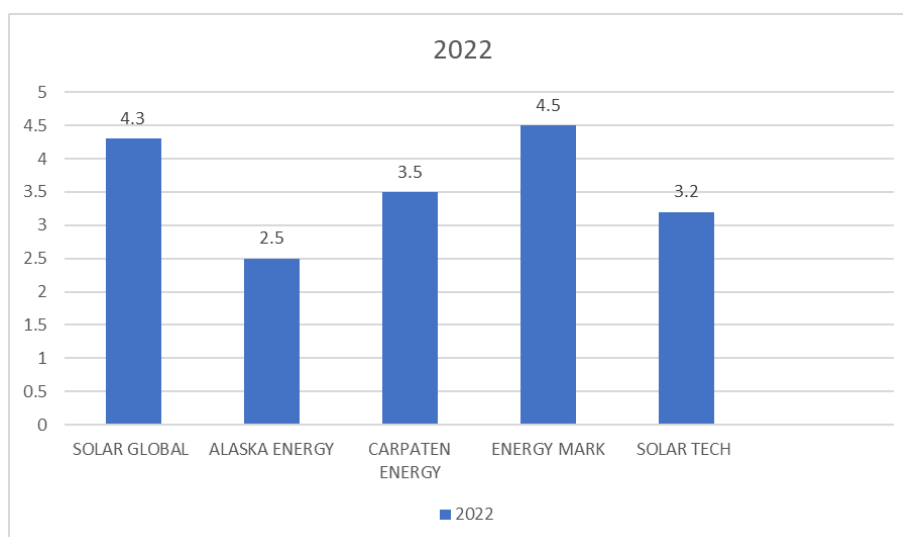


Figure 2 : Turnover graph

Conclusion

How do we define quality content?

It is a question many people ask themselves when planning their content marketing strategy. That is why it is important to clarify this point.

Quality content is content that is informative and which should answer the questions that potential customers ask.

The key qualitative approaches, i.e. interviewing, observation, and textual and discourse analysis, are described as examples of communication and exemplified with reference to studies of media organisations, media texts and media users. Finally, this paper considers the ways in which digital technologies are changing the conditions under which qualitative communications research will be undertaken in the future.

Increasingly, people are communicating not just over the air and through media, but in systems that accumulate both data and meta-data, which lend themselves to both commercial and academic applications.

GRAPH WITH ANALYSIS ON GLOBAL SOLAR SOCIAL PLATFORMS VS OTHER COMPANIES STUDIED IN THE ANALYSIS

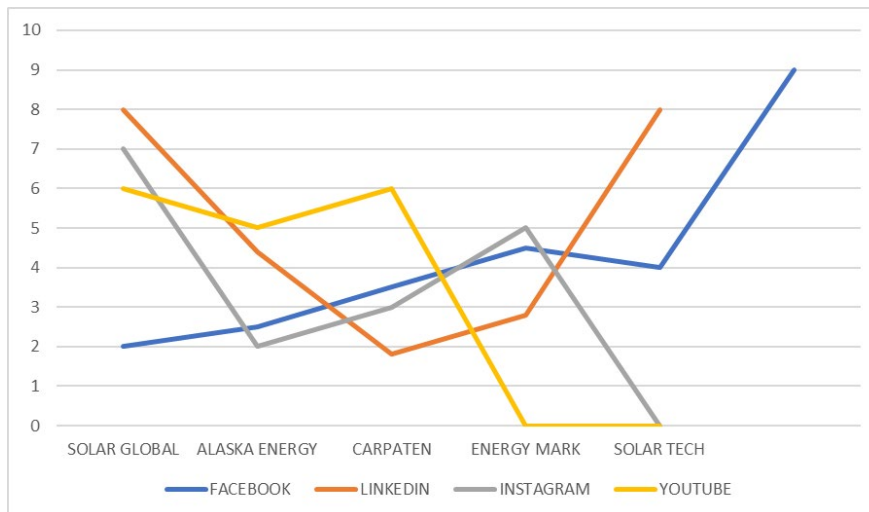


Figure 3 : Platform analysis chart

In conclusion, based on the analysis done in the research, the companies have a deficit of information that is made available to the public. Some of them have been able to promote themselves online and to make this tool called social media an asset for the company.

The energy field that was chosen to be studied is a growing one at the moment, being more productive and efficient every year and preferred by all the social categories and especially by investors.

The SWOT analysis shows the lack of information in this field. Every company chooses to promote itself on different social networks, but there is not enough activity as many of them have only image buttons on their websites.

