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**FACULTY OF COMMUNICATION SCIENCES**

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## EDITORIAL ADDRESS

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Faculty of Communication Sciences, *Politehnica University Timișoara*

Str. Traian Lalescu 2a, Room 301, 300223 Timisoara, Romania

Web: <http://sc.upt.ro/ro/contact>

Email: [sc@upt.ro](mailto:sc@upt.ro)

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**EDITURA POLITEHNICA**

Bd. V. Pârvan nr. 2b  
300223 Timișoara, Romania

**Tel./Fax** 0256/403.823

**E-mail:** editura@upt.ro

**Editorial advisor:** Prof. dr. ing. Sabin IONEL

**Redactor:** Claudia MIHALI

**DTP:** Vasile GHERHEȘ

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# *Banca Transilvania and Banca Comercială Română in the Context of the Covid-19 Pandemic: Social Involvement Actions*

Ana-Lăcrămioara Rebeli-Szabo

**Abstract:** *This paper approaches a sensitive subject to the whole world nowadays: the impact of the Covid-19 virus on our lives. Focusing on corporate social responsibility (CSR) actions that were run by two banks in Romania after the state of emergency was declared, this paper aims at presenting the manner in which both Banca Transilvania and Banca Comercială Română have chosen to get involved. To go even further, a comparative analysis of the actions that were taken during this troubling time has been carried out to show that any help, no matter the overall impact, counts. By observing the manner in which these banks have chosen to change their priorities in such a short period of time, the long-term outcome of their CSR measures can be discussed. Even more so, the subject of continuing the already planned CSR actions for 2020 has been discussed and the manner*

*in which the banks are handling this issue has been presented. Predicting the direction and the manner in which these CSR actions will evolve after the end of this pandemic, is also an issue that will be brought to the readers' attention.*

**Keywords:** CSR, banks, donations, COV-19, helping the community

## **1. Introduction**

The crisis situation that made its debut with the first case of an infection with COVID-19 and then progressed with the spread of this virus globally, has triggered a series of problems that are still affecting important sectors, such as the economy, the medical system, the educational system, and even the population that is being faced with an unprecedented situation.

Being a matter of actuality, this analysis of the CSR actions that were taken in a record amount of time (because immediate help was needed), lays the groundwork for the future studies that will develop on this topic, while also guiding those who want to find out concrete data about the involvement of BT (Banca Transilvania) and BCR (Banca Comerciala Română) to fight the negative effects of the new coronavirus.

The purpose of this paper is to observe and analyse the way in which the two banks have offered their help and managed the financial aid directed to the causes that they chose in the context of the crisis situation that has been taking place since March 2020.

## **2. Research method**

To analyse the data available at the moment of doing the research, the method that was used in order to write this paper is the comparative analysis.

The data that have been analysed come from the BT's and BCR's official websites, which have specific tabs/sections that are specific to the topic of interest, particularly those that mention the fight against the new coronavirus. In what follows, the paper will present the statements that were made by these financial institutions regarding the amount of money that was donated, the manner in which the financial help was distributed, the cities that benefited from these CSR actions, but it will also touch upon other relevant data to this research.

Therefore, the following items will be highlighted:

- The date of the first donation made in the context of the COVID-19 crisis
- The amount of money that was donated
- The way in which the sums of money were used
- The way in which the donations were targeted
- The cities in România that benefited from the banks' help
- The statements that were made by the bank representatives regarding the involvement in the fight against COVID-19
- The promotion of the CSR campaigns that are aimed at combatting the new coronavirus on social media

In this comparative analysis, the actions that were taken by Banca Transilvania and Banca Comercială Română right after the state of emergency was declared, i.e. during March 2020, will be presented. The aim of this analysis is to showcase the power of the CSR action type of involvement when help is needed and when it has to be delivered urgently. The analysis has shown that both BT and BCR have specific sections on their websites that are aimed at the same cause: fighting against the new coronavirus. These websites provide insight and information on the donations that were made, having an established and similar format, which

contains the date, the amount, and the distribution of the measures that are meant to help in this context



Fig.1. Banca Transilvania's website section – Help against COVID-19



Fig.2. Banca Comercială Română's website section – Help against COVID-19

Before this crisis situation has made its debut, both banks were already involved in CSR actions in various CSR areas, as it will be illustrated in figures 3 and 4.

**Domenii în care Banca Transilvania se implică prin activitățile sale:**



**Protejarea mediului**

Exemple: implicarea în acțiuni de voluntariat pentru împădurirea unor zone din Transilvania; clădiri BT green; distrugerea cardurilor expirate cu respectarea normelor UE de mediu; materialele de comunicare și publicitate tipărite pe hârtie reciclată; respectarea regulilor de amenajare a clădirilor istorice în care se află sedii BT; senzori de amurg la toate firmele luminoase ale clădirilor băncii; finanțarea unor proiecte de eficiență energetică etc.)

Fig.3. CSR involvement, Banca Transilvania

The screenshot shows the CSR involvement page of Banca Comercială Română. It features a navigation menu on the left with options like 'Viziune', 'Proiecte', 'Leadership civic', 'Educație pentru dezvoltarea competențelor practice', 'Proiecte pentru tineri și susținerea comunităților locale', 'Raport CSR', and 'Contact CSR'. The main content area includes a mission statement, a list of projects, and two featured project cards: 'Educație financiară pentru toate vârstele' and 'Leadership civic'. The 'Educație financiară' card describes the 'Școala de Bani' program, and the 'Leadership civic' card mentions the 'BURSA BINELUI' initiative with a website link.

Fig.4. CSR involvement, Banca Comercială Română

In the following pages, the data available at the moment of doing the research, regarding the amount and form of support that was offered by the BT and BCR banks, will be also presented.

Due to the negative evolution of the number of people infected with the new coronavirus globally and nationally, a state of emergency was declared in our country under a decree published in the Romanian Official Gazette (Decret privind instituirea stării de urgență pe teritoriul României, 2020) on 16 March 2020.

Thereby, the first CSR measures that the two banks have implemented from 16 March will be observed and examined since the research will be focusing on how fast they responded, on how fast they acted and on the manner in which they used the budget that was directed towards each bank's CSR department.

### **Banca Transilvania**

Donation declaration date	Contribution amount	Object of donation	Beneficiary	Beneficiary location
16.03.2020	300,000 EUR	Mechanical ventilation devices, equipment	State hospitals in România	Romania
17.03.2020	93,000 EUR	Medical equipment (e.g. Trilogy 100 Ventilator)	Unspecified	Unspecified
17.03.2020	30,000 EUR	Test kits, ambulance repairs	Unspecified	Unspecified
18.03.2020	39,000 EUR	Disinfectant, videolaryngoscope, ultrasound machine, FFp2 masks	Emergency county clinical hospital	Cluj

18.03.2020	1,000 EUR	Travelling costs for the volunteers that go grocery shopping for the elderly	Elderly	Cluj
18.03.2020	2,000 EUR	Masks, disinfectant, protective suits	Emergency county hospital Mavromati	Botoşani

Table 1. (The first) 6 aid actions declared by Banca Transilvania

As it can be noticed in table 1, BT declared their first aid action on 16 March 2020, which was followed by donations for various purposes and to various locations in the next days. These aids went to multiple hospitals in counties, such as Cluj and Botoşani, in the first phase. The focus was to help with the supplies such as masks, protective suits, test kits for COVID-9, disinfectant, but also with the medical equipment.

With the help of this table (table 1), it is easy to notice that the first donation made by Banca Transilvania took place on the exact same date that the emergency state was declared in Romania.

The BT's involvement has continued even further than the period that was included in this analysis; therefore, the impact at the present moment is considerably larger, but in order to focus on the immediate actions that were taken, a relevant timeframe that would illustrate the importance of getting involved in a record amount of time needed to be selected. It was observed that, on 18 March 2020, 1,000 EUR were donated to cover the cost of travelling for the volunteers that were helping the elderly population living in Cluj county. This type of action is not seen very often, but in the context of this pandemic, the focus fell on the elderly people. The World Health Organisation has reported that, based on the evidence that exists today, people over 60 years old represent a risk group, because when contacting the virus, they have a higher chance of developing complications

(World Health Organisation, 2020). That being said, measures were taken to reduce the risk of getting the virus for this age group, by limiting their outings and offering assistance at their own houses.

### **Banca Comercială Română**

Donation declaration date	Contribution amount	Object of donation	Beneficiary	Beneficiary location
23.03.2020	5,000 EUR	Equipment, hygiene and protection materials	Asociația Doctor Victor Babeș (Doctor Victor Babes Association)	Timișoara
24.03.2020	10,000 EUR	Hot meals	Doctors, nurses, people that are in isolation (through the Act For Tomorrow Association)	Unspecified
24.03.2020	20,000 EUR	Protective suits, supplies, medical equipment	Through - Salvați Copiii (Save the Children)	Unspecified
25.03.2020	2,000 EUR	Patient treatment products, equipping medical staff	Institutul Inimii Nicolae Stăncioiu ("Nicolae Stancioiu" Heart Institute)	Cluj
25.03.2020	1,000 EUR	Gloves, masks, protective equipment	Asociația Medici pentru Viața Copiilor ("Doctors for Children's Lives" Association)	Unspecified
25.03.2020	15,000 EUR	Medical education campaigns	The large public through Asociația Observatorul Român de Sănătate (Romanian Health Observatory Association)	Unspecified

Table 2. (The first) 6 aid actions declared by Banca Comercială Română

The data that are used in this research come from the statements that both banks have posted on their own internet pages. Therefore, the first known action that BCR took, in order to help combat the COVID-19 negative effects, was declared on 23 March 2020. With that being said, the first donation made by BCR comes 7 days after the first donation that was made by BT, with the purpose of lowering the impact of COVID-19. The help that was being provided by BCR transformed the amount of money directed to CSR actions into protective equipment, medical equipment, hot meals, but also into educational campaigns.

Considering the fact that a comparison of the amounts of money that were donated requires a more profound research of the matters regarding the BT's and BCR's capitals and their power on the market, and that this paper does not aim at delving into these issues, the way in which both banks chose to distribute and use the amounts of money that they had made available in order to fight the new pandemic will be compared.

The help consisted of:	Banca Transilvania	Banca Comercială Română
Protective equipment	X	x
Medical equipment	X	x
Disinfectant	X	x
Hot meals		x
Medical educational campaigns		x
Test kits to detect COVID-19	X	
Covering the costs of the travelling for the volunteers	X	

Table 3. Comparative analysis of the aid management granted by BT and BCR

The comparative analysis shown in table 3 presents the actions that BT and BCR have in common (they both helped by providing protective

equipment, medical equipment and disinfectants), but also the differences. The fact that they (BT and BCR) responded to a need that was continuously growing and that they got involved in the prevention of the spread of this virus is very important. They offered their support to the hospitals, to those working on the front lines that were spending so many days a week around those who were infected with COVID-19.

Looking specifically at the way in which BT got involved, it can be noticed that the aid came in two different ways compared to BCR, meaning that Banca Transilvania put an effort into supplying the hospitals with test kits meant to detect the COVID-19 virus, but also covered the costs for the volunteers who "donated" their own time with the purpose of helping the people in the risk groups who were above 65 years old.

Looking at BCR's actions, it can be seen that they got involved by also making medical educational campaigns available for the society, as it is known that education is one of the elements that play a crucial role in lowering the odds of spreading any viruses and not only the COVID-19 virus. Banca Comercială Română also showed support to the doctors, nurses and the people who were being isolated by providing them with hot meals.

The help that both banks gave goes beyond appearances and beyond just offering medical equipment and protective equipment, both caring for aspects that could have easily gone unnoticed because of the panic created due to the current state of affairs. That is why, these actions are more than just CSR activities, they are actions that bring people closer to other people through the effect of the emotional and educational impact that they have. The quick reactions of Banca Transilvania (that got involved since 16 March) and of Banca Comercială Română (that offered its help since 23 March), prove that priorities can change drastically, no matter if you are an institution, a company, or the society as a whole. The most important thing

is to get involved when it is needed, because that is when the impact will be the strongest.

## **Conclusions**

Based on the research that was conducted and presented above, it can be concluded that both Banca Transilvania and Banca Comercială Română were quick in responding to the growing issues by implementing CSR measures in a timely manner, considering the fact that the world found itself in an unprecedented situation that developed rapidly and that left little to no time for a reaction before it provoked major shifts in the entire society.

The financial institutions that are the subject of this paper are still continuing their helping actions in the present because it is expected that this difficult situation will not be over anytime soon (Kolata, 2020), considering the fact that we are dealing with a new, dangerous and aggressive virus that proves to be very tough to handle. The help that could have not been predicted and that will go on for an indefinite period of time is most certainly an effort than not many entities could be able to provide, but when a set of actions with such a big impact are being taken, the appreciation from the community is considerably larger.

Concretely, as it has been mentioned at the beginning of this paper, both banks got involved in the past by implementing their own CSR campaigns and both of them did their part on at least one of the four types of CSR that exist. At the present time, Școala de Bani, which is one of the financial educational programmes ran by BCR, is carried out now exclusively online (CSR media, 2020). This programme was one of BCR's most successful programmes. The information that is available at the moment shows that starting from February 2020 and until now, Banca Transilvania and other banks that operate in Romania are involved in a campaign that wishes to provide useful information about credit cards and

other issues to the public, this action bearing the name of #DreptulLaBanking (Banca Transilvania, 2020).

The differences between the actions that were taken by them are important, because through these differences the help that is provided ends up being far more complex. Most certainly, these concrete acts of involvement will end up benefiting their image in the society and in the consumer's mind, but considering the current situation, it cannot be told for a fact that they had this in mind when they offered to help; still, we have to admit that we will be able to notice a high ROI (return of investment) rate. After all, the trust that the people have in these banks is what makes them want to have a long-term collaborative relationship. With this being said, it can be assumed that the trust levels of the society regarding both BT and BCR will be much higher because their actions proved that they are able to get involved in a fast and meaningful way, changing their previously set priorities for the year of 2020, transforming them into CSR measures that respond to the immediate needs caused by the COVID-19 crisis situation.

The research developed around the corporate social responsibility will become "richer" in content that can be analysed, because starting with March 2020, many companies, financial institutions, small- and medium-sized enterprises have gotten involved in the fight against the new coronavirus. Each of them has contributed in the way they could, and without their support, the situation would have certainly been more difficult to manage.

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# Sustainability in the Activity of the Retailers in Romania

Adela Lăcrămioara Lazăr

**Abstract:** *In this paper, “Sustainability in the Activity of the Retailers in Romania”, we aim to study the measures and actions taken by three retailers in order to have a sustainable activity, that is, all the processes that have led to a sustainable company and implicitly, to a sustainable society and environment. Moreover, we bring into discussion the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and the Agenda 2030, which is the perfect context for both retailers and this study, as well as the connection between communication and digital media in this situation. In this study, we want to analyse the GRI reports published on the websites of Profi, Lidl and Kaufland. The reports are made in accordance with the GRI and we want to identify the common points used by the three retailers in order to make a relevant quantitative research based on the sustainable elements identified in the reports, such as the measures taken by the retailers in order to fight pollution, to reduce the use of plastic or food waste and so on. In order to do a relevant research, we administered an online questionnaire to all the possible clients (both women and men) of these retailers. The questionnaire has 15 main questions and its purpose is to find out the level of awareness when it comes to the measures that concern the concept of sustainability, as seen in the supermarkets by the clients.*

**Keywords:** sustainability, GRI reports, website, digital media, communication

## 1. Introduction

The main objective of this paper is to evidence the importance of sustainability nowadays, when we face changes in nature due to climate change and also a lot of negative effects caused by pollution and the use of plastic in a global world. Globalization is a good thing because we, as a society, need to develop, but in order to achieve our goals we also need a balance - the balance between nature and our actions. We use natural resources in order to evolve but these resources are not going to be here forever. In this context, we chose the retail area for this research because they use a lot of resources through their activities, but they can also reach a lot of people, irrespective of age or social status. They can provide sustainability and they can teach sustainability by using digital media in order to communicate with their clients. They can provide the key to a sustainable country or even to a sustainable world in the context of Web 2.0.

## 2. Research method

**Comparative analysis:** the object of this research involves three retailers (Profi, Lidl and Kaufland). These retailers have something in common, the GRI reports for sustainability. We performed a comparative analysis on the three reports in order to identify the measures taken by the companies in order to improve their impact on the environment and to see which are the practices used in the supermarkets that can be also observed by their clients. In order to identify the common points, we took the following aspects into account:

- the use of the Internet to communicate with the community;
- the actions taken to improve or to reduce the energy used in their activity;
- the presence of recycling programs;
- the use of plastic;

- the actions taken to prevent food waste;
- the approached communication style through the Internet and the social media;
- the products that come from a sustainable source;
- the approached GRI standards;
- the measures taken concerning local supplies;
- the presentation of the report.

In light of the above, we performed a comparative analysis of the retailers' sustainability reports, in order to identify the most important elements, the common points, and also those points that differentiate them, in order to find out what can still be done and to highlight what the companies report and what can be seen by clients in the supermarkets.

We took into consideration only the common points found in the reports, so that we could do further research.

According to the website of the European Union, "sustainable development aims to meet the needs of present generations without jeopardising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It provides a comprehensive approach bringing together economic, social and environmental considerations in ways that mutually reinforce each other." ([https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/international-strategies/sustainable-development-goals/eu-approach-sustainable-development\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/international-strategies/sustainable-development-goals/eu-approach-sustainable-development_en) accessed on 08.06.2020).

**Quantitative analysis:** Here we use the questionnaire as an investigative tool. We created a questionnaire with 15 questions, which was administered to around 60 people through the online platform Isondaje. The first questions in the questionnaire are more general, in order to find out whether the clients know the concepts of sustainability and CSR, while the following questions are more direct and specific, so that the clients may respond and choose from several given examples. The aim of this analysis is to find out what the clients notice about the sustainable measures in the supermarkets in contrast to what the retailers report in the GRI reports.

### 3. Results

After the analysis of the reports, it can be concluded that all the three retailers (Profi, Lidl and Kaufland) have somehow the same orientations and objectives when it comes to the measures and actions concerning the sustainability process. In fact, even though they share the same objectives and somehow the same actions, such as reducing the plastic used in product packaging, installing a LED lighting system in order to reduce the energy used or even better, using digital media to communicate in a very sustainable manner with the clients, some retailers have still have to do more in this area of action. There is a very good connection between what they promote and inform online and the actions seen in the supermarkets. For example, Lidl has built a huge online community with more than 2 million people on Facebook (<https://www.lidl.ro/ro/catalogue/raport-de-sustenabilitate-2019/view/flyer/page/72>).

The answers to the questionnaire have led to the conclusion that, while most of the clients are familiar with the concepts of sustainability and CSR, their knowledge of these two concepts is rather vague.

When the respondents were asked how important it is if the products in the supermarket come from a sustainable source, on a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 means – very important and 5 means – totally unimportant, the opinions were split; however, most of the clients do not really find it important (Fig 1.). This means that there is still room for more actions that have to be taken.

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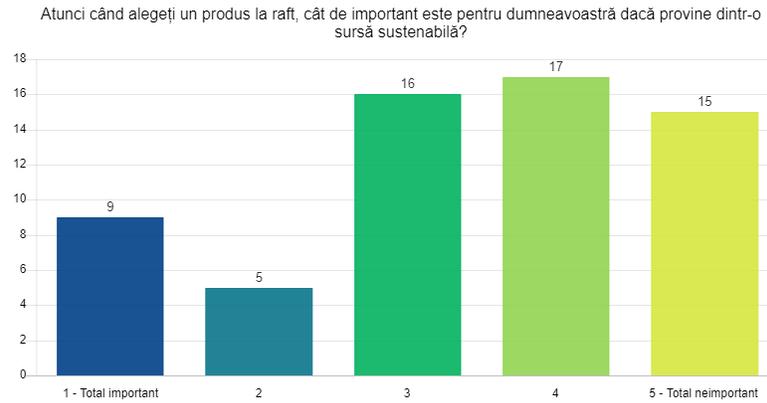


Fig. 1

In what concerns the question about the importance of an annual report done by the retailers, 37 respondents think it is very important, whereas 15, important (Fig.2). The same result was received when the clients were asked if they thought that the retailers could change the actual status in the context of global warming by taking serious measures. Most of the respondents think that it is very important.

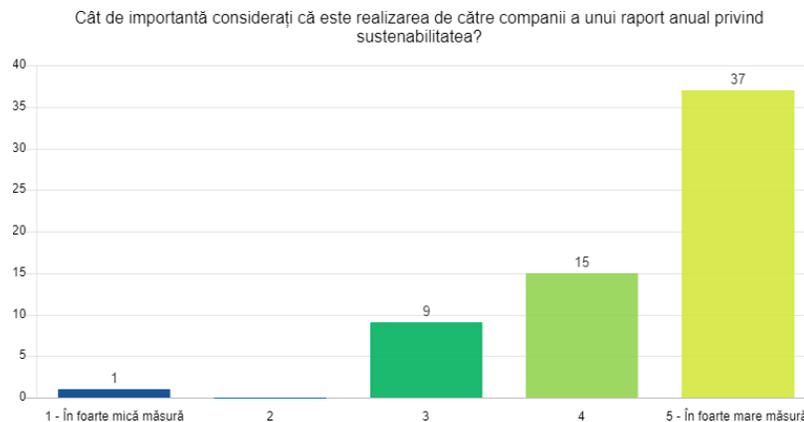


Fig. 2

To conclude, we definitely think that the concept of sustainability and the GRI reports are very important to the activity of the retailers and we also believe that at the same time, the retailers can make a change and that this change can be made through education and communication. Digital media and communication are of utmost importance, because we need to step forward towards a world where everything can be done without harming the environment.

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# *Ecological Concerns in the Discourse of the Fashion Industry*

Iasmina-Andreea Lele

**Abstract:** *In this paper, I address the issue of ecological concerns in the discourse of the clothing industry, focusing on Andreea Raicu and A List Magazine. The latter is a fashion magazine, whereas the former is a well-known fashion blogger, whose influential blog deals with many fashion-related topics. My study focuses on the techniques used to inform the public on this topic. Sustainability in the field of clothing can have a very big impact on consumer behavior. Protecting the environment is for the benefit of future generations and is one of the major challenges nowadays. For a single coat in our closet, important resources of our planet are depleted. According to its 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the UN put forth a plan to increase and promote sustainable clothing among consumers.*

**Keywords:** *Textile Industry; Pollution; Sustainability; Economic.*

The textile industry is the world's second largest source of pollution, to which each of us contributes when we throw away a piece of clothing or buy another. However, more than three quarters of the clothes used

worldwide are not recycled. There should be more responsibility throughout the chain of use of a garment, from its purchase to the end of its life cycle. Consumers influence all stages, hence the obligation to act responsibly. The aim of this paper is to analyze the behavior of manufacturers and how information reaches consumers.

The textile industry also has a massive impact on the environment, as it produces about 20% of the world's wastewater and 10% of global carbon emissions and other waste. The major impact of the textile industry, which is less noticeable to humans, is the pollution of water with plastic fiber, as about 60% of the materials used in the manufacture of clothing are made of plastic (Nayak, 2019). Every time they are washed, clothes release an impressive number of small plastic fibers that researchers call microfibers, which end up in lakes, rivers, oceans. Water treatment plants are not required to capture them. But the chain of negative effects produced by microfibers is not limited to sewage treatment plants. They can be easily confused with food by marine life, thus having a devastating effect on underwater animals, causing endocrine and digestive disorders. They can even slow down the development of some species.

Pollution is not caused only by the finished product. It starts early in the production cycle. The process of cultivating materials such as cotton or hemp requires equipment that pollutes the air, eliminating emissions. Later in the process, the development of plant oil-based pesticides also contributes to air pollution. Harvesting also contributes to the degradation of the environment. The processing of raw materials needed by the textile industry also involves the use of water resources. All these mean that the textile industry makes use of a series of processes that negatively influence the environment, and the finished product has a short life, ending up in the garbage, thus contributing to the issue of waste management. (Nayak, 2019)

People have realized the importance of ecology and of taking care of the surrounding environment. Although this is a relatively new trend,

ecologists make their voices heard on the importance of protecting the planet and of limiting the negative influence of human activities on the environment. More recently, ecological concerns have been tied to the concept of sustainable products. Sustainability has been paramount to most production sectors and supporting it is a commitment to the company and the community of customers, respectively the environment. "The term sustainability was coined in 1987 in the Brundtland report, which means 'meeting current needs without verification finds the needs of the next generation'" (Keeble et al., 2003).

The big textile companies are channeling their way towards "ecofriendly" production, which will lead to sustainable fashion. The chemical processing of fabrics in an environmentally friendly way is being developed through the adoption of new technologies such as the use of natural dyes and dye lasers.

Non-profit and governmental international organizations put pressure on fashion companies to adopt the concept of sustainability. In the past, most factories focused on profitability, not on community wellbeing. However, more recently, under the influence of political and moral factors, several brands have taken the path of sustainable fashion in clothing, by adopting practices that support and care for the environment. Economic sustainability is defined as "the ability of an economy to sustain different levels of production to the end" (Thwink, 2014). Economic support focuses on the search for alternative sources of materials, which are natural, biodegradable and recyclable, which rely on wind or solar energy, low energy consumption as well as a low amount of water. "The third aspect of sustainability is corporate social responsibility (CSR), which ensures that corporate societies follow the approaches and creates minimal harm in the event of non-compliance, thus contributing to social improvement while generating profit. Identifying a series of CSR rules makes it difficult for corporations to comply with CSR concepts that need to be implemented in

business. One of the widely used definitions provided by Bowd, Harris, and Cornelisen: CSR is the responsibility to hold companies accountable through explicit social contracts or implicit contracts with beneficiaries in compliance with government laws and regulations and operates ethically. (Bowd et al., 2003).”

In the last decade, the concept of fast fashion has revolutionized the clothing industry system, where new styles appear weekly. Fast access both online and in stores at an acceptable price only strengthens young people’s habit of buying clothes very quickly. Besides, clothing retailers such as Zara and H&M sell clothing that can be used less than 10 times, thus supporting “throwaway fashion” culture. We can talk about ethics in the consumer clothing industry and that plays an important role in having an impact on the environment, people and animals. Clothing consumer ethics should focus on sustainable, practical, environmentally friendly products, but studies show the opposite. Indeed, when fashion trends are alert, the support of techniques capable of protecting the environment is low. It is often difficult for consumers to meet certain ethical standards because information on the topic is difficult to get. Therefore, the concept of “throwaway fashion” becomes a “fad” that may become an upward trend in the future (Nayak, 2019).

The clothing industry needs to focus on raw materials that have a more efficient recycling process and do not require a major effort, i.e. much processing, water, energy and many human resources, which affect the environment. In the paper *Opportunities and Barriers to Textile Recycling, AEA Technology, Recycling Advisory Unit*, the author Cupit claims that although some natural fibers are biodegradable in their production process, they require significant water consumption. Water consumption for the production of synthetic fibers has a lower percentage of water use compared to cotton. However, on the other hand, synthetic fiber involves consuming a larger amount of energy.

In recent years, researchers have studied the replacement of biodegradable natural fibers and found solutions to replace some of them, such as the cultivation of biodegradable and renewable soybean, bamboo and polylactic acid (PLA) fibers that are more environmentally friendly and do not affect the environment. Clothing made of soy fibers is soft, similar to cashmere, and elastic, but less durable than cotton. In the book *Thermal properties of knitted fabrics made from cotton and regenerated bamboo cellulosic fibers*, Majumdar et al. claim that organic cotton is more resistant and durable, with a higher moisture absorption level than cotton. A big plus of organic cotton production is the lack of pesticides and fertilizers to grow the plant (Nayak, 2019).

One of the main points of learning transformation theory is the continuous dialogue. The fashion industry is not just the consumer, but the union between educated consumers and the industry itself, an assumption based on the historical law of supply and demand developed by Adam Smith. Much of his theory has been to argue that everything we value, such as the functioning of the economy, can be found in people's demand. Thus, a lot of responsibilities are assigned to the consumers, an idea that can be easily overshadowed. While most economists tend to argue for consumer sovereignty, increasing their satisfaction as the ultimate goal to be achieved, nowadays, some claim that consumer behavior is cultivated more as a means for business owners. A complicated point, given that the priority of businesses is to make money, not to make a better world. This is why it has become even more critical for consumers to take a second key role on the path to more sustainable fashion. If consumers continue to buy only sustainable products, then the entire supply chain will change according to the diffusion model. And as a closed loop, consumer patterns will influence the action of producers, who will push consumer behavior to change. Thus, consumers have a responsibility to send signals to make consumption evolve while businesses have to listen to and answer these calls.

Sustainability in fashion is also a topic of major interest in the financial environment. Transforming the economy is possible. Europe has made significant progress in increasing resource efficiency. Several UN strategies and legislation include framework directives on consumer information and behavior change. According to the provisions of the UN's 2030 Agenda, consumers must be educated, and brands must also inspire consumers, leading them and guiding them towards the process of change, which is vital for the future.

In Romania, the idea of recycling clothes is less developed. Second-hand clothing stores are the only way we act. A possible model is the one proposed by Tonelli and Cristoni's "MUD Jeans", which offers customers the opportunity to repair or recycle jeans, as well as the service of renting jeans for a monthly fee. After one year, customers can return the product or choose a new pair. It is the brand's decision whether to provide vintage jeans in exchange or to recycle the jeans. More promotion campaigns are needed to popularize sustainability in Romania and to teach people to protect it. In the stores that sell sustainable clothing such as the ones mentioned above, customers should be able to choose the material, fabric or color and to customize their clothes in an environmentally friendly style, which creates a connection between the store and the consumer. This kind of action takes place in India, under the campaign entitled "Fashion on Demand", which invites the customer to choose from some options, e.g. styles, fabrics, colors, sizes, to create a unique design, using the mix-and-match concept. The order takes three weeks in which the customer enters into an emotional connection with the specially tailored product, thus motivating the buyer to use the product for a longer period, while also contributing to the sustainable creation of the product.

According to Maslow's Pyramid, all needs are grouped into deficiency needs and growth needs. Deficiency needs are fulfilled, but growth needs are unstable and require more once a segment is met. In the case of

physiological and safety needs, function is the most important, such as the purchase of a winter coat in the winter season. After physiological and safety needs comes the need for love and belonging, in which the consumer is attached to the family, colleagues, roles and status; for example, the need for a T-shirt by a teenager. From street fashion to suits, the entire clothing spectrum is affected by the need for esteem and the need for self-actualization. In the case of self-actualization, the consumer moves to another stage and wants to show their creativity and individuality to stand out from the others, but still receives the extraordinary acceptance of his social environment. Here the consumer maintains social uniqueness and image improvement. These needs of the individual or the consumer play an important role in the consumer's decision-making and purchasing process.

Fashion has become an integral part of the history of life/personality, culture and position in society. There are some possibilities to improve the situation and engage Romanian consumers in the eco-friendly trends. In what follows, I will share some of my proposals and thoughts:

Through social media. "Trait" theory is more appropriate for styles that gain adoption over time and in socioeconomic groups. Leaders and celebrities play an important role in fashion. Romanian influencers such as Alina Ceușan, Carmen Grebenisan, Laura Giurcanu and Laura Charaba (to name only some) are people who care about fashion and represent a potential partner in promoting sustainability among young people.

1. **In the traditional media**, the best-known fashion show is "BRAVO AI STIL". It could be used as a promoter of sustainability. For instance, the producers could encourage young competitors to choose "green" outfits and launch challenges designed to stimulate creativity and sell the clothes to followers who could create or update the apparel, rearrange them for their consumption.
2. **Through education and experiential learning**. I propose the creation of personalized kits; more precisely, people can choose the materials,

colors as well as everything necessary. Of course, there may also be standard kits. These kits will encourage consumers to tailor their own creations, thinking *Of course, I can reuse them*. These kits can be available on a website for easier access or through partnerships with companies promoting this new trend in Romania. Similarly to the “Fashion Week” event, an “Ecological Fashion Week” may be organized, where producers will show consumers and potential consumers how to produce clothes, from beginning to end, on social media. Transparency towards people is something that many companies should address.

3. **Through educational policies.** At the local level, I believe that associations for children and youth can teach children about the environment and eco-friendly approaches, e.g. what they are, why such an approach is good, etc. It is better to act preventively, during the personality formation period.

