THE IMAGE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY
THROUGH SOCIAL NETWORKS.
AN ANALYSIS OF THE BANKING ENVIRONMENT IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: *Online self-presentation methods are becoming more and more difficult to manage today because communication technology limits user control over the information they use to strategically present themselves. By comparing older communications platforms (e.g., online chat rooms) where all the information was provided, today's web is defined by user-generated content and allows both sides to communicate in a public environment. While self-presentation and impression management are similar concepts that are closely related, there is a consensus in the literature that impression management is a process by which individuals try to control the image that others are forming about those individuals or organizations. The size and diversity of online social networks are associated also with strategic self-representations as actions in which individuals present themselves in a way that suits the audience's expectations. Clearly, self-disclosure is an essential mechanism in developing and maintaining relationships. Therefore, the larger the size of the online social networks, the more individuals need to provide more information about themselves. The present paper aims to briefly present the ways of communication and promotion of the banks in Romania through the online environment and especially the identification and analysis of the ways in which those banks communicate and promote through the Facebook social network. To achieve the goal, a descriptive research was conducted, using the content analysis as the research method and the frequency analysis as a technique. A theoretical sampling and a partially guided sampling method based on accessibility (availability) was carried out. The universe of research was constituted by all the banks in Romania, according to the list from the official website of the National Bank of Romania (from April 2018), and the sample is represented by those banks in the list that meet the criterion of having an official website. Thus, the volume of the sample included in the analysis is 18 cases. The research tool (analysis grid) for the Facebook page contains four major categories of information provided directly on the page: visual content, written content (status) consisting of page postings, company base information and content of Facebook activities. Content analysis of the Facebook pages has proven to be a useful way to research the information promoted by banks in the online environment. Using Facebook can help banks communicate with as many customers as possible in the shortest possible time. In most cases, banks prefer the use of photos, videos, posts and events to promote their image by using social networks, such as Facebook.*

Keywords: *image, image management, social networks, banks, content analysis.*

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1. INTRODUCTION - THE IMAGE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY THROUGH SOCIAL NETWORKS

Online self-presentation methods are becoming more and more difficult to manage nowadays because communication technology limits user control over the information they use to strategically present themselves. By comparing older communications platforms (e.g., online chat rooms) where all the information was provided, today's Web is defined by user-generated content and allows both sides to communicate in a public environment [1].

Constructing and maintaining positive self-images is important to achieving all these goals because research shows that unsuccessful self-presentation is often associated with rejection and criticism [2].

2. NEW MEDIA AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

The new mediums of communication are commonly referred to as new media. This concept was initiated with the development of the Internet, through well-known social networks, websites, blogs, etc. New media makes it possible for an increasing number of people to produce different information. In other words, new media does not refer to recently emerging technologies, but to some that already exist and which, through some changes, have attracted public attention [3].

The characteristics of the new media mean the transformation of media communication, largely determined by the complex interaction between the perceived needs, the political and competitive pressures and the social and technical innovations [4].

New media primarily refers to the Internet and includes websites, video games and social media. Communication through new media has some features common to traditional media.

Both have the advantage of being able to communicate to a broad audience and feature multiple types of channels that enable the use of a wide variety of multimedia tools to give an eye-catching form of message [5].

Lon Safko and David Brake have identified five behaviors that social media users may have about interacting in an online community:
1) will become active co-authors or will contribute to generating content;
2) will comment on the content created in the community or post reviews, feedback, or links to other content that may be considered useful to the community;
3) communicate the content of friends or colleagues;
4) they will simply look at the content and then return to their affairs;
5) they will ignore the content [6].

Social media is the next step of Web 2.0 technology development. Social media makes communication possible through all known online environments, so that these virtual communities include forums, virtual worlds, opinion sharing communities, social networks [7].

In conclusion, in the simplest way, social networks describe how individuals use technology and online practices to create content (opinions, perspectives, and experiences) to share on the Internet.

3.   RESEARCH

The purpose of the study is to identify the main ways in which Romanian banks communicate and promote themselves online through new media and more specifically, by using the Facebook's social network.

A descriptive research was conducted using the content analysis as the research method for systematically examining the content of the communication, analyzing the messages and the text of the communication. In the online environment, content is quickly available and can be used to examine trends and patterns from the web [8].

Research corpus is constituted by all the banks from Romania (from the list from the official website of the National Bank of Romania) and the sample is represented by those banks that meet the criterion to have an official Facebook page: BCR, Transylvania Bank, BRD Group Société Général, Raiffeisen Bank, UniCredit Bank, Alpha Bank, Bancpost, Garanti Bank, Piraeus Bank, OTP Bank, Romanian Bank, Crédit Agricole Bank, Idea::Bank, Railway Commercial Bank, Intesa Sanpaolo Commercial Bank Romania, Leumi Bank Romania, Libra Internet Bank and Patria Bank. In the end, the volume of the sample included in the analysis is constituted of 18 cases and the period we conducted the analysis was April 2018.

The research tool is represented by a coding scheme for content analysis. This coding scheme for the Facebook page is based on four major categories of information, provided directly on the page. (1) Visual Content, (2) Written Content (Status), (3) Basic Information and (4) Activities.

The Visual Content category is composed of visual content of the photos and of video clips. The recording units for the visual content of the photos are types of photos, such as: photos of products/ services, logo, events, campaigns, advertisements, customer photos and the counting units are the total number of photos, albums, comments, rating and labels. The recording units for the video clips are the video types: about products/ services, about the company, events, contest, campaigns, advertisements, celebrity videos and the counting units are the total number of videos.

