New Trends in Responsible Romania: Social Campaigns

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Abstract

Social responsibility has begun to be a fashionable concept in Romania, designating the attitude that a company should adopt in order to be perceived as socially responsible. Given this reference point, in this paper we aim to provide a multidimensional analysis of social campaigns in order to evaluate their impact upon the Romanian public and how effective they are. We focus upon the following questions: How is social responsibility perceived? What impact do social campaigns have upon the Romanian public? Which are the triggering factors acting on a mental level? And, especially, what stimuli play a key role in the adoption of “responsible” behavior? For this, we have made use of a questionnaire-based inquiry as a research method with a group of 50 persons, students of Communication and Public Relations. The purpose of this questionnaire is not to allow a rigorous sociological analysis with statistically valid results, but rather to identify the impact and efficiency of social campaigns, respectively, in terms of the “thought particularities” existing at the public level that would allow us to formulate some final conclusions and substantiate such a process. Although the group is relatively small, the results we have obtained open new lines of action, new challenges for future research.

Keywords: social responsibility, social campaigns, multidimensional analysis, impact, stimuli;

Introduction

Social responsibility has, nowadays, become a fashionable concept, a benchmark for the activity of a company wishing to adopt responsible conduct, both towards itself and towards society. Some specialists believe that social responsibility, if applied correctly in terms of strategy, may represent more than mere expenditure, a constraint or a charitable act, and may constitute a (re)source in terms of opportunities, creativity and competitive
advantage, thus contributing to social progress (Porter & Kramer, 2006, pp. 78-79). In order to be efficient, the strategic approach should focus upon the public interest, and that of society and the environment, by reducing negative effects. At the moment, case studies have shown that social responsibility has advanced significantly in companies’ lists of priorities, turning it into a strategic issue. Social expectations regarding those companies which assume public responsibility, have changed to such an extent that, today, those who do not take the exigencies of this activity seriously are faced with the possibility of real risks.

In order to deal with such challenges, companies nowadays have to initiate socially responsible actions which should meet the demands and expectations of society. The basic purpose of social responsibility policy should be, first of all, to accomplish certain social objectives by generating corporate resources and responsible initiatives which may lead to enhancing public welfare. As intermediate effects of this policy, if built and implemented correctly and transparently, the company’s reputation and the level of profitability will become long-term positive advantages to the benefit of the company, as well as to society as a whole.

The challenges associated with the two different approaches to corporate social responsibility, reflected in the literature, present it, on the one hand, as a profitable business practice which consolidates the corporate image in the middle and long term, and on the other hand like an inefficient way of using the financial resources of a company, correlated negatively with downward performance. Debates on this topic have pointed out the fact that there is no unique approach to the issue of companies assuming social responsibility (Iamandi, 2010, p.14). In our opinion, the most “responsible” approach should relate to a positive correlation between corporate performance and the development of society, to the benefit of both.

The concept of CSR

Essentially, social responsibility designates a company’s attitude towards society in which success is achieved by respecting the law, behaving ethically, paying special attention to the environment, and taking into account the needs and interests of all partners. It is defined as the continuous engagement of companies in terms of conducting itself ethically, and contributing to economic development, and, at the same time, improving the quality of the lives of its employees and their families, the local communities and society as a whole (Oprea, 2005, pp. 45-47).

According to the European Union, social responsibility is a concept by means of which a company willingly integrates its social and environmental concerns in its business operations and in the interaction with interested partners. These principles are related to two dimensions of the relationship between company and community: an internal dimension, which brings to the forefront the relationship with the company’s employees and implies the maintenance of a healthy working environment, constant care for improving the employees’ lives both within the workplace and outside it; an external dimension, which focuses on the relationship with interested partners and on supporting the development of the communities in which companies conduct their activities, respect for human rights and diminishing the impact of the company’s activities upon the environment and upon natural resources (Oprea, 2011, pp. 42-44).

To define this concept, Archie Carroll proposes another formula, which he calls the pyramid of social responsibility. This includes four basic elements: economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic. According to Carroll, the companies which deal with Corporate Social Responsibility should try and make a profit, respect the law, be ethical, and behave like good corporate citizens (Carroll, 1999, pp. 288-289).

Most of the viewpoints describe social responsibility as a concept by means of which companies should manifest social and environmental preoccupations, contributing, via their activities, to the economic development of the community, with a relevant impact upon society. Following this analytical framework, we may argue that there is no single CSR, but a variety of forms, correlated with diverse business environments, different action strategies, corroborating the moral and spiritual principles of society. We believe that social responsibility is a
fundamental notion – such as freedom or truth – which is being constantly (re)defined, in order to correspond to
the needs which are, in turn, subject to constant change, from one epoch to another (Petrovici, 2012, p. 40).