The full implementation of such policies would offer many benefits. Fewer resources would be used for production and this would contribute to the protection and conservation of the environment. At the same time, the economy would benefit from fundamental innovations and greater competitiveness for European companies.

All these are extremely important to the economic and financial environment, to the natural resources, to improving people’s lives and to raising living standards. We need to learn how to spend our hard-earned money and how to generate profit in this process. The purchase of small quantities should lead to the creation of more innovative services and the production of less disposable products. We need to create a new kind of consumerism, based on shared authentic values and greater needs.

## Acknowledgements

This study in the field of communication campaigns would not have been possible without the help of Assoc. prof. Mariana CERNICOVA - BUCĂ, PhD, my dissertation coordinator, whom I kindly thank for her suggestions, patience and understanding.

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# *The Role and Importance of Communication in the Doctor-Patient Relationship*

Andreea Maria Pașca

**Abstract:** *Communication is the main ingredient of healthcare. Effective communication can build a close relationship between the doctor and the patient and this can have therapeutic benefits for the patient. The way in which the message is conveyed and the advice given can change a patient's feelings forever. As regards the method of communication with the patient, 73.8% of the respondents chose open communication as being the most effective one. As in any process, barriers are present in this context as well. In general, medical terms are one of them, and only 58.5% of those questioned said that they understood the doctor's medical terminology. Unfortunately, many post-graduate doctors cannot meet their patients' demands due to the lack of training in communication skills.*

**Keywords:** *Communication, doctor-patient relationship, the role of communication, barriers in communication.*

## **1. Introduction**

### **The doctor-patient communication**

Effective communication between the doctor and the patient is the central function in establishing a therapeutic relationship between the two, which is the heart and art of medicine. The relationship between the doctor and the patient is one of the most complex interpersonal relationships. This implies interaction between people in unequal, often involuntary positions. While sophisticated technologies can be used for medical diagnosis and treatment, interpersonal communication is the primary tool in which information is exchanged between the doctor and the patient (Ong, De Haes, Hoos & Lammes, 1995, p. 903).

### **The characteristics of the medical communication**

The communication between the doctor and the patient is a direct, face-to-face communication, which is not mediated and formalised. The purpose of this communication is to obtain information that both subjects want: to find answers that relate to the patient's health, the remedies proposed for improving the patient's health and the practical ways to be set in action.

### **The DONA communication "window"**

In his book, *Medical psychology*, Florin Tudose (2007) presents the manner in which the doctor-patient communication is conducted using the concept of the "communication window". It is described as having four square areas through which the two subjects communicate face-to-face. The D zone represents the behaviour known to himself and others. It shows to what extent two or more people can freely give and receive, work together, and enjoy common experiences. The O zone, the blind area, represents the behaviour that is not known by the self, but is obvious to others. The N zone

is the area of unknown activity where the behaviour is not known to the individual or others. The A zone represents the behaviour that is known to himself but hidden from others. Without a good communication, a qualitative medical encounter could not be carried out. This is necessary to make the process of finding the patient's problem and its cause, reformulating it into a diagnosis and then communicating it to the patient in the simplest way. The quality of the doctor-patient relationship depends largely on the patient's satisfaction and acceptance of the treatment and of the results (Tudose, 2007, pp. 132-133).

This study focuses on the doctor-patient communication. The study had three main objectives. The first objective was to identify the most effective way of communicating with the patients. The communication process is important for the professional interaction with the patient. The second objective was to identify the existing barriers in the communication process between the doctor and the patient. Their existence is not at all limited. The barriers to effective communication are the medical terms used by doctors, the lack of time, and the haste during appointments. The last objective considered the role and importance of communication in the relationship between the doctor and the patient. The role of communication is very important in the relationship between the two actors and, therefore, simply recognising the need for a good communication is not enough; doctors must strive to obtain the skills for an effective communication.

The opinionated survey was used as a study tool to achieve these goals. It was applied to a sample of 115 individuals and the sampling was a non-probability of convenience one.

## **2. Research method**

The opinion poll is an indirect method of data collection. These data are collected from people with knowledge of the field of research, who are called respondents. The opinion poll is a quantitative method. However, this does not exclude the fact that qualitative data can also be collected. The survey can conduct several types of study, such as exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory (Sandor, 2013, p. 108).

For this study, an opinion poll concerning the most effective way to communicate between a doctor and a patient has been created. The questionnaire is made up of a set of 16 questions addressed to the respondents. The questionnaire was applied to a sample of 163 respondents (48 males, 115 females) aged between 17 and 76 years old. After the application and interpretation of the questionnaire, the achieved results will be presented for each question separately, because it is believed that each of them is important in finding out the objective. A non-probability sample of convenience was used.

## **3. Results**

Following the interpretation of the questionnaire, the answers to the proposed objectives outlined at the beginning of the study have been extracted. The first goal was answered in question number seven, where 73.6% of the respondents stated that they would like the doctors to communicate with them in an open way (Fig.1.). This way of communication gives patients the courage to open up to the doctor and gives them the confidence that the treatment they will be given will help in treating the condition they have. This is how real communication begins and even the least possible situations are solved. Speaking openly to the patient will help him/her to describe his/her illness and the doctor will be able to understand the problem better.

### How would you like a doctor to communicate with you?

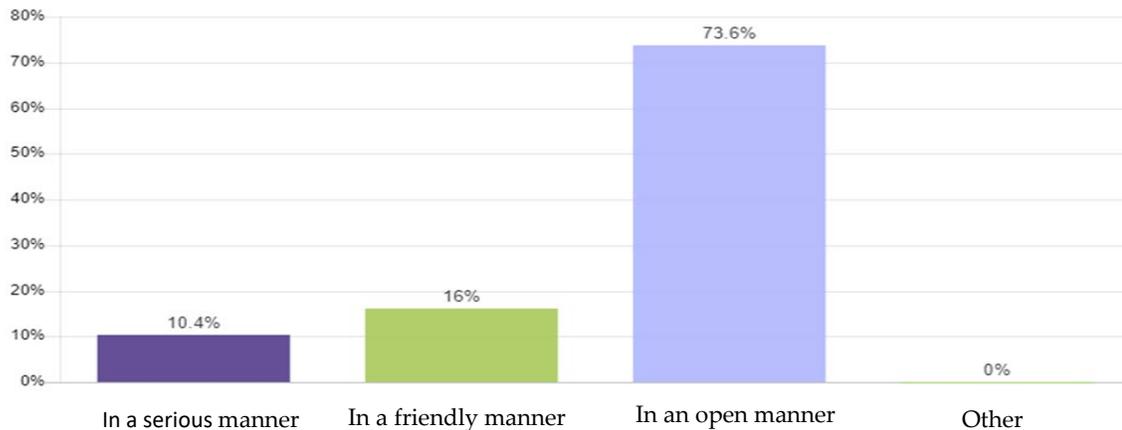


Fig.1. The mode of communication

Any communication has its barriers. However, in the medical field, technical terms are very often found even in the dialogue with the patients. Many of those questioned say that a problem in communication is due to the use of medical terms that doctors often do not even bother to explain to their patients. 58.5% of the respondents said that they encountered medical terms in the doctor's speech (Fig. 2.). Doctors should, therefore, explain to the patients during the examination all the procedures in a manner that could be understood by everyone regardless of age, cultural knowledge, social status, and ethnicity. Another barrier in communication is the lack of knowledge of the communication skills as far as the doctors are concerned. They do not have very good communication skills, fact confirmed by 17.3% of the respondents (Fig. 3.).

Did you encounter medical terms in the doctor's speech that you did not

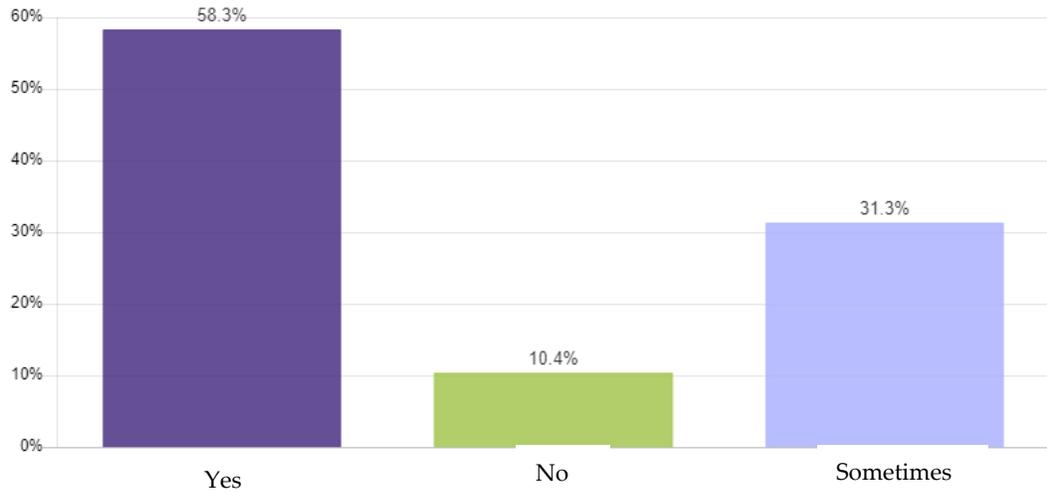


Fig. 2 Medical terms in the doctor's speech

Do you think that some doctors have difficulties in explaining?

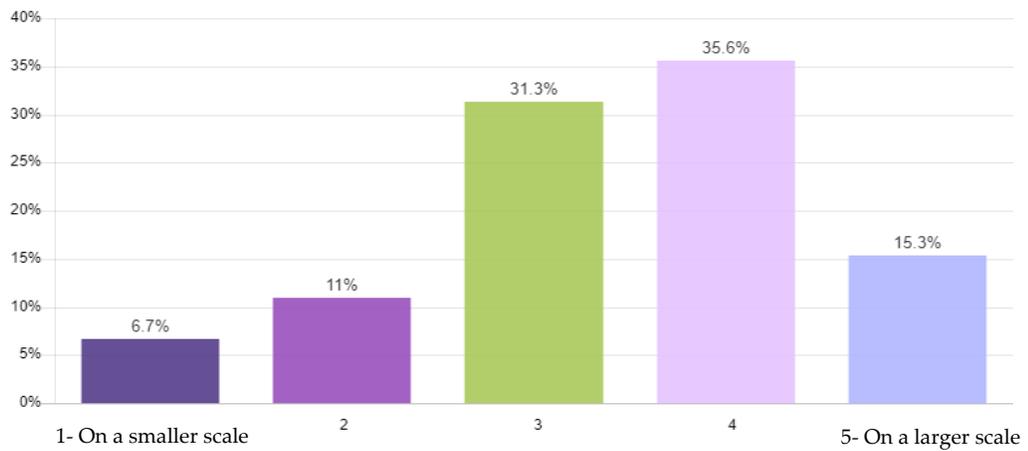


Fig. 3. Explaining the diagnosis with difficulty

The role of communication in the doctor-patient relationship is very important. 72.6% of the respondents consider it to be the most important process in the relationship between the two of them (Fig. 4.). Besides being important, the doctors' professionalism depends very much on how competent they are in communication. Therefore, 93.3% of the respondents believe that doctors should attend a training course at least once a year in order to develop the skill of communicating more efficiently with the patients.

To what extent do you think communication is the most important process in the doctor-patient relationship?

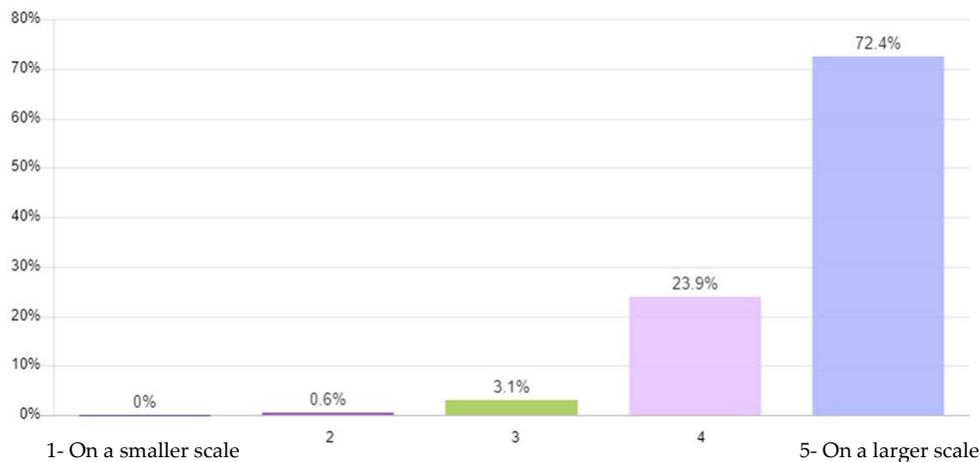


Fig. 4. Communication – the most important process in the doctor-patient relationship

## Conclusions

The doctor's job is not an easy one, to say the least. Patient diversity makes this profession even more difficult. Therefore, doctors need to have very

effective communication skills and to know very well how to approach every patient differently. The primary purpose of communication between the doctor and the patient is to exchange information so that both the diagnosis and the treatment plan could be determined correctly. In addition to the information exchange, communication also aims at creating a good interpersonal relationship between the doctor and the patient.

This research has achieved its proposed objectives. As far as the method of communication with the patient is concerned, 73.8% of the respondents considered that speaking openly was the most effective method in this respect. This method of communication is advantageous for both sides. The relationship between the doctor and the patient becomes more relaxed; therefore, everyone says what they have to say. The doctor finds out what s/he wants to know from the patient, and the patient from the doctor. This type of communication can be defined as communication without inhibitions.

As in any process, barriers are present in this context as well. In general, medical terms are one of them and 58.5% of those questioned said that they encountered these terms in the doctor's speech. Another problem that occurs in the doctor-patient communication is the short time that is provided for the patient's consultation. Some doctors' lack of empathy is also a barrier in communication. If doctors cannot put themselves in the patient's shoes, the communication process will not be hindered.

Communication is indeed the process that plays the most important role in the relationship between the doctor and the patient. This is emphasised by 72.4% of the respondents, who consider communication to be a necessary process for both of them "to a very large extent". As this is so significant for the relationship between the two of them, communication must also be effective. The more effective the communication is, the more easily the medical act can be performed, the needed information will arrive

to the doctor in a much shorter period of time in order for him/her to choose the most effective treatment for the patient.

A solution to overcome the doctor's communication difficulties and the communication barriers would be to participate at least once a year in specialised patient communication courses. 93.3% of the respondents considered that doctors should take part in such courses.

In conclusion, communication is the first link between the doctor and the patient, through which important data are conveyed in order to give a correct diagnosis and, by extension, an appropriate treatment. However, the barriers in such a relationship are unavoidable and numerous. These barriers will not be easy to overcome, but by simply choosing the right words, a calm and a patient tone of voice, and accurate and complex information, the communication with the patients can be improved. These positive attitudes and skills can be applied without great effort by any doctor in almost any situation and can generate a major improvement in the doctor-patient bond, which greatly influences the effective result of the medical act.

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# *Ethical Aspects Concerning Inditex's Business Practices*

Camelia-Viviana Vişan

**Abstract:** *Fast fashion has boomed as an industry over the last few years. Little do people know though about the negative impact it has on our planet. The article presents the results of an online conducted survey, that aims to discover people's buying habits and perception of this industry, with main focus on the ethical issues around one particular company - Inditex. The results show that people have the will to make a change, but it takes some educational effort and probably some time. Although most of the respondents (90%) still buy from brands owned by Inditex, a great percentage of 68% are willing to give local brands a chance. The study offers an overview of the fast fashion consumer behaviour and the importance assigned to ethical aspects, in hope that it encourages people to be part of the change.*

**Keywords:** *fast fashion; business ethics; applied ethics; Inditex.*

## **1. Introduction**

We live in a culture of consumerism. Everything happens so fast, that we don't realize the impact it has on the world. But sometimes investigations reveal the dark side of this culture. In "The new black book of corporations", Klaus-Werner and Hans Weiss detail the less known ethical issues in the activity of many multinational corporations.

The fast fashion industry is one of the worst, being responsible for 10% of all carbon emissions globally. Because of the poor quality and the rapidly changing trends, the lifespan of fast fashion is nonexistent. The clothes are treated like disposable pieces, usually ending up in landfills. And everything comes with a price. The increased carbon footprint, the large consumption of water and the enormous waste led to a growth in the number of natural disasters and disease.

Furthermore, there is a question that fast fashion retailers prefer to avoid: ``who makes the clothes?``. In order to keep production costs low and to increase the rate of production, these giants outsource parts of the production process to Third World Countries, where the lack of laws and regulations allow them to pay lower wages to workers and to pressure these into meeting unreasonable deadlines. Moreover, labor standards are so low that they lean towards exploitation, sometimes even of children (child labor).

Inditex, owner of the brands Zara, Pull&Bear, Massimo Dutti, Bershka, Stradivarius, Oysho and Zara Home, is one of the world's largest (fast) fashion retailers. Targeting various types of consumers with the multitude and the diversity of its brands, alongside sales, promotions and hard to resist prices, the company sure knows how to ensure its way to people's closets.

As a response to the rising concern for environmental issues, the Spanish group invests in strong PR and several campaigns aimed to promote its efforts to be more sustainable. But truth is, a fast fashion company can't be sustainable by definition. Therefore, the theme addressed in this article is sadly a very present one in today's reality.

The study aims to discover peoples' perceptions of the company and of its ethical issues, as well as to identify their buying habits when it comes to clothing.

## **2. Research methods**

The method used for this research is a questionnaire-based survey. The survey gathered a total number of 60 respondents in 4 weeks and was

conducted online, mostly due to its convenience and efficiency. Chelcea (2001, p. 177) defines the questionnaire as “a technique, and correspondingly a research tool, consisting of a set of written questions and perhaps graphic images, arranged in a logical and psychological order, which administered by operators or by self-administration determine answers from respondents, answers that are to be recorded [in writing].”

The objective of the survey is to find out the extent to which people acknowledge the ethical issues of fast fashion and how willing they are to change their behaviour as consumers who play a part in the market mechanism by buying certain goods.

### **3. Results**

The results of the survey show that nearly all the respondents (90%) buy clothes from brands that belong to Inditex, although the frequency of purchase varies from one brand to another. Some of the reasons behind this habit are the clothing style, the accessible locations and the cheap prices (all in equal percentage of ~30%). Other reasons are the desire to keep up with the trends (18%) and the brand loyalty (only 3%).

However, the people who participated in the survey have also noticed some less pleasant aspects when buying from Inditex’s brands, such as the mass effect (31%) and the poor quality of the products (26%). 9% of the respondents consider ethical issues a good enough reason not to buy from these brands anymore.

Ethical and environmental issues are generally important for the majority of the questioned people (38%), for some even very important (43%). Either way, only half of the respondents try to find out more about the history and the values of a company before making a purchase and just about the same percentage (55%) knew about Inditex’s ethical issues. What triggers people the most is apparently child labour (63%).

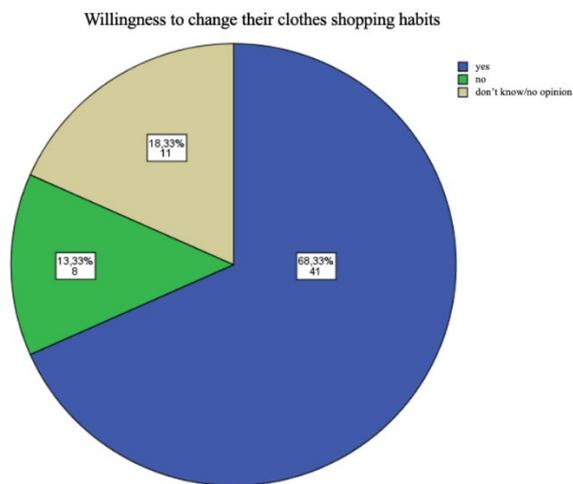


Fig. 1

Most people who were part of the survey are willing to change their buying habits when it comes to clothes (68%), but they hardly know any local, sustainable brands. There are also factors that could determine them to look the other way: low prices (43%), spreading and location of the stores (25%), the “I can’t change much about it anyway” mentality (17%) and the distance to the third world countries (15%).

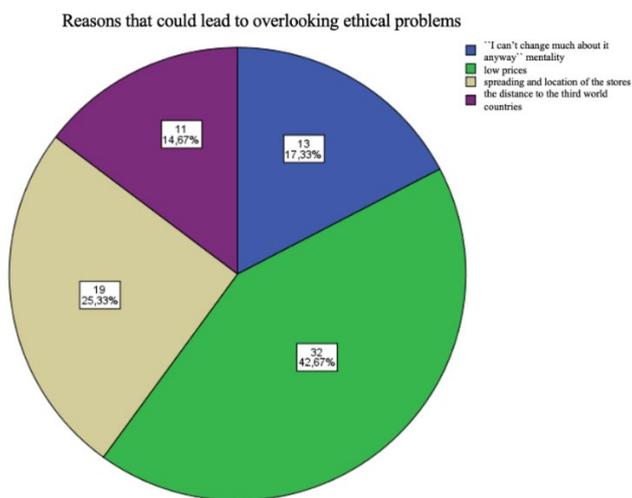


Fig. 2

If they were to choose local brands, the reasons for their choice would be the high quality of the materials (24%), the wish to support local business owners (19%), the unique pieces (17%), the adjusted sizes (16%), the attention to details (14%), and the ethical reasons (10%).

The respondents live mainly in urban areas (80%) and have an average income of 2,000-3,000 lei (42%) or 1,000-2,000 lei (23%). 87% of them are women, aged 18-25 (92%) or 26-35 (8%).

### **3. Expert sources consulted**

The topic addressed in this paper is part of the business ethics field. Business ethics is “a particular form of applied ethics, a set of rules and moral norms concerning the conduct of traders in the economic activity, both at an individual and at a collective level” (Bădescu, 2014: 79).

Although it used to be believed that ethics and business cannot go hand in hand, the general perception of the business environment has significantly improved lately. Even corporations had to adapt to a growing concern about the welfare of the planet and its inhabitants. New concepts have appeared, revolutionising the way people do business. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is such a new concept and it refers to the “set of actions, principles and practices through which a company engages in the society in order to ensure a positive impact of its activity and to contribute to the development of that society” (Ștefana, 2012).

Still, there are many issues that have to be fixed within the business world and labour conditions in the fast fashion industry is one of them. When speaking about the ethical issues that Inditex and other similar companies refuse to address, we refer to low wages, long hours, child labour, insanitary conditions, and the undermining of factory standards.

### **Conclusion**

Not only should customers be aware of the business practices of these big corporations (including Inditex), but they must also take action and

change their buying habits. Some brands, such as Zara, have started to make little improvements, e.g. launching sustainable collections with clothes made out of recycled materials, but that must be just the beginning.

Following the study, it can be agreed that people have the potential to start the “revolution” in the fashion industry themselves. It only takes some research to find out how ethical a company actually is and to find alternatives, preferably on the local market.

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# *Ethos and Strategies for Strengthening Credibility in Leaders*

Miruna-Narcisa Pașca

**Abstract:** *Overall, I can summarize all the work for my paper as a fight for some principles I believe in. It can be called a wake-up call, as we should not follow someone based on their earnings, but based on what they stand for, on who they truly are. As with all human endeavours, ethos is a part of business. I have learned that, if something you have to say might influence at least a small percentage of the world, you should speak your mind with every chance you get.*

**Keywords:** *ethos, leader, credibility, fairness, follow, believe, trust, analysis.*

## **1. Introduction**

The main purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the need to use more trumps when we want to strengthen our credibility. For a more thorough analysis, I will only focus on two attributes, namely those that I consider, perhaps, the most important in influencing the public: ethos and credibility.

Therefore, in my paper, I present what ethos and leadership mean and, of course, how they can be used in speeches. The reason I consider them the most important features in delivering a speech is that they incorporate a multitude of imperative features. Whenever I reflect on these terms and their use, most of all, I run into the need for intelligence.

To prove my hypothesis that “a speaker must represent in the public’s eye both an ethical character and a true leader”, I have chosen to analyse and compare the speeches of Nelson Mandela and those of Donald Trump - both leaders, recognized by the whole world.

The topic I am addressing is of real, eternal importance. Speeches have not begun and will not end with our era. Speeches have existed since the beginning of the world and will continue until it ends and in one way or another they represent a part of our lives. At least, when we are the speakers, we shall do it by the book, and when we are part of the audience, we shall know how to identify the pros and cons most objectively.

To be as close to the truth as possible, I have decided to consult all the sources that address this topic, in order to support the various hypotheses that I will present in the present paper.

## **2. Research methods**

I have decided to use neo-Aristotelian criticism and the interview as methods of validating all the statements made in the theoretical part of my paper. The former might be closer to philosophy, to the human side, whilst the latter, certainly closer to business.

Neo-Aristotelian criticism involves listening to the speaker’s voice. The Neo-Aristotelian method was the first formal method of rhetorical criticism developed in the field of communication. It is called Aristotelian to make a direct reference to *Aristotle’s Rhetoric*, preceded by “Neo”, and has been adapted to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. (Foss, S., 2009, pp. 21-29)

The idea of traditional rhetorical criticism is to analyse the method used by the speaker, by describing their personality, describing the audience and the adequacy of the speech to it, formulating and organizing the main ideas, analysing the evidence provided by the speaker, the manner and style of expression, the testimonies of the public or the recordings that can provide further evidence in this regard. In its traditional conception, it must appeal to ethos, pathos, and logos as the main standards of analysis.

Based on the Neo-Aristotelian structure, Sonja Foss (2009, pp 24-28) describes the three stages in the actual analysis of a speech: the reconstitution of the context, the application of the 5 dogmas and impact assessment.

Rebuilding the context helps the critic better understand the speaker, the occasion and the audience. At this stage, information is gathered on the formative influences that have determined the speaker's principles and motivations; information about the speaker's experience on the subject; identifying the speaker's motivation.

Gathering information about the present or targeted audience helps the critic understand why the speaker has chosen certain strategies to achieve their goal, identify the speaker's reputation while also taking into account the public's knowledge of the speech topic.

The second stage concerns the application of canons, since the critic must meet the requirements of the five dogmas: invention, disposition, style, utterance and memory; they may summarise their analysis only on invention and/or disposition.

The first dogma, invention, refers to the critic finding the ideas, arguments and fundamental content of the speaker. Therefore, they can use the two major types of evidence: external evidence, also called non-artistic/non-technical evidence, such as witnesses and various documents and respectively, internal evidence, also called rhetorical

evidence/artistic/technical evidence, which is used by specialists and which incorporates ethos, pathos and logos.

In the case of logos, we can identify two types of reasoning that need to be analysed: inductive reasoning, in which one departs from a particular case to arrive at a general conclusion, and deductive reasoning, in which a general statement implies a particular statement.

The second dogma, disposition, refers to the way ideas are structured and organized in the speech. One can identify the idea that dominates the speech, why it is placed where it is, and the repeated ideas. The purpose of the critic is to determine whether the structure of the speech is consistent with the subject and its purpose, as well as whether it is appropriate for the public. Moreover, the critic must identify the general method of organization. The main types of organization are as follows: chronological order, problem-solution order, problem-cause-solution order, comparative advantages order, and sequential-motivating order/motivating scheme for the organization of persuasive messages, which has five parts – attention, necessity, satisfaction, visualization and action.

The third canon, style, has to do with the language used by the speaker, i.e. the use of certain words or symbols to create various rhetorical effects, and with an analysis of the general effects: common, robust or ornate.

In the fourth dogma, uttering or delivering the speech, the critic identifies the presentation mode (spontaneous/read); body language and vocal skills.

Memory, the last rhetorical canon, is not mainly used in the neo-Aristotelian analysis, because most contemporary discourses are rendered by reading. Even so, the critic can identify the relationship between memory and presentation.

The third and final stage, impact assessment, lies in drawing a general conclusion about the speech. The critic has to determine the effect of the

speech, or, in other words, whether it has succeeded in achieving its intended purpose or not.

“The interview is a social situation of conversational exchange between two persons to gather information within a specified framework.” (Weil-Barais, A., 1997, p. 99). The primary purpose of the interview was to find out to what extent people consider ethos relevant as a characteristic of a leader and to what extent they let themselves be led by it when they decide whether to follow a person or his/her example, or not.

Similar questions can be found in the interview, just to check consistency in answers and to discover new information that may arise due to different wording. The questions asked in the interview are specific and focus on the subject. They are also concise and do not suggest an answer, precisely so as not to influence the interviewee.

Given the nature of the interview, which is grounded in a desire for knowledge, we can say that information is the crucial element in this equation. Thus, for the accuracy of the results, I interviewed subjects having different backgrounds.

The number of questions is small, given the desire not to deviate from the subject, but at the same time, the questions give freedom of expression to the interviewee. Even though I started from the assumption that ethos is important to all of us when evaluating any person we meet, I wanted to find out how important it is to the interviewees.

I tried to identify all the links between ethos and the natural need to follow and empathize with someone characterized by this particular quality. I also figured out what made the interviewees attracted to this attribute or not. Motivation is as important as validating the assumption itself.

Similar words, positive or negative reactions, responses leading to a similar conclusion were also evaluated in parallel. The identity of the

interviewees remained anonymous so that they could express themselves freely.

### **3. Results**

In my dissertation paper, I used discourse analysis to compare a general and a political leader. The reason I chose this fine analogy between political and business leaders is that I do not believe that there is a distinction in this regard.

Hence, based on the analysis of some of Nelson Mandela's and Donald Trump's speeches, it can be concluded that ethos is very important when we want to gain the trust of the majority. Of course, as I mentioned in the course of the analyses, it is not the only element a leader, be they political or business, should take into account. A complete leader, a leader in the truest sense, should harmoniously frame everything that means ethos, pathos and logos, and give the proper importance to each, in various contexts.

We can easily see the differences between the two protagonists. While Nelson Mandela builds his speech based on the principles he truly believes in, Donald Trump builds his speech on simple but powerful words to create the illusion that he has a valid point of view, even when he supports racist/sexist practices. This characteristic of Trump is representative throughout his entire career as a businessman. Even so, contrary to general opinion, I believe that he can be seen as an intelligent man, to some extent, precisely because of his ability to be as good as a spin doctor, presenting his ideas as being as ethical and as well-intended as can be.

Thus, the greatest difference between the two lies in ethics, honour and good intentions. The fact that Donald Trump won the elections does not necessarily illustrate the fact that he managed to win the trust of the majority. It rather shows that the \$5 million invested in Cambridge Analytica to analyse the data, in September only, was well spent.

If we analyse the results of the interviews, we can see that an overwhelming majority, i.e. seven out of eight respondents, would rather choose Nelson Mandela over Donald Trump, while only one respondent prefers Donald Trump, in virtue of the drastic measures he dared to establish.

If we focus on what the majority asserts, we can notice that Nelson Mandela is appreciated precisely for what Donald Trump lacks, i.e. for his ethics, for the “stubbornness” specific to his fight against racial segregation, for equal rights regardless of the underlying human aspect.

Five out of eight respondents claim that ethos is the most important feature in a leader, while three believe that logos comes first. Even so, we can see that two out of the three respondents who support this lean towards ethos in subsequent questions.

When it comes to performance at work and the attitude of the boss, opinions are divided equally. Some respondents claim that their work would be affected by their boss’s attitude, while some believe that this would not represent an issue. Even so, the latter answer comes in all cases with an addition or a condition: “the boss should be professional/should have common sense”, “the respondent should find joy in his work/should do what he likes”.

For out of eight respondents claim that if they were given the opportunity to be leaders, they would be ethical leaders. However, in this category we can also include the majority of respondents, who, even if they did not use the term “ethical”, used terms that revolve around this concept, such as “balanced”, “fair” and “transparent”. Furthermore, the majority claims that they would choose to be informed leaders, using attributes that revolve around this term, such as “logical”, “calculated”, “rational” and “professional/performance excellence”. These answers emphasize the idea that ethos and logos go hand in hand when it comes to an ideal leader.

The majority of respondents would be willing to change their beliefs if evidence and arguments were presented to them, instead of suggested hypotheses. Nevertheless, experts in the field are the primary choice in the process of forming an opinion.