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Local Economic Development through Traditional Trade: A Sustainable Approach

Simona Zetea

Abstract: *Developed from traditional trade, sustainable trade reflects the changes and demands of modern society, focusing on social, economic, and environmental issues and seeking to create a balance between economic growth and profitability. In this context, this article looks at the work of the Resource Centre for Ethical and Solidarity Initiatives (CRIES) on sustainability, promotion of traditional trade and online promotion. I have identified and analysed the impact of this centre in promoting ethical and solidarity values in the community, supporting sustainable development, and stimulating traditional trade. The research methodology involved a case study of the Resource Centre for Ethical and Solidarity Initiatives (CRIES), including a review of relevant materials, a semi-structured interview with one of the organization's founders, and an online questionnaire administered to 67 adults, designed to investigate the promotion of sustainability within the community. The results of this study indicate that there are significant opportunities to increase public awareness and involvement in ethical and sustainable activities, as well as the promotion of local and traditional products. However, more effective communication is needed to increase awareness and knowledge of sustainable initiatives and the promotion of traditional trade.*

Keywords: *traditional trade, solidarity initiatives, sustainable trade, cultural systems.*

1. Introduction

Traditional trade refers to commercial activities within the local community, based on local traditions, culture, and products. Supporting local producers and sustainable practices brings significant benefits to communities, the economy, and the environment. This form of trade has multiple benefits, from maintaining cultural identity to creating jobs and developing the local economy. In an economic landscape where big chain stores and e-commerce are rapidly gaining ground, promoting and

supporting traditional trade have become particularly important to maintaining the economic and cultural diversity of a community. But for local businesses to find a place in the competitive marketplace, they need to adapt to consumer demands using available marketing tools (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Pavel, 2017).

The success of a business depends on the ability to understand the requirements, preferences and needs of the market in which it operates, as well as on the ability to meet them (Kotler & Keller, 2016). To achieve their objectives, businesses need to develop effective promotional strategies that draw consumers' attention to their products or services (Dogaru, Zaharia, David & Ionescu, 2017; Pavel, 2017). By tailoring these strategies to the needs and preferences of the target audience and using the right communication tools to convey key messages, small businesses can appeal to their audience's preferences and influence their purchasing decision. Digital transformation has radically changed the way people interact, being indispensable in the contemporary technological era, with a significant impact on both the daily lives of individuals and the business environment. At the beginning of 2023 alone, there were 17.82 million internet users in Romania, of which 13.50 million were social network users (Digital 2023: Romania, 2023). Given these changes, it becomes obvious that digital technologies must be adopted and used, with particular focus on online promotion. Online marketing and social media have become increasingly important in recent years, providing extensive promotional opportunities to organizations. Through websites, search engines, social media platforms and digital marketing campaigns, businesses can reach a wide audience and interact directly with consumers (Meseșan-Schmitz, Coman & Popică, 2021). Communication tools such as advertising, public relations, direct marketing, online marketing and social media have become indispensable to the effective promotion of products or services, and business planning should also include public communication strategies (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Dogaru et al. 2017). Developing an effective promotional approach involves building strong relationships with customers. Technology and access to information have made people more aware of the issues affecting society and the environment (Vlăsceanu, 2010) and have brought about significant changes in the way they engage with social and political issues as well as in their concerns for sustainability and global issues.

Economic development has brought about several environmental problems, which have resulted in significant social changes, such as the emergence of green markets and green consumers (Vasiliu, 2022). An effective solution to combat the consequences of climate change is to support local producers in a sustainable way. Promoting traditional trade and supporting local producers have become issues of great importance in the context of developing local economy and creating a sustainable environment (Cuc, Pelău, Szentesi & Sanda, 2022). In an era when globalization and international trade dominate the economic landscape, sustainability and local development take on particular significance.

This study focuses on sustainability, the promotion of traditional trade and online promotion, and aims to raise awareness of the importance of promoting local and traditional products, as well as to provide some recommendations on developing strategies to promote these products.

2. Research methods

This study relies on qualitative and quantitative research methods to collect information on ways to promote sustainability and on consumer preferences for sustainable practices and purchasing local and traditional products.

The qualitative method consisted of a case study on the Resource Centre for Ethical and Solidarity Initiatives – CRIES (www.cries.ro), an association promoting social and solidarity economy. For data collection, I conducted a semi-structured individual interview with one of the founders of CRIES. The interview took place online, on the Zoom platform, on May 29, 2023. I also analysed the materials created by CRIES, posted online on the communication channels of the organization and of its partners. As for the quantitative research method, I conducted an online survey on Google Forms between June 07-11, 2023. The questionnaire comprised 16 questions and was completed by 67 adult respondents.

3. Results

The CRIES case study allowed me to identify the organization's main values and strategies, the way it selected and implemented projects and its impact on beneficiaries and the community. I also understood the methods and approaches used by CRIES in its work and the challenges it faced.

The association has long been active in encouraging ethics and solidarity in society, through the development and implementation of numerous projects and initiatives aimed at fostering a culture of ethical values and social involvement. One such project, part of the "Timișoara European Capital of Culture 2023" Program, is LA PAS/SLOW DOWN - a project aimed to promote gastronomic heritage by applying specific "slow-food" principles, develop responsible consumption skills among young people, adopt sustainable practices in the organization of cultural and tourist events, implement public policies that support sustainable development models and promote a culture of sustainability among citizens. This project, aimed at both young people and adults, has a strong education and social responsibility component on sustainable production and consumption practices, as well as on social inclusion and appreciation of diversity. The project covered the following events:

- o "LA PAS/SLOW DOWN Artisan Gastronomy Festival", which brought together local producers, talented and passionate chefs and consumers interested in quality and sustainable food, to promote the value and importance of sustainable communities;

- o "TASTE AS HERITAGE", which highlighted local gastronomy through cooking workshops with chefs, food bloggers and cooking enthusiasts interested in the sustainability of the food chain;
- o "Education for Change", where 2500 students and their families participated in hands-on educational workshops on responsible consumption, food waste reduction, healthy eating, urban gardening and sustainable fashion;
- o "LA PAS/SLOW DOWN in the Neighbourhood", which included educational picnic workshops in Timișoara's neighbourhoods.

