The Importance of Integrated Communication Strategies for Tech and Business Events

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Abstract: *In this paper, I intend to study integrated communication strategies as important forms of communication, with a role in event promotion. With the development of communication channels, social networks, and both offline and online communities, the type of events have diversified, and so has the behaviour of participants. Therefore, event organizers have to come up with fresh branding ideas and a unique positioning statement, in order to reach their target audience, deliver messages with a strong impact, create connection points and build communities that would live and engage beyond an activity that is happening once a year, or at a custom interval of time. In this paper, I am bringing into discussion the different types of local tech and entrepreneurship events from Timișoara, in order to observe the type of content used in promotion, the frequency at which they release communication messages, and the communication channels used by each. I will also examine their communication strategies through interviews, analysing event participant behaviour and preferences through an online survey. The final results of the research will give an in-depth overview of the current state of local tech and business events promotion, highlighting a generic integrated marketing communication strategy that can be applied to such events. Therefore, I think this research addresses a present-day and important topic, which brings the integrated marketing communication approach to a new area of public relations, such as events. The integrated marketing communication strategy has been traditionally used mostly*

by corporate organizations, and now I will explain why and how it can be used by event organizers to attract participants at events and to have a bigger impact on their target audience.

Keywords: *event communication, event branding, integrated marketing communication, community building*.

1. Introduction

The main objective of the research is to bring into light the main communication strategies and tactics used by the local tech and entrepreneurship events happening in Timisoara, for promotion prior, during, and after the event. The mentioned field is very broad and there are various types of events that require specific communication channels or activities. Therefore, this paper is based on the hypothesis that people are spending time gathering information before participating in an event, and that they have the desire to participate because they want to be part of a community, they want to meet new people and specialists from the field where they are working in, to expand their network, and to build meaningful conversations. In a recent survey published in Sinteza Magazine by the Romanian Institute for Evaluation and Strategy, "Romanians and Facebook - perceptions and habits of use", 13% of respondents confirmed that they are actively searching for current and future events when they log in to Facebook; 43% of people consider themselves highly informed, while 28%, less informed.

2. Research methods
2.1. Comparative analysis
The main goal of this research is to highlight the communication strategies used by each tech and entrepreneurship event and study each channel of communication by using a comparative analysis. In table 1, I will study the communication goals, type of content, the

frequency of posts, the environment used for communication, and the interaction with followers.

Going forward with the analysis of each event, I will highlight:
- The branding identity assets
- The communication style
- The type of content
- The frequency of posts
- The accessibility towards social networks
- The accessibility towards offline communities
- The promotion of events through specific communication campaigns and messages

In this comparative analysis, I will study two events in Timisoara, namely HackTM and CodeCamp Timisoara. The first event is a hackathon addressed to technical professionals, developers, designers, and freelancers, while the second one is a technical conference with specific masterclasses addressed to the same audience. The two events are part of the technical events category, and their marketing communication materials aim to attract the same target audience who want to expand their knowledge, learn new skills, grow and nurture their networking opportunities, and be more engaged into the local tech community.

This analysis aims to highlight both advantages and disadvantages of the communication channels used by the aforementioned two events, by highlighting the type of content, the communication channel, the posting frequency, and the user interaction. The comparison between the two events is based on a research conducted during the months of January, February and March, this year.

Both HackTM and CodeCamp conference have a main website to highlight the event description, the event agenda, links to other communication channels and also past event editions.
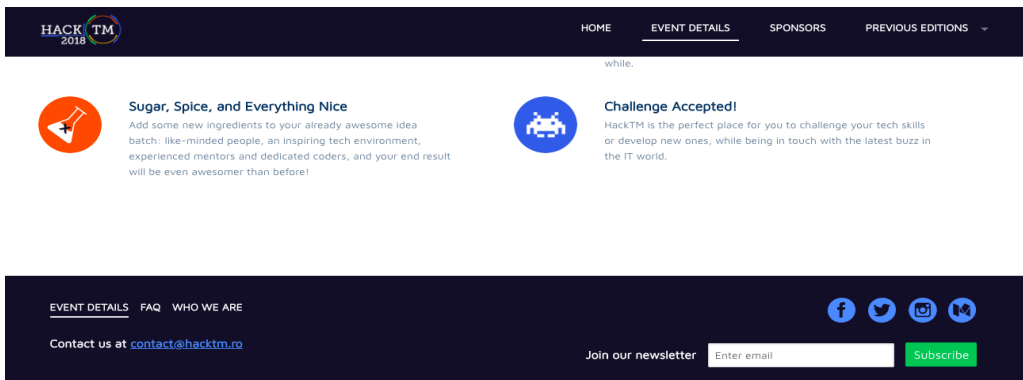
Fig. 2. HackTM website - Footer with Social Media Icons