In light of both the content analysis and the answers provided by the interviewees, I can strongly affirm that ethos is an indispensable attribute in leaders, an attribute without which Nelson Mandela would have been just another ordinary name, not a name that made history and still serves as an example, even after his death. Without ethos, therefore, we cannot speak of leaders, but only of managers, organizers and bosses.

## **Conclusions**

The fact that my study draws on a previously defined theoretical framework does not mean that I have eliminated the novelty factor. This study was launched on certain premises that I wanted to demonstrate and emphasise in my case studies by means of both discourse analysis and the interview. I cannot possibly imagine this study will be used as a cornerstone in business and beyond. This study can, however, be taken into consideration in any company, any business. It is not an unknown situation that people are more or less similar in certain aspects. Even diversity itself is a conglomeration of similarities. It is well-known that information is power, but I believe that we are still in the incipient phase in terms of ethical practices and conferring importance to it when it comes to manager or leaders, even if progress has been made in recent years in this branch. It is also noteworthy that the interviewees value both ethos and logos, to more or less the same extent. An employer, someone who runs a team or a group of people, should, therefore, in the first place, ask themselves what they hope to get from those people. If the answer, among other things, is respect, admiration, to be a role model, to enjoy maximum performance, to be able to work as a team, to solve problems in the most effective way, then they

should consider this study, or any other similar study in the field, which emphasizes the importance of a criterion that has not been particularly prominent in the past.

I must admit that it is a concise study that aims to highlight certain configurations, certain aspects, more or less known. Its limits are obvious when it comes to novelty, given the large number of previous studies on the same topic. However, I have not been able to identify any other work focusing on the antithesis between Nelson Mandela and Donald Trump. As for the interview part, the guide was created entirely by me.

For better understanding, I would recommend an experiment carried out by companies based on the information provided in this article.

It is said that employees are perhaps the most important part of stakeholders because they are the most viable source of information that inevitably makes contact with the outside world. In other words, an employee who is satisfied at work represents an employee who adds value to the company's brand. By analogy, an employee will recommend the company they work for and will bring a favourable reputation only if they are satisfied with what they are experiencing at work.

I am not sure if the theoretical (not empirical) studies in this direction are redundant or vital to establishing certain irrefutable bases in business practices and beyond. On the one hand, I am convinced that all studies in this regard are sufficient to demonstrate the effectiveness and need of ethos, but on the other hand, I feel that this way of thinking is not shared by everyone. This can only highlight the fact that this should not represent an end, but just a means to an end.

Paradoxically, I consider this work to be a meaningful one, but at the same time, just another work that succeeded (I would dare say) in demonstrating something that is already known; the assimilation of new opinions is never in vain, the practical meaning finally sealing some utopian

concepts, which on the surface are defined by fairness, ethics, and perseverance. In a word: ethos.

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### **Interview guide**

1. When you choose to follow a leader, which of the three specific characteristics matters most in this endeavor (ethos – ethical argumentation, pathos – emotional argumentation, logos – logical argumentation > ethos – credibility: intelligence, virtuous character, goodwill; pathos – emotions, feelings, affects; logos – inductive examples, deductive reasoning)? There are ten points that you need to distribute according to the importance each characteristic has in your opinion.

2. Have you heard of Nelson Mandela? If so, what do you know about him?

3. Have you heard of Donald Trump? If so, what do you know about him?

4. Regarding questions 2 and 3, please choose one of the above-mentioned leaders you would follow and mention three representative features that made you choose him.

5. Do you think that your work is influenced by your boss's attitude? If so, can you mention the features that should define a boss so that you work to your full potential?

6. If you were a leader who has influence over many people, what characteristics would you focus on? What kind of leader would you be? (e.g. an ethical leader, a fair leader, an informed leader, an emotional leader, etc.)

7. In your opinion, what could a leader do to gain credibility? What criteria should they meet? (e.g. virtuousness, righteousness, intelligence, emotion, being informed, etc.)

8. Regarding the previous question, once a leader has managed to become credible, what could make them strengthen that credibility? (e.g. maintaining the same practices, developing other features, improving what they have already built, etc.)

9. Which characteristics of a leader would make you give up on your own beliefs and follow theirs? (e.g. virtuousness, righteousness, intelligence, emotion, empathy, being informed, etc.)

10. Do you think you become more susceptible when someone you trust tries to convince you of something? Please motivate your answer.

11. If you don't have a clear opinion on something, who would you listen to and follow? (e.g. an expert's opinion, a friend's opinion, a journalist's opinion, media's opinion, etc.)

12. In the decision-making process, do you settle for information coming from a single source to form an opinion or would you rather listen to both pros and cons from various sources? Please motivate your answer and, in case you prefer to consult multiple sources, please mention some of them in order of importance.

# *Graphical Design in Public Speaking*

Marioara Bleoju

**Abstract:** *This paper aims at presenting some new and futuristic insights into public speaking from the point of view of the modern means of speech delivery and contemporary graphic methods that help communicating new information. The new graphic methods represent an easier way of communication for both the sender and the receiver. This article discusses not only the methods and techniques of speech delivery, but also their efficiency in capturing the public's attention and in mastering new information. At the same time, it takes into account the impact and the efficiency of a well-built and structured speech that is delivered to a specific audience that needs action and interaction, i.e. children. With the ever-growing evolution of technology, we can talk about digital public speaking, which is the art of speaking using digital multimedia, such as images, audio, and video. This paper is very useful in changing the perspective on the role of public speaking and, in a more specific way, on the teaching methods in the digitalised era.*

**Keywords:** *communication design, audience, graphic design, public speaking, speech delivery*

## **1. Introduction**

Studies on the ability to attract the receivers' attention during a speech show that the sender can capture their attention more easily if, during

the delivery of the speech, the receivers' senses are stimulated. In other words, you need to simultaneously add to your speech the multimedia transmission: images, sound, and motion. In the case of public speaking, it is necessary to involve emotions and feelings as much as the context allows.

Unlike traditional communication, the added visual support relying on the graphic representation of the message has the specific purpose of amplifying the impact of the message. Also, the communication design involves the assignment of meanings to images and the interpretation of the whole semantic ensemble as a part of a communicational process that is more complex. Therefore, in the digital era, the sender will not focus just on building and delivering the written message, but also on the graphic representation of the new communication. An image that resonates with the target audience can elicit joy, appreciation, sadness, shock, fear, or anger. Through the power of a visual message, the content is more likely to reach the audience.

## **2. Research methods**

This paper presents two research methods:

a) The comparative analysis was carried out by studying the methods related to teaching the public speech in public schools vs private schools, during a limited period of time of 45 minutes. The goal of this comparative analysis was to find the usage of the graphic methods of the public speech in different environments as well as the obtained results.

Therefore, the following elements have been taken into consideration:

- The level of interaction with the audience.
- The level of the receiver's attention through the entire speech.
- The receiver's reaction to the message delivered by speech.

b) The quantitative analysis was carried out by using a questionnaire about the learning styles. The following elements have been taken into consideration:

- The respondent's expectations as far as the delivery methods are concerned.
- The way in which we can assimilate the new information at an individual level.

## 2.1 Methods and techniques of public speech delivery

The following example is part of a category of the comparative analysis of public speech delivery methods, the result being the effect that the message has on the receivers.

The first category of receivers, the children in the public schools, had mastered the theoretical level of a set of information about feelings. The second category experienced feelings with the help of the senses. The method of delivery for the first category was the verbal message accompanied by a worksheet.



Figure 1: Verbal message accompanied by a worksheet

The method of delivery for the second category was the verbal message accompanied by a lesson with an object. This method refers to the use of additional helping tools that can support the verbal message. This is a widely used method in public speech delivery in the educational field. The mostly used method, the cube, will be taken as an

example. A situation with many perspectives, allowing questions and a complex approach of a subject. The following steps are recommended: building a cube that has the following words written on the sides: describe, compare, analyse, associate, apply, and argue. This method helps both the receiver and the sender. In this example, the cube was accompanied by coloured balls that represent the basic feelings. Every receiver received a ball that represented a feeling and then proceeded to analyse it with the cube as homework.



Figure 2: Coloured balls

The surprising element (a guest or a reward):

This method is considered as one of the most effective methods in capturing the public's attention and in maintaining the thrill if well-prepared. Used mainly in the educational environment, it consists of the introduction in the speech, at a very well-planned moment, of a secret guest or of a reward. This method has a purpose and that is to give meaning to the information during the speech. In my example, the surprise had been announced at the beginning and was left for the end with the goal of maintaining the children's attention during the whole lesson. At the end of the lesson, the audience enjoyed "Joy", the main character of the blockbuster movie *Inside Out*. "Joy" measured the children's joy in the room with the help of an emotional thermometer.

### 3. Visual support

#### 3.1 Visual support as text for the public speech designed for children

As it has been presented at the beginning of this paper, the classical approach involves worksheets with much more space for text. In what follows, different modern perspectives on delivering the speech in an active way will be presented.

Depending on the children's age, when delivering the public speech, nicely-coloured materials in the shape of a book or a brochure, being represented by a funny character or a nice mascot, are recommended. In this case, "Noni's feelings" book series was used, the main character being a unicorn that experiences different states that can be presented to the children. The graphics are very modern, printed in an A6 format, so that they could be easily handled by the children.



Figure 3: Noni's feelings

There are many types of books or educational brochures for children, depending on their age or their subject of interest. Some of these have an interactive content using 3D, inks, or codes that children can decode using their mobile phone (D'Vari & RoAne, 2005, p. 32).

### 3.2 Visual support based on a video

In the digital era, video materials have a significant meaning for the public speech delivery. Video materials also have a big contribution on specialised platforms (YouTube, Vimeo, etc.) or for production companies (Disney, Pixar, Marvel). The short video materials that are introduced in the public speech addressed to children can be the most useful way to deliver a message that they could understand. The association with the characters, the dynamics, or the graphics make the video material a key component to the public speech in this digital era. There are many categories of video materials that can be used in public speaking with an educational goal depending on the topic chosen for discussion -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XIBIVNtzymU>.

### 3.3 Visual support based on PowerPoint

When the sender turns to a media support for the presentation, s/he usually uses PowerPoint, Prezi, or Keynote. But no matter what programme s/he uses, there are some general rules that must be applied in order to have a good material.



Figure 4: Slideshow 1

In what follows, the PowerPoint slide will be taken as an example. For a clear delivery, that is easily understood from the first seconds, there are a few important rules that need to be followed:

#### Conceptualising the message

It is important to mention the fact that the PowerPoint presentation does not represent the whole message, but only a visual representation of the message (Duarte, 2012, p. 9). As a matter of fact, the slides represent the transposition of the written/verbal message into a concept. The analogy in between the slides and the road signs are perfect for understanding the replacement phenomenon in the public speech, with several slides. To avoid the substitution of the speech with a presentation, it is important to emphasise the fact that, during the delivery of the speech, the attention is moved from the speaker to the visual representation just for a few seconds. It is worth highlighting the fact that it is not recommended to transpose the text message on slides, but to conceptualise and transpose it into relevant images. The visual concept could be graphically expressed through a popcorn machine doing its thing. Nowadays, in the presentation, we can use symbols instead of classical photographs.

### One idea, one slide

The text limitation involves the concentration of the message in one representative image. The display of the items one by one, but also the succession of the slides to show the idea bring rhythm and dynamics to the public speech. The strategy is to focus the attention on a successive way: image, words. Therefore, it is recommended to show the constitutive elements one by one on the slide (Wilder, 2008, p. 46). A piece of information that appears on the screen and is presented afterwards in words is already expired! It is also useful to use introductory elements on the slides as if directing a play in which the actors enter, perform, and then leave the stage.

### Colours, shapes, fonts

As far as the topic for discussion is concerned, the coordination of visual elements in between them is made by using one or two shapes at the most, complementary colors, and classical fonts. It is recommended to use the same font in maximum three dimensions (for the title, the big one, for the main idea, the medium one, and for the content, the normal one). Finally, an important role is given to the movement of the images through animations and transitions (Slideshare, 2011).



Figure 5: Slideshow 2

### **3.4 Visual support based on GIFs or funny illustrations**

The GIF is a new, modern, and efficient way of capturing and maintaining the children's attention during the public speech. GIF comes from the expression Graphics Interchange Format; it is made up of 8 bits and has a blush wheel of 256 different shades. It is considered a useful tool, especially in the public speech addressed to children. It has a small format, the messages are conveyed and understood easily and, more importantly, they are funny. GIFs can be made by two methods: a series of static images that are continually repeated, creating the movement impression or a short sequence of a video recording repeating endlessly. GIFs can be used to mark a funny moment during the speech. They are useful in the humoristic field of the speech construction and delivery. Another way of expressing the funny message can be done through the illustrations known as *Meme*. It represents a concept or slogan that is quickly spread through the social media. They are usually found as an image, GIF, or video.

And, finally, another useful tool is video animation. This is a short material that can convey a powerful message. The video animation is a project based on audio and visual communication, but also based on the sequential design. The elements that build the animations can be the scenes linked by chronological events. Animations are made by several media elements structured by a specific time frame (<https://medium.com/designers-notebook/12-secrets-graphic-designers-dont-want-you-to-know-4fb258fd0dd0> accessed April 6 2020).

### **4. Developed materials**

Based on these methods, the following graphical design, useful when working with children, was obtained.

The materials were created with Adobe Illustrator and Adobe InDesign graphic editing programmes. While creating the "Adventures in VIP Land" workbook and the mascot, a palette of primary colours, predominantly yellow, that are attractive for children, was used. The

fonts are Futura book for text, Grinched for title and Jingle bells for cover. The concept and the movements of the mascot were created on the round structure.



Figure 7: Developed materials 2



Figure 8: Developed materials 3

The created materials are intended to capture and maintain the children's attention, the interaction with them but also to understand the message sent in a dynamic and contemporary way.

## Conclusions

In the digital age, people's attention and focus have changed considerably. After carrying out this analysis, it can be seen that the visual content gets messages across faster. This happens because it is easier for people to understand something that is represented visually. Taking into account the analysis results, one can understand the importance of the visual impact for public speaking by increasing the interest for the message and the audience's involvement in the message. The communication design is one of the important communication processes. This involves a creative and systematic plan to solve a problem or to reach some objectives using images and symbols which, at one point, may be a substitute for words. It is about the visual communication and the esthetic expression of ideas and concepts using many possible elements and graphical images.

The best practices for the graphical representation are the use of a soft presentation tool as support for the verbal message, the conceptualisation and representation of images, the use of video materials or short animations to underline ideas, and the use of tint, illustrations and diagrams in the learning process.

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# *Digital Products for Children. UX/UI Design*

Isabela Lavinia Răpeși

**Abstract:** *This paper aims at studying the educational applications for children used in Timisoara and around the world to find out what children think about these products and the impact they have on them, what they want from an application as well as to compare their desires concerning the existing applications in order to create a good application for them and to promote a bookstore. In order to do that, it was necessary to learn about application design, multimedia content, information layout, children's experience in applications and the manner in which they interact when using them, the device they are available for, the age category to which they are addressed, whether they have certain security options and whether they are related in the offline environment to a bookstore, toy store, organisation, etc.*

**Keywords:** *digital products, user interface, user experience, educational applications, mobile applications, children's preferences, bookstore promotion.*

## 1. Introduction

Children are increasingly using new technologies and need digital products that are appropriate for their age group and fit their preferences. As Paul Osborne (2020) stated, "A UX design that works perfectly for most people, most of the time, may not work well for children at all". When using an application, it is important that the user needs to be satisfied both visually and through the experience provided, even if it is for children or adults.

The objectives of this research are to create an application as suitable as possible for children, to promote reading among children, and to promote the "Librarul cu papion" bookstore. The information about the children in Timisoara was needed in order to respect their preferences when an application could be proposed for them. Therefore, the children's preferences in terms of digital applications needed to be known in order to find other features that could be useful in developing applications and their correlation with the needs of the "Librarul cu papion" bookstore in order to obtain a beneficial product both for children and for the bookstore.

Children differ from adults in dexterity and thinking, so they need applications designed specifically for them. When making such applications, certain characteristics must be taken into account: for children, age groups vary more; children need immediate results; children need an interface as simple as possible; children need a story to understand; children act emotionally, not rationally; children need more encouragement; children learn faster than adults; children do not need to be loaded with a lot of information; children do not have the same dexterity as adults, children's applications require special measures for safety; advertising in children's applications should be avoided; younger children cannot read or they read with difficulty; testing products for children is more difficult, etc.

## **2. Research methods**

In addition to researching the theory and consulting the existing studies, a more detailed analysis is needed. For example, even if we found out information about children's preferences in general, it is important to have specific data about the children in Timisoara. In addition, it was important to know what has worked and what needed to be improved on what has been developed so far in the field of digital products for children. Therefore, to meet the above objectives, two research methods - the comparative analysis and the questionnaire - will be used.

### **2.1. Comparative Analysis**

Following the analysis of ten educational applications, the focus was on some characteristics in order to discover the children's preferences. In order to analyse the mobile educational applications for children, certain steps have been followed, such as identifying the applications to be analysed (by consulting certain sites and centralised answers after applying the questionnaire and checking the number of downloads from Google Play and the reviews), identifying common quantitative and qualitative characteristics, creating an analysis grid and ticking the characteristics of the respective applications, analysing the data and formulating the conclusions. To meet the objectives of the paper, some of the popular applications in the world and the applications used by the children in Timisoara have been analysed.

This comparative analysis helps to identify the differences and similarities between the applications and to find out how a similar application for the bookstore can be made, as well as the application that can be used by the children in Timisoara and some elements that would make it equally attractive or even more attractive than the existing

applications. In the analysis grid, the applications used by the children in Timisoara have been compared with the applications that are very popular among the international children.

In the analysis of the educational applications, the following will be highlighted - the subject of the applications, the age category, the number of their downloads from Google Play, the reviews, the device for which they have an available version, the safety measures it offers, whether they have a website or a logo; the design features; the multimedia content; the way the information is presented; the way of interacting; the assistant; whether they have game features; whether they offer feedback; whether they have offline connections; whether they are free or have ads; the languages in which they have versions and whether children can connect with other children when they are using them.

## **2.2. Quantitative Analysis**

The questionnaire was applied in order to find out more about the children in Timisoara, especially about those who use digital products and educational applications. This questionnaire was applied before having conducted the content analysis to find out which applications are the most used in this category, in order to analyse them and observe the children's preferences.

The stages of conducting the survey were the following: selecting the target audience, writing the questions and organising them, and presenting the necessary information to those who received the questionnaire to complete it. The questions have been ordered as follows: the first were the questions about the children participating in the study, followed by questions about the questionnaire, digital products for children, how they use them and their experience with such products, and at the end I asked the questions for parents, through whose answers they were to express their opinion about these products and the effect they have on their children.

Although the target audience is children from Timisoara aged between 3 and 14 years old, the questionnaire was sent to parents and they were asked to complete it with their children, requesting them to answer certain questions and explaining to them what they have to do.

Some questions only needed to be answered by parents to find out what they think about the educational applications and the other types of applications that their children use. It would have been more difficult for the children to complete it directly because some of them cannot read or understand the questions, making it easier for them if their parents explained to them what they were talking about. If the author had met these children and asked them the questions, they might not have answered so correctly or they might not have been able to answer some questions at all, being intimidated by the presence of a stranger. It would have been much harder to conduct this survey, especially for very young children. Therefore, the questionnaire was applied to a sample of 60 people (60 parents with their children).

### **3. Results**

When asked what their favorite colours were, most of the children (28.4%) answered "light blue", and 13.4% of the children chose purple as their favourite colour. Surprisingly, black is among the favourite colours of 11.9% of the children. Light green and pink were chosen as favourite colours by 19.4% of the children.

The most used device by children is the mobile phone (96.7%). The children's favourite activities when using a mobile phone, laptop or tablet include games (37.6%), applications for learning or acquiring certain skills (31.7%), watching videos (25%) and using social networks (6.7%). More than half of the children who responded to the study prefer interaction through gestures and voice with applications (61.7%). When asked which

applications they prefer, 26.7% of the children chose educational applications (with stories, mathematics, etc.).

35% of the children who answered the questionnaire preferred an animal as an assistant. The analysis has also shown that many applications have animated characters in the form of an animal as an assistant that helps children. Most children (91.7%) want to be rewarded with virtual prizes during the interaction with the application. Children get bored quickly, which is why 95% of the children in Timisoara who were surveyed want the level of difficulty of the application to be increased at some point.

Following the analysis of the 10 educational applications for children, several common features that make the applications as enjoyable as possible for those who use them have been found out. Educational applications are found in various forms: applications with stories, Romanian language, mathematics, languages, puzzles, colours, finding differences, general culture, applications for schools, applications for learning notions of history, chemistry, and others. A part of this analysis will be presented as follows.

Table 1 - Analysis of educational applications for children

Name of the application		Duolingo	Infinite	Lingokids	Povești pentru copii	Învățarea numerelor
Application subject	Stories	✓	-	-	✓	-
	Romanian language	-	-	-	-	-
	Mathematics	-	-	-	-	✓
	Foreign languages	✓	✓	✓	-	-
	Puzzle	-	✓	-	✓	-

	Application for schools	✓	-	-	-	-
<b>Age category</b>	3-5 years	-	-	✓	✓	✓
	6-8 years	-	✓	✓	✓	-
	9-11 years	✓	✓	-	-	-
	12-14 years	✓	✓	-	-	-
<b>Downloads from Google Play</b>		Over 100,000,000	Over 10,000	Over 10,000,000	Over 100,000	Over 1,000,000
<b>Google Play review (from 1 to 5)</b>		4.7★	4.6★	4.6★	4.7★	4.6★
<b>Number of reviews</b>		9,000,000	294	68,000	2,000	4,000
<b>Safety</b>	Internet necessity	✓	✓	✓	-	-
	External links access	✓	-	-	-	-
	Settings access without password	✓	-	✓	-	-
	Transactions possibility	✓	-	-	-	-
	Ads	✓	-	✓	-	-
	Security code	-	✓	-	✓	-

	Login required	✓	✓	-	-	-
	Parental control	-	✓	-	✓	-
<b>Design</b>	Dominant colours	✓	✓	✓	-	-
	Cold colours	✓	-	✓	✓	✓
	Warm colours	-	-	✓	✓	✓
	Neutral colours	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Simple interface	✓	✓	-	✓	✓
	Menu	✓	-	-	-	-
	Template	✓	✓	-	✓	-
	Playful font	-	-	-	-	✓

The children's applications have many downloads, being widely used, especially the educational ones, because parents consider them useful for the children's development and are a good way to spend time having fun and learning something new. The analysed applications have between 50,000 and 100,000,000 downloads in Google Play.

The children in Timisoara prefer applications for learning foreign languages, applications with stories and applications with mathematics. Internationally, language applications are less widely used. The children in Timisoara prefer to have an animal as an assistant in the application, and internationally, in addition to the animal, a boy or a girl is also preferred.

Both in Timisoara and internationally, toys are promoted through applications. Therefore, this promotion strategy was used in the case of “Librarul cu papion” bookstore, to make children buy as many books as possible and, of course, to read them, contributing thus to their development.

The characteristics of the analysed applications match the answers to the questionnaire perfectly. All the analysed applications have a version for the phone or tablet, the interaction on this device being the one preferred by the children in Timisoara who answered the questionnaire.

Among the analysed applications, Duolingo is the most appreciated application, having the most downloads and being mentioned most often in the answers to the questionnaire. This is an application that is frequently used by the adults who want to learn a foreign language, so it is the only one of the analysed applications that offers the possibility of transactions, without the need for a code that only parents can enter. However, you need an account and an e-mail to make transactions if you want the Premium version without ads. Some applications offer the ability to access certain stories or sections of the application without Internet access, but additional features are required.

All the applications use neutral colours and do not make a difference for boys or girls. Both cold and warm colours are used and all the interfaces contain many colours. Many of the applications have simple interfaces, with a few characters, to help children navigate as easily as possible. However, very colourful applications with more complex graphics are also appreciated.

Half of the analysed applications are free, others have only a version that can be tested for a short period of time or for an indefinite period of time, but with fewer interactions than the paid version. The children in Timisoara prefer to use free applications. Half of the analysed applications have parental control, allowing only parents to access certain parts of the

application and requiring the use of a password, or writing numbers / letters, which young children who interact with the application cannot enter only by touch.

#### **4. Expert sources consulted**

The topic of this paper is part of the graphic design field and, therefore, many graphic design books, such as “The principles of Beautiful Web Design” (Beaird, 2010), “Graphic Design Solutions” (Landa, 2014), “The Elements of Graphic Design” (White, 2011) have been read. Books for the UX/UI field, such as “UX for Beginners. A Crash Course in 100 Short Lessons” (Marsh, 2015), “The Elements of User Experience” (Garett, 2011) and many specialised articles such as “UX Design for Kids: Key Design Considerations” (Osborne, 2020) have been consulted. The course notes in Onița (2018) have been used; valuable information on graphic design and UX/UI design and on how to create a UX/UI design project could be found in these course notes.

These studies have been based only on recent and updated books. All the books and online sources are not older than 10 years. Some of the books are revised editions of the old books.

#### **Conclusions**

After having collected this information, a proposal for an educational application that should be as suitable as possible for children will be made. An example is the Webkinz desktop application that can be accessed by children with a code they receive when they buy a toy. In the application, the child discovers a world of animals, where s/he can play a variety of games and participate in various activities with his/her friends, each with the character of the purchased animal.

A similar idea for the “Librarul cu papion” bookstore in Timisoara was believed to be a good idea in order to create a connection between the

offline (buying and reading books) and online (using an application for fun and testing the knowledge learnt from books). Children who buy a book from the bookstore will have access to the application and will be able to answer questions from the stories they read, playing with their favourite heroes and deepening the knowledge they have from reading the books.

Of course, children will be helped by their parents from the purchase of the book to the use of the application. It will also be easy for the children to use. In this way, they will be able to learn and have fun at the same time. Currently, there are many applications that take away children's time and make them have no time to learn or read. Therefore, it was thought that designing this application will solve two things at the same time: the children's desire to play and the promotion of reading among them.

This application also promotes "Librarul cu papion", a children's bookstore opened last year, which already has quite a few followers and organises a lot of events, but could develop even more in a short period of time with the help of this application and could increase its popularity. In addition to the well-known stories, bookstore-specific stories can be introduced in the app, which are read for children who come to "Librarul cu papion" or books that can be purchased from there. A message can be displayed in the app urging children to buy the books from this bookstore. They will then talk to their parents. It is important for them to know that there is a place where they will find the book. Maybe they will buy the book, so the bookstore sales will increase.

By conducting this research and by designing this educational application several problems have been solved: children who spend a lot of time on mobile phones will use them in a constructive way, children who do not give too much importance to reading will be more motivated to read in order to play with friends in the application, and even though most applications have ads, children will now be able to use an application without ads and without referring to external links. In addition, the

"Librarul cu papion" bookstore, which has recently opened and needs advertising, will be promoted in a unique way.

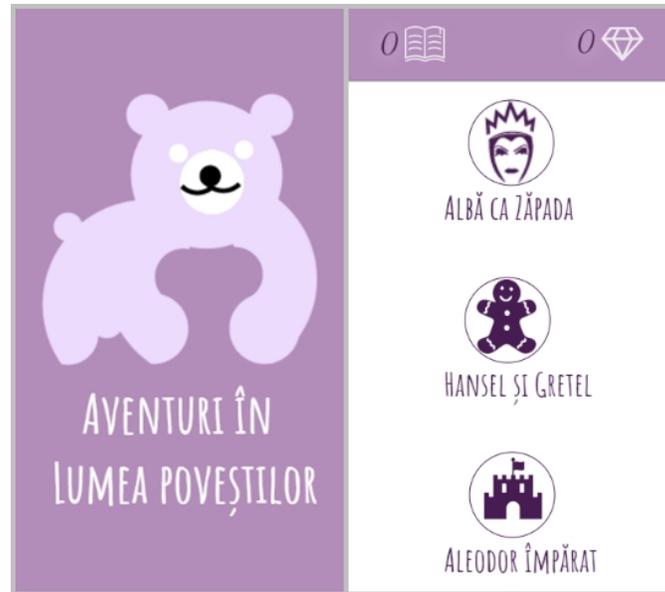


Figure 1: Start page and Home page

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# *Aesthetic and Functional Features of Book Cover Design*

Adina-Lorena Smarandache

**Abstract:** *The well-known saying “Don’t judge a book by its cover” has become one that most of us use frequently especially in our day-to-day life, reminding us to see past the appearances and, perhaps, to help us become better human beings. As a matter of fact, when it comes to actual books, this phrase could not be more wrong since most of the people do judge a book by its cover. Even though the way a book cover looks may not be the final purchasing decision, it is the first thing that people’s attention is drawn to. The aim of this paper is to present the importance of a good cover for books, the design challenges that have to be overcome when creating the final look of a book as well as the specific features that need to be taken into account when designing a book, whether it is a printed version or an e-book or audio-book, and the differences between them. On the other hand, the ways of designing a book cover that will draw the buyers’ attention to, the ways of promoting a book based on its design and, ultimately, the way of discovering how to design a book that sells will also be explored.*

**Keywords:** *Books cover, design, design principles, impact on sales.*

## **1. Introduction**

The topic of the paper is book cover design, the features and the concepts used, the importance of the message that is transmitted and finally, the importance of a cover design in promoting a book and its success.

The first part presents both the general and the specific design principles, which must be taken into consideration when designing a book cover. If we were to look at the past, for hundreds of years, the use of the book cover served as a protective device for pages usually made by hand as well as for keeping the pages together by linking them. However, although the cover was a practical object, it did not lack aesthetics, and was always decorated as a tribute to the cultural authority. Even then, the design of a book cover was considered, but it was not designed to market the book itself.

In the second part, the paper will deal with a case study on how successful a book is based on its cover, on the impact of its design on the sales and popularity, but also on how well the cover contributes to the general opinion on the book.

## **2. Research method**

The cover of a book is practically its image, the first thing the reader sees, and the impact it has on the public is a very important one in the purchase decision; this, of course, leads to the product's success. The cover plays a major role in conveying the message and the style of the book, which can be decisive for the buyers' attention.

According to a study conducted by Self-Publishing School, 79% of the respondents voted "yes" when asked if the design of a book cover plays a decisive role in the decision to buy it (<https://self-publishingschool.com/>,

accessed on 3 May 2020). The conclusion in this case is that, in fact, we do judge a book by its cover and it should be no secret these days.

Following this, the study has continued with the aspects of a book's cover that are important to take into consideration when designing one; therefore, some information about a cover's elements, dimensions and, ultimately, design styles has been selected below.

The size of a book and, implicitly, its cover, play a role almost as important as the chosen design. Depending on the style of a book, the genre and the audience to which it is addressed, the book will have different sizes, the most common example being the children's book, in which case the square shape is chosen at the expense of rectangular dimensions - which are also the most common. Of course, there are several standardised sizes that are most often used, but they are by no means mandatory for a book and its cover. However, one of the most popular alternatives is the classic A5 (148 x 210 mm) in the final version.

When it comes to the eBook design, there is no golden rule for cover sizes, as online bookstores require different sizes and e-readers have different resolutions. However, it is important to make sure that the right size ratio is used, based on the requirements of online bookstores and high-resolution images. One of the most popular platforms of this type is Amazon, being very versatile in terms of cover design. Still, there are some recommendations: "The ideal size of the eBook cover is a height: width ratio of 1.6: 1. This means that for every 1,000 pixels in width, the image should be 1,600 in height. To ensure the best image quality, especially on devices with high-definition screens, the image height should be at least 2,500 pixels. The ideal dimensions for cover files are 2,560 x 1,600 pixels " (<https://kdp.amazon.com>, accessed on 12 June 2020).

In the case of audiobooks, the most common format is 3,200px x 3,200px or a 1: 1 ratio (<https://www.audible.com/blog/>, accessed on 5 June 2020). Their covers are most often presented in a square shape like covers

of vinyl records - emphasising that they are in audio format, thus making them easier to differentiate from eBooks.

The mandatory elements of a book cover are on the front cover, i.e. the title of the book and the author's name, and optionally a subtitle or additional information such as "Bestselling author". On the spine of the book, the same information is usually included, sometimes even the publication year, and on the back cover, there will be the blurb, some information about the author and sometimes even reviews, but these are again optional.