Through this project, CRIES addressed a diverse public made up of cultural operators, artists, consumers, craft producers and farmers, teachers, parents, young people, and public authorities.

In supporting the development of sustainable agriculture and small local farmers, CRIES plays an important role in promoting ASAT partnerships in Romania. ASAT is the Romanian Association for the Support of Peasant Agriculture. This type of community supported agriculture (CSA) focuses on direct collaboration between farmers and consumers who are members of the same community. This is achieved through a partnership between an agricultural producer and a group of consumers, based on a mutual commitment on the duration of the collaboration, the payment of a subscription and the distribution of agricultural products.

To support local businesses, CRIES comes up with different projects through which local producers can have access to larger markets and wider distribution channels, facilitating partnerships with social enterprises, restaurants, and other food sector entities. As such, CRIES encourages the promotion of sustainable local products and facilitates business relations, networking, and the exchange of experience between local producers.

Over the years, the Resource Centre for Ethical and Solidarity Initiatives has established and maintained several alliances and partnerships with various relevant organizations and institutions. The aim of these collaborations and partnerships has been to strengthen the impact and spread the values of ethics and solidarity in different fields and communities. CRIES has worked with non-governmental organizations to develop and implement joint projects, sharing resources, expertise, and networks to achieve common goals related to ethics, social responsibility, or community development projects. It has also collaborated with national and international agencies and institutions to promote ethical policies and regulations, and to develop projects or initiatives for the benefit of the community.

When asked about ways to increase the impact of sustainability activities and initiatives on people, the founder of CRIES replied that continuity, perseverance, financial resources, and trained staff are needed, along with effective networking. It is also important that authorities, educational institutions, and the business sector support such efforts, so that the message gets spread.

This research has provided a comprehensive perspective on the work of the Resource Centre for Ethical and Solidarity Initiatives, (CRIES). In particular, the

findings contribute to a better understanding and exploitation of their impact in the field of ethics and solidarity, as well as in the promotion of local and traditional products.

To obtain relevant information on peoples' views on promoting sustainability in the community, I conducted an online survey, which I distributed randomly to adults between June 07-11, 2023. The survey comprised 16 questions, with one or more answer options, some of which had a personalized response option. The questions focused on participants' knowledge of initiatives to promote sustainability in their community, their preferences for purchasing local and traditional products, as well as on effective communication and promotion methods to support traditional sustainable trade.

The questionnaire was answered by 67 people over 18 years of age, both women (55.2%) and men (44.8%). When asked about sustainability, sustainable actions and such initiatives taking place in their community, most respondents stated that they had average knowledge of sustainable development and sustainability, that they had not participated in actions to support and promote sustainability, and that they had not heard or read much about events organized to promote sustainability in their community. These answers show that efforts and initiatives to promote sustainability are not extensive or effective enough to reach a significant number of people, which is why a broader and more strategic approach is needed to communicate and promote sustainability events.

Of the sustainable practices that should be promoted more, promotion of local and traditional products came first, most respondents considering that supporting local producers is important in the development of the local economy. As for their preferred way of promoting local and traditional products, respondents opted for events where they can taste the products, as well as for their presence in local shops and markets. In their opinion, these are the best ways of interaction between producers and consumers.

The interactive medium was chosen as the main means of communication that could influence participation in sustainable actions and initiatives, with community events being respondents' first option, followed by media information and online promotion.

The last question was optional and asked participants to provide suggestions for improving the promotion of sustainability awareness events, programs, and campaigns. There were 29 suggestions, most of which related to online and social media promotion, advertising, more intensive marketing, neighbourhood promotion, and local government and community involvement. All these suggestions suggest that the promotion of sustainability awareness events, programs and campaigns requires a broader approach, using technology, intense advertising, and local engagement to reach a wider audience and inspire sustainable change in society.

Conclusion

Although the results of the questionnaire cannot be generalized, as the number of respondents was too small, they suggest that people are in favour of sustainability, sustainable practices, supporting local producers and promoting traditional and local products. However, there is a lack of knowledge and information about specific actions and initiatives in these areas.

To motivate consumers to support such actions, promotion strategies should be tailored to their needs and preferences. Consumers' interest and involvement in supporting local and traditional products can be stimulated by personalizing messages, using technology and digital media, organizing events that foster interaction and creating a favourable communication environment. As a result, small businesses could gain a competitive advantage and thrive in a changing business environment.

In today's competitive marketplace, success depends on the ability of businesses to adapt quickly to change, to innovate and to communicate effectively with their target audiences. By using the right promotion and communication tools, together with a genuine and valuable approach, businesses can make a difference and achieve long-term success.

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