

Integration Perspectives of the Communication Management within Organizations' Policy

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Abstract

While the marketing specialists reach the conclusion that building a brand in the XXI century signifies customer relationship development in a permission marketing approach, the public relations starts to be the pillar of the brand strategy. The target public coverage level and frequency, the coordinates in which advertising proved to be traditionally more efficient than public relations, will become less relevant in the future. In this new context, the marketing professionals will be more interested by notions as "commitment" and "involvement" which will be focused on public relations tools as: customers' information, rather than the products promotion; the gain of trust rather than the gain of time; initiation of dialog rather than submission of messages.

Key words: public relations, communication management, internal communication, CSR





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1. Introduction

The last years, the field of communication has known an outstanding development also at the level of Romanian companies, first of all as a result of the active intervention of multinational companies. We ought to appreciate the contribution of those organizations that offered us true communication lessons and presently excel by economic force and remarkable corporative cultures. In this context, communication should not be considered as the prerogative of those multinational organizations; practice has demonstrated that companies from SMEs' field have as much need of communication, sometimes probably more. In practice one can find a category of companies for which even the existence of a marketing department is a problem. Such companies recognise the problem of communication, its importance and its role, but do nothing about it for lack of an appropriate budget. Basically, in such cases communication consists only of producing the goods and packaging, setting prices, establishing the distribution network, without major concern for standing out on the market, for developing an image, a reputation and most importantly for gaining the trust of one's target group.

2. The present framework of the communication management at the European level

The researches undertaken were focused on:

-  Challenges for communication management in the recession and media crisis;
-  Strategic issues, development of the discipline and communication instruments;
-  Trends in internal communication, measurement/evaluation and interactive communication;
-  Communication executives' roles and influence on management decisions (figure 1).

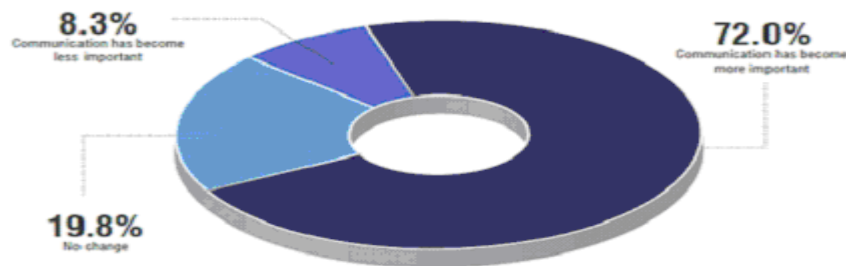


Figure 1 - European study related to monitoring communication

Source: www.communicationmonitor.eu

The evolution of the most important communication types at the organizations' level

Present	For the year 2013	Forecasting level
Corporate communication	Corporate communication	→
Marketing communication	Marketing communication	→
Crisis communication	Internal communication	↑
Internal communication	CSR and sustainability	↑
Business communication lobbying	International communication	↑

Source: www.communicationmonitor.eu / Zerfass et al. 2010

We can observe that for the near future, both corporate and marketing communication will be at the same level. In view to reveal the preventive management in the structure of communication management, a special attention will be accorded to CSR and sustainability, internal communication and communication associated to the international presence.

Internal communication and CSR are growing, more disciplines are following:

- ✚ The survey predicts a changing relevance of the various disciplines within the broad range of strategic communication. Corporate communication is most important, followed by long-time forerunner marketing/brand communication. While internal communication and corporate social responsibility communication are continuing their upswing, predictions for personal coaching and international communication are above the average for the first time since 2007.
- ✚ Regarding communication instruments, online communications, media relations on the web and social media have risen since 2009 and are expected to grow further.
- ✚ For the first time, it was possible to compare predictions for the future from previous surveys with actual insights from the same focal year 2010. Obviously, PR professionals regularly overestimate the growth of disciplines and communication channels [. For example, CSR did only grow by 11% in three years instead of 31% as predicted in 2007. Press relations targeting print media was expected to decline by 9.5% from 2007-2010; in fact it increased by 5.2%. Also, social media was thought to rise by 41.4%, but it was only 15.2%.