There are many definitions for the word design. Some examples would be presented as follows: A discipline that aims at the aesthetic harmonisation of the human environment; a way of presentation (aesthetics) of an item or shape; the external appearance of an object elaborated in accordance with the laws of aesthetics (<https://dexonline.ro/definitie/design>, accessed on 10 May 2020). Design is also defined as an arrangement of lines or shapes created to form a pattern or decoration, according to Oxford Dictionary (<https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/design>, accessed on 10 May 2020).

Because book cover design is a specific type of design, there are some important aspects that need to be taken into consideration. Such aspects are the use of images, the colours and, ultimately, the fonts. All these elements play a very important role in transmitting the right message about the book's genre and main subject.

The popular saying "An image is worth a thousand words" seems to be very true. Images, be they illustrations or photographs, are the most easily recognised elements by the human mind, they are all around us every day and this makes their interpretation much deeper and more detailed than just shapes or words, both rationally and emotionally.

Colours are the ones that influence emotions in most cases, and through colours we can most easily understand what the design conveys to

us. The colours used in a design offer a lot of versatility, but there are some rules to keep in mind that ensure a design is both correct and aesthetic. These rules apply to the manner in which the colours are combined and associated and to the manner needed to find the balance between them.

Ultimately, the font family is one of the most important elements of a book cover. The cover generally has a few words displayed (title, subtitle, author's name), and they have a huge influence on the design and on the reader as well. The fonts chosen for the book cover can improve our design or make it fail (Nipane, 2018).

### **3. Results**

The cover of a book can tell us a lot - consciously or unconsciously -, about what we are going to read. For example, if the cover seems cheap or unprofessional, it will convey that the author does not believe in his/her work enough to invest in its image, concluding that if the publisher or author himself/herself does not believe in the book enough to invest in a qualitative cover, then why should the reader believe in the quality of the words inside?

Commercial design, in its variety of directions and ideas, is reduced to two fundamental principles: the design resembles another one or stands out (Bache, 2018). In most cases, when it comes to the cover image of a book, the first reaction is for the design to stand out, to be unique and "original" because this idea equates "visibility" with "more sales", but this theory is not always valid. In order not to compromise the book, when the cover is created, some research has to be carried out first.

The cover of a book can decide to a very large extent whether it will be bought or ignored by the readers. There are so many books on the market these days and we can no longer rely solely on the quality or originality of the content to make it successful (<https://writingcooperative.com/>, accessed on 24 May 2020). When we are looking for a new reading, whether we go

to a traditional bookstore or to an online bookstore, there are so many options that are presented to us at once that we cannot pay attention to all at once; something draws our attention over another thing and this is the cover design.

As an example of why the cover is a powerful tool for promoting a book, Martin Lake's book series, *The Lost King*, and more precisely, the first volume, *Resistance*, has been chosen. It was first launched in August 2013, both in print and electronic format. In the image below (figure 1), the first and second version of the cover launched on the market can be seen.



Figure 1: Before and after examples of the cover design for *The Lost King: Resistance*

One of the reasons why this book was not successful at the time of the launch is by no means that it is a bad or poorly-written book, but simply because the cover is uninteresting. Its execution was certainly not done in a professional editing programme, the fonts used are not at all attractive and the photo used is of low resolution and poorly lit; also, there is no prominent colour and practically nothing attracts the reader's attention.

The sales of the three books in the series tripled after changing the cover of the first book. Two months later, the cover of the second and third books in the series was changed to match the first, and sales doubled again, from 15 copies sold per month to 54 per month, and then to 96. These numbers represent copies sold after the cover has been restored but without advertising the book or the series of books at all. When the advertising campaigns and the marketing strategies started, the sales took off - in June 2014, 559 copies were sold per month (<https://www.creativindie.com/>, accessed on 30 May 2020). In the image below (figure 2), a record of monthly sales between November 2013 and June 2014 can be seen.

MONTH	RESISTANCE	WASTELAND	BLOOD OF IRONSIDE	TOTAL
Nov 2013	8	3	4	15
<b>Dec 2013</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>54</b>
Jan 2014	31	10	12	53
Feb 2013	42	28	26	96
March 2013	45	15	20	80
April 2013	90	44	41	175
May 2014	184	88	84	356
June 2014	292	133	134	559

Figure 2: The sales record of The Lost King series

In November 2013, before the cover of the first book was changed, only 8 copies of the first volume were sold, followed by an increase in December 2013 - when the volume with the second version of the cover was published – of three times higher in sales. In the following months, sales

started to increase more and more, reaching a total of 356 copies in May 2014, and in June 2014 - when the series of the books also began to be promoted, they were sold in a total of 559 copies. Thus, no matter how important the cover of a book is in its success, we must not only rely on the offered design, but also on the advertising and on the methods of promoting a book.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it can be emphasised that both the aesthetic and the functional features of a book cover, as complex as they are, contribute greatly to the finished image of the book in general, as it has the power to influence the book's sales and success.

Following the notions presented, it can be stated that, indeed, the cover of a book plays an extraordinarily important role both in terms of the opinions that readers form about a book, and in the case of influencing their decision to buy it. Also, from the design point of view, it is very important to use elements that suggest and involve the genre of the book and its subject, but also to make sure that the design has a clean and modern look that aligns to the current trends.

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# *Face-to-face Communication vs. Digital Communication. Case Study: “Cărturești” and “Două Bufnițe” Bookshops*

Ramona-Valeria Giurgiuca

**Abstract:** *In this paper, entitled “Face-to-face Communication vs. Digital Communication. Case study: “Cărturești” and “Două Bufnițe” Bookshops”, we aim to distinguish as clearly as possible between direct communication and its role in establishing interpersonal relationships, and technology-mediated communication and the specific elements it brings in interpersonal communication and information transmission. In the first section, we focus on some theoretical aspects related to these two types of communication, as well as on reviewing methodologies for communication instrumentation, looking at the different tools for mediating the communication act and at how each instrument influences the act of communication itself. We relied on the study of organizational forms of communication, in terms of the communication methods and digital media marketing strategies used by organizations and their implications in achieving a communication and information relationship that benefits the organization and its customers. In the case study, we analysed the communication methods adopted in two organizations, namely, the bookshops ‘Cărturești’ and ‘Două Bufnițe’, and how their methods of transmitting information to their clients can*

*influence the relationships established with them and the construction of their organizational image.*

**Keywords:** *face-to-face communication, digital communication, local bookstore, chain bookstore*

## **1. Introduction**

The main objective of the study is to analyse two bookstores, “Cărturești” and “Două Bufnițe”, in order to see how the two organizations use online and face-to-face communication. “Cărturești”, as a bookseller well-established on the market, uses more digital media, while “Două Bufnițe”, being a small neighborhood bookstore that emphasizes community value, uses more face-to-face communication.

The idea of analyzing the above has also developed due to current events – being in the midst of a pandemic and forced to move our work online – and especially because young generations have lately become more active online and less active in direct interaction. With this in mind, we thought to come up with a proposal, at the end of the analysis, which consists in developing online communication for the “Două Bufnițe” bookstore.

## **2. Research methods**

In the analysis, we used as a research method the analysis grid, adapted to the type of communication for each bookstore, the grid that was adapted to the online environment for the “Cărturești” bookstore and to the communication itself for “Două Bufnițe” bookstore.

The analysis grid on the “Cărturești” bookstore showed that it uses various online communication tools: the bookstore website, the blog, the facebook page, the Instagram page, Twitter and the YouTube channel. The most usual online communication tools used by “Cărturești” are its website and its blog.

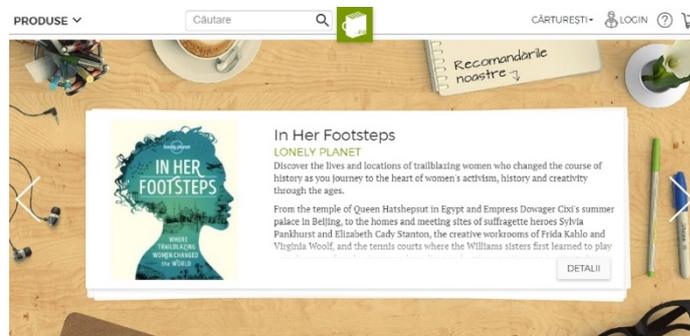
### 3. Results

The layout of the analysis grid:

1. Online communication channels (library website, Facebook page, "About me" page, frequency of postings, content of postings)
2. Message content – targeting and identifying the topics covered (logo, how the organization is perceived behind the text)
3. The verbal message (use of certain words, specific address, subjectivity, language, etc.), where we find:
  - "Language"
    - Register (familiar/colloquial or elevated), everyday language/specialized terms, professional jargon, and language used: English/Romanian + English)
    - Style
    - Subjective marks/marks of objectivity (depending on whether one or the other of these types of brands is present, conclusions will be drawn on the social distance/with the public)
4. The visual message containing:
  - Type of image
  - The theme
  - The presence of the organization's logo
5. Text-to-image association (attention-catching colours, moving/sensitizing images, etc.)
6. Marketing strategies in the online environment.

Applying the Online Communication analysis grid for the "Cărturești" bookstore:

- **The "Cărturești" Website**, with a pleasant design, with a harmonious and wide range of vivid colors, complex graphics; navigation of information is logical, consistent and well-designed. There are unique animations for every theme or subject, which do not bother the eye.



- **The “Cărturești” Blog.** On the website: <https://Cărturești.ro/blog>, readers can find various valuable information such as: news, events, contests, promotions, projects, selection section where articles with various ideas and interviews are posted. As a design, they adopted a much more simple style, where information is displayed in chronological order. There is also the search button in the upper right corner of the page, along with the other online communication tools (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube).



- The **“Cărturești” Facebook page Timisoara**. After the analysis, we noticed that the “Cărturești” page has 10.207 likes and 11.389 followers. Those who follow the page frequently interact in the following ways: like, share, check-in or label in page posts. The Facebook page was opened for the general public on November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2000.
- **The About Me Page** or **„About Us Page”** (Romanian translation) is very well organized; one can find information about the bookstore address and the location on the map, the company's products, its story and the prizes that the bookshop has received.

## Conclusions

In this paper, we have defined and listed the essential concepts of direct communication and media communication, as well as the forms of communication, promotion techniques in the digital environment and the marketing strategies of organizations.

The “Cărturești” bookstore uses several online communication channels, such as: the bookstore website, the blog, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube, the most common among them being the bookstore website, Facebook and the blog. With these online communication tools, “Cărturești” achieves better networking with customers or potential customers, with a very well-developed marketing strategy.

From the analysis of the two bookstores, it appears that some methods or techniques used by the “Cărturești” bookstore can be borrowed and adapted by “Două Bufnițe”. Our suggestion to “Două Bufnițe” so as to make the virtual bookstore more effective is to improve its marketing strategies by adding annual promotions, organizing children's book fairs where price reductions can be made and setting up a customized loyalty program for loyal customers.

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# *The Role of Online Communication in the Start and Growth of a Micro-enterprise. Case study: Dumblegift S.R.L.*

Cristina Budea

**Abstract:** *People's preference for the online environment has become more and more pronounced lately. Companies have adapted to this tendency by embracing new online communication channels. This paper presents both the organic and the paid results of the research conducted on the Facebook page and the Instagram profile of a micro-enterprise. The research aims at highlighting the role of online communication (through social media) as well as at arguing about the importance of its strategic management, by showing how the business's promotion can be improved if certain factors are taken into consideration. The study outlines that the best organic results are obtained on Sundays, in the time frame 12<sup>00</sup>-13<sup>00</sup> or 18<sup>00</sup>-21<sup>00</sup>, during weekdays, or simply by using hashtags and other features (location, tags, etc.). Paid results are always influenced by the ad spend, but targeting also plays an important part. This paper is meant to serve as a starting point for the future strategy of the micro-enterprise, but it might also be useful to other small business owners and/or*

*organisations that target a similar audience and want to find a more effective social media approach.*

**Keywords:** *online communication; social media; micro-enterprise; strategic communication; organic reach; paid reach.*

## **1. Introduction**

The 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. From websites (which are meant for content sharing) to social media (interactive technologies that allow instantaneous communication), it was only a step. But now it seems like there is more to come. These new platforms are constantly evolving, making it hard to think about what they will look like after each upgrade.

The digital revolution has radically changed the rules of the game in the business world. Until recently, a company's external communication used to be focused on media relations. Nowadays, social media allow you to get your message to reach the audience directly. This way, companies can avoid message distortion, gaining full control over the shape, the content, and the direction of transmission (Cismaru, 2015, p. 29). But that is not all. Companies must also keep an eye on the immediate reactions of their customers, since social media contributed to a shift towards the two-way dialogue. The new technologies, based on interaction, opened the door for a two-way communication, in which feedback and instantaneity play a big part (Săvulescu, 2016, p. 64).

With this freedom of communication in the online space, there comes a need for continuous monitoring. The consequences are hard or impossible to prevent. Even though messages are no longer shaped by the media, people have become so sensitive that everything might offend someone. It is therefore very important to pay close attention to

any distortion of organisational messages that may occur at an individual level. Companies must learn how to handle (and to address) negative comments and complaints on social media. Simply deleting them will not do the work. Quite the contrary, it will make people even more furious, damaging the company's reputation and pushing customers away. A social media response strategy is very much needed for both preventing and overcoming a scandal.

The rapid evolution of technology has affected the entire business environment, but micro-enterprises benefit most from the changes. There are a lot of new opportunities for small businesses and some entrepreneurs have started to notice it. In the last couple of years, micro-enterprises in Romania have recorded a positive business growth (Forbes România, 2019). In a country that encourages entrepreneurship, without allocating substantial funding for people who want to start a business, the number of these enterprises will increase due to their size. Micro-enterprises (also known as micro-businesses) are the smallest businesses by number of employees, turnover and share capital (Clasificarea întreprinderilor, 2012).

Since small business owners usually do not have a lot of money and do not get much help from the state, online communication can be a life saver. Although some platforms (such as websites) cost quite a lot to develop, maintain and optimise, others (like social media) are free of charge (unless you want to invest in ads).

Therefore, the topic addressed in this paper is a very current one, given the evolution of technology. By integrating online communication into their strategy, companies (especially small ones) benefit from the numerous advantages brought on by the digital revolution.

This study aims to investigate the relationship between the results obtained by a micro-enterprise on social media and the factors that could have affected these results, differentiating between the organic and the paid impact.

## **2. Research methods**

The research has been conducted on two of the most popular social media networks at the moment, Facebook and Instagram, by analysing the content (text, graphics, images, audio, video) of the posts as well as some of the key performance indicators (KPIs), for a period of three months (8 December 2019 – 8 March 2020). The posts are aimed at a target audience made up of residents of Timișoara, aged 25-50, with high and above-average earnings, who have very little free time (less than 3-4 hours/working day) and/or do not enjoy buying and wrapping presents.

The methods used for this research are content analysis and statistical analysis. Gunter (2000) defined content analysis as “a method of studying and analysing communication in a systematic, objective and quantifiable way, for the purpose of measuring variables”. While content analysis provides qualitative information, statistical analysis shows what happened by using past data from the platforms’ insights. Combined, the two methods are used for understanding audience preferences.

The KPIs included in the research are post reach and engagement. Reach measures the number of unique people (accounts) who saw the post within a certain amount of time (how many people it has reached). Engagement refers to the number of actions performed by users within a certain amount of time on a post (likes, shares, comments, clicks, etc.) (Ciorei, 2017). The factors affecting the results on social media can be the day, the date and the hour when the post was shared, the features that were used (location, tags, hashtags, etc.) and last, but not least, the particularity of the content.

## **3. Results**

### **Organic results**

For a better understanding of the problem, a sample of the summarised data (the last three weeks of February 2020) will be analysed; the period

has been chosen in order to avoid addressing the fluctuations caused by an increase in the number of followers or by the Holiday Season.

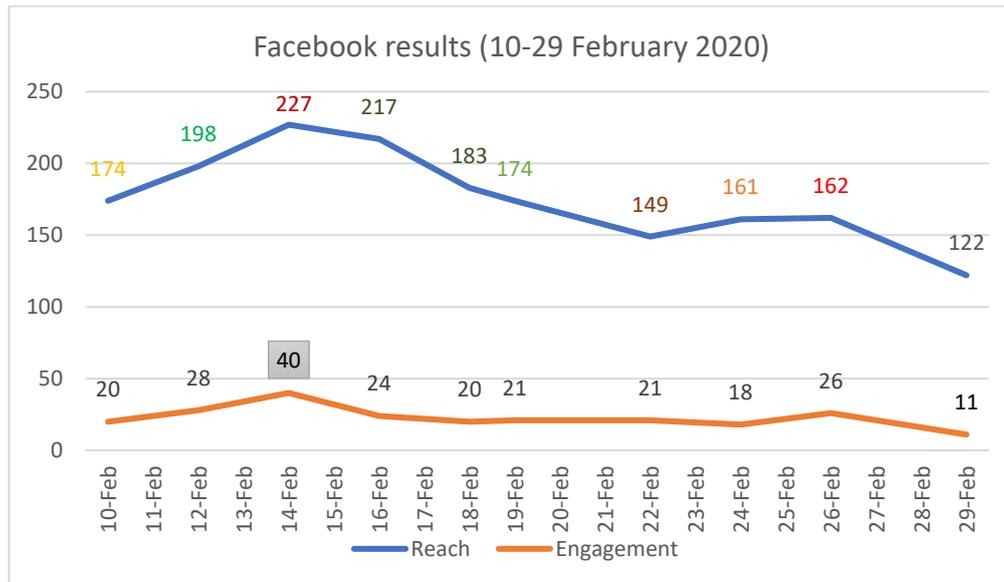


Fig. 1 Post reach and engagement on Facebook (10-29 February 2020)

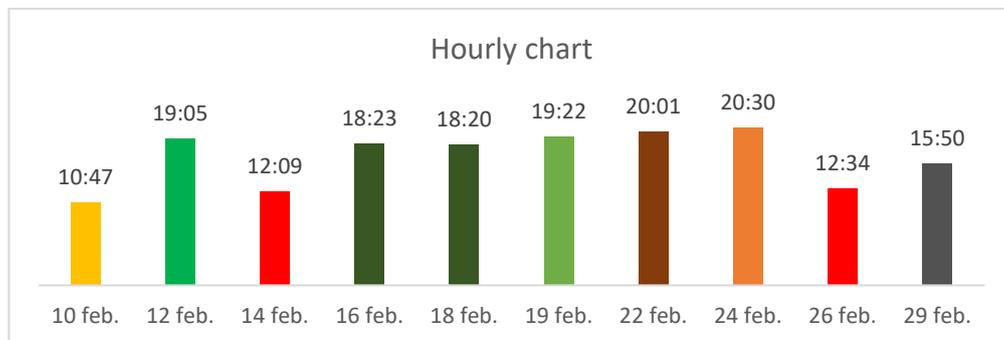


Fig. 2 Hourly chart for Facebook posts (10-29 February 2020)

On Facebook, there are no significant variations regarding the engagement. The maximum value (40) was reached on 14 February. The post matches the theme of the day and has all the potential to visually attract social media scrollers. The image shows a heart-shaped chocolate in front of the Eiffel Tower and calls for a “Happy Valentine’s Day”.

As for the reach, results prove that mainstream holidays can be a good time to share content on Facebook. That same Valentine’s Day post scored the highest reach: 227 unique people. Sundays are also an option. The second highest reach out of this three-week period was on a Sunday (16 February), probably because it is officially a free day and people have more spare time.

As seen in Fig. 1, the reach line forms two positive curvatures, one with the maximum value on 14 February and another with the maximum value on 26 February. These two posts were both shared in the time frame 12<sup>00</sup>-13<sup>00</sup>, which is known to be recommended by specialists as it corresponds to the lunch break (on working days). If we take a look at the other hours and keep in mind the two curvatures, it is safe to say that the posts with good results were shared after six o'clock in the afternoon (18<sup>00</sup>): 18:20 - reach 183, 19:05 - reach 198, 19:22 - reach 174, 20:30 - reach 161. Apparently, the best time seems to be around 19<sup>00</sup>, as the reach slowly drops toward evening.

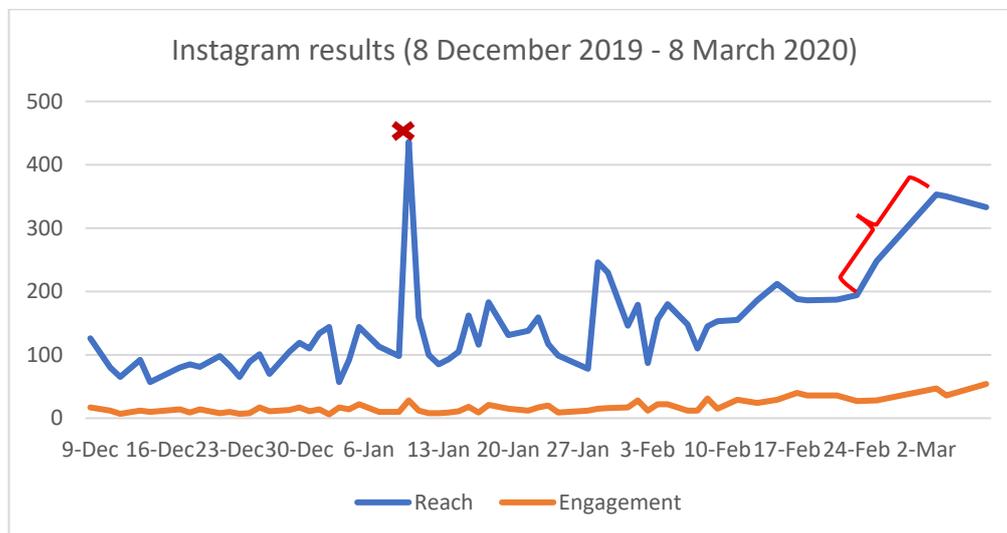


Fig. 3 Post reach and engagement on Instagram (8 December 2019 – 8 March 2020)

Referring to the same indicators (post reach and engagement), this time on Instagram, we notice that the two have developed quite

differently. In order not to lose sight of the bigger picture, not only a sample (as above), but the summarised data of the whole period (8 December 2019 – 8 March 2020) will be analysed.

The slight increase in the engagement seems pretty logical due to the evolution of the Facebook page, although it is somehow slow (it becomes noticeable only in February - March). The reach, on the other hand, has had more of a chaotic evolution. Two things stand out: a much stronger increase at the beginning of March because of a giveaway hosted by Dumblegift with the occasion of the International Women's Day and the maximum value of the reach (436) on 10 January 2020. The insights of the post which scored this reach show that out of 467 impressions (the total number of times a post has been displayed), 369 come from hashtags.

Other factors that affect the results on Instagram are the features used for every post, such as tagging and location, the number of followers and, of course, the content. As a platform of photo-sharing, the main focus is on the visuals. The quality of the pictures, the brightness, the saturation, all of these influence the organic results, but the extent to which every single one of them impacts the reach and the engagement remains uncertain. For my target audience, there is a tendency, though, to engage more with high quality and warm-tone images.

### **Paid results**

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 located in Timișoara, aged 20-55. Depending on each paid post, some of the targeting criteria were:

- interests in the business's field of activity: gifts, gift wrapping, Christmas gifts, personalised gifts, birthday gifts, home delivery;

- general interests: family, friends, birthdays, holidays; particular interests: (for instance) cosmetics, clothes, fashion, beauty;
- interests in: small businesses, entrepreneurship, local businesses.

Other targeting criteria also included:

- the workplace (e.g. employees of a big corporation);
- upcoming birthdays/anniversaries (e.g. friends/close friends of people with birthdays within a week/month).

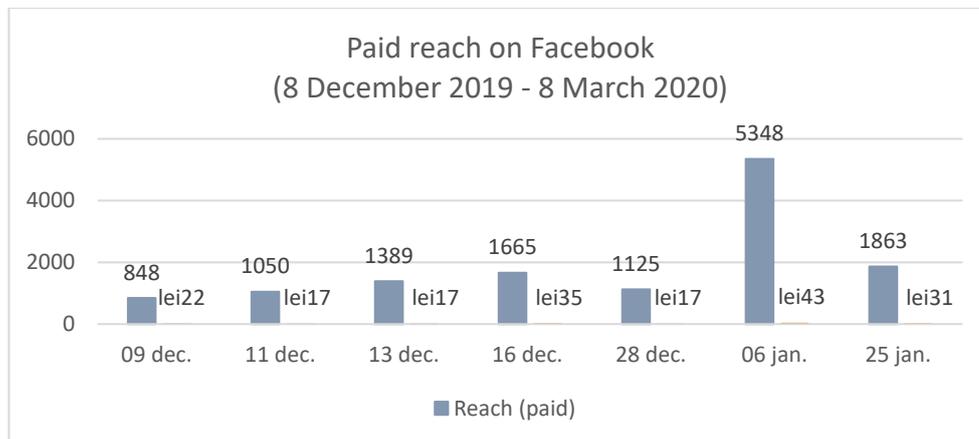


Fig. 4 Reach + amount spent for every paid post on Facebook (8 December 2019 – 8 March 2020)

During the three-month period (8 December 2019 – 8 March 2020), there has been a total of seven boosted posts on Facebook, all with a duration of 1-2 days. The average amount of money spent in a day was 16.64 lei. 43 lei (21.50 lei/day) was the largest amount spent by the micro-enterprise for an ad and it proved to be effective, since the post scored the highest reach. Anyway, there seems to be more to it. Given the fact that the differences in the amounts spent are hardly so big, it was probably the targeting that influenced the results. The post consists of an image with the quote “Eat cake. It’s somebody’s birthday somewhere”, which is why birthday-related targeting criteria were

used. Except for this specific post, no definite conclusions could be drawn from juggling different criteria on Facebook.

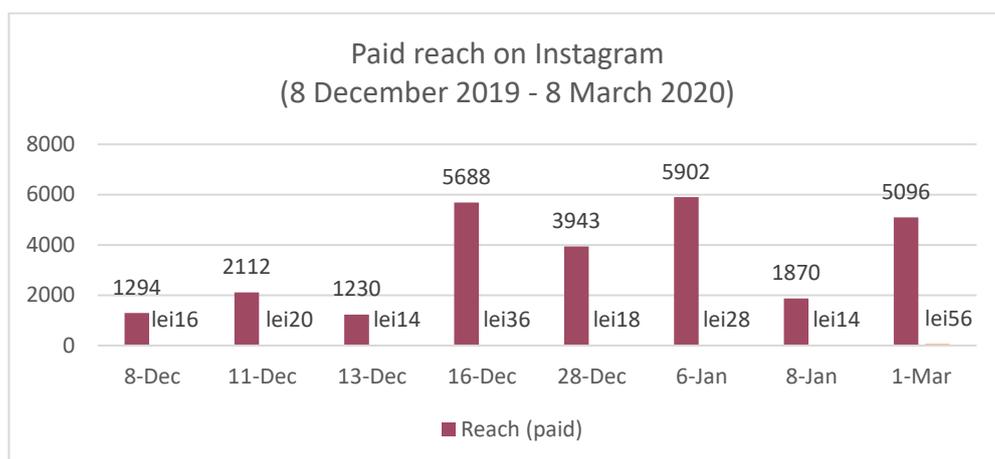


Fig. 5 Reach + amount spent for every paid post on Instagram (8 December 2019 – 8 March 2020)

The best results on Instagram are obviously obtained by the posts with the highest ad spend. Out of these, however, the smallest amount (28 lei) brought the highest reach (5902). This is the same post as the one on Facebook, which means that the targeting criteria were very similar. Therefore, it can be assumed that (a) this kind of content has a tendency to go viral, (b) the targeting was done right or (c) both.

Finally, the post, dated 1 March, brought the best long-term results. It was used to announce the giveaway for the International Women's Day, hosted by Dumblegift. In order to participate, people had to follow the business's account and to tag other users in the comments. The post had a budget of 56 lei, distributed over 4 consecutive days. Because the prize was a fragrance for women, some of the targeting criteria were interests in self-care, cosmetics, perfumes, make-up, perfumery, shopping, Sephora, etc. The strategy has worked: the contest generated nearly 1,000 entries, boosting the number of followers for the micro-enterprise and attracting an average number of 900 profile visits in merely a couple of days.

### **Expert sources consulted**

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

According to Cismaru, “online social networks are online communication platforms which use software instruments, but work in a similar way as natural social networks, based on direct interpersonal contacts” (2015, pp. 58-59). Social media are seen by specialists as “extremely profitable promotion tools, but also as means through which companies can interact with their customers, offering assistance” (Sălcudean, 2015, p. 135). Social media is a collective term for websites and applications that enable users to create, post, and share their own content or the content created by others. Out of the many types, a few can be mentioned, such as blogging (Blogger), social networking (Facebook), photo sharing (Instagram), video sharing (YouTube), microblogging (Twitter), etc.

Since the research was conducted on a micro-enterprise, it is only fair to clarify this term. In Romania, a micro-enterprise is a business that, by the end of the previous fiscal year, has had a turnover of maximum 1,000,000 euros, a share capital not owned by the state or by administrative territorial units and is not in dissolution, followed by liquidation (Codul fiscal actualizat, 2020).

For such small businesses, social media (as part of their online communication strategy) present numerous advantages, the most significant of which might be the reduced costs.

## **Conclusion**

Not only should companies be aware of the importance of online communication and the changes that have occurred with it, but they must also understand the difficulty of managing these new (online) channels. It is highly required, especially for small businesses, to conduct tests on social media platforms, in order to see which factors affect their results most and how they can make use of them. It would be a shame not to take advantage of the many benefits brought by the online environment for both communication (direct, two-way communication, feedback, instantaneity, diversified content, interaction, etc.) and marketing (e-mail marketing, content marketing, social media marketing, pay per click, etc.) (Alexander, 2020).

Following the study, it can be agreed that some factors do indeed influence the post reach and the engagement on social media. The results, however, are only conclusive for the micro-enterprise in question. Unfortunately, there are no general rules, mainly because every company addresses a different audience and needs to see what works best for theirs. The results confirmed some of the theories, such as the ones claiming that the best time to post is at noon or on weekends, but invalidated others, such as those which argue that the peak audience time is around 2100 (the peak audience time for Dumblegift was around 1900) (Orel, 2020).

Nowadays, we talk about strategic communication, defined as “the intentional use of communication, by an organisation, for the purpose of fulfilling its mission” (Hallahan, Holtzhausen, van Ruler, Vercic & Sriramesh, 2007). Therefore, it is out of the question not to use such promising channels. Efficiently managing these new online platforms becomes a must for the micro-enterprises that want to survive on the market.

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# *Online Communication Channels in a Company. Case study: Bosch Service Solutions*

Alexandra Diana Rafila

**Abstract:** *In the article “Online Communication Channels in a Company. Case study: Bosch Service Solutions”, we highlight the communication platforms within the IT Service Desk project, the quality and transmission of information. In many companies, a lot of tools have been analyzed and made available for people to communicate with each other. At the moment, there is a need for efficiency and speed in our daily interactions. Effective communication enables one to send a clear message as soon as possible. Mastering effective business communication has a positive impact on the management of professional relationships and organizational behavior. More precisely, to meet the need for communication and to make human interaction more effective and simple, organizations provide various platforms where employees can share ideas, debate different topics, communicate with colleagues, including those from other departments in the organization. There are many ways of communicating and transmitting information online at Bosch and each has its own specificities. The way in which messages or information are sent is*

*extremely important. Either in writing or orally, we must consider the type of channel available. Various platforms and programs are available within the IT Service Desk project, so that employees can communicate with their colleagues, solve the problems faced by users, provide feedback, etc.*

**Keywords:** *communication, company, chat, information, effectiveness.*

## **1. Introduction**

The purpose of our work is to identify the main communication channels in a company, the frequency of their usage and the level of communication effectiveness. Analysing the various types of channels, each with its own characteristics, we were able to find out how specific information is transferred and how a message is sent from one colleague to another.

Communication channels are tools used by companies to establish a relationship with their customers or with their employees, and to communicate with their public. They improve the experience between the customer and the brand, stimulating marketing, generating company recognition and sales impact.

Communication channels create a bridge between the firm and its public. Therefore, knowing what they are and how they work, the chosen communication channels are essential in attracting the right customer for the brand, because this will be the foundation for the digital marketing strategy. There is no specific channel that brings big results. Everything depends on the business and the customer profile that will take shape over time. But since there are multiple communication channels, one should offer customers multiple ways to reach the company.