The other communication channels used by these two events are included in the footer of the websites:
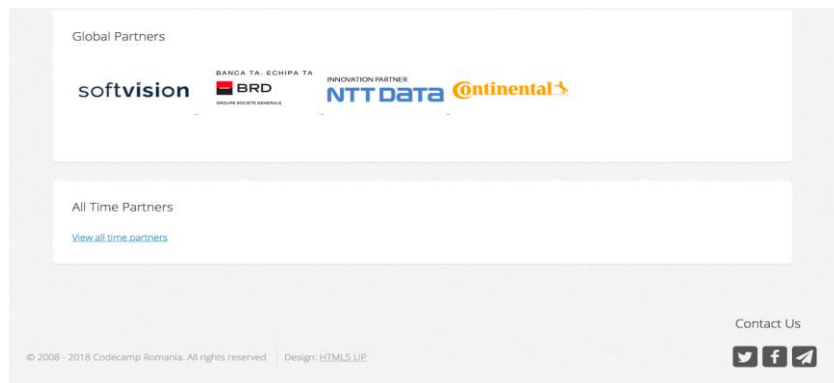

Fig. 3. CodeCamp website - Footer with Social Media Icons

The HackTM website footer is very visible, branded with icons that observe the design guidelines, which give us the perfect overview of what other social networks are used for online communication: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Medium blog. The CodeCamp website footer is less visible compared to that of HackTM, but includes social media icons that redirect the user to Twitter and Facebook, and a Mail To button.

From a historical perspective, CodeCamp conferences have been organized for 7 years and have more than 21 event editions. The second event from the list, HackTM has been organized for 4 years,

and has 5 event editions: four general ones and one dedicated to technology solutions for the healthcare industry.

The branding identity of the two events are very different: HackTM uses a palette of dark colours, compared to CodeCamp, which uses white as the main colour, alongside red, green and blue. On the one hand, CodeCamp uses only the main colours and local city pictures from the location where the event is held to build its marketing and design materials. On the other hand, HackTM has a strong brand identity behind, which includes brand personality, a custom language that appeals to technical people, alongside with custom designed icons and gamification elements.

Furthermore, extending the analysis started above, we will continue to look at the two events in table 1:

	HackTM	CodeCamp
Social Media	x	x
Advertising	x	
Email Marketing	x	
Blogs	x	x
Website	x	x
Interactive Marketing	x	x
Word-of-mouth Marketing	x	
Offline Promotion	x	x
Public Relations	x	x
Sales Promotion	x	x
Events	x	

Table 1. Comparative analysis of HackTM and CodeCamp

The comparative analysis that studies HackTM and CodeCamp highlights the following facts:

- Both events are using Social Media promotion and their online communication channels are included in the footer of their websites. HackTM social media buttons are more highlighted due to a more appealing design and a better alignment on the page. CodeCamp also has the buttons featured on the website footer, but they are less visible due the fact the main color is gray, similarly to the generic background.
- HackTM, compared to CodeCamp, uses Facebook Advertising and has a dedicated budget for paid posts.
- Email Marketing is a marketing tactic used only by HackTM, which has a subscription box on the event website, where people interested in receiving news can fill in their email address.
- The blog as a communication channel is used in different ways by these two events. HackTM publishes blog articles through an account on the Medium publication platform, and has different types of articles available. The CodeCamp blog is developed through the website as a custom platform, and highlights only generic information about the event agenda, speakers and sponsors.
- Organizing smaller events to support and promote a bigger event is a strategy that raises brand awareness, and in our case, only HackTM has organized pre-events before the big hackathon. These events were run under the name of HackTM Meetup, and there were two: one in Oradea in March, and another in May, in Belgrade, Serbia.

Event organization is a core public relations activity that has proved its efficiency through time. Whether we speak about organizing an event for the general public or for a specific niche, the event organization activity is efficient because it creates a personal connection and a touchpoint with the event target audience. (Ctrl-D,

Organizarea de evenimente, activitate de bază în PR, 8 July 2013, https://ctrl-d.ro/tips-and-tricks/organizarea-   de-evenimente-activitate-de-baza-in-pr/, accessed on 23.04.2018)

2.2. Qualitative analysis

In the dissertation paper, I will use the interview as an investigative tool, where I created a questionnaire with 8-10 questions, aiming to highlight the main communication strategies used by local tech and business events. The interviews are directly addressed to the communication specialists behind the event, and can also be delivered by project managers, event managers or other leaders within the organizing team. On the one hand, I have interviewed the Project Manager behind the TechTalks Timisoara conference, organized by Catalyst Solutions, a talent and employee branding agency. This is a conference organized twice a year, during the job trade fair "Angajatori de top", taking place in two cities, Timisoara and Bucharest.

Fig.1. Main Promotional Banner of TechTalks Timisoara

The interview framework is oriented towards the presentation of the event and the identification of the main communication strategies used by organizers to create awareness around it. The questions can be consulted below:

Q1. To begin with, please provide a brief personal presentation of the entity you represent, as well as a short presentation of the TechTalks event.

Q2. What is your opinion regarding the number, quality and sources of information about the events in the IT & C industry?

Q3. Which are the main promotional strategies and tactics used to promote the TechTalks event, given the fact that it is organized in two different cities?

Q4. The TechTalks Conference has always been held together with the top employers job fair? If yes, have you ever considered separating the conference from the fair?