The arguments in favour of social responsibility are of a: moral nature, as reflected by an ethical and
responsible behaviour towards society; an economic nature, as revealed by increased notoriety and visibility on
the market; a rational nature, confirming the fact that in today’s globalized world, in which individual and
activist organizations are empowered to adopt a change, CSR represents a way of anticipating and mirroring
social concerns with a view to minimizing the operational and financial limitations upon a business (Werther &

Most of the literature agrees with the fact that corporate social responsibility represents an efficient strategy
which brings advantages to all the parties involved, namely the company as well as the different categories of
audience with which it interacts. The literature also mentions the fact that this phenomenon is quite widespread in
most developed countries, such as those in Europe,. Unfortunately, in Romania, the phenomenon is new and
often misunderstood, due to the simple fact that there have not been enough CSR actions and campaigns yet, in
the true meaning of the word (Petrovici, 2012, p. 55).

Materials and methods

The main objective of the present research consists of a consideration of the impact and efficiency of social
campaigns upon the public. Our attention focuses upon the following questions: What is the impact of social
campaigns upon the Romanian public? Which are the triggering factors acting on a mental level? and, especially,
Which are the deciding stimuli in adopting “responsible” behaviour?

Our research aims at a multidimensional analysis of social campaigns in order to evaluate their impact and
efficiency upon the public, to identify the factors which have an impact upon the public, which determines
“responsible” behaviour. To this effect, we have analyzed ten social campaigns that have been recently conducted
in Romania: the campaign “Save Roșia Montana!”, the campaign “Drinking and driving is murder”,
the campaign “Doctor, you are a hero!”, the antidiscrimination campaign “When I grow up, I shall be a thief”,
the campaign against violence “Listen to his soul”, the campaign “Colour a destiny”, the campaign for the prevention
of begging “Prince and beggar”, the campaign “Medicines are not candies”, the campaign “Happiness is
measured by healthy smiles”, and the campaign “I feel like doing good”.

Results and discussion

The case study based on a questionnaire was conducted during seminar classes on a sample of 50 persons,
students of Communication and Public Relations, during 2011-2012. The selection of this sample relied on
findings provided by market research which suggests that teenagers and adults aged up to thirty are increasingly
hard to influence and persuade by means of classic commercial advertising (Kotler and Armstrong, 2008, p.610).
Recent research on efficient advertising is oriented towards processing it on other reception levels which may
stimulate the consumer’s interest and attention (Pringle and Field, 2008, p.176). The questionnaire contains a set
of 15 questions, grouped around certain points of interest. The statistical processing and counting of answers led
to the results presented below. First of all, there is a visible interest and attention with regard to this subject,
highlighted by the high percentage obtained in this respect (above 95%). According to the respondents, these
campaigns are highly useful (88%) and rather useful (12%). The most popular campaigns are “Save Roșia
Montana!” (34%), “Listen to his soul” (24%), “When I grow up, I shall be a thief” (22%), “Drinking and driving
is murder” (12%), “Doctor, you are a hero!” (8%). In terms of efficiency, 88% of the respondents believe that
these campaigns are highly efficient, whereas 12% of them regard them as rather efficient. The aspects which
particularly drew attention to the campaigns mentioned above are: the message (54%), the visual identity (24%),
the social cause (16%) and the campaign’s concept (6%).
To the question as to whether or not they had noticed mass-media articles or reports on these campaigns, 96% of the respondents answered in the affirmative, while only 4% provided no answer. To the question concerning the impact of such campaigns upon the public, 86% of the respondents believed they had a positive impact, whereas 14% of these believed that these campaigns had no impact at all. As for the personal impact of such campaigns, 94% of the subjects estimated that there had been a positive impact, whereas 6% of them believed that such campaigns had no impact upon them. In terms of all the respondents, 42% took an active part in one event, 12% took part in several events, whereas 46% of them took part in no events related to these campaigns. In the respondents’ opinion, the greatest achievement of these campaigns was drawing attention to the social cause (34%), raising the public’s awareness concerning the adoption of a certain type of behaviour (28%), informing and/or educating the public (22%), involving the public in certain actions (10%), as well as raising awareness of the risk factors (6%).