The following are online communication channels suitable for a company: Social media, blogs, email marketing, support, videos, forums, a

channel for complaints. Depending on the company, these channels may be aimed at the customers or the employees of the company.

## **2. Research method**

As the co-author of this paper has been working at the same company for almost 4 years, she is extremely familiar with its channels and she was able to make a comprehensive analysis of each channel.

As a research method, we have chosen the interview. Interviews can be defined as a qualitative research technique which involves “conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program or situation” (Boyce, 2016).

The interview consists of 19 open questions and it was administered to 35 employees at Bosch Service Solutions.

Based on the respondents’ answers, we received concrete examples and learned more about their opinion. We encouraged the interviewees to go into detail as far as possible, allowing them to be as free and honest as possible in their expression, so that we can get an image as close as possible to the truth.

As for the location of the interview, it was carried out online, on the well-known platform Skype for Business. We would have liked to take the interview face-to face at the company, but because of the 2020 pandemic, we had to rely on an online channel.

The interview lasted 25-30 minutes. Some sessions lasted even longer, because the respondents wanted to give us concrete examples, and even ideas for improving some communication channels we use daily but which are frequently avoided due to flaws. The interviews spread over 2 weeks. The respondents selected for the interview are colleagues with whom the co-author of the paper interacts every day, which led to a more informal

relationship between the two sides as well as to more honesty and lack of any constraints on the part of the interviewees.

### 3. Results

Based on the respondents' answers, we were able to analyze the following issues: general problems related to the effectiveness of communication when they send messages, how they manage to understand a message, differences in communication between the virtual and the real-life environment, the communication channels they frequently use, etc.

As for the preferred chat channel, 77,1% of respondents chose Skype, whereas only 22,9% chose Teams (Fig. 1). The frequency of use of the chosen channels was as follows: 25 out of 35 interviewees said "always", while the rest used 9 or less on a scale from 1 to 10.

What is your favorite internal communication channel?

35 responses

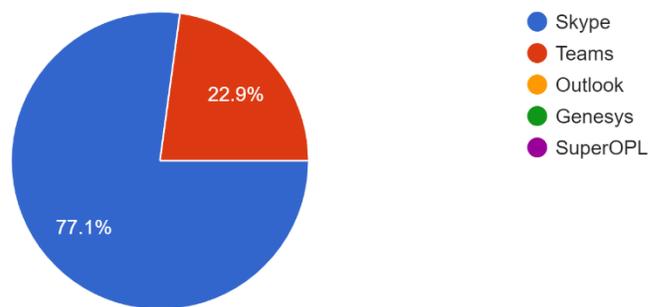


Fig.1 – Favorite chat channel

When it comes to sharing important information to a large group (+50 users), most respondents said that they shared information through email, via *Outlook*. When someone is working from home, urgent information or

very important information should be sent verbally, in Skype meetings. Under normal working conditions (at the office), this type of information is best transmitted orally in a meeting.

In what concerns giving feedback, all the respondents considered it better to submit important information online (via Feedback tracker, e-mail or chat), in order to have either a sample of what is said or a timeline of facts. (fig. 2)

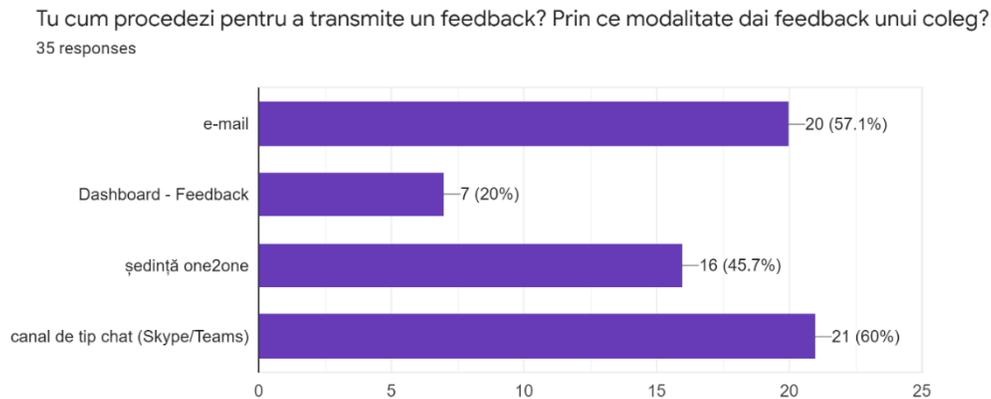


Fig. 2 – Preferred way to give feedback

When it comes to solving technical problems or explaining solutions, respondents chose several tools that are used every day. Whether it is from a customer or a colleague, the problem or the request must be solved in the most effective way. The graph below shows what colleagues use to solve various incidents. Agents who interact with customers benefit from the diversity of intranet platforms and numerous programs that can make their work easier, but everything depends on them when it comes to solving a request. Accordingly, they can choose from links, screenshots, graphs, etc. to solve the issue in the best and quickest way.

## Conclusions

It was essential for us to make a difference between the two types of communication in an organization: online channels and face-to-face communication.

Each program we use is intended to make communication more effective and to provide various tools that can facilitate good and complex communication (image sharing, screen sharing, various documents such as MS Office documents, (video) calls, etc.). The question was: *How do you explain a solution to a colleague or a customer?* (fig.3)

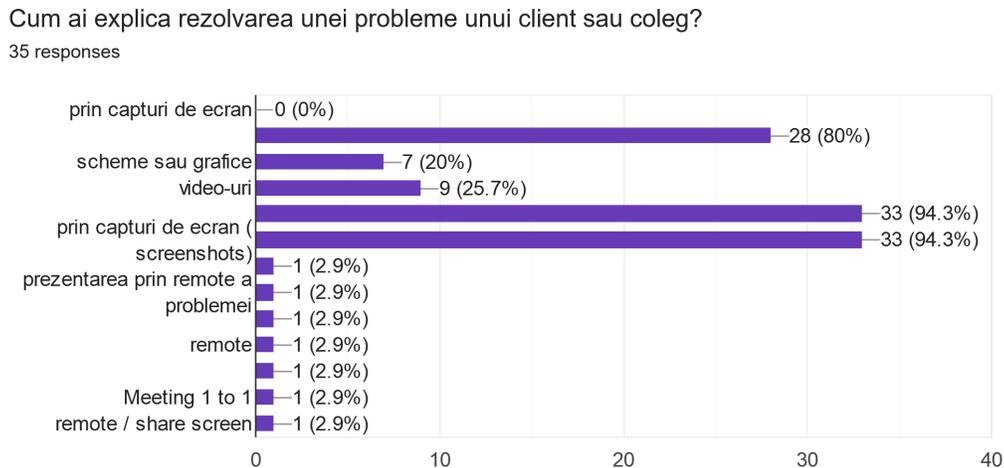


Fig. 3 – Tools to solve problems

As for the results of the interview, we have noticed that several respondents (or all, in some cases), share the same opinion about the same programs and each is motivated to be as productive and effective as possible. The message should be sent as simply as possible, whatever the problem, by avoiding technical vocabulary, so that the other person can

understand it easily. Open communication is also effective. If people can talk openly to each other and in a calm way, without differences, then communication is as effective. For the message to be understood there must be no haste in speech and the vocabulary used should be general.

A major result that we have found was the following. Although the respondents hold different project positions (some 1st-level agents, some 2nd-level and some team leaders), they have similar interests in communication. They have chosen the same tools in order to solve problems and they try to explain a certain problem in the same way: using as many tools as they can, so that the other person can fully and effectively solve their issue. In the end, we can say that they all want the same thing: to be understood.

Consequently, the internal online communication channels available in a company should be used to their maximum potential due to the significant impact they have on how people create privacy in conversations. Online communication is more and more popular nowadays, it is encouraged and makes it easier for everyone to move online, but people need to interact and will still tend to use face-to-face communication.

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# *Online Promotion Strategies Used by Iulius Town Timișoara*

Georgiana - Maria Sîrca

**Abstract:** *The starting point of this paperwork lies in the desire to study the way online platforms are used by the largest business, retail and entertainment hubs in western Romania. Events are per definition limited in time and space. However, the social interaction taking place before, during and after the events can continue online. As the online environment seems to become a priority for promoting different activities, our intention is to analyse the ways in which such a business retail company is promoted online, as well as how it interacts with the audience, in an attempt to attract new customers. The paper “Online Promotion Strategies Used by Iulius Town Timișoara” aims to develop a framework for online interaction strategies, resulting from several comparisons made at various periods of time. We will highlight a content analysis of social platforms, as well as a qualitative analysis by designing an interview addressed to the marketing specialists working at various companies.*

**Keywords:** *events, strategies, online platforms, social media*

## **1. Introduction**

The main objective of this paper is to illustrate the online promotion of a mixed project, an urban regeneration project for Timișoara. Given the

fact that nowadays people spend a lot of time online, the information distributed by a retail business with the help of the internet engages the online community to interact more, involving them in the company's activities. People put their trust in a company, so online promotion is a very important element which can help the company gain new customers. Moreover, there are interactions between event attendees who have met during an event and who maintain their friendship online, the photographs from the event are shared and commented on, sometimes publicly, for example on the Facebook page of the event. Our case study shows the way in which the image of such a large business, retail and entertainment hub in the Western region is promoted to the community.

## **2. Research method**

As research methods, we have chosen monitoring the online communication tools used by Iulius Town Timișoara, the content analysis of their posts on Facebook, Instagram and Youtube, and the content analysis of the online press, as well as an interview with an employee who works at Iulius Town, in the field of marketing.

For this research, two periods of time have been chosen. We will determine the presence of Iulius Town on online platforms by comparing two different months: August 2019 and April 2020. Located in the center of Timișoara, Iulius Town is the most important real estate project inaugurated in 2019 on the Romanian market.

Content analysis is useful to see how traditional methods are transferred to the online environment, how often the social media platforms are used by such a company as the Iulius group, the frequency of their posts, the number of followers, the number of likes and also the number of comments.

The interview is a qualitative research tool that we will use to obtain meaningful information from someone working at Iulius Town Timișoara and will provide more details about the company's promotion strategy. Interviews are the most common and at the same

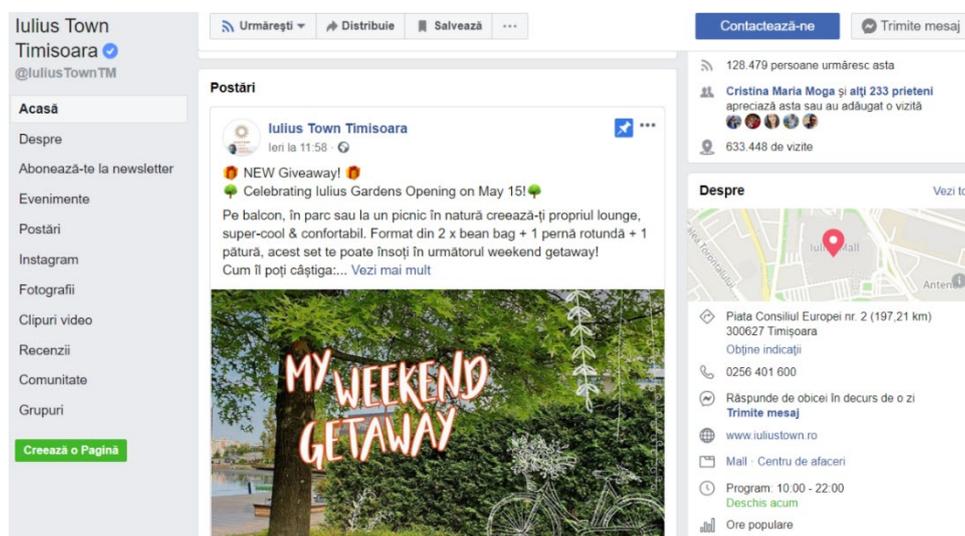
time the most valuable qualitative method of market research. They involve a conversation based on a large number of questions asked by the researcher to find out the interviewees' beliefs and the perceptions that underlie their behavior. The interview we intend to administer contains 8 short questions, designed to find out more details about the promotion of Iulius Town in the online environment as well as in the traditional one. This will provide us with an overview of their promotion strategies.

### **3. Results**

The following example is the content analysis of the Facebook page of Iulius Town Timișoara. The official page of Iulius Town Timișoara (<https://www.facebook.com/IuliusTownTM/>, accessed on 20.03.2020) was created in 2010. This page was originally named Iulius Town, but in 2020 the page name was changed. Currently, the page has 121,533 likes and 128,384 followers, and the number is increasing steadily.

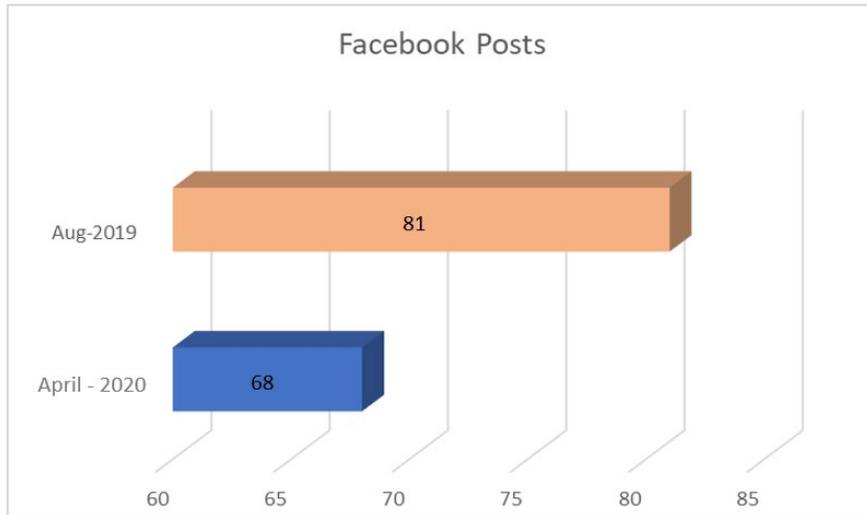
By analysing the Facebook page of Iulius Town Timișoara we noticed that the page is very active and posts on average twice a day about the projects that take place, the services it offers to the customers, the events that will take place and it also informs about promotions inside the Iulius Town restaurants and shops.

The main page contains a section with the specific buttons “Follow”, “Like”, “Send message”, “Contact us”, but there are also the following categories: “Home”, “About”, “Subscribe to the newsletter”, “Events”, “Posts”, “Instagram”, “Photos”, “Videos”, “Reviews”, “Community”, “Groups”. These buttons help users to follow what they are interested in more easily.



Also, we noticed that the category “Subscribe to the newsletter” appears on the main page, which is a good strategy for promotion using the email marketing method. If the section is accessed, the user is redirected to a registration form. Once accessed, it can be seen that the platform used for email marketing is MailChimp.

The concept of multichannel is applied within the Facebook page. The phone number of Iulius Town, its address, its location on the map, its web page address and its operating hours are displayed. Comparing the two time intervals, August 2019 and May 2020, some significant changes have been noticed. Iulius Town was active on the Facebook page both month. In August, there was a total of 81 posts, while in April the total number of posts was 68.



In August 2019, 80% of the posts were about to the inauguration of Iulius Town, in contrast with april 2020, when Iulius Town was affected by the crisis period caused by Covid19 and the messages referred only to Auchan promotions or to the "Donate today, smile tomorrow!" campaign. This campaign, launched by IULIUS company, provides the community with a platform that allows anyone to donate any amount of money, supporting the hospitals in Timișoara in the fight against the Coronavirus. All of them were multimedia content posts.



Virtual photo frame

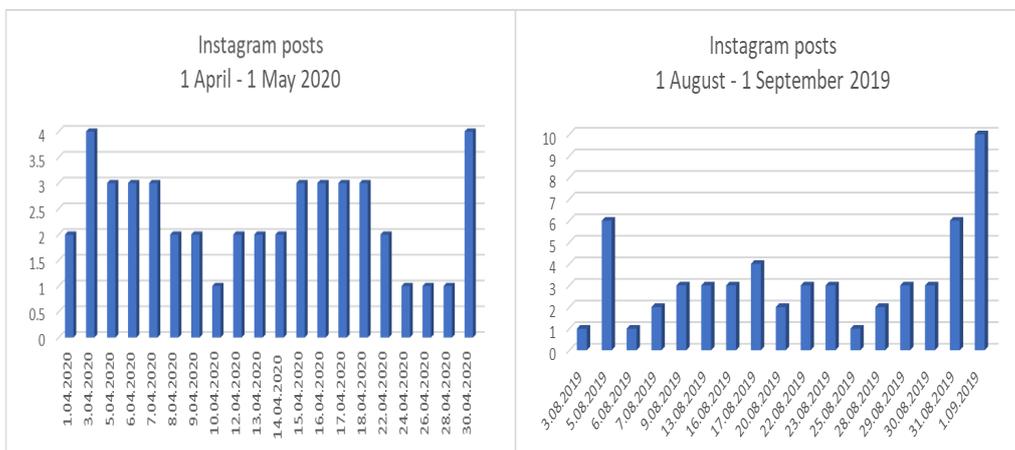


Cover Facebook

In August 2019, a very good way to promote was relying on posters and personalized photographs created by the specialists in charge of the official Facebook page. There were a multitude of photos designed to make the inauguration of Iulius Town known to the community. On August 31<sup>st</sup>, Timișoara broke a new Guinness World Record when the most LED lights lit simultaneously.

Iulius Town Timișoara also has an Instagram page that currently has 10,800 followers and 806 posts. Specific contact information has been added, such as the link to the website, the address, but also a short description in bio: "My Town".

In the charts below, it can be seen that in August there were a large number of Instagram posts. Similarly to Facebook, all posts covered the Iulius Town inauguration and the three-day festival full of events for the community. Thanks to all these posts, the public can find out in advance about the events taking place and they can also share the information to their groups.



The official Youtube page of Iulius Town (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWe1xsQMb6cEv7p38U6iwxQ/f> eatured, accessed on 14.04.2020) was created on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019 and has 1,043,136 views and 311 subscribers. Currently, Iulius Town has 32 uploaded videos. During August, Iulius Town had 15 videos uploaded on Youtube. The figures in the table below show that the most

widespread video was “Stabilim un nou Record Mondial – 31 aug”, with a total of 498,867 views. In contrast, no videos were uploaded on Youtube in April.

	Video title	Views	Likes
1	Record Mondial - Tutorial - Folosire Bratara	945	4
2	Stabilim un nou Record Mondial - 31 aug	498,867	18
3	Luminăm #TimișoaraÎmpreună	245	5
4	Iulius Town - Iulius Gardens	2,351	33
5	UnderTown 4	165	0
6	UnderTown 6	57	1
7	UnderTown 7	49	0
8	UnderTown 1	57,752	2
9	UnderTown 2	61	1
10	UnderTown 5	27,730	2
11	UnderTown 3	37,196	2
12	IULIUS TOWN - YOUR NEW SHOPPING DESTINATION	327,323	6
13	Iulius Town - United Business Center Timisoara	2,469	46
14	Iulius Town - Iulius Mall Timișoara	2,331	36
15	Oamenii IULIUS	1,526	20

To conclude, Iulius Town uses online communication tools to a great extent. However, the analysis of the two different periods of time shows that the content of the messages has changed significantly over time. August was a month full of events, the company attracted customers and enjoyed notoriety, whereas April was a time of crisis and this was felt as well by Iulius Town.

#### 4. Expert sources consulted

The topic addressed in this paper highlights how a company can use social platforms in a good way to promote itself. Everyone uses social platforms to communicate, spread information and find out about a variety of things. Promotion is a complex process, which has a decisive impact on the effectiveness of an organization's activity. Promotion is the effort made by an organization through which it can present its offer in a positive light, so as to sell as much as possible. However, this approach

is considered simplistic, and the true power of promotion is to create a certain image of an event, product, service or organization (Zbucea, Pînzaru & Galalae, 2009, p. 24).

In „Event Marketing. How to successfully promote events, festivals, conventions and expositions“, Leonard H. Hoyle (2002, p. 30) states that, regardless of the nature of the event, its success will largely depend on the promotion. Promotion is vital to creating awareness of the event, to instilling the desire to participate in the public and the feeling that the investment of time and money validates the benefits offered by the event.

Camelia Cmeciuc (2013, p. 133) argues that the strategies used in online public relations campaigns are diverse. There are three campaign strategies addressed to the online public: the information and interactivity strategy, the connection strategy, and the participation and mobilization strategy. The message is a key element in promotion campaigns. It must be designed to elicit a reaction from the target audience, such as purchasing products, participating in various actions and changing behaviour. The communication for promotion must be addressed both to those in the internal environment of the company and to those in the external environment.

In the article “Placing Romania on the map: the quest for recognition through Guinness Book Records“, Mariana Cernicova (2017, p. 5) points out that Timișoara is considered “a city of premieres” and exemplifies many significant initiatives that happened there. Timișoara has succeeded in securing three records: one registered by the cartoonist Ștefan Popa and two linked to the identity of the city. Thanks to all these premieres, the city caught media attention.

In “Digital Marketing Excellence: Planning, Optimizing and Integrating Online“, P. R. Smith (2017, p. 33) points out that the use of the Internet has led to the creation of the new concept of online marketing, with a new model of buyer and seller. This type of marketing helps businesses be present where the customers are always present: online. There is no doubt that digital marketing can help build a brand.

Many analysts see digital marketing as a way to build both the brand image and the overall company value.

Content strategy on Facebook should focus on the following steps: finding the audience's interests, the topics covered, the content, the length of the texts, the frequency of the posts, the right time to post. When the interests of the audience are known, it is easier to communicate a message of interest. Content strategy needs to include the times to post various photos, videos and links. An effective way to attract as many users on a page can be to post daily about the company's activities. It is recommended to use keywords to write online texts. For example, for trading strategies on Facebook, some keywords can be: "event", "win", "winner". Posts that generate comments are the ones that contain questions, and it is usually a good idea to ask the question at the end of the text (Bădău, 2011, pp. 144-154).

## **Conclusion**

This research has helped us realise the impact promotion can have on organizing different events, the workload needed and the importance to have well-defined strategies to contribute to development of the business.

By using content analysis, we found out that the online environment is a means of communication used a lot by Iulius Town to promote itself among the online community, and the social media is used as a way to promote existing events but also to attract customers.

The newsletter is another strategy that Iulius Town uses to promote itself. We are living in the age of Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, but email is still a promotion channel that brings sales to retailers, especially when it comes to customer loyalty.

The city of Timișoara enjoys a distinct identity, the inauguration of Iulius Town offering the city the chance to present itself as different, in a positive way. We can say that it was a city branding strategy.

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# *Social Media Advertising During the COVID-19 Pandemic*

Lorena Dumitru

**Abstract:** *Social Media is the place where we share ideas and thoughts. It is the place where we go when we want to read the news, entertain ourselves or just talk to our friends and family. For businesses, Social Media is the place where they can reach out for customers very easily using all the tools that platforms have to offer. But what happens with all of these when a lot of people become unemployed or they have to work from home? Or when traveling is banned? Everyone turns to technology and online communication undergoes some changes in this context. The aim of this article is to analyze how COVID-19 has changed the way businesses communicate and how we can adapt and respond as a brand during these uncertain times.*

**Keywords:** *social media, pandemic, advertising, marketing.*

## **I. Introduction**

### **1.1. Definition of Social Media**

Social media is a collective term for websites and applications which focus on communication, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration.

On these networks, people can contribute by posting different kinds of content such as: personal information, documents, videos and photos (Rouse, 2019).

While there are a lot of marketing strategies that businesses can use to promote themselves, only one is successful in almost every case: Social Media Advertising. Social Media Advertising can increase sales and brand awareness, businesses can keep in touch very easily with customers and they can see what their competitors are doing and how (Newberry, 2018).

There are a few social media networks where advertising can be very successful (Statista, 2020):

- Facebook – with 2.45B active users/month
- Instagram – with 1B active users/month
- Twitter – with 330M active users/month
- LinkedIn – with 310M active users/month,

## **1.2. Regular posts**

Even if businesses are aware of the impact of Social Media, many of them are still not making full use of these platforms. For the benefit of the business, brands have to invest time, effort and money. This means that regular posts on Social Media can increase brand awareness and visibility and customers can see more of the brand. Between 3-5 posts per week on Social Media will build loyalty and credibility (Fyfee, 2020).

## **1.3. Paid ads**

On these Social Media networks, especially on Facebook and Instagram, marketers create paid ads with different objectives: brand awareness, store traffic or website traffic, reach, app installs, engagement, video views and many more. Depending on the subject of the post, we can choose the one objective that suits our strategy, create an audience, choose the duration of the ad and add a budget. Regular posts on Social

Media and ad campaigns for almost every single post are the key to success for brands, because those ads will always reach to new clients and regular posts will keep the relationship strong with the actual clients.

## II. How the pandemic has changed the way businesses communicate

A lot of brands and businesses teamed up with their advertising agencies and used their creativity to make sure that they are spreading powerful messages and that their communication with their customers is correct and efficient during the pandemic (Wikipedia, 2020).

### 2.1. Coca-Cola

Coca-Cola wanted to make sure that people understand that social distancing is very important and that they observe the rules (Schultz, 2020). To send their message, they changed their logo and they used a billboard on Times Square, New York, to show the new logo with extended spaces between letters + the headline: *“Staying apart is the best way to stay united”* (Figure 1). Also, the campaign was very successful on social media, given the number of shares.



Fig. 1: Times Square Billboard. Source: adage.com



 **Spotlight Heritage Timisoara** ...  
Published by Lorena Jaqueline [?] · May 11 at 5:47 PM · 

Nimic nu se compară cu o plimbare prin cartierele din Timișoara, într-o zi însorită de primăvară. 🌸  
Dar cum ar fi dacă în timp ce admiri fascinantele clădiri, afli istoricul prețios al acestora?  
Descarcă aplicația Spotlight Timișoara pentru Android pe [bit.ly/spotlight-heritage-google](https://bit.ly/spotlight-heritage-google) sau pentru iOS pe [bit.ly/spotlight-heritage-appstore](https://bit.ly/spotlight-heritage-appstore) și bucură-te de o plimbare virtuală prin oraș! 🗺️

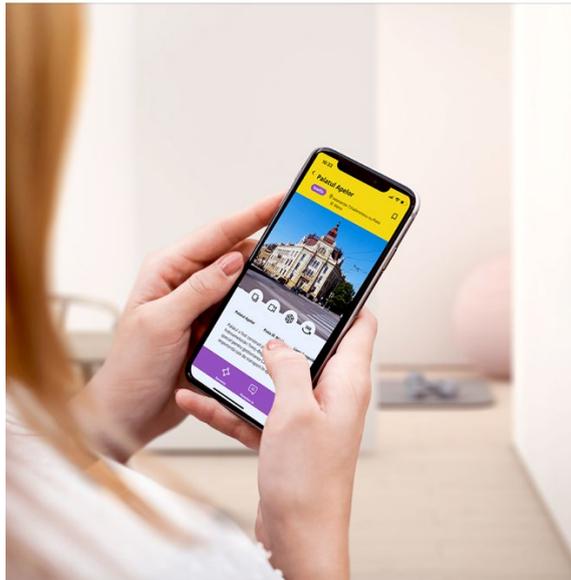


Fig. 3. CTA adapted

### 3.2. Keep in touch with customers more than ever

Social Media is the place where people can interact with brands, posts or services, but most important is the fact that they can interact with businesses to ask questions for which they can receive a quick answer. Even if we have a conversation about a review, a comment or a message, we have the possibility to shape the view of the customer about our brand or product (Gregory, 2019).

### 3.3. Interact more

Questions like “How was your weekend?” to a text post, or posts like a video or a poll can easily increase the interaction and therefore, the credibility. Also, there is a big chance for them to answer and interact with the brand/business (Figure 4).



Fig. 4. Poll added on a video

### Use the channels where the audience spends the most time on

Most people spend a lot of time on social media and they have an account on more than just one platform. To avoid losing them, find out which are the platforms that the audience is on. Maybe they use just Instagram and Facebook, or they have just discovered TikTok and they love it. A brand has to consider all the platforms in order to reach to new customers or keep in touch with the old ones.

### Conclusions

Business were not prepared for times like these, but with some creativity, experience and strategy, things can work very well on Social Media even in these times. Social Media has managed to keep some

businesses on top during the pandemic, and if some business somehow closed, or paused for a while, maybe they should have used Social Media and not just give up. Social Media is the place where we can share opinions and experiences and it is very important to know what it can offer us and how we can use it.

Based on my research, I have proposed 5 steps to successfully adapt communication during the pandemic:

- Pivot and adapt
- Keep in touch with customers more than ever
- Interact more
- Use the channels where the audience spends the most time on.

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# *Online Social Networks and Social Capital. Case Study: Facebook*

Anka-Roxana Şuba

**Abstract:** *The use of online social networks is increasing significantly in terms of the number of users, as the technological infrastructure is constantly evolving, causing certain effects on student behavior. This paper presents and analyzes how online social networks shape and change human behavior through the exchange of messages that it facilitates. Previous research has shown a link between perceptions of social capital and the use of the online social network Facebook. To identify the positive and negative effects of online social networks, we used data from 217 students at the University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Banat "King Michael I of Romania" in Timisoara (USAMVBT), Faculty of Management and Rural Tourism. Facebook is frequently used by students for many purposes; overall, the highest percentages are in the range "Very often" - "Often" (51.58% for women and 43.95% for men, taken together). With this paper, we want to develop and empirically validate a research model on intentional social action in online social networks and social capital. As a case study, we chose the most popular online social network, namely Facebook, because this online communication platform (and not only) has an increased impact on students' motivation to learn, on emotional learning and classroom climate.*

**Keywords:** *online social networks, social capital, students, communication, Facebook.*

## 1. Introduction

**Online social networks** are an essential component of the virtual space, being defined as “online applications that help connect friends, business partners and interest groups” (Mitruțiu, 2005, p. 1). On the other hand, the traditional (offline) social network is defined as a “map of relationships between individuals, which points to the ways in which they are connected through various degrees of social familiarity, starting from accidental acquaintances to strong family ties ”(Mitruțiu, 2005, p. 1). Through online social networks, the socio-economic dimension is highlighted, the virtual environment having a major social impact, in a context characterized by the permanent evolution of the contemporary society. Facebook is one of the most popular online social networking platforms.

Social capital is created by the patterns of interdependence and social interaction that appear in a modern society. Previous research has shown a link between perceptions of social capital and the use of the popular social networking site Facebook. Reciprocity is a key facet of social capital. The expectation of reciprocity is an inherent component of building social capital, although expectations can be violated (Teevan, 2011). One way in which social capital is maintained is through social care activities and other relationship maintenance behaviors that signal attention to one's own network. Facebook is an effective context for achieving these types of social interaction.

Social capital describes the benefits that individuals can access through their social network; these benefits may include emotional support, material support, and new information (Putnam, 2000). Thus, the establishment of one's own social network is directly related to the level of perceived social capital. The relationships between perceived social capital and activities with the online social network have been examined by many social media studies (Burke, Marlow & Lento, 2010).

## **2. Material and methods**

The first stage of the study consisted in studying the bibliography to which we could have access, given the conditions of the pandemic period: we relied on online foreign bibliographic sources almost exclusively, as the effects of online social networks on social capital do not seem to be of much interest to Romanian researchers.

As one of the requirements for the master's dissertation is to use only recent bibliography from the last ten years, we have analyzed only synthesis studies and thematic studies from 2010 on. Reading this bibliography has helped us better understand what social capital looks like from an information and communication technology perspective and why online social networks in general, and Facebook in particular, are a threat to privacy because of their influence on communication.

At the same time, the bibliography we consulted helped us outline the questionnaire we used for the case study, which we administered to students at the University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Banat "King Michael I of Romania" in Timisoara, Faculty of Management and Rural Tourism. The questionnaire contains 17 questions related to the topic of the study and 2 demographic questions (related to the age and sex of the respondents). The 17 questions on the topic are general questions designed to identify the place and role of social media in the lives of users (e.g. confidence in social media, evaluation of social media, social media used, preferred social media, the flow of information posted on Facebook and if closing the social network Facebook would affect respondents).

## **3. Results and discussion**

The results expected at the end of this research concern the identification of the positive and negative effects of the Facebook social network on students.