Priorities for communication management in Europe:

- ✚ The survey identifies two main issues of major importance for communication professionals throughout Europe. Half of the respondents state either that coping with the digital evolution

and the social web and/or linking business strategy and communication are most relevant for themselves within the near future. The digital topic has overtaken the business link issue which had been the number one issue for the past three years.

- ✚ Social responsibility and sustainable development as well as building and maintaining trust are still important, but both have slightly lost significance, whereas dealing with the demand of new transparency and active audiences has gained since 2009.
- ✚ Many PR professionals plan on the instrumental level, mostly for single instruments, overall communication strategies and for major disciplines and stakeholders. Monitoring is not done continuously. In line with the mainstream focus of communication management on speaking instead of listening, only one third of respondents has developed monitoring strategies.

PR practitioners face the recession and media crisis with defensive strategies:

- ✚ Both the economic recession and the crisis of the mass media sector have changed the framework for communication management in Europe. The long-term upswing of the occupational field has come to an end. 47% report budget cuts and 22% report that staff numbers have been reduced. This is especially true for joint stock and private companies, whereas governmental and non-profit organisations are less under pressure. Anecdotal evidence claiming budget shifts from marketing communications to public relations could not be verified on a large scale. Nevertheless, more than 80% of the respondents are optimistic for the next year.
- ✚ A clear 60% majority claim they will respond to the recession by focusing on the "most relevant issues and stakeholders". Another 40% see a stronger demand for evaluation. This means that PR strategies have not been managed up to the highest standards until now - strategic priorities and transparent measures should be a part of communication management anyway. Only one third of the respondents say that they will take a proactive approach by investing in new instruments or tools.
- ✚ Following this approach, three out of four practitioners think that communication management will adapt to new routines evolving in journalism in times of the media crisis. 33% state that communication professionals will help the media to survive, i.e. by providing free content. Speaking in terms of the intereffication theory, media relations shows strong adaptations to journalism, compared to significantly less inductions.

3. The analysis of the public relations domain in Romania

A look inside the SME sector points out the same deficiencies in the communication system of Romanian companies concerning social communication, societal communication, event design and crisis communication. A slight improvement of financial communication is noticeable related to the emergence of new technical facilities, such as the Internet. The incapacity of an organisation to create and manage a strong, both internally and externally relevant identity, the lack of concern on behalf of Romanian managers to promote a coherent company image, the failure of an organisation to take control over messages issues are all elements leading to a so called image crisis, which can affect the credibility and proper operation of any company, albeit financially solid. The practice of international companies present on the Romanian market is indisputable proof for the importance of public relations measures both inside and outside an organisation.

During the years 2003-2007, the generic Romanian company has had the following traits, in a markedly unstable environment:

- ✚ Increased awareness, over time, of the need to define one's own identity, of using common language in the context of market globalisation;
- ✚ Endeavours to carry out viable and efficient communication measures;
- ✚ Will increase its budget for communication measures in the near future;
- ✚ Envisages the transposition of strategic objectives in communication terms;
- ✚ Has no major concerns for communication during times of crisis;
- ✚ Does not have a communication department as a separate structure within the organisation;
- ✚ All companies express their wish to receive media coverage and state that they foresee the increase of their communication budget in the near future;

- # The establishment of the concept of image in its tendency of becoming an objective for the organisation;
- # The current absence among Romanian companies of a communication plan as part of systematic strategy. This becomes a threat with effects on the company's image on the market;
- # Emphasis on the need for corporate communication;
- # There is communication with the employees, which indicates concern for good internal communication with effects on external communication; Romanian companies are becoming more concerned with their employees, who are currently a secondary target for communication, the main target being represented by their customers.
- # The Romanian manager is aware of the current status of communication in Romanian companies, and of weak points in organisation management.
- # The distinction between management and shareholders is vague;
- # Employees have multiple roles;
- # The main activities relate to solving everyday problems;
- # Informal relations and communication predominate generally.