The Written Content (Status) category has the contextual unit defined the written content (status) that consists of page posting, the recording units are the product/ service posts, events, news, sharing experiences, and the counting units are the frequency of these posts: never, rarely, once every few weeks, 1-2 days a week, 3-5 days a week, once a day or several times a day.

The Basic Information category has the contextual unit defined by the basic information about the company. The recording units are the company address, e-mail address, site address, telephone number, broad description, history/ story, important moments, sign-up date on site and the counting units are the frequency of sharing this information.

The Activities category has the contextual unit defined by the content of Facebook activities, the recording units consist of apps, reviews, notes, groups and pages, events, likes and followers. Counting units are the frequency of activity information sharing, and in the events these units are, in fact, the total number of types of events (such as musical events, competitions, sporting events, cultural events, corporate and banking events).

4. RESULTS

The visual content is the richest and it's represented especially by the profile picture and the cover that are posted on Facebook platform, sending in explicit way essential information about banks. Regarding the profile pictures, the most used are the logo photos (78%), followed by the those with the advertising campaigns (10%), by the events photos (5%), by the photos with ads (3%) and by those with products/services and clients (2%). We can observe the significant difference between the first and the last picture categories. Banks choose the logo pictures to be identified easier by the customers. Selecting a profile picture confirms what value the banks have and the way they want to be perceived. Cover pictures are the most common where those with the advertising campaigns (30%), followed by the products/ services photos (22%), by the ones with ads (21%), by the events ones (19%), the photos with clients and the logo ones (4%). The bank with the highest number of photos is BCR and the one with the least number of photos is OTP Bank. Bancpost has the largest number of profile pictures, whereas Raiffeisen Bank, OTP Bank, and Patria Bank have just one profile picture. The bank with the largest number of cover photos is Garanti Bank and the one with the least number of cover photos is Alpha Bank. The bank with the largest number of photo albums is BCR, and the one with the least albums is Patria Bank. The number of likes of profile photos - the highest number was identified at BRD Société Générale and the lowest at Raiffeisen Bank and OTP Bank. In relation to cover photos, the most likes were at Garanti Bank and the least at Romanian Bank and Railway Commercial Bank.

The most frequent video clips are those about events (36%), followed by 28% videos with products and services, 19% by the ones with PR campaigns, 11% advertising and 2% videos about the company, competitions and those that feature a celebrity. The bank with the highest number of video clips is Transylvania Bank, while Leumi Bank does not have any video clip. Some banks have on their Facebook page recommended video clips (BRD Société Générale, Transylvania Bank, Bancpost, Piraeus Bank, Railway Commercial Bank and Libra Internet Bank) while others (BRD Société Générale, Raiffeisen Bank, Transylvania Bank, UniCredit Bank, Credit Agricole Bank Romania, Idea::Bank, Libra Internet Bank and Patria Bank) have a video instead of a photo for cover. These video clips have thousands of views and are always accompanied by text and sometimes links to other web pages. This analysis shows that on Facebook, banks use more photos than video clips.

The written content is represented by a status, defined by Facebook posts. Usually, the posts that contain text are accompanied by photos, video clips or links to other web pages. The most common posts were about products/ services (34%). These are followed by posts regarding events (31%), PR campaigns (13%), 10% represent sharing of different experiences, 6% news and shares. Analyzing the posting frequency of statuses, we discovered that most banks (32%) post several times a day, 26% post once per day, 21% post rarely, 16% post 3 to 5 days a week and 5% post 1-2 days a week.

The banks have different content in their menus about basic information:
>   100% the column with the site address and e-mail address,
>   88% the column about company description,
>   83% the column about phone number,
>   61% important moments,
>   50% headquarters address,
>   27% working schedule,
>   26% history/ story and Facebook signup date.

Regarding the last category (the Activities), data analysis shows that 61% of the banks have applications on the Facebook page. In relation to the reviews, 50% from the analyzed pages included this information. 72% of banks have notes on the page, while the events and the groups have been mentioned (50%) and pages (94%), referring to other pages, unofficial ones, of banks that are on Facebook. In the events cases, 23% of banks have organized/ participated to sporting and cultural events, 18% competitions and banking events, 13% events from the company and 6% musical events.

5.   CONCLUSIONS

The content analysis of the Facebook pages turned out to be a useful method to explore the offered information by the banks on this social media platform. We have identified the main methods to promote and communicate on Facebook for the chosen banks: in the most cases the banks favor the use of photos, video clips, posts, and events to promote.

The richest content is the visual one. The banks favorite method to promote on Facebook is through posting photos (mainly logo and advertising campaigns). The cover photos are in a larger number than the profile ones. Those are followed by the video clips that also have a great impact on clients because they forward more information than the photos.

Another self-presentation method on Facebook is the written content, represented by posts. The most frequent posts are about products/ services. The banks are posting very often, the most utilized period of time being several times a day. For banks notoriety, the appreciations number and the followers are fundamental. On Facebook, those are of thousands in counting, showing the banks popularity.

This study offers an overall perspective on communication through new media in the banking sector. The banks choose to communicate and to promote themselves with the help of the Facebook tools to create an online presence. Banks are presenting themselves always in a favorable light and prefer the online promotion to reach a large number of people.

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