In order to illustrate the impact of the social network Facebook, we further present the results obtained after administering the questionnaire (only the questions related strictly to Facebook).

Asked to give grades from 1 to 10 to the social network Facebook, USAMVBT students gave grades that show the generally upward trend of grades up to 8 given to the Facebook social media (regardless of gender), but also a decrease in high grades (9 and 10) (for both sexes), which indicates a decrease in the popularity of this medium of socialization among young people in favor of other means of socialization, a fact found after the synthesis of the answers to Question no. 2. This clearly shows the third position of Facebook (after YouTube and Instagram) and respectively, the fourth position (after YouTube, Instagram and Pinterest) among the respondents (Figure 1).

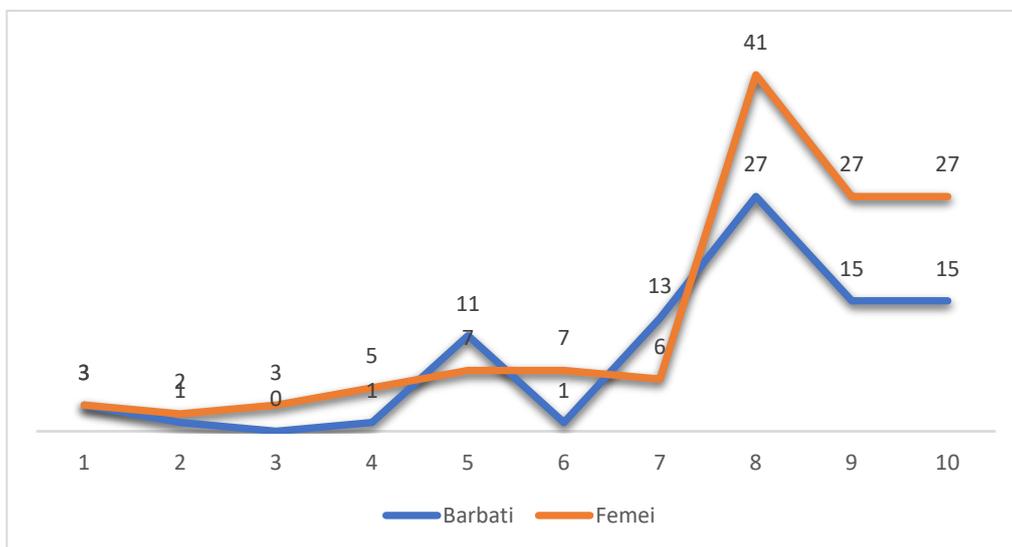


Figure 1. The answers to question no. 2: Please give marks from 1 to 10 to the social media Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Twitter and YouTube

The answers to the question "In a normal work week, how often do you use Facebook?" show that respondents have an average degree of Facebook use compared to respondents: men outperform women in the categories "Often" (28.57% vs. 25.39%), "Moderately" (29.67% vs. 23.01%) and "Seldom" (20.87% vs. 18.25%), while women outperform men in the "Very Often" (26.19% vs. 15.38 %) and "Never" (6.34% vs. 4.39%) categories. Overall, however, the highest percentages are in the "Very Often" - "Often" range (51.58% for women and 43.95% for men, by cumulating percentages), and the lowest percentages are in the range "Seldom" and "Never" (25.26% for men and 24.59% for women by cumulating percentages) (Figure 2).

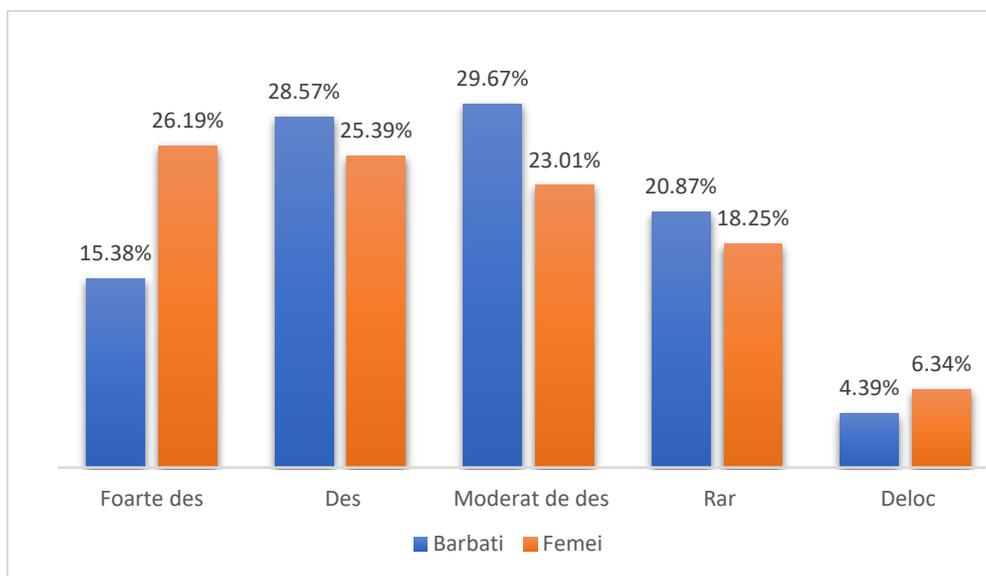


Figure 2. Question no. 4: In a normal working week, how often do you use Facebook?

The answers to the question "How many friends do you have on Facebook?" show that the number of "Facebook friends" for men is higher than that for women in the segments "Under 1000 "(56.04% vs. 51.58%) and "Under 4000 "(10.98% vs. 6, 34%), but it is lower in the segments

“Under 2000” (23.01% vs. 15.38%), “Under 3000” (8.73% vs. 6.59%), “Under 5000” (3, 86% vs. 1.09%), “I don't know” (5.55% vs. 4.39%) and “None” (2.38% vs. 1.09%). One female respondent explained that she has no “friends” because she does not have a Facebook account. It is interesting to note that more than half of the respondents (regardless of gender) have less than 1000 friends on Facebook: even so, their number is big and cannot cover the traditional, dictionary meaning of the word “friend” (“a person with whom someone is connected through special affection, based on mutual trust and esteem, on common ideas or principles; friend”- cf. DEX). We also wonder how someone can say that they have under 2000, under 3000, under 4000 and even under 5000 “friends” on Facebook without being a public person, i.e. a person with notoriety, who is appreciated by the national or international public (artists, celebrities, etc.) (Figure 3).

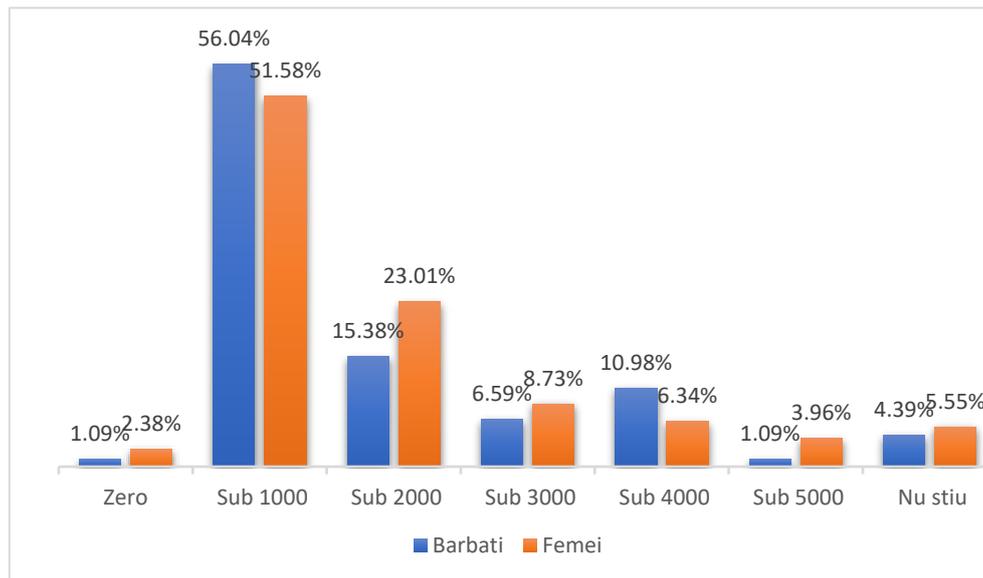


Figure 3. Question no. 6: How many friends do you have on Facebook?

As for the question "How many of your Facebook friends have you met in person?", the percentage of men who personally know their friends on

Facebook is higher than that of women only in two cases: “All” (16.48% vs. 13.60%) and “None” (1.09% vs. 0.80%), while the percentage of respondents who know their friends on Facebook personally is higher than that of respondents in the following cases: “Most” (45.60% vs. 41.75%), “About half” (27.20% vs. 25.27%), “Some” (14.40% vs. 13.18%) and “No answer” (0.80% vs. 0%). Only one respondent did not answer this question because she does not have a Facebook account (in which case the calculations were made according to 125 answers). It is, however, hard to believe that over 40% of men and over 45% of women know “Most” of their “friends” on Facebook (Figure 4).

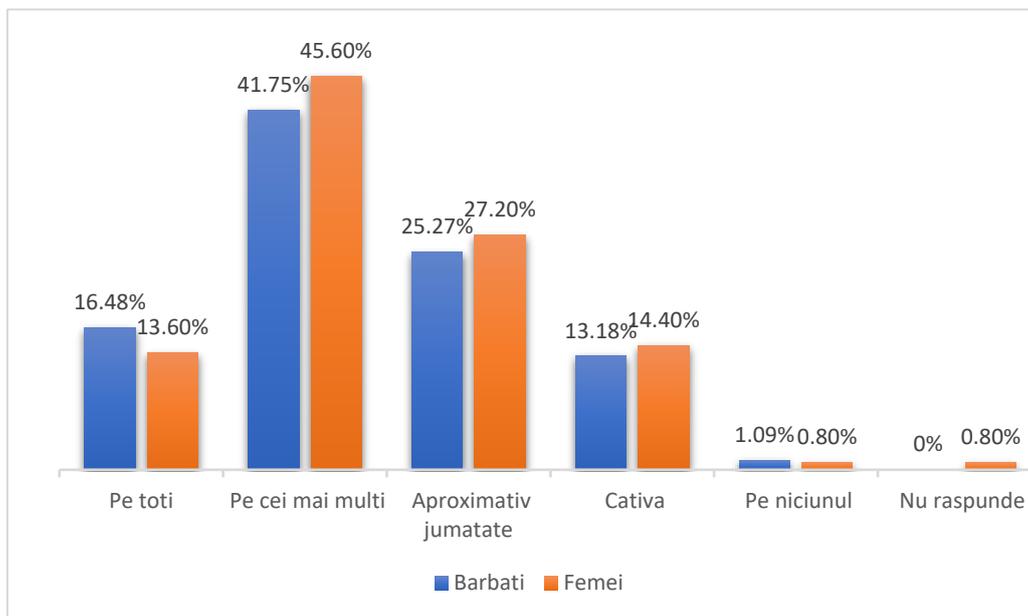


Figure 4. Question no. 7: *How many of your Facebook friends have you met in person?*

The answers to the question “To what extent does the flow of information posted on Facebook influence your decision-making?” are not surprising, given that most Facebook users use this social media either to post their own photos and / or texts, or to see how their

acquaintances, friends and relatives are doing, not to inform or, if they are informed, they do it accidentally (anyway, the weather forecast can be checked on the phone): this explains the percentage of over 49% men and over 35% women who say that they are influenced to a very small extent by the information flow on Facebook when they have to make a decision. It is worrying, however, that only 2.19% of respondents and respectively 0,79% of respondents admit that they are greatly influenced by the information on Facebook in decision-making, although experience shows that, at least in the fields of fashion, gastronomy and health, the degree of influence is high. Worryingly, but not surprisingly, it is known that young people are not interested in economic, political or social news in print (newspapers, magazines), broadcast (TV, radio) or online media (newspapers, magazines) (Figure 5).

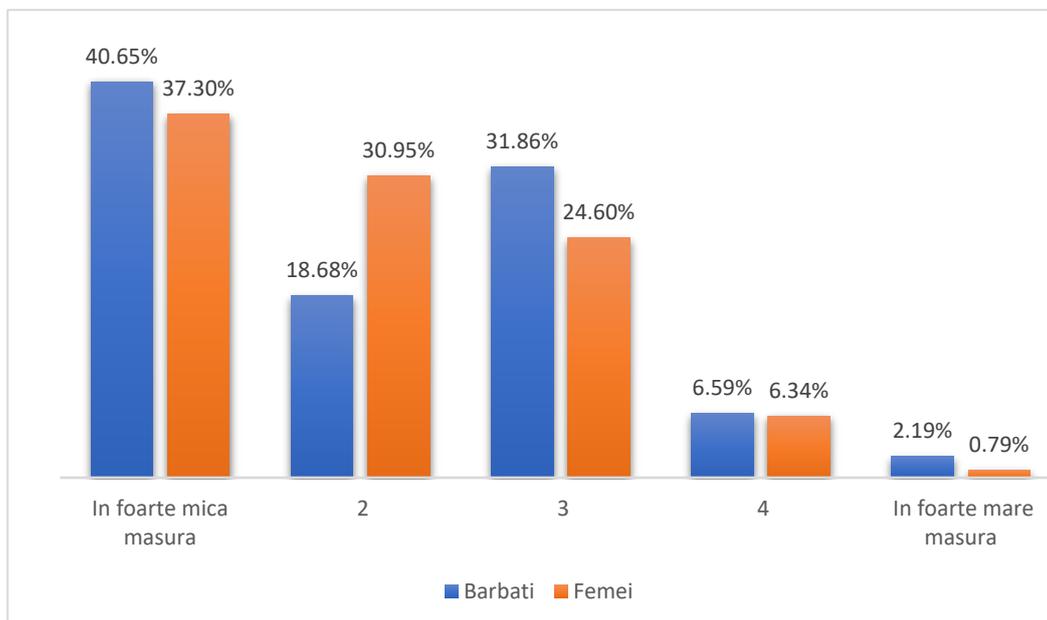


Figure 5. Question no. 18: *To what extent does the information flow posted on Facebook influence your decision making?*

When men were asked why they use social media, they surpass the women only in the cases “Fighting injustice” (30.28% vs. 22.42%), “Event

planning” (9.85% vs. 7.62%) and “Charity ”(6.33% vs. 6.27%), while respondents feel more strongly the need for “Socializing” (40.80% vs. 39.42%), “Making friends” (8.96% vs. 4.22%), “Shopping based on promotions” (6.27% vs. 6.33%) and “Job hunting” (4.93% vs. 3.52% ) (Figure 6).

As with any study based on Facebook interactions, the specific characteristics of the system can influence our results. Because the Facebook Edge Rank algorithm selects the content that appears in Friends’ News Feeds, we do not know how many people saw the requests posted by our respondents. The reasons why some requests were more successful than others were most likely affected by the variables we measure here, but may have also been influenced by their visibility in the news network of our participants’ networks.

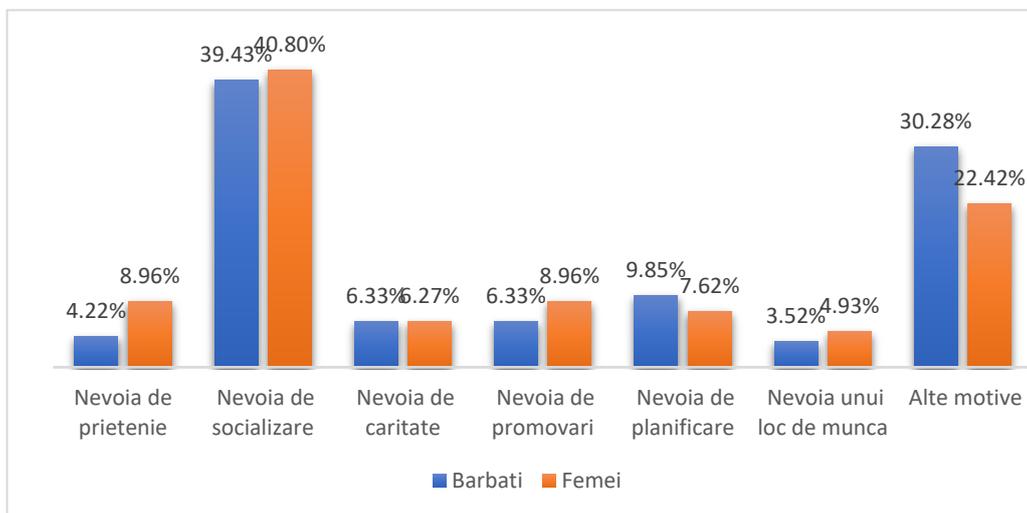


Figure 6. Question no. 13: Why use social media?

Finally, the answers to the question "To what extent would the decision to close the Facebook social network affect you?" correlate with the answers to question no. 2 ("Please give marks from 1 to 10 to the following social media", where the grades 9 and 10 were fewer than the

grade 8 for both men and women): in the case of this question, there is a decrease in the number of those who would be greatly affected by the closure of the social network Facebook - in close connection with the greater popularity of other social networks, of course. Thus, the number of respondents who would not be affected at all by the decision to close the social network Facebook is 10 times higher than the number of respondents who would be affected by this decision (30% vs. 3%), while the number of respondents who would not be affected at all by the decision to close the social network Facebook is more than 4 times the number of respondents who would be affected by this decision (33% vs. 8%). The difference between men percentages and women percentages could be explained by the tendency of women to post (photos, texts, etc.) on Facebook more often than respondents (Figure 7).

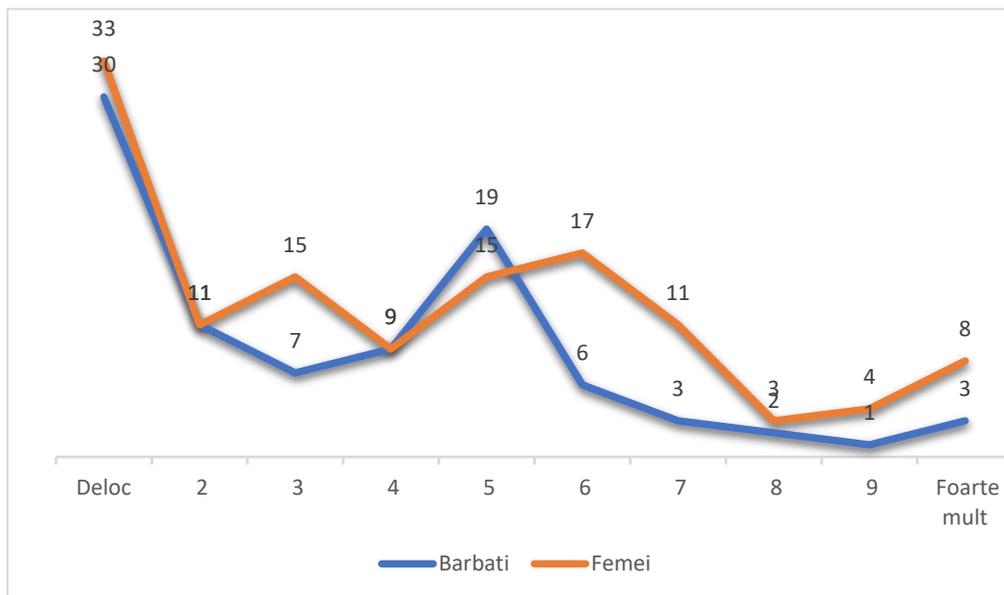


Figure 7. Question no. 19: *To what extent would the decision to close the Facebook social network affect you?*

## Conclusions

In light of the results presented above, the following conclusions can be drawn regarding the identification of the positive and negative effects of the Facebook social network on students:

- **using Facebook has positive effects:**
  - *making “friends”*, which allows introverts to overcome, to some extent, their fear of socializing;
  - *information* in areas such as gastronomy, fashion, health;
- **using Facebook has several negative effects:**
  - although the grades given to Facebook (below the grades given to the social networks *YouTube*, Instagram and Pinterest) show a decrease in the popularity of this social medium among young people in favor of other social media, they simultaneously show an excessive use of some media at the expense of other concerns (hobbies, reading, sports, etc.);
  - In a normal working week, the high frequency of Facebook use (51.58% for women and 43.95% for men) is double the low frequency of using this social media (25.26% in the case of respondents and 24.59% in the case of respondents), which indicates excessive use of Facebook at the expense of other concerns (hobbies, reading, sports, etc.);
  - the number of “friends” on Facebook, if real (it is hard to believe that someone can have thousands of “friends” on Facebook without being a public person, i.e. a person with notoriety, who is appreciated by the national or international public), worryingly points to the superficiality with which our respondents call “friendship” a relationship that has nothing to do with it;
  - it is hard to believe that over 40% of men and over 45% of women know “Most” of their “friends” on Facebook, which makes this social environment a social danger (our respondents could fall at any time victims of cyberbullying, manipulation, blackmail, etc.);

- most Facebook users use this social media either to post their own photos and / or texts, or to see how their acquaintances, friends and relatives are doing, information being purely accidental.

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# *Communicating Social Issues through Social Media: Strategies to Increase Visibility on Social Media*

Andreea-Mihaela Cepoi

**Abstract:** *This paper sets out to study the manner in which some social issues can be communicated through social media. Companies choose to get involved in social campaigns for various reasons: to improve the company's image, to support a social cause, and to try to change the public's opinion about the company. There are many ways in which an organisation can get involved in social causes: a company either chooses to get involved only financially in certain campaigns by donating sums of money or chooses to develop and organise its own campaigns concerning social issues in order to support a certain cause. This paper will first present a comparative analysis of two campaigns concerning social issues, whose topics are related to people who have a complicated life due to problems with their physical appearance, in order to highlight the type of the transmitted information, the used methods, the type of the images that are used and the communication techniques that are applied. Second, a questionnaire addressed to the audience will be applied in order to see whether the message was received correctly or not.*

*Therefore, the paper deals with a topic of interest as it highlights the methods needed for the communication of social issues and the manner in which a gap between the message sent and the message received can be avoided.*

**Keywords:** *social media, strategy, visibility*

## **1. Introduction**

The main purpose of the paper is to highlight the methods that can be used to increase visibility in communication and to reduce the gap between the message sent by the company and the message received by the public. The paper comprises the theoretical notions about the communication of social issues and about the visibility in communication and the practical part to exemplify them.

The main objective of the paper is to draw attention over the main elements that makes us to pay more attention to visibility in communication and the most important reasons why this aspect is relevant for communication specialists. Social media is a new channel that can be more than useful while trying to increase visibility in communication.

This paper is based on the hypothesis that people spend a lot of time in the virtual environment, so that makes social media the perfect way to increase visibility in communication campaigns.

There are several specialists that approached this subject in his works. I've decided to use multiple research methods like: an analysis grid, a questionnaire and some more.

## **2. Research methods**

1. The comparative analysis: The subject of the research are two campaigns concerning social issues that address the same topic: how to improve the

lives of people with physical difficulties after a series of surgeries, treatments at beauty salons and hair changes. One of the campaigns is the one started by TopLine Romania and the second one is a TV show produced by Pro TV.

The analysis grid consists of the following criteria:

- Presentation of the campaign
  - Campaign type
  - Purpose of the campaign
  - Duration of the campaign
- The information transmitted during the campaign
  - Information type
  - Explicit information
  - Default information
- Graphic elements with an informative role about the sender's intention
- Images with an informative role about the sender's intention
  - The power of suggestion
  - The degree of affectivity that the image can transmit
  - The degree of demand of the receiver to understand the message
- The association between the text and the image

Thus, this analysis has been designed in order to identify the main elements used to convey the message, the ways of communication, the differences between the two campaigns, but also to emphasise the importance of using appropriate techniques and strategies.

2. The quantitative analysis: a questionnaire will be used in this respect.

The purpose was to build a questionnaire with a series of approximately 12-13 closed questions, which is addressed to the public

receiving the message transmitted during the show and the social campaign. On the one hand, the percentage in which the message was received correctly must be found out, and on the other hand, the parts that attracted the most attention and that were of the greatest interest to the public must be highlighted. Following the analysis of the two elements, the social campaign and the television show, but also the application of the questionnaire, my purpose is to find out the communication methods and techniques used by those who organised the campaign and the show, but also the manner in which the public received and assimilated the information to see if there were any differences between the information transmitted and the one that was received.

### **3. Results**

Following the application of the criteria of the analysis grid on the materials used and distributed to the public during the social campaign and the television show, a conclusion has been reached and the data related to the transmission of the information have been extracted. The results obtained after having applied the analysis grid are the following:

- Both the "There is no can't" social campaign and the "Beauty on the edge of a knife" television show deal with social issues. Both refer to how a person's life can be changed as a result of surgeries, body treatments at the beauty salon and haircuts. The people participating in the campaign and the show have problems related to their physical appearance and their purpose is to remedy them and restore their self-confidence.
- The information in the distributed materials is transmitted both explicitly and implicitly. This means that the information is either explained overtly or that it is implied. Explicit information is related to the physical changes, the surgeries and treatments that people undergo and the products used while the implicit information refers

to the emotional changes that people experience. These changes are those related to self-confidence, the perception of oneself, the perception of others, the way people relate to the others and to the society.

- In the materials distributed during the campaign and the television show, images with a high suggestiveness, a low degree of affectivity and which do not demand too much from the receiver are used. Images are frequently used during the campaign and the show and convey a large amount of information.
- In the text materials, the graphic elements are used with a low frequency in order to emphasise the transmitted information. These elements refer to the use of the colours, punctuation, the bolding of certain words or to the use of capital letters.
- The text-image association is used in the social campaign and the television show, but not in a quantity that is large enough to be able to influence the information transmitted.

After obtaining the results about the manner in which the message was sent, it is important to get information about the manner in which the message was received and understood as well as about the information that was sent. These results have been obtained after having applied the questionnaire, i.e. 105 responses from 88 women and 17 men, of an average age of 27 years, coming from urban areas.

The obtained results are the following:

- Every person who responded knew the show and the campaign and watched them unfold.
- Most people stated that the purpose of the two was to change the participants' physical appearance, without emphasising the emotional changes to which they were subjected.

- Most of the respondents were attracted by the participants' life stories.
- The part that attracted the most attention was the one related to the presentation of the participants and the surgeries they underwent.
- The greatest interest was for the physical changes that those who participated went through.

After analysing the results obtained from the application of the two research methods, it is easy to see that there are significant differences between the message that the campaign's and show's organisers wanted to convey and the one received by the public. This difference may be due to several causes.

### **Consulted specialist sources**

The topic researched in this paper is related to the communication of social issues, emphasising the way information is transmitted as well as the methods that were used. The theoretical notions the research is based upon refer to the communication of social issues, social campaigns, the transmission of information about social issues in the online environment and the increase of visibility in communication.

Sandra Oliver describes the relationship between the public relations specialist and the target audience in this way: "Public relations specialists communicate with all relevant types of internal or external audiences, to develop positive relationships and create a cohesion between organizational goals and societal expectations. They shall develop, implement and evaluate organizational programs that promote the exchange of influence and knowledge between the constituent elements of an organization and the public " (2009, p. 35).

Referring to the social campaigns, Doug Newsom and his co-workers state that "A campaign is designed and developed to raise a problem, solve one, or improve a situation. Campaigns solve these things by changing a

behavior, a law or an opinion, or causing a desirable behavior, opinion or law" (2001, p.152).

As far as the communication visibility that a brand needs is concerned, a specialised site believes that "The visibility of a brand is the level of familiarity that consumers have about a company. Its name, features, logo, or any other element that may be associated with it. But the visibility of a brand also means the goods and services it offers. It is essential, from the first days of a brand's existence, for it to be able to indicate and predict the opening on the profile market. But also its market position, compared to direct and indirect competitors" (<https://banner-rollup.ro/blog/sfaturi-la-inceput-de-cum-sa-cresti-vizibilitatea-unui-brand.html>, accessed on 15.04.2020).

## **Conclusion**

Following the theoretical notions that were acquired and mentioned earlier, a research on how the information is transmitted within the "There is no can't" social campaign and the "Beauty on the edge of a knife" TV show has been carried out. The research has focused on the message sent by their organisers and on the manner in which the message was received by the target audience.

After having analysed the obtained results, it was noticed that there is a difference in communication between what the broadcaster wanted to transmit and what was received by the audience. The main part of the message that did not reach the audience is the one related to the emotional changes that the participants went through.

The dissertation paper will assess the need for a proposal to streamline communication in the case of the show and the campaign and a proposal will be formulated, if necessary. In order to minimise the communication gap, it is important to implement and use appropriate communication techniques and strategies.

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# *Instagram: from a Social Network to a Marketing Tool*

Amalia Cristiana Popovici

**Abstract:** *Communication is the most important aspect of people's lives and it is considered a fundamental need. Human interaction has always happened and it has evolved with society. The evolution of modern media devices has resulted in the shift of interaction to the online environment. Together with the actions of communities, companies and businesses have been constrained to be part of the social media as well. This modern way of showcasing products on social networks has generated a whole new branch of media creators and advertising. Instagram, the platform meant to be a photo sharing album, has soon transformed into a new sales market, including brands and business profiles all over the world. Online creators put a lot of skill and imagination into creating suitable content for this particular social network. Brands invest in quality advertising to reach potential customers and improve their public relationship with their customers. The aim of this paper is to prove that nowadays Instagram is more than a social network, and can be used as a marketing tool as well, with the right communication strategies and visual marketing. Therefore, the proposed topic represents a new approach to marketing communication with the help of digital media.*

**Keywords:** *communication, Instagram, brands, advertising, marketing, digital media, social network.*

## 1. Introduction

As smartphones have become part of our lives nowadays, it is no surprise that most people use them to communicate. To facilitate interaction through the internet, developers have come up with social networks for the public. Naturally, humans have started to create virtual communities and share content with their online friends. The need to interact online has resulted in the first platforms created for the public to socialize, such as Facebook, Instagram or Twitter. From old to young, everyone has found their place in social media and created a virtual profile to reach friends, relatives or to find people with similar interests and hobbies.

Carr and Hayes (2015) define social media as Internet-based channels that allow users to opportunistically interact and selectively self-present, with both broad and narrow audiences who derive value from user-generated content and the perception of interaction with others. Social networks therefore allow users to filter their content according to their preferences and this feature helps in creating groups based on similar interests. Among the most used social networks, *Instagram* is based on the visual aspect and is well-known for the quality content shared on the platform. Here, people manage to be creative but also to interact with artistic content; beautiful images are posted, but one also expects innovation and an interesting feed.

With digital media, people have created a whole new life for them, at just one click away. Companies and small or big businesses felt the need to be part of people's lives even online. Wanting to maintain their relation with their customers or looking for attention for their business, brands have started to become visible on social networks. Nowadays, people can interact with their favorite products and companies using *Instagram*, following the activity on the brands' profiles, watching different types of ads or tagging them in photos. This way, companies can easily maintain their relations with the public and can communicate with them through the

mentioned social network. The way a brand chooses to display itself on social media should overlap with the company's ideals and personality. The virtual profile is the online image of a company and consequently, it will count in the buying decision process.

As companies are now part of social media, the content shared on the business profiles interacts with the customers; this is *corporate communication*. The aim of public relations is to create, develop and multiply the relations between organizations and their communities. These relations are characterized as a set of expectations shared by all parties with respect to mutual behavior (Kim & Rader, 2010). Marketing communication on *Instagram* has to adapt to the content shared on this platform and the way companies promote products to the customers has to match the whole content shared. In social media, traditional commerce must be reconsidered and product placement should be more creative than ever. Online filters can help companies gather audiences around them and can also improve user experience.

The main purpose of this paper is to examine the degree to which people realize how exposed to advertising they really are on *Instagram* and to determine which type of advertising users prefer. Along with the hypothesis that people interact with companies using social networks, we aim to share some documented proposals for future approaches to the use of *Instagram* as a marketing tool. The last part of the paper provides a series of factors that improve online presence and contribute to the success of a post.

## **2. Research methods**

While the first section of the paper states the reason companies are nowadays part of social networks, this section focuses on different examples of marketing strategies on *Instagram* and on the ways in which people react to online advertising.

## 2.1 Examples of successful moves

In what follows, a series of examples will be analysed in an attempt to support our research and to determine what can be changed in order to make the public interact with a product. We shall take a look at three different scenarios where the companies have managed to sell the product in a suitable manner, without disturbing the users.