In many cases companies communicate especially with clients in order to ensure maximal satisfaction through a quality offer of products and services. These aspects are often concentrated in their advertising slogans; no company has a different attitude towards their target audience. Still, respondents continue to state that the main objective is profit increase. This shows that for a part of Romanian companies performance is proven only by numbers.

We can also say that there is growing belief that promoting an organisation on the Internet is absolutely necessary, and as this becomes more accessible it will turn into a real opportunity. In general, for many small and medium sized enterprises, PR is still considered a whim afforded only by those who have too much money. This relies on the conviction that PR activities do not generate immediately visible results like promotions and advertising. PR can be seen in the fact that a company has a good reputation on the market and that it ultimately rises vigorously and securely among other hundreds of thousands of companies, without resorting to spectacular recipes.

Against this background, EU integration can be seen as both a threat and an opportunity for the SME sector. Communication could be, under these circumstances, one of the criteria deciding who lasts and who doesn't, as the accession process purports the risk of newly entered companies with a competitive edge in communication occupying the market much faster. European companies will impose new image standards on the Romanian market, and SME will have to face them in order to remain in the competition. Regardless of how good a company's products or services are, promotion will prove to be an important advantage on the market. Image strategies, improving internal communication, promotion in the virtual environment can be means through which Romanian companies can make a difference.

The truth is that very many companies on the market do not yet have a website, an email address, business is handled through acquaintances and personal recommendations and specialised consultancy services are employed only in crisis situations. According to most PR experts, SME need first and foremost a visual identity setting them apart from others. The first step would be the definition of a company identity, its products or services and its communication. These are essential for the design of a clear plan (which would include essentially what do I want to convey, to whom and how?) and its implementation. Consistency in communication is a must for success. Otherwise, small and medium sized companies need consultancy to promote their activity and to enlarge their communication scope, namely internal communication, internal publications, event organisation and even social responsibility.

4. The present frame of the public relations domain in Romania in the European context

- # In the present, the organization communication management is under the incidence of the elements' dynamism of the external and internal environment. Having in view that many companies have suffered from an economic point of view and the business frequency has

diminished, the specialists observed that the communication industry is in decrease. Thus, it was clarified that there is a definite connection between the communication activities and the facility of the business processes - instead of focusing on the consolidation of the image and reputation - with a positive impact on the budgets' planning.

- ✚ The corporative communication is still considered the most important branch of the communication domain, followed by the brand focused marketing communication. The on-line communication, the relations with the on-line media and the socializing communities gained an enormous importance starting with 2009, they were consolidated during 2010 and a continuation of this tendency is expected.
- ✚ In this context, the on-line communities represent an important channel for public relations. The foresights regarding any online socializing platform are positive, the video networks being on the first position. Despite this perspective, the number of the organizations which have already started to establish certain working guidelines in this domain, such as a series of action rules in the social media, is relatively reduced.
- ✚ In general, the European specialists in communication are satisfied with their work in the specialty agencies, even if there is a considerable difference between the regions. The most satisfied are the East -Europeans while the least satisfied are those from the South. Although work in the public relations domain is considered interesting because it presupposes the carrying out of various tasks and it is acknowledged by superiors, the safety of the work place, the salaries and the career prospects are limited.
- ✚ The communication specialists who support a participative (active) leadership style are more satisfied and have a bigger influence within their organizations than the practitioners who use the transactional or transformational leadership style. The participative leading style characterizes the superiors who appeal to ideals and visions or formulate challenges and encourage the process of making decisions together within the teams.
- ✚ Excellence indicators: the good relations with the relevant factors for the company, the ability to stimulate people and the official involvement in the management process are the first three characteristics which define an excellent communication department, according to the respondents' perception.
- ✚ Referring to the situation of the following years, the specialists in communication tend to overestimate the evolution of the domains and the communication channels. Thus, there are expected a 9,5% decrease of the importance of the relations with the written media and a clearer direction towards a more interactive communication environment.