Therefore, in the wake of the campaigns, 88% of the respondents noticed a higher degree of interest in social campaigns on the part of the public, whereas 12% noticed no change in this respect. As for their own attitude to them, 42% of all the respondents noticed a significantly increased interest on the cognitive level, 44% on the emotional level, 8% on the behavioural level, whereas 6% were unable to decide. The distribution of answers by gender reveals 96% “feminine” answers, 4% “masculine” answers, with the segment of the female public being prevalent in this respect. In terms of age, the answers show a percentage of 82% for the age category 18-23, 12% for the age category of 24-34, and 6% for the age category 35-50. Regarding the level of studies, the answers obtained point to 84% respondents with high-school studies and 16% respondents with university studies.

The processing of the answers and the interpretation of the results lead to the formulation of some observations. First of all, we should mention the fact that, in relation to the present research, the stated considerations are purely indicative, as a group of 50 persons cannot enable pertinent conclusions to be arrived at. Rather, the results offer some findings on the impact and efficiency of social campaigns upon a segment of the public. The interest in these campaigns reveals the fact that they were perceived and appreciated favorably by the vast majority of the public, with the campaign’s concepts, their creative and sometimes nonconformist approaches also constituting reference points. Thus, among the aspects which drew attention to these campaigns, the message seems to be determining in this respect, being benchmarks in the respondents’ opinion. Messages such as “A man is worth more than the gold he is wearing. So is a country”; “The body heals quickly, the soul does not”; “Roma children dream of what we allow them to dream”; “The bottle which you drink before you drive can turn you into a criminal”; “Access to life. Doctor, you are a hero!” generated “emotions” among the public, showing their impact upon the audience. Together with verbal identity, visual identity has stimulated the public’s attention being, in turn, another factor with an impact upon the audience.

The literature mentions the fact that mental activities such as perception, attention, affectivity or motivation are stimulated by certain triggering factors which act on this level and which, in their turn, engage modifications on other levels (Du Plessis, 2011, pp. 76-88). As can be seen, the recorded answers show that the emotional factor is of key importance in terms of the respondents’ preferences, in that the highest values were recorded with regard to this factor. In this case, the emotional selling proposition turns into a reference point (Pringle & Field, 2008, pp. 96-97). Moreover, this finding coincides with the data provided by the literature about effective advertising, mentioning the fact that it should be processed by consumers on a cognitive level, that it should draw attention and raise interest and that it should make one “think” about the commercial and its message, so as not to forget it (Pringle & Field, 2008, p.176). Concerning the behavioural level, we note some significant changes, stimulated by the emotional level because, in the specialists’ opinion, an emotion is a subjective answer, generally accompanied by physiological modifications, which prepares individuals for certain actions and which is associated with behavioural change (Lefton, 1991, p. 408).
Conclusions

Currently, in a responsible Romania, social campaigns have become a “modus vivendi”, a “unique” way of gaining visibility in the public space. One of the frequently used approaches in this sense is the exploitation of the emotional side, with the aim of raising public awareness with regard to the social topic under consideration. In advertising, resorting to emotions, with a focus upon the emotional component of attitudes, has become common practice, some specialists claiming, rightly, that influencing emotions often represents the best first-step in influencing beliefs and, eventually, behaviour (Harris, 2009, p.111). This finding coincides, as a matter of fact, with the data provided by our research concerning the impact and efficiency of social campaigns upon the public, which reveals the fact that emotional factors succeed in drawing the public’s attention and, eventually, generating the desired result, leading to the adoption of “responsible” behaviour. This behaviour may be justified by the fact that emotions are reactions to aspects which seem to be extremely important for our well-being and, in most situations, occur so rapidly that we are unable to become aware of the triggering mental processes (Ekman 2003, p.48). “Save Rośia Montana!”, “Drinking and driving is murder”, “Doctor, you are a hero!” etc. are illustrative examples in this respect.

Nevertheless, this study is restrictive because we have assessed the impact of social campaigns only on a group of 50 students, within a small frame, which thus circumscribes the obtained findings. In this sense, it is necessary that the research on the impact and efficiency of social campaigns should be conducted on a larger and more heterogeneous group, allowing the researcher to perform an analysis in order to highlight the reasons why attention is focused upon only one of the factors involved in such campaigns. For example, the literature mentions the existence of certain categories of factors which determine the focalization of attention - on the one hand factors related to stimuli, on the other hand factors related to personality traits and the actual situation in which the consumer finds himself (Fennis & Stroebe, 2010, p.51). Therefore, the challenge is to constitute a new direction of action for future research.

References