The first ad shows a post of someone well-known in social media, taking a sip of an iconic drink. The picture has got more than 7 million likes and is known to be the first ad that features an *influencer*. Once the singer Selena Gomez shared the photo to her followers and the photo became visible to anyone online, she associated her image with that drink. The popular company gained trust with this post as well as potential customers.

The second example is not a traditional promotional material, but a marketing strategy aimed at drawing people's attention to the brand as well as to the company's profile. Taking advantage of the attention created around the royal wedding and using the event hashtag, the LEGO company shared a photo of the royal couple together with the #RoyalWedding hashtag. This way, they gained more followers and comments compared to a regular post.

To really show the power behind *Instagram*, the last example is actually a world record. The newly created profile @world\_record\_egg got a huge number of likes and followers faster than anyone. The marketing campaign behind the project invited *Instagram* users to become part of breaking a new world record for likes, by liking a photo showing an egg. Gaining people's attention and making them interact with the account, the creators have revealed the brand behind the marketing campaign and now the account is used to attract members to the platform.

## 2.2 Market Research questionnaire

In order to succeed in elaborating a reference method for the current market, the questionnaire was chosen as the method of investigation. The survey starts from the premise that social media users make their choices based on the influences from the online environment and aims to find out the most effective way to reach the public. Using 14 questions, the method of approach with which the local market can interact will be determined, in order to later propose a successful *Instagram* marketing strategy.

The results of this study show that well over a third of social network users also follow the activity of public figures, companies or media creators. More than 60% of Instagram users noticed the advertising on Instagram. Among the most popular forms of advertising material exposure are video ads and photo or story ads. Users interact moderately to seldom with ads that send to the location; instead, the most popular posts are those which also contain a link to the purchase site. The research has revealed that the public is largely familiar with the notion of *influencer*. More than half of the respondents claim that they are often influenced by online reviews. This is accompanied by a high percentage of users who choose to research the company on social media before choosing a product. However, the most effective aspect depending on which users choose to interact or not with a post is the discount codes provided to the public on *Instagram*.

The answers provided by the respondents, presented in the table below, helped us determine the way in which they react to different types of advertising methods and what exactly makes users interact with a post:

Table 1 - Interaction with the ad

Type of ad	Interaction with the ad				
	Very often	Often	Moderately	Seldom	Hardly ever
Story ads	6	9	13	5	20
Ads as intuitive pictures	5	12	15	8	13
Video ads	5	10	13	10	15
Referrals to stores	9	11	11	8	14
Links to purchase sites	13	13	10	4	13

(the figures represent the number of respondents)

### 2.3 Negative example – a case study

In what follows, a negative example will illustrate where poor public relations can lead. This case study will show the impact that companies have through social media and the ways advertisements are displayed to the public.

An *Instagram* profile for cosmetic products is well known in the Romanian online environment. Many public figures and *influencers* have shared images with these products and have organized giveaways for this cosmetic brand. The public realized that all these posts were part of a marketing campaign. Although all these influential people on *Instagram* have shared promotional content about these products, followers have noticed that these creams and lotions were not actually used by the celebrities in the daily routine. Therefore, the lack of trust the users felt towards the brand came as no surprise. The aggressive manner the product was promoted in this case is a negative example and should be avoided.

The content creators chosen to be part of the marketing campaign for a specific brand should be trustworthy but they should also trust the products they are selling. Followers pay much attention to the products promoted and they associate the product with the face that is advertising it.

### 3. Results

In the results section, we present a series of factors that have been demonstrated to be effective. These tips can improve online presence and can contribute to the success of an *Instagram* post.

For a better interaction with Instagram users, content should be posted regularly on social media. Users tend to share content frequently and react to other content that has been posted recently. Instagram posts should be particularly innovative and the visual features are more appreciated on this media platform. Instagram is currently a platform through which companies manage to promote products in a creative way, emphasizing the visual aspect.

The users of the platform interact constantly with the products advertised online and filter their own results according to their own preferences. Through this platform, individuals can get in touch with new people and products. Freedom of expression and people's access to information has led to Instagram being used as a marketing tool. The quality of the posts and the time invested in them has built trustful relationships between companies and the public, and social media influencers contribute to the final choice of users.

The online personality created through Instagram is one that mirrors reality and does not try to mislead the public. The association of products or companies with certain well-known faces on the internet only reinforces this realistic, human, almost personal image of brands. The way a company chooses to communicate online and the topics around which it operates create a brand's online personality and contributes to its reputation. With each advertising approach or with each image posted for commercial purposes, it can be argued that Instagram, the popular social network, is more than a way of interaction, but a tool through which marketing strategies are put into action.

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# *Communication Techniques for Brand Promotion in the Digital Environment Case Study: Favisan and Gerocossen*

Ioana-Roxana Toth

**Abstract:** *This paper sets out to outline the impact of the online promotion, which has undergone various changes and transformations with the evolution of the Internet. In today's society, the Internet has become the most important tool for promoting a business. With the help of the Internet, any business can be present in the online environment with lower costs. Moreover, through this permanent exposure in the online environment, the company informs the public continuously and it is more efficient in its relationship with the customers. First, a comparative analysis of the two Romanian brands, Favisan and Gerocossen, will be presented, being based on an analysis grid having the following criteria: the general presentation of the brands and the analysis of their online communication. Second, a quantitative analysis will be highlighted by applying an online questionnaire on the impact of Favisan's and Gerocossen's online promotion on the general public.*

**Keywords:** *Promotion, Online communication, Digital Media*

## **1. Introduction**

The main objective of the paper is to highlight the impact of the promotion in the online environment by focusing on drawing the readers' attention to the online communication, i.e. websites and social networks. The field I have chosen to analyze is in a continuous development, and the number of people who use these social environments also I believe is increasing as much as possible. Therefore, this paper is based on the assumption that people spend a lot of time in the online environment, wanting to be part of a community, and are putting their trust in companies that are present online. With the help of the Internet, any business can be present in the online environment with lower costs. Through this exposure in the online environment, the company informs the public continuously and is more efficient in its relationship with customers. Thus, in this article I will show how online communication has experienced a significant increase in recent years, being the best way to promote a product or service. I will also update the society on the impact of promotion in the online environment, which has undergone various changes and transformations with the evolution of the Internet.

## **2. Research method**

1. Comparative analysis: the object of research involves two Romanian brands, Favisan and Gerocossen, which target a similar audience.

In this analysis, the general presentation of the companies, the analysis of the online communication for the 2 brands (website, Facebook page and Instagram page), post frequency, post content and swot analysis of each communication channel will be taken into consideration.

The purpose of this comparative analysis is to highlight both the positive and the negative aspects of the two brands' online communication.

2. Quantitative analysis: to determine the impact of the online promotion as a quantitative method through an opinion poll comprising 18 questions. The opinion poll was created to demonstrate the impact of the online promotion for the two companies, Favisan and Gerocossen.

The goals were the following:

- To find out if the audience has heard of these companies;
- To find out where they found out about them;
- To notice which brand is more used by the public;
- To find out where to buy their products;
- To find out what the general public thinks about promoting the two companies in the online environment;
- To observe what methods in the online environment influenced the respondents to buy the products.

The questionnaire emphasises the impact of promoting the Favisan and Gerocossen brands online. After having interpreted the questionnaire, the conclusion that has been reached is that advertising is effective in the online environment and that the Favisan brand has a more limited promotion than the Gerocossen brand. This conclusion is the result of the respondents' answers. Thus, it can be inferred that the respondents knew the discussed subject well and offered plausible solutions and answers. This questionnaire demonstrated both the importance of the online promotion and the need for a proposal to streamline virtual communication for the Favisan brand.

### **3. Results**

The comparative analysis is based on the digital communication for Favisan and Gerocossen.

On the one hand, the forms of communication of the Favisan company that have been followed are its website and its Facebook page. On the other hand, Gerocossen uses the following forms of communication: website, Facebook page, and Instagram profile. The

online communication analysis grid applied for each company contains the following criteria:

- I.1. Favisan's overview
- I.2. Analysis of Favisan's online communication
  - I.2.1. Favisan's website
    - I.2.1.1. SWOT analysis of the website
  - I.2.2. Favisan's Facebook page
    - I.2.2.1. Favisan's About Us page
    - I.2.2.2. Frequency of Favisan's posts
    - I.2.2.3. Content of posts
    - I.2.2.4. SWOT analysis of the Facebook Page

- II.1. Gerocossen's overview
- II.2. Gerocossen's online communication analysis
  - II.2.1. Gerocossen's website
    - II.2.1.1. SWOT analysis of the website
  - II.2.2. Gerocossen's Facebook page
    - II.2.2.1. Gerocossen's About Us page
    - II.2.2.2. Frequency of Gerocossen posts
    - II.2.2.3. Content of posts
    - II.2.2.4. SWOT analysis of the Facebook Page
  - II.2.3 Gerocossen's Instagram page
    - II.2.3.1. Gerocossen's page
    - II.2.3.2. Frequency of Gerocossen's posts
    - II.2.3.3. Content of Instagram posts
    - II.2.3.4. SWOT analysis of the Instagram page

To conclude, a comparative analysis of Favisan's and Gerocossen's online communication tools will be presented.

The research has shown that Gerocossen's website is much better organised than Favisan's. Gerocossen presents a page with the ingredients that are used, where various informative articles are posted. Also, on this site, there is a page where active contests can be

found. For example, the company had a Women's Day contest. During this competition, the campaign, the prizes and the participation regulations were presented.

In addition, the site also contains articles about the benefits of some ingredients, well-groomed skin, hydrated skin, effective anti-hair loss treatments, new product ranges and sun protection.

Another communication tool in the analysed online environment is the Facebook page. Therefore, Gerocossen's Facebook page has 53,555 likes and Favisan's Facebook page, 6,505 likes. The number of likes that Gerocossen has is much higher compared to that of Favisan's, provided that they target a similar public. Gerocossen also posts a maximum of 3 posts per day, while Favisan does not have a number of posts per day. Thus, Gerocossen has a much higher visibility on Facebook than Favisan does.

Moreover, Gerocossen also has an Instagram profile as opposed to Favisan. The fact that Favisan did not create an Instagram profile is a drawback as the presence in the online environment on several well-maintained social networks leads to a much more positive image of the brand and intensifies the relationship with the receivers (in this case, the receivers being the fans of that brand).

#### **4. Expert sources consulted**

The topic addressed in this paper is part of both the public relations and the digital media fields, emphasising the way in which a company can promote itself in the online environment through various forms of communication. For this paper, the forms of communication in the online environment that were analysed were the companies' websites and Facebook and Instagram pages. Returning to these aspects, the bibliographic sources that have been used are represented by both printed books and electronic sources.

With the rise of the Internet, the computer has become a very important tool in our lives.

"The Internet has become a new way of processing, presenting and communicating information which allows the implementation of new models and concepts hitherto unimaginable: from another way of going through the written information using hyperlinks generated by hyperlinks to multimedia presentations that include text, images, animations, and sounds in the same entity; from social surveys and real-time statistics generated simultaneously with the change of input data, to the presentation of information and its adaptation to users" (Graur, 2001:98).

In an organisation, the first step you need to take if you want to have a good presence in the online environment is to create a website.

Orzan & Orzan (2007) support the idea that for a website to work properly we must take into account the following aspects:

1. Purpose: Any organisation that opens a website must set its own goals and priorities. Only when the company has well-established objectives, it is a good idea to create a website.

2. Creativity: A website, like any other means of communication, must have a creative idea that attracts potential consumers.

3. Address: A good website should have an address that is easy to remember, which is related to the name of the organisation or the products it sells.

4. Content: A good website must always have up-to-date and well-defined information. If it remains unchanged, the company will lose its fame.

5. Structure: A website must have well-structured information that must be easily accessible. Customers will give up the site if its structure is cumbersome.

6. Functionality: Technology is a very important point when it comes to a website.

7. Uniqueness: In order to always be present in the online environment and to have as many likes as possible, you must always bring something new to the communication strategy.

8. Promotion: In order for the website to be as popular as possible, it will need to be promoted in the online environment to increase the audience.

9. Cost: If you want to have a good and efficient site, the costs will be quite high. Also, in order to have a site with a high level of professionalism, you must have as much knowledge as possible in this field.

Social networks are also part of the online communication methods. Social networks are online platforms where users can interact. There are several types of social networks: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Youtube, etc.

"Facebook is unmatched in its ability to connect businesses with their customers in a fast and humane way. It is an ideal platform to spread the word quickly, to monitor reactions and to collect data" (Schaefer, 2016: 205).

Also, lately, Instagram has become a very popular social network among companies. It offers the ability to upload photos, videos, apply photo filters and share them on other social networks. The visuals also play a very important role in the contemporary society. Thus, with the help of an Instagram profile, you can stand out or you can attract new customers(<https://socialweb.ro/ebook-cum-folosesti-aplicatia-instagram.pdf>, accessed on 21.03.2020).

Therefore, the effects that social networks have on people's everyday life are visible and they cannot be overlooked given that their evolution is considered to have radically influenced the evolution of society and business.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the theoretical elements from the consulted sources, a comparative study between the two Romanian brands, Favisan and Gerocossen, has been conducted. The usefulness of the online forms of communication and the importance of using them as promotional tools have been taken into consideration. In addition, a proposal will be

made in the dissertation paper to help Favisan's efficiency in the digital environment as the company does not have a qualitative promotion. For Favisan, this could be both a method of improvement and a necessity for achieving its goals in the online environment.

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# *Public Relations in the Online Environment. Transilvania Bank's Online Promotion*

Maria Diana Ungureanu

**Abstract:** *This paper sets out to study the site as a form of corporate communication with a role in promoting the company's image. At present, the Internet is no longer just a new way to build relationships, to search to gain understanding, goodwill, sympathy and public support by communicating with certain well-defined target audiences; the Internet is a new living environment, one in which each participant has the potential to be both a consumer and a sender of messages. This paper aims at presenting, in addition to the theoretical aspects of the public relations online, a case study showing the importance of the online promotion in a company that wants things to be well done, ideas to be capitalised and dreams to be fulfilled, supporting people who have the courage to do things differently. To exemplify these things, we must first talk about the notion of the Internet, namely public relations, and only then about promotion. Basically, the case study highlights a promotion strategy, at this moment Transilvania Bank going through an intense stage from the beginning of March, when it had to decide and implement a lot of actions adapted to the new reality.*

**Keywords:** *online environment, promotion, online banking, public relations.*

## **1. Introduction**

The development of the electronic communication, especially the Internet, has thus opened another way, much easier and offering more possibilities than all the others, for those who want or need to disseminate to the public the information about their own organisations. However, the need to have a website also implies a new type of challenge for the organisation: by accepting to be more visible through the internet, the organisation must also agree to become much more transparent, both in relation to the external audiences and to its own members. Also, the unprecedented proliferation of the information sources and the considerable increase in the speed of the information dissemination make the reputation of organisations more vulnerable in the Internet age, a threat that requires careful monitoring of the presence of an organisation in cyberspace. Moreover, unlike the printed material, the Internet is not something you once browse and then put on a shelf or throw in the trash. Thus, in addition to the fact that the information on the Internet is in a continuous process of updating, the internet offers the chance of the permanent exchange of information, of the interactive dialogue. It is known that the public relations specialist must act without benefitting from the advantages of the direct communication, such as eye contact or non-verbal communication. In addition, the Internet offers an organisation the opportunity to communicate directly with the audiences it targets, giving up the contribution of the media. However, this possibility is both an advantage and an assumed risk: an advantage because the organisation decides upon the most appropriate ways of communication and the opportunities it will use; a risk because no one guarantees that the target audiences will access the information it provides, just as there is no guarantee that there will not be a very large proportion of visitors that were neither expected nor wanted.

## **2. Research**

Banking without coming to Transilvania Bank

- The story of Transilvania Bank started 26 years ago in Cluj-

Napoca.

- 79% Romanian capital and 21% foreign capital.
- The first Romanian bank with a branch in Italy and the Republic of Moldova.
- 4 main business lines: -Large Corporate; -Corporate; -SMEs; -Retail.

It is important to have more time for yourself and at the same time to know that you have control over your money in a safe, fast and easy way. Thus, Transilvania Bank has self- banking options, meaning ways to do banking ‘without coming to the bank’.

**BT Pay application** – it is free and helps you pay with your Android phone, and regardless of the phone, it allows you to transfer money, check your balance and control your cards directly from the phone - change the trading limits, you can block them or unlock them.



### Pay by phone

There is no need to stop talking to your friends or close other applications that you use when you want to pay by phone. It is enough to unlock the phone and bring it closer to the POS, without opening the application.

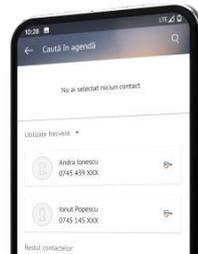


Unlock & Pay - fast and simple and you will not be asked for the PIN code. You can see all the payment methods in the application settings and it is good to know that you do not have any commission when you pay by phone.

### **Do you want to send or request money from a friend?**

If your friends also have BT Pay, all you have to do is select the person or persons in the phone book and fill in the amount you send or request. If not, it is just as easy to transfer money to them through the IBAN.

You can also transfer money between your cards easily, in one go.



### **Digital card? Yes, any card is visible for the first time in BT Pay.**

What is a digital card? It is your newly issued card, which has exactly the same characteristics as the one you will receive physically after a while. Any BT card will arrive in BT Pay for the first time. You will be able to do absolutely any operation with it - including withdrawals or online payments.



Save with BT Pay. How?

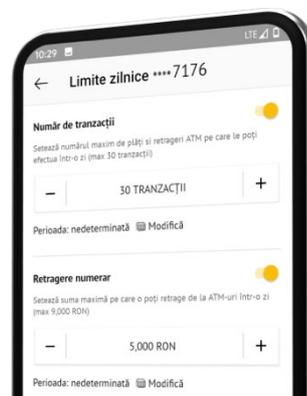
From now on, it is easy to watch how you spend your money. You will see in the application, for each card, a graph of your expenses, by areas: utilities, supermarket, transport, leisure, etc. This will make it easier for



you to know where you can save.

### **Take control of your cards, digitally & physically**

Yes, sometimes you want to know that everything is safe and in your control. From now on, you can change the limit of your online and offline transactions, cash withdrawals from ATMs and the number of transactions that can be made with the card.



### **Easily manage payment obligations on your credit card**

Do you write in your calendar when you have to pay your monthly obligation? From now on there is no need. You can set the automatic payment of the monthly obligations on the credit card, on the due date or you can pay when you want, until the due date, through the special 'Feed

the card' button.

You will decide whether to pay the mandatory minimum amount or you will pay the full amount used at the end of the previous month, so that you no longer pay the interest.

In addition, the chart will help you see exactly what the balance and payment obligations



## Split the Bill

Did you go out with friends in town and realise you did not have cash? Did you get a gift and want to share the cost with the rest of your friends? All you have to do is pay by card and request money from the rest of the people, selecting them from the list of contacts on the phone. The amount can be divided equally or a different amount can be requested. People from whom you request money must also use BT Pay.



## Transfer between cards

Whether you want to transfer money from your non-BT card to your BT card or between your BT cards, you have the option to transfer between cards. It is simple: choose the card you want to send money from,



and then the card you want to send.

### **Add non-BT card**

From now on, you can add cards issued by other banks in Romania. What can you do with them in BT Pay?

- Instant transfer from these cards to your BT cards;
- You will be able to send money instantly to your friends with BT Pay.



### **Cash withdrawal**

You will be able to generate a code, which can be used at any BT ATM, to withdraw a certain amount of money. This functionality helps you in situations when you do not have contactless ATMs and you do not have the card with you, but you definitely need cash. Because sometimes it's a mustache.



### **Expert sources consulted Support your favourite NGO and donate**

Now it is easier than ever to donate to the causes you support. In BT Pay you have a list of partner NGOs to which you can donate money directly from the debit card, and the transaction is not commissioned. We encourage good deeds.



### **Research results**

In order to find out the clients' opinion about Internet Banking, a questionnaire was created, being addressed to all clients, regardless of age, but who use the bank's services in the online environment.

The questionnaire has 14 questions, with different answers. The first 3 questions are related to age, gender and occupation. The average age of the 70 respondents is 35.1 years, 27 men and 43 women.

To the first question "How often do you access Transilvania Bank's website, 31.4% answered daily and 24.3%, less than once a month.

To the second question, "How long have you been using our products or services?", 85.7% said that for over 12 months.

To the third question, "When was the last time you bought a product / service?", over 32 respondents said they had more than 6 months since the purchase.

To the fourth question, "What applications do you use most often", over 50% of the answers were BT Pay.

To the question number 5, "What services do you benefit from BT?", almost 50% of the respondents chose the Current Account option.

When asked question no. 6 about the services accessed during the pandemic, the results were shared almost equally between all the Bank's online services.

For question 7, where the quality of the bank had to be evaluated, the result was 6.57 out of a maximum of 7.

Question 8 on the quality of services during the state of emergency was evaluated with a grade of 6.61 out of a maximum of 7.

To question 9, 23 respondents believe that Transilvania Bank's services are much better than those of the competing banks.

When asked question no. 10, 78.6% of the respondents recommended BT products and services to others.

In questions 11 and 12, the degree of satisfaction with the bank's products and their quality is over 60%.

For question no. 13, "What are the most important measures taken by BT for safety and customer support during the Pandemic?", most of the answers were "BT tried to reduce as much as possible the physical contact with the clients, guiding them on the electronic channels, introducing new online methods of enrollment and opening of products and services, sending cards at home, and in case of physical contact in the BT agencies, protective measures were taken, masks, gloves, protective glass, entry into the agency one by one, daily disinfection."

To the last question "Comments, suggestions and recommendations", most respondents had no comments to make, and the suggestion was to further develop the online part.

## Conclusion

Internet advertising allows any company the chance to be known internationally, its website can be accessed by users around the world. This offers targeting possibilities that no other form of advertising can offer, monitoring, interactivity (the consumer does not only see advertising, s/he can interact with the product, s/he can find out the other buyers' opinions).

- By means of the internet advertising, the company can obtain various information about site visitors, such as the area of origin, which captures their attention on the site, the number of clicks and demographics. Due to these advantages of the online communication, the website can be adapted to the visitors' needs, while TV or press advertising does not allow you to know the exact number of people who saw the ad.

Given the benefits of the online environment for promoting the company's products and image, anyone who advertises should also use online advertising with confidence, and those who already use it, should give it more importance and a higher percentage of the promotion budget.

- Transilvania Bank benefits from all forms of promotion; this is the reason why it was also found on Facebook. At a glance, it could be noticed the number of users who follow them and the attention their fans receive every day. Facebook interacts with consumers and customers, knows their behaviour and receives responses very quickly.

- The useful tricks that were noticed while studying Facebook were the importance of the profile and cover photo to represent the company as it is the first impression it leaves on the customer; an introduction about the company on the profile is very important, as well as updating the frequency of the state so that people can know what you are doing and find out the latest news, to be active and interactive by getting involved in discussions. All these things lead to a better development of the activity.

Following this analysis, one proposal has been postulated: Transilvania Bank's website should try to increase the number of posts

per day, so that the public can interact with them more. Over time, this issue could lead to a loss of readership.

In conclusion, Transilvania Bank benefits from all forms of online promotion and is a real success, using non-aggressive advertising. In the current situation, if they manage to maintain and solve their small problems, they can have the first site in Romania in the banking field.

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# *The Impact of Using Online Questionnaires with Instant Response in the Educational Environment. Digital Interactivity during a Pandemic*

**Maria Dorca Marițescu**

**Abstract:** *The aim of my research was to assess the impact of online questionnaires with instant answer in the educational environment. This article aims to evaluate the impact of using online questionnaires in the educational environment and analyzes the behavioral trends of the participants in light of the results arrived at. The findings highlight the needs that Romanian universities have, in order to be included in the top of modern 21<sup>st</sup> century universities and shed light on the need for development and maintenance of various types of online questionnaires used in education. Also, this study nuances how a new technological solution for interactive communication and collaboration can be adopted in different situations in the educational environment, in the current and future integration*

*scenarios, as well as the ways in which existing technological solutions can be reused in order to avoid the individualistic paradigm, especially in this period, when online is the solution. The results of this study reveal that collaborative learning and the involvement of participants in virtual classes, through various online questionnaires, can improve learning performance. The conclusions reflect the potential benefits of these online questionnaires, both in the favour of those who already use them and those who want to implement them in the future.*

**Keywords:** *online education, online learning, online questionnaires, online educational tools, digital access, digital interactivity, online teacher, virtual student.*

## **1. Introduction**

Lately, in Romania, as well as in other countries, the "online" phenomenon is experiencing unprecedented growth in a multitude of domains of interest, from economics, politics, social life to education. For this reason, most traditional educational functions and activities have moved online, using applications, platforms and various tools and working methods for the online educational environment.

Online education, being a major topic during this period, determines us to reflect more deeply on the role of the teacher and the student in the educational act, as well as on the interaction between them. Teaching in the online educational environment requires not only an understanding of the content, but also a constant concern about how this content is presented and verified to have been understood by the virtual participants.

I believe that a challenge encountered by most people in the educational environment, especially during this period, is to catch the students' attention and to maintain teacher-student interactivity during online learning. How to provide the participant in the online educational event with a relevant learning experience and to be sure that the information transmitted has been understood?

The main purpose of this paper is to address this challenge, by

assessing the impact of using online questionnaires in the educational environment and analyzing the behavioral trends of participants, based on the results of the study.

In this paper, I will analyze the impact of using online questionnaires with instant response in the educational environment, focusing on the need for digital interactivity during a pandemic, given the current crisis situation, due to the existing virus. I will conclude the paper with a few brief general conclusions.

In short, the main outcome of this study is a "theoretical and evaluative radiography" of these online tools in the educational environment.

## **2. Case study - The impact of using online questionnaires with instant response in the educational environment. Digital interactivity during a pandemic.**

By using the new technologies, teachers can save time, organize courses and communicate more effectively with their students. The available support applications allow students to engage actively in the educational act and teachers to evaluate them as learning happens. By using real-time querying, aggregating results, and visualizing, we can get an instant perspective on the levels of understanding.

### **2.1. The objective of the study**

Online learning technologies have been recently developed with speed and innovation in hardware and software and are constantly evolving in all areas, especially in education.

As more and more research begins to consider the integration of pedagogical and technical aspects of innovative online learning technologies in learning environments, we chose to conduct this study to assess the impact of using these technologies in a university in Romania.

Recent Internet and Web technologies help higher education institutions design and provide online educational opportunities to meet the needs of students and adults, such as convenience and flexibility. With the help of these technologies, the number of online programs and courses has increased significantly in the new century.

Despite the increasing number of online courses and programs, online learning still faces several problems. One of the main concerns of online learning is the high dropout rate. Many students easily leave online courses and learning programs or go through them without satisfaction and without being really involved in the educational act.

Keeping students' attention and interest in online education has been actively researched for a long time. Several researchers have pointed out that limiting school dropout and retaining online learners are essential in online learning, as dropout rates are considered an important indicator of online quality.

The main objectives that formed the basis of my research were: evaluating the use of questionnaires in the active learning process; investigating student involvement in the use of technology in the teaching process; improving student involvement in the classroom.

## **2.2. Methodology used**

The methodology used was qualitative research, which is necessary and very important to highlight certain characteristics or behaviors.

In my research, I started by documenting the field of study and collecting more detailed information from several case studies. The information from the qualitative research studies reproduces the information collected as accurately as possible and can be converted into quantitative expressions by coding, and then subjected to certain processing, e.g. counting and comparison to find out the frequency.

Then, I continued with the content analysis and data interpretation, focusing the study on a central idea of the cases, I used several sources of

information (e.g. reports, questionnaires, testimonials, evidence, documents) and I used the comparative method with similar cases, to find the best solutions.

As a qualitative method, I used the case study for this paper. An extensive literature review was conducted, which consisted of both formal documentation sources (dissertations, organizational research, published books) and more informal ones (blogs, wikis and websites).

This review examined the current context of technology, the current digital policies, contemporary digital successes and challenges in schools.

Yoder J. D. defines the case study as “a research strategy that requires empirical investigations into a particular contemporary phenomenon, in a real-life context and using multiple sources of information (interviews, questionnaires, testimonies, evidence, documents)”.

Although the case study is not based on quantitative expressions, it does involve some measurements. Based on specific questionnaires, I extracted different concepts related to the central idea that underlies the study. The samples I worked with were selected according to the purpose, and the selection of participants was not random.

Also, I established that the thematic analysis is topical to represent a current problem in the educational environment in this case. The data was collected, then processed to provide the general factors that explain the study and to provide a theoretical framework for future research.

### **2.3. The educational environment in the current context**

A challenge encountered by most people in the educational environment, especially during this period, is to catch students' attention and to maintain interactivity during the educational act. How can a relevant learning experience be provided to the student in this context?

This question was the basis of my study. The participants in the study were teachers and students in Romanian tertiary education, mainly from the Politehnica University of Timișoara, but also in secondary education.

The number of participants in the two case studies exceeded 600 (between 120 and 250 people participating in running a questionnaire). The two studies highlight the importance of using questionnaires during courses and webinars.

The graphs presented in the following section show the results of the tests during the classes and of the webinar presentations. The present studies highlight the importance of interactivity and instant feedback.

#### **2.4. Case study - Use of questionnaires with instant feedback at Politehnica University of Timișoara**

The platform used for this study is Socrative. I think one of its most important features is instant feedback. Students can understand the content of the course in real time, through personalized activities, and the teacher can provide an answer on the spot, continuing the course in an adapted form based on the feedback received.

The method presented in this paper is used during the Java Object Oriented Programming course. Its structure is 3 course hours and 2 laboratory hours / 10 weeks + 4 evaluation weeks. Teaching a 3-hour programming class using traditional methods, such as PowerPoint presentations, can make the course boring, making it difficult for students to follow the teacher's explanations for such a long time.

To increase the interactivity of this course, traditional pedagogical methods were combined with interactive questionnaires, initiated on students' mobile devices. Students had to answer these questions using their own mobile phones. Teaching that includes initiating questions during classes is more effective in getting good results from students than teaching without questioning that students understood everything during the traditional presentation.

Before using mobile phones during the course, it was checked if all students have such a device. Fortunately, all the students had a smart phone. If there had been students who did not have such a device, we could

not have used the new method on grounds of discrimination.

Name T	Score (%)	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8	#9	#10	#11	#12
*****	92%	C	B	A	B	A	A, D	F, D, B	True	False	E	A	False
*****	75%	A	A	B	B	A	C, A	F, D, B	True	False	E	A	False
*****	100%	C	B	B	B	A	A, D	F, D, B	True	False	E	A	False
*****	92%	C	B	B	B	A	B, D	F, D, B	True	False	E	A	False
*****	67%	C	A	B	B	A	A, D	A	True	True	E	A	True
*****	67%	C	A	A	B	A	B, D	F, D, B	True	False	E	B	False
*****	83%	C	B	B	B	A	A, D	F, D, B	True	False	E	B	True
*****	67%	C	A	B	B	C	A, D	F, D, B	False	False	E	A	True
*****	58%	C	B	B	B	A	A, D	G, D, B	True	True	D	E	True
*****	92%	C	A	B	B	A	A, D	F, D, B	True	False	E	A	False
*****	75%	C	B	B	B	C	A, D	D, B, A	True	True	E	A	False
*****	83%	C	B	B	B	A	A	F, D, B	True	True	E	A	False
Class Total		87%	57%	80%	81%	85%	75%	70%	80%	91%	87%	78%	76%

Figure 1. The teacher's mobile interface for instant feedback

## IMPLEMENTATION RESULTS

- Socrative allows the teacher to instantly connect with pupils or students as learning happens.
- With this platform, the teacher can quickly assess students' activity with prepared activities or quick questions to get an immediate perspective on students' understanding.
- They can then use the instantly received results to determine the best instructional approach, in order to continue teaching as effectively as possible.
- The teacher can see the results in real time, for a single student or pupil (as the case may be), or the statistics of the general results.
- Student results populate the teacher's screen while sending answers to the questions received. Figure 1 presents the results for one of the tests received by students from the Politehnica University of Timisoara, in the Java Object Oriented Programming course.