The CCRP survey about the way the public relations services at the level's companies in Romania are perceived and used. The survey was based on 200 interviews with the companies' representatives who use or intend to use public relations services, at the level of communication manager, marketing manager or general manager. In what concerns the intentions to invest in communication in 2011, 54,8% of the respondents said that the budgets would remain constant, 24,7% declared that they would increase and 20,5% of them said that they would decrease. The survey confirmed the fact that during the crisis, the customers approached the PR rationally. Thus, there have been companies which decided to internalize their PR services and a part of the marketing budgets were guided towards PR once with the increase of the brand PR request.

The structure of the PR market at the level of the potential customers for the PR agencies has changed in the last years; consequently, the weigh of the small companies which require this type of services increased very much since 2006, from 12,2% as they represented in the respondents' sample in 2006 to 25% in the present. Under the impact of the economic situation, the companies requested the PR agencies services connected to communication marketing, but also communication with the business partners and internal communication.

Unlike the small companies, the corporations continued to focus on corporate communication and CSR. These results at a national level practically confirm the international trend which will focus on a preventive type communication in the structure of the communication management,

respectively the emphasis of the CSR concepts importance, events communication, communication with the employees, as well as international communication.

The graduate increase of the continuous communication projects, the involvement of the top management in making decisions about communication, the integration of the communication with the business strategy, the involvement of the smaller companies in constant communication are the expression of an increase in quality and the communication potential.

5. Conclusion - Predictions regarding the evolution of the public relations

- # The guidance towards the consumers' needs and demands.
- # An integrated approach on a unique and unitary strategy which equally capitalizes the force of the new and traditional channels.
- # The instruments' area will be enlarged having into consideration that publicity has still a role to play, as a product or instrument at the service of the public relation function.
- # The positioning of the Public Relations closer and closer to the brand strategy centre in order to reinforce the concepts of credibility and creativity.
- # The integrated administration of the relations with the co-interested groups: the regulation bodies and the legislators, the investors, the communities, the employees, the consumers, the media and many others.
- # The communication function will enlarge the content area and the importance being responsible of the building and maintenance of some honest relations between institutions and the variety of stakeholders.
- # The integration of the service customer concept in the public relations department - the new directions towards social media show that the brand and the reputation of an organization can be influenced - in a positive or negative way- by the services this one provides for the consumers.
- # As the reputation of the corporations and the relations they build with the stakeholders get to be perceived as assets of critical importance, the consulting firms in the management domain will show more and more interest in offering counseling concerning the way these two coordinates must be administrated.
- # The real objective of the public relations, its true contribution to the success of an organization is estimated in the quality of the relations it generates.

At a time when Romanian companies are trying hard to improve their performance towards European standards and to adjust their manner of operating to international practices, PR services are becoming as vital as a good relationship with suppliers or wholesalers. It is impossible to imagine a healthy business climate without the intervention of communication professionals, the only ones capable to establish a fluent and proper communication among the private sector, the public sector and consumers.

Starting from Martin Neureiter's statement "social responsibility is the key to the healthy economic, social, ecological and political development of a country", one must emphasise the fact that Romanian managers, irrespective of company size or area of activity, must understand the need to design organisation structures promoting the exchange of information, dialogue and cooperation, this aspect being mandatory for any organisation wishing to face the challenges of organisation and reputation management.

In general, one cannot provide a real dimension for taking on the concept of social responsibility as a guarantee for success in business for an organisation, but one should be aware of the fact that this is not only a instrument of maximising value through image building, but an essential element of long term success, which is directly linked to social and environment performance of the community.

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