Q5. Have you approached different promotion strategies in promoting the event in the two cities: Timisoara and Bucharest? If so, please explain why.

Q6. Can you provide us with information on the main communication campaigns to promote the event, their duration and their budget, if possible?

Q7. Do you use performance marketing strategies, such as Facebook Ads or Google AdWords, to promote events? If so, do you consider these platforms more effective than other methods?

Q8. Please list some of the results obtained in the event promotion campaigns, beyond the increase in the number of participants.

Q9. Finally, can you tell us what is the number of people involved and / or the budget invested in promoting the event?

3. Results

The main goal of the dissertation paper is to study the existing tech and business events taking place in Timisoara, and to analyse the communication strategies of the events by using a comparative analysis, interviews with the communication specialists behind the events, and a survey addressed to event participants, which will highlight participants' behaviour when they are interested in attending an event.

Following the results of all the research methods and the analysis of the existing communication strategies, I will propose a

framework of integrated marketing communication strategy for the Startup Survivor educational program.

4. Expert sources consulted

The topic of Integrated Marketing Communications for event promotion has been discussed less in the marketing and events industry, but I will bring insights from both industries highlighting how an event organizer should use this communication strategy as a strong tool for event promotion. Concerning these aspects, I have consulted a wide range of bibliographical resources, both offline materials, such as books, scientific articles, and electronic sources.

Stephan Schafer-Mehdi (2008) mentions in his book that events are not the result of traditional or new media channels, but on contrary, they have been present since the Ancient Rome games. What is a new in event organization is the positioning as a marketing strategy. In the opinion of the author, the new mix of modern communication used by an organization should include activities such as advertising (TV, mass-media relations, cinema), PR, direct marketing, personal selling, new media, event organization and trade fairs. Furthermore, when planning a tech event there are a few important steps organizers should follow, such as validating an industry or community need, choosing the right event type and team members, building a strong website and starting developing relationships with sponsors & partners, having a strong promotion, a list of well-known speakers or industry specialists, attracting the needed number of participants, providing entertainment, and having an energetic team of volunteers to help. (Ctrl-D, Etape esențiale de urmat în planificarea unui eveniment tech, 15 January 2018 https://ctrl-d.ro/tips-and-tricks/etape-esentiale-de-urmat-in-planificarea-unui-eveniment-tech/, accessed: 21.04.2018)

Each type of event should have a custom communication framework that would fit the organization goals and customer interests. For example, trade fairs and expositional events have been

analyzed from an organizational and communication perspective by Zamfir Moise (1997:208-209). According to him, recurring trade fairs, as well as any event, should analyze the strong and weak points, because these have an impact on the launch of future editions.

Beba and Mira Rakic (2014) argue that a successful IMC strategy should integrate and be a mix of the five main pillars of integrated marketing communications, a mix of various possibilities of interaction, and a mix of communication processes initiated by both consumers and organizations.

The five pillars are highlighted below:
- Traditional media - Print: Newspapers, magazines, radio, television, direct email, catalogue marketing, billboards
- Other product specific media (online & offline): branding, design, packaging, price, placement, word of mouth
- Digital media: internet promotion, mobile phone & mobile devices promotion

While digital and social media continue to grow and expand to new boundaries, traditional media is still keeping a large share of budget across marketing departments. A research study mentioned by George and Michael Belch, in "The role of New and Traditional Media in the Rapidly Changing Marketing Communications Environment" (2014), highlights the fact that magazine ads, newspapers and television are still effective in triggering the consumer decision process. At the same time, branding has gained more and more power within organizations that realized the value it can bring. This consists in "a disciplined process used to build awareness and extend customer loyalty and a desire to lead, outpace the competition, and give employees the best tools to reach customers" (Wheeler, 2009/6).

Therefore, event organizers that build a strong brand and communication strategy should encompass both traditional communication strategies and the new digital frameworks brought by technology. Thus, events are no longer individual activities promoted through printed promotional materials; they also have a strong brand

image that includes a wide range of marketing activities and the events, which in their turn can be strong marketing communication tactics for organizations and community building goals.

5. Conclusion

Based on the theoretical inputs from the sources I consulted, and the research conducted to analyse the event communication strategies and the promotional campaign tactics, I will highlight how important they are, and what type of impact they can have, both in the short term, during the event ticket promotion, and also in the long term, building a strong brand image for the event itself.

In the dissertation paper, I will firstly compare through the same analysis table more local tech and entrepreneurship events. Secondly, I will run an online survey addressed to about 100-200 tech and business event participants from Timișoara. The online survey has as a main goal the analysis of event participants behaviour and preferences, and how their actions can impact the event communication.

The survey will be appliesd exclusively online and the results will be interpreted in the practical part. The online survey is already available and can be consulted at: https://www.123formbuilder.com/form-3637337/TimisoaraTech-Survey-2018

Besides the questionnaire and the in-depth analysis, I will present a second interview with an event organizer highlighting more specific communication tactics used in the industry. Based on the results of all the three research methods, I will end my dissertation with a case-study on how I built and applied an integrated marketing communication for an entrepreneurship event, namely Startup Survivor.

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