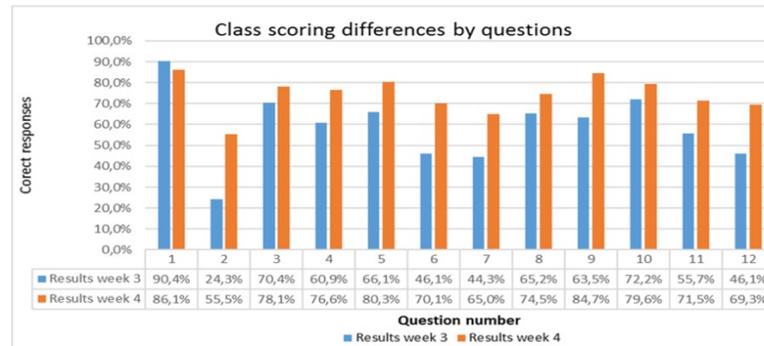


Figure 2. Differences in class scores on questions asked for two consecutive weeks

## IMPLEMENTATION RESULTS

- Figure 2 shows the differences in class scores for questions asked for two consecutive weeks. According to the chart above, the general trend is to improve results, but there are two particular cases:
- The first question shows a slight decrease, which can be explained by the fact that it is an easy question, and the students' lack of attention resulted in selecting the wrong answer.
- The results for the second question do not exceed 60%. During the study, I found that if the results are below 60%, it is considered that the problems presented in class were not well understood and with the help of feedback, the teacher must intervene and clarify the specific ambiguities of that course or question, respectively.

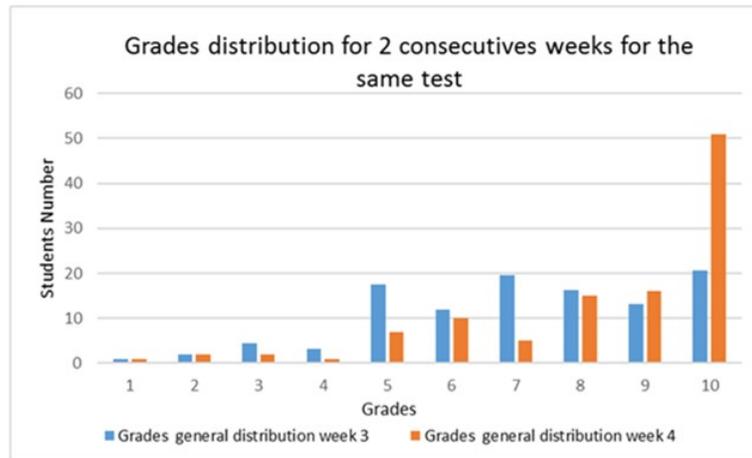


Figure 3. Distribution of grades for two consecutive weeks - same test

## IMPLEMENTATION RESULTS

- In the study I used two tests for the same course. In week 3, the test took place at the end of the course, and in week 4, at the beginning of the course.
- The first tests at the beginning of the course contain questions from the previous course, while the last ones, from the current course. Figure 3 shows the comparative results for 2 consecutive weeks for the same test.
- We can see an increase in results; students learn at home to get good grades. Students perform better on tests previously announced with recapitulation questions than on questions to which they have not been exposed before.

### 2.5. Case study - Use of interactive questionnaires during webinars

Teachers are constantly looking for new ways to increase involvement

and understanding among their students, and the tools they can use to measure students' understanding are among the most valuable in the modern toolkit. Public involvement is the most important thing one can do during a presentation. This can easily happen in the educational act, using a program that allows the audience to become part of the "story", instead of just listening to it. Very often, the biggest problem of the presenter is the uncertainty about what the audience thinks. One of the best ways to find out what the public thinks is to use interactive questionnaires. Conducting live surveys during a presentation session can help the presenter get instant feedback and adjust the presentation based on that feedback.

Next, I will present the results of the second study, namely, the webinars from the Together Online series, initiated by the e-Learning Center, Politehnica University of Timisoara, Romania.

During each webinar, between 120 and 500 participants were present, both from the Politehnica University of Timișoara and from many other universities in the country, as well as people from secondary education, teachers and students.

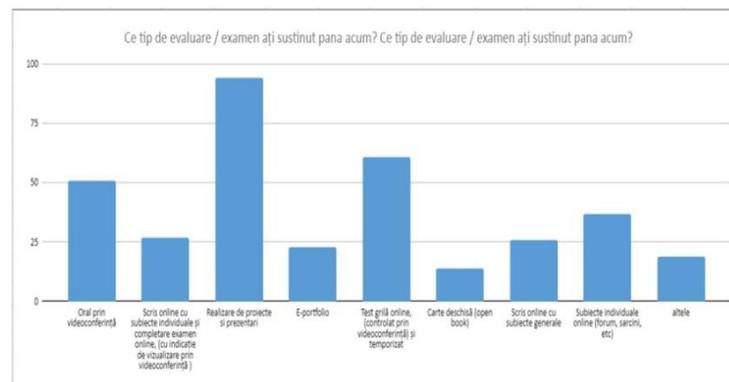


Figure 4. Question asked in order to find out how well the participants know the subject of the presentation and how the presenter can continue the explanations based on these answers

I noticed that the predominant answer is to make projects and presentations. That is why we need to consider these some of the interactive questionnaires, in order to make learning as interactive and effective as possible.

#### IMPLEMENTATION RESULTS

- The teacher can quickly connect with students, can interact and better explain the concepts presented in the course.
- Facilitating conversation arising from the dynamic development of the presented content.
- One can instantly check if there are any further questions about the presentation.
- Teachers leave the individualistic paradigm, opting for open learning.
- Presentations can easily turn into effective collaborative learning conversations.
- Integration of open learning in education through anonymous responses and debates on the outcome of the various cases presented.

#### **Conclusions - The pedagogical impact**

According to the informal data collected from the presented studies I concluded that:

- Collaborative learning significantly helps the learning performance of students and enables the teacher to understand their level of knowledge.
- Furthermore, pupils or students consider that their answers and opinions are valuable for the teacher and colleagues. At the same time, it is easy for the teacher to check how many students understand the concept presented.
- Using online interactive questionnaires helped students to be more

active in class and to understand concepts and facilitates group work.

- These tools also increase communication among teachers, especially in the current context, and support the exchange of collaborative information between them.
- Collaborative learning develops communication skills and enhances collaboration between students and teachers.

## **Conclusions**

The conclusions of this study reflect the potential benefits of online questionnaires, both for the benefit of those who already use them and those who want to implement them in the future.

Testing these tools experimentally in an academic environment, the results of the studies reveal that collaborative learning and student involvement in the classroom improve student learning performance, develop communication skills and a spirit of collaboration between pupils or students, increase interactivity between teacher and students, but also between classmates, which positively influences collaborative learning and student involvement in the educational act. Feedback stimulates the process of directing, controlling and motivating learning and can be the key to success, especially in e-learning.

Through the exchange of knowledge, in which students learn from each other and develop interdependence, students and pupils are able to effectively obtain a huge amount of information, which is useful in generating new ideas for effective learning. The use of online questionnaires in the educational act encourages students to contribute to the answer and to express their opinion. Consequently, students collaborate in the development of their own knowledge. The learning method by using these interactive tools allows students to understand more deeply about the subject and helps them to link new information with previous knowledge.

I strongly recommend the constant use of instant feedback questionnaires as a tool in the educational environment to improve the active learning experience. Despite the fact that the cited researchers emphasize the importance of feedback in electronic courses and although I have demonstrated in previous studies its usefulness in the classroom, the proper and correct use of feedback in electronic courses can still be problematic.

Following this conclusion, I will provide some recommendations that I consider beneficial for improving the use of online questionnaires in the educational environment. Feedback is effective if the learning objectives were achieved in the expected time, the students became more motivated and independent in the learning process. However, most of the time the most important part of using feedback is ignored. This consists in the analysis of the students' results, performed by the teacher, the detection of the error and the correction, but also the modification of the training process in the future.

Whatever the environment (digital or traditional), the teacher must be very attentive to the content, form and timing of providing feedback. Therefore, it is necessary to train teachers in advance, by acquiring professional digital skills.

A limitation of these case studies is that they focus only on a certain sample of people, namely, the users of these types of platforms. Therefore, further research would be to test two different groups of participants: users and non-users.

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# *Crisis Communication in the Age of Digital Media*

Flavia Mezzetti  
Ana-Maria Popescu

**Abstract:** *It is known that every organization or company is vulnerable to crises. In the age of Social Media, used effectively, public relations can prevent a critical situation from resulting in irreparable damage to the business's reputation. In order to understand the importance of public relations, we have chosen to present a real case of crisis communication, an example of how not to manage a crisis, Carolina Girls, which gives us the opportunity to display our take on a situation like this, together with our suggestions on how the situation should have been managed from a PR standpoint.*

**Keywords:** *crisis communication, digital media, crisis management, public relations*

## **1. Crisis Communication**

In the information age, also known as the digital age, "going viral" is not always a positive thing. This is a period characterised by a significant change in the way people interact with businesses and each other. Because information is free and readily available for everyone, the

distribution of power between organizations and customers has changed.

The digital age allows the customer to access the latest information. Because of that, they can now filter what they see in social media about products and brands. We can say that, in this new age, the customer, rather than the brand, controls the interaction. But what do we do when going viral affects our organization or our brand? Bad news travels instantly and is very important to act quickly in order to avoid misinterpretation.

### 1.1. Defining crisis communication

A crisis is seen as a sequence of unwanted events in an organization, which leads to uncertainty and causes major harm to the organization and its employees. It is very important for an organization to sense the early signs of crisis and warn the employees about the negative consequences, as a crisis not only affects the smooth functioning of the organization but also poses a threat to the brand name.

**Crisis communication** deals with the reputation of the individuals as well as of the organization. In other words, crisis communication **is an initiative that aims at protecting the reputation of the organization and maintaining its public image** (Coman, 2009, pp. 3-18).

Egelhoff and Sen define crisis communication as the result of “environmental threats correlated with the organization's weaknesses; it occurs when environmental threats interact with the weaknesses in the organization” (Egelhoff and Sen, 1992, p. 447).

In the past, organizational crises were considered a threat to the activity of an organization. A fire could cripple production, a damaged machine would not meet the demand for products, and a massive storm could block the railways. However, crises also have a reputational element. Barton considers that a crisis does inflict harm on the organization’s reputation because of the negative information

it generates about the organization (Barton, 2001, pp. 225-262). Nowadays, it is appropriate to distinguish between operational crises and reputational crises (Sohn & Lariscy, 2014, pp. 23-43). We have to take into consideration that a crisis can affect both, but one of the two factors may dominate a crisis.

There are many different definitions of a crisis, but what is very important to know is the fact that a crisis can have negative consequences if it is not handled properly. It can create three related threats: public safety, financial loss and reputation loss. All of these threats are interrelated, because, for example, injuries or deaths will reflect in financial and reputation loss, while reputation will affect the financial resources of an organization (Coombs, 2007, p. 3).

In most cases, a crisis is seen as an event that creates or has the potential to create a negative image to an organization and that may affect its profitability, development or even survival (Lerbinger, 1997, p. 4). Coombs and Holladay think that the way in which we define a crisis determines whether we see its interconnection with issues, brand equity and risk (Coombs & Holladay, 2010, p. 5).

#### 1.1.1. Crisis Management

Crisis management can be defined as a process designed to prevent or reduce the damage a crisis can inflict on an organization. Frandsen and Johansen highlight the fact that, in many organizations, crisis management and crisis communication are seen as only one discipline that is based on a very important principle: “no crisis management without communication, and no crisis communication without management, when a crisis breaks out” (Frandsen & Johansen, 2017, p. 10).

In fact, we cannot reduce crisis communication to only one operational or tactical activity and wait for the management team to activate it after they have decided which strategy is better to apply in order to handle and solve the crisis. Crisis management is designed to

protect an organization and its stakeholders from threats and/or reduce the impact felt by threats.

#### 1.1.1.1. Stages of Crisis Communication

When we speak about crisis management we see it as only one thing, but as a process, crisis management can be divided into three phases: (1) pre-crisis, (2) crisis response, and (3) post-crisis (Chiciundean & David, 2011, pp. 42; Coombs, 2007, p. 3).

##### **(1) Pre-crisis phase**

The pre-crisis phase is concerned with prevention and preparation. For good crisis prevention, mitigation and communication response it is necessary to elaborate a strategic business plan (Coombs & Holladay, 2010, p. 2). Coombs says that prevention involves seeking to reduce known risks that could lead to a crisis. Pre-crisis stage should be considered as a part of an organization's risk management program. As a rule, preparation involves creating the crisis management plan, selecting and training the crisis management team, and conducting exercises to test the crisis management plan. At this phase, the crisis management team has the challenge to face crises before they occur and adopt this stage planning process, because it represents the essential foundation for any effective crisis management (Coombs, 2006, pp. 123-137).

##### **(2) Crisis-response phase**

The crisis response phase occurs when the management team must actually respond to a crisis. During this stage, the crisis management team have to face the crisis, assess the situation and be prepared to recommend action. As recommended, it is assumed that there is a crisis management plan, and the crisis team have to implement crisis communication and clearly assign roles and actions. At this stage, there are a lot of tasks that deal with public relations in organizations during

crises. Most of them are related to the mental image of the institution or to solving emerging problems.

If the previous phase has led to the development of crisis plans, then the organization may have a relative control over the way the crisis will trigger. Even so, if the organization cannot prevent and control the crisis, they should be able to control the information that is distributed. This is a very important moment, because the public and the mass media are aware of the crisis and will watch their moves (Coman, 2009, p. 55).

At this stage, the crisis management team and PR specialists have to build strong messages around the framework of compassion and take action related to the context. It is recommended for the company brand and reputation to take genuine and authentic actions that align with the company values and culture. People will remember when a company does the right thing.

### **(3) Post-crisis phase**

Once the crisis is over, the organization should broadcast a final statement which summarizes what happened and the steps that will be taken in order to restore the normal state of facts. At this phase, it is recommended to look for ways to better prepare for the next crisis and to fulfill commitments made during the crisis phase including follow-up information. The post-crisis phase is seen as an opportunity for follow-up communication. The crisis management team should review the lessons learnt from the crisis, which may reduce the likelihood of recurrence and prevent repetition (Coombs & Holladay, 2010, p. 9).

The organization should update their key messages and rely on them in order to provide consistent information to their audiences. It is important to know that reputation repair can be used in the crisis response phase, post-crisis phase or both (Coombs, 2007, p. 9).

#### 1.1.1.2. The Crisis Management Plan

Coombs believes that a crisis management plan is “a reference tool, not a blueprint”. This plan should provide information, remind the organization of what should typically be done in a crisis, and make available for use documents for the crisis response. It is important to know that “a crisis management plan is not a step-by-step guide, but it helps the team to save time during a crisis by pre-assigning some tasks, pre-collecting some information, and serving as a reference source” (Coombs, 2007, p. 4).

The documents drawn up for the crisis management plan should also include details about the audiences, contact information and messaging. During a crisis, this information must be easily accessible, reviewed, tested and constantly updated.

#### 1.1.1.3. The Crisis Management Team

The crisis management team manages events, potential risks and the harm caused by the crisis. Whether an organization is preparing a plan in case of a crisis or is caught in an ongoing crisis, one of the biggest factors that will determine success or failure is the strength of the crisis management team. In order to create a strong team, it is very important to choose the right people, according to their individual strengths.

A strong and effective crisis management team should be tested regularly. The core members of the group will help to analyze the circumstances, determine if the plan works for action, and implement it in order to minimize the damage caused by the crisis. A crisis management team is very valuable for an organization, because the team has already decided on who will do the specific tasks required in a crisis. The result of all these actions saves time (Coombs, 2007, p. 4).

#### 1.1.2. Role of Public Relations in Crisis Communication

Crisis communication specialists strive hard to overcome tough

situations and help the organization come out of difficult situations in the best possible and quickest way. For this reason, public relations specialists play a key role in preparing spokespersons for handling questions from the news media. In crisis management, the media relations element of public relations is a highly valued skill. The public relations team is responsible for providing training and support, because in most cases, they are not the spokespersons during the crisis (Coombs, 2007, p. 4).

Effective crisis management is highlighted by the sequential way in which the threats are handled. In all organizations, the primary concern in a crisis has to be public safety. That is why, understanding public perception on the risk is essential. A good PR specialist should find out how the public perceives the risk and should take that into consideration when communicating anything. Therefore, the communication effort should be directed towards understanding the risk. Also, it is very important to involve the press in this process in order to better understand the story if problems arise .

It is known that a crisis may affect the reputation of an organization, but also the credibility, legitimacy and development of an entire field. The role of a public relations and communication specialist is a strategic one. They should be able to handle the situation in a very professional way and should know that everything they do (talking about crisis communication or implementing a communication plan) has one ultimate goal: to overcome the crisis situation and to restore the confidence in the organization image and culture.

During the crisis, honesty is essential. The organization has to speak from the point of view of public interest, not of its own interest. It is very important for the organization to be transparent, because this means total openness to the public information requirements and those who are responsible to inform the mass media and journalists (Coman, 2009, p. 112).

Moreover, media communication, the external but also the

internal one, must be coordinated by a trained and capable person who has in-depth knowledge of the activities and characteristics of the organization. In most cases, the PR specialist is the one who saves, recomposes or recreates the image of an organization affected by a crisis.

## **2. Case Study: Carolina Girls**

### **2.1. Description**

In order to have a better understanding of all the concepts discussed above and to further deepen our research about the subject, we have chosen to present a real case of crisis communication, analysing how it happened and the manner in which it was managed. The case we have chosen is an example of *how not to manage a crisis*, which gives us the opportunity to display our take on a situation like this, together with our suggestions on how the situation should have been managed from a PR standpoint.

The case takes place in the summer of 2016, in South Carolina, USA, the homeland of the jewelry and gift store Carolina Girls, but also of Casey Parham, a teenage girl of colour who spends her summers at her family home in Kiawah Island. The story starts with Casey walking into the jewelry store with her friend, looking for a new wallet. As soon as she walks in, one of the salespersons, a middle-aged white woman, turns to her younger colleague and allegedly says the word “shoplifter” whilst subtly pointing at the teenage girl. The saleswomen giggle and Casey immediately puts the wallet back and leaves the store.

Once home, Casey tells the story to her mother, Rene Syler who, to the store’s misfortune, is a local blogger with a fairly good reach. Upon hearing the news, Rene first shares her daughter’s story on her Facebook Page, where it goes viral. The post gets over 1000 shares and 400 comments and people start leaving negative comments on the store’s official Facebook Page as well. She then shares her story on Twitter as

well. As a response, Carolina Girls posts a public apology to Rene on their official page:



Fig. 1. Carolina Girls' first response (via goodenoughmother.com)

After the official statement, the store sent a personal email to Rene's address reading the following:

"Dear Ms Rene Syler,  
We wanted to reach out to you to discuss what happened at our Kiawah Island location yesterday. We are sorry for anything that was said or done by anyone that upset your daughter. We are very aware of the challenges people face in today's society and certainly would never minimize the existence of prejudices. We want you to know that personally we are a multi-cultural family and professionally we are a multi-cultural business. We will be using all of our resources to help us piece together what happened in the store. But in the meantime we wanted to personally apologize to you and daughter."

Another few hours later, the brand released a second statement on their official Facebook Page:



Fig. 2. Carolina Girls' second response (via goodenoughmother.com)

The post inevitably triggered a decent amount of criticism, with people leaving negative comments and opinions all over the internet, in the form of tweets, Facebook mentions, reviews and so on. In response, Carolina Girls started deleting the comments that put them in a bad light, but the one thing they could not delete was the Yelp reviews, as

this particular website does not allow that. Their solution for this matter was to create a fake account, then leaving fake positive reviews to counter all the negative ones. Their next step was to shut down their Facebook Page completely, pulling the head-in-the-ground move and hoping that everything will pass by (Sources: <https://oursocialtimes.com/6-examples-of-social-media-crises-what-can-we-learn/>, <https://www.goodenoughmother.com/2016/08/monday-motivation-dollars-sense-experience-with-carolina-girls/>, accessed on February 22, 2019).

Finally, after everything else had failed, Carolina Girls pulled out their last resort solution: setting up an interview for a news channel, with the owner of the chain. The interview was an attempt to prove their implication and care for the family, but, unfortunately for the brand, all they managed to do was to attract even more attention on the whole situation and more online criticism.

### 2.1.1. Their Strategy

After getting familiar with the subject, we took a closer look at it, analysing it from three perspectives.

#### 2.1.1.1. Internal Communication

There is no certain way to know exactly the company's internal strategy regarding the crisis, but there are some things we can assume might have happened internally. Taking into consideration the brand's public responses, we can assume that their Social Media Manager was instructed to act as fast as possible in crisis situations, giving the Public Relations Team time to react and come up with a more detailed and competent response.

Now, it was time for them to start acting in accordance with their crisis plan, or, if not properly prepared, start planning their course of action. The following messages the chain released show at least some kind of internal communication, as they state an extensive investigation

has been conducted in that location of the chain. We are led to believe someone with a higher hierarchical level has visited or at least contacted the employees of that particular location. However, there is no possible way for us to know whether the culprit was found or not, since we can never know if the second release was true or just a cover-up.

After realising their efforts did not pay off, we assume their internal communication intensified and, as we see it, the process could have taken one out of two turns. They either hosted a brainstorming session and the best solution they could come up with was the idea of “going under” and hoping everything will go away, or a state of chaos has taken over the team in charge with crisis management, which resulted in their Facebook page being closed.

#### 2.1.1.2. Public and Mass-Media Communication

Even if their internal communication process is not public information, the store’s external communication strategy was more conspicuous. Obviously, their first step was to release a statement as quickly as possible. Their first statement was an apology to Rene and her daughter and an assurance that measures will be taken.

The second step was to send a private email directly to Mrs. Syler with a personal apology and, again, assurance that the case will be looked into.

Next, they posted a second response on their social media, assuring both the victims and the general public that the matter had been investigated, and that they were sure the bullying did not come from one of their employees, but instead, from another client present in the shop at the same time as Casey. They also apologized once again and said they would reach out to Rene Syler privately.

Now steering away from the new media towards the traditional ones, Carolina Girls also tried to implement a strategy regarding mass-media communication. Carolina Girls did reach out to a local news channel, in an attempt to prove they did everything in their power to meet with Rene and her daughter and set things straight once and for

all. The interview was given by the owner of the store chain, Stephanie Davis, but it did not meet expectations.

#### 2.1.1.3. Structure and Quality of the Message

Although the strategies the brand used were fairly legitimate in theory, it was practice where they really lacked expertise. For us, it is obvious that the company's intentions were generally good; however, the composition and approach of their messages were particularly poor. Naturally, we are going to start by analysing the first Facebook post, which read the following:

“As a business we are very sad to see these comments on our social media. We take pride in serving all of our customers with respect and enthusiasm every single day. Please trust that we will absolutely look into exactly what happened yesterday. To Ms Rene Syler, we truly apologize for anything anyone said or did that upset your daughter during her time in our store. We will be reaching out to you to discuss what happened and hopefully we can move forward in a positive way.” (source: [goodenoughmother.com](http://goodenoughmother.com))

As far as their first response is concerned, the overall message was actually reasonable, although the very beginning of it could have been better. In our opinion, it was not the best idea to start off with a self-centered sentence. The fact that they chose to open the statement with the idea of them being sad because of their imagine being harmed makes them look slightly self-centered and tactless. A better tactic would have been to begin with either the apology itself or the acknowledgement of the situation.

The next part of the statement was appropriate, we believe. They did apologise and address the fact that the situation needed more attention on their part. They also stated they would reach out to the victim personally, which again, was a wise call. Whether they actually complied or not is to be discussed further on. All in all, we consider that, as a public apology, this was a completely acceptable one and, if they

were to stop there with their social media actions, the situation would have looked at least slightly better for them in the end.

The next part of their communication strategy was contacting Mrs. Syler personally, via email:

“Dear Ms Rene Syler,

We wanted to reach out to you to discuss what happened at our Kiawah Island location yesterday. We are sorry for anything that was said or done by anyone that upset your daughter. We are very aware of the challenges people face in today’s society and certainly would never minimize the existence of prejudices. We want you to know that personally we are a multi-cultural family and professionally we are a multi-cultural business. We will be using all of our resources to help us piece together what happened in the store. But in the meantime we wanted to personally apologize to you and daughter.

Carolina Girls

Charleston, SC” (source: [goodenoughmother.com](http://goodenoughmother.com))

In our opinion, the idea of sending a private email to the victim, since her email address was public on her blog, was a good one, as in theory, it gave her a way of writing to them privately, as well as establishing a more personal connection. Unfortunately, the message and the overall structure of the email was not the best. However, let us start with the positive aspects. First of all, they do apologise twice in the email and they do address the challenges black people may face in today’s society. Secondly, a good approach they used was referencing their own family and therefore giving the problem a more personal feel and, at the same time, giving an insight into their own family values as well. Along with this, they reassured Rene of the fact that the matter will indeed be closely analysed.

On the other hand, this email had some mistakes that unfortunately took away the good intentions the brand may have originally had. The most obvious mistake from our perspective is the fact that the email is not signed by a person, but rather generically, by their brand. This makes all of their previous efforts to look and feel more personal fade away, since the whole strategy would be to make the email

feel as if the connection is with a real person, and not a cold and impersonal company. This truly distracts from the apology seeming heartfelt. Another mistake was not to make a clear invitation and set a face-to-face meeting.

The third and last written piece of communication they provided was their second Facebook post:

“We have conducted an extensive investigation into what actually transpired at our store yesterday. After an in-depth inquiry conducted with every employee at the store, not one of them witnessed any such incident as has been alleged. We are as shocked as the rest of you that this type of slur would be uttered anywhere near, much less in our store. We can only conclude that the comment may have come from young shoppers in the store at the same time as Ms. Parham. Since none of our employees saw Ms. Parham either, it would be difficult to verify, but one thing that is certain is that we have zero tolerance for any slight or mistreatment of even one of our valued clientele. If this had occurred at our store, the employee would no longer be in our hire. While we are greatly relieved that this was not a comment made by one of our employees, we can’t be held responsible for the actions of shoppers in the store. This is not behavior we’re accustomed to seeing, and we’re very sorry that anyone patronizing our store would offer such an inappropriate accusation as this, simply to be hurtful. That is not our culture and it’s not our style. We’re sorry for the consternation this alleged incident created. We are relieved to report the result of our inquiry but are sorry if it did in fact happen in our store. We’ll reach out to Ms. Syler privately as well and hope we can get her into the store for the positive experience we are devoted to delivering to every customer who walks in the door.” (source: [goodenoughmother.com](http://goodenoughmother.com))

This message is where they really missed the mark, by not knowing where to stop. In their despair of clearing the brand’s name, they made the unacceptable mistake of implying that the victim had lied. The way the writer built this statement makes it sound fake and accusatory.

The beginning of the message tries to explain their efforts to unfold what exactly happened at the store, but ends up being terribly vague and unverifiable. They even admit that it is virtually impossible to certify who exactly spoke the demeaning words. Moving forward, the writer continues with his second mistake of tossing the blame. It is no secret that everybody’s first reaction to an accusation is denial, but

blaming the misstep on their own clients who, at the end of the day are the ones who bring them the profit, only made them look even more repulsive to their own audience. Even if that was indeed the case, this was not the way to handle the situation. In the following sentences, the brand states twice that they are relieved not to be the culprit after all, making it seem as if they had tangible proof to clear their employees' names.

In the end, they express their wish to contact Ms. Syler privately again and finally set a face-to-face meeting. As Rene declared on her blog and social media posts, this never materialized, but even if it had, we believe it would have already been too late. In our opinion, this should have been one of their first steps in figuring what happened at the store. Meeting them in person would have given Rene and Casey the chance to further explain the course of action of that day and, at the same time, create the impression of being more involved and actually making an effort to find the truth.

#### 2.1.2. Risk Management

What the brand California Girls did by poorly managing this crisis situation was, first and foremost, seriously harm their brand image. Secondly, by not knowing how to react to a crisis situation, they undoubtedly lost some fans and brought a lot of negative attention to themselves. Also, the closure of their official Facebook Page cost them a two-month gap in their social media posts, meaning a two-month gap in their social media presence and marketing, between July and September 2016.

Although this may not seem such great loss for a rather big company, we would like to emphasize how quickly the situation escalated, taking a toll on the whole chain as a result of the ignorance of one particular employee in one particular location.

## Conclusions

### Public Relations Specialist's Perspective

After analysing the Carolina Girls case, as PR specialists, we can safely say that the company's approach to managing a crisis situation was highly unprofessional and immensely defective. However, they did not start on the wrong foot from the very beginning, their first response to the accusations being close to what a public relations or crisis communication specialist would have probably done.

Swiftness is crucial when dealing with a crisis, therefore giving a fast response, acknowledging and addressing the problem as soon as it occurs should always be a priority. This is why, Carolina Girls' fast public response on their Facebook Page was a very good idea. It is true, the message could have been written better, in a less egocentric manner but, all in all, they did apologise and address the situation as soon as they could. If they had stopped there with their public statements, the situation would have never deteriorated as bad as it did. Next, they tried to establish a more personal connection with the victim which, from a PR perspective, is again a very important step in such situations. However, not signing a direct email with the name of the person who wrote it and instead signing it generically with the company's name does not accomplish that. People want to talk and connect to other people, equal to them, not to businesses or brands. At this stage of the crisis, the recommended course of action would be trying to initiate a face-to-face meeting with the alleged victim in order to strengthen the personal connection and show involvement. The company could have easily avoid what followed by simply composing a better message and meeting with the victim in person. If the meeting had gone decently, the crisis might have ended there.

Despite everything else, the brand's second and final public statement was undoubtedly the worst decision they could have made, at least from a PR standpoint. In managing a crisis, some of the worst things a company can do is lie, blame the alleged mistake on somebody else without having any proof, or be insensitive to the parts involved.

With their last statement, Carolina Girls made all these three mistakes at once. Of course, we cannot know whether they lied about the investigation conducted, but we do know they lied about setting a meeting with the mother and daughter. Moreover, they blatantly called the victim a liar and relentlessly blamed the racist remark on another shopper, another client of theirs, after all. In our opinion, this is where they completely lost the fight. These were all solutions that a crisis communication specialist would have never advised upon doing. The natural response from their audience was unsurprisingly critique and anger. Consequently, this triggered another reprehensible idea on the company's part. Deleting bad reviews and creating fake positive ones should never be a solution for anything. People eventually figured it out and the audience only got more and more outraged. At that moment, the lack of public relations expertise was obvious, which is why the next move did not shock us. To put an end to everything, Carolina Girls chose the "head in the sand" strategy, by deleting their entire official page and putting a stop to any kind of public communication. A good communicator knows that hiding everything under the mat is never the best way to avoid criticism.

To sum it all up, Carolina Girls' reaction to this particular crisis situation was not the best. Their crisis communication strategy lacked professionalism and cost them their brand image. It is true that a racial accusation is not an easy subject to deal with, as it asks for some degree of crisis communication and public relations expertise, which not every medium-sized company affords, but the brand could have at least shown more diplomacy and compassion in managing the problem.

### Suggestions for Better Crisis Management

It is known that every organization or company is vulnerable to crises. Used effectively, public relations, even if we talk about outsourced public relations if the company does not have an internal department, can prevent a critical situation from resulting in irreparable damage to the business's reputation.

After presenting and analysing the Carolina Girls case, we can certainly say that there was a lack of communication. If they really want to recover from the effects of the crisis they have gone through, they must improve their communication, because it is an essential part of trying to control any crisis situation. It is the responsibility of the company to provide information about what is happening and what the company is planning to do to solve the problem.

In order to improve their image and avoid or prevent such crisis situations, we suggest they organise an awareness training for their employees. In addition, they need to review the situation, learn from it and also consult a public relations specialist to help them set the next direction of communication for the company. We believe that public relations is the backbone of any company, as it is the administrative system which cares about the image of the company inside and outside.

The technological advancements in communication and information processes have greatly impacted our daily lives. In the age of digital communication and social media, information can be accessed very quickly and people are able to share experiences and opinions across borders and time constraints. That is why, it is of utmost importance for any organization or institution to react and be prepared to face a crisis, to hopefully prevent a crisis, to quickly end the crisis or to meet the crisis as a challenge and create a positive opportunity.

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