

MEDIA COMMUNICATION. A CASE STUDY ON EUROPEAN UNION

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Abstract: On the one hand, professional media communication has been going through massive changes due to the digital technologies that had a major impact on media relations, on PR and news media industry, on media consumption and on access to information.

On the other hand, European professional communication system has been changing rapidly during the last years due to both new trends in traditional journalism, media consumption behavior, and also due the euro-skepticism wave highly expressed through the 2005 French and Dutch rejection of the proposed European Union constitution.

Consequently, European Union was forced to develop diverse communication tools that became generally available, addressing the wide, diverse and multicultural segments of European audiences.

This proposed paper first presents a theoretical background on media communication and media relations techniques – referring to aspects like media institutions and newsroom, media targeted audiences.

Further on, the article will look into some of the specific media communication instruments.

The case study of this paper includes an analysis of the media communication of the European Union – the EU online newsroom which is the official news website of the institutions of the European Union and it provides online access to the latest official press material released by all EU institutions, as well as practical information for journalists. The EU newsroom provide live web TV coverage, audio, video and photo reliable archives, permanent updated press releases and much more, all for free.

Keywords: news media, media industry, professional media practices, media consumption, Romanian media.

An Overview of Media Communication and Media Relations

Mass communication has been defined as the process where professional communicators produce and distribute messages to large audiences with the help of technological tools. One important theory related to mass communication is the agenda-setting one (introduced by Lazarsfeld and Katz) that considers that the public constructs its own agenda based on what the media is communicating. This means that professional communicators understand that it is absolutely mandatory to get the media attention and coverage, in order to become important for the large audiences.

Recent technological development, however, brought significant changes within the media relations industry. Nowadays, the message that a professional communicator has to share may almost instantly reach diverse and numerous segments of audiences using other communication channels as well, not only media organizations – texts uploaded on the website of the company, e-newsletters, information shared through different social networks and others.

The specific instruments of media relations in the digital era includes e-mail, social networking (Facebook, Twitter and others), blogs, websites, newsletters, updates, media gadgets, tablets, smart-phone, news aggregators, multimedia platforms, interactivity, innovative applications, cloud is just some of the symbols of recent years in communication media.

According to “The Public Relations Handbook”, “good media relations can contribute to longer-term strategic objectives, such as: ’improving company or brand image; higher and better media profile; changing the attitudes of target audiences (such as customers); improving relationships with the community; increasing market share; influencing government policy at local, national or international level; improving communications with investors and their advisers; improving industrial relations” (Theaker, 2004, p.148-149).

Bernard Miege (2008), based on Habermas's theory of public space, demonstrated the complexity of the contemporary forms of public space, explaining that it is organized as follows:

1. The actions that are taking place within the public space are related to the four communication patterns from the history of democratic societies: opinion press (especially in the eighteenth century); commercial press addressing the general public (beginning with the late nineteenth century); audiovisual media and especially mainstream television targeting general public (mid-twentieth century); and general public relations.
2. Alongside the dominant model, the author also identifies the communication strategies of the companies. Miege mentions the role of opinion polls in the activity of media organizations and in shaping public opinion.
3. Individualizing social practices that are being reinforced lately due to communication technologies which is specific to a marketing phenomenon of information, culture and communication. And others.

With the advent of Internet communications, such as online social networks, news and company web sites, the practice of public relations may no longer be limited to press releases, events and media interviews considers Idil Cakim in his study titled “Digital Public Relations, Online Reputation Management” (Duhe, 2004, p. 135).

The author goes further and explains that in the digital age of communication where news immediacy is as important as accuracy and audiences have access to numerous sources, corporations must take the lead in providing clear and sufficient information.

Cakim highlights the huge importance of organizing an online communication channel such as a website where companies have the chance to share their side of the story. The author also mentions the user-generated media that is increasingly becoming a trusted source of information for audiences (Duhe, 2004, p. 141). Further, Cakim identifies a set of new public relations skills in the digital era of communication (Duhe, 2004, p. 141-143); we will briefly mention some of these skills:

1. *Online audience statistics* – professional communicators must understand the importance of assessing the value of a story placed online; therefore, they must pay attention to the number of visitors on their website, the time they spent, their geographical location and their main interests in the website content.
2. *Search engine optimization* – in order to reach target audiences online, company websites need to rank among the top listing of the most popular search engines; so, communication specialists should pay attention to the content of the stories, to the key words etc.

3. *Online media relations* – digital public relations do not limit to the existence of a website; media relations specialists must also identify the key online journalists;
4. *Online crisis communication* – in spite of all the sophisticated tools linked to the online communication, during a crisis communicators must first focus on delivering a clear, concise and relevant information, paying attention to the amount and the frequency of delivered information.
5. *Digital public relations tools* – professional communicators must always pay attention to the latest technologies that can help distribute online information to the right audiences;

According to Alison Theaker, in *The Public Relations Handbook*, “the revolution in media relations has certainly been slower than that in information technology; the impact of new technology varies according to individual journalists, the media they work in and the industry sector (Theaker, 2004, p. 150)”.

However, nowadays media relations include the classical press release that has a modern format (the audio press release, the video press release etc); the press conference that may be organized online as well using different virtual platforms; online press offices that include numerous media communication services mainly addressed to journalists, but also used for internal communication or targeting wider segments of audience – such as statistics, info graphics or video, photo, audio and text content; media tours organized by different companies; communication through social networks or through blogs; video or audio LIVE streaming from events; e-newsletters and others.

All of these traditional or new media relations techniques are used in order to communicate an institution, a person, an event, a product and so on, targeting both professional reporters and large audiences as well.

Media Communication within the European Union

According to the *White Paper on a European Communication Policy* from 2006, communication has remained too much of a ‘Brussels affair’ and European citizens feel they are not so important in the EU decision-making process (<http://europa.eu/>, accessed 2014).

Citizen participation is a precondition for developing a true European democracy and in order to get involved EU citizens need to understand Europe and to be well informed – “the right to information and freedom of expression are at the heart of democracy in Europe” highlights the cited *White Paper*.

Starting with this strategy, the European Union emphasizes the importance of the “local dimension” when addressing European affairs. Also, the *White Paper on a European Communication Policy* draws attention to the new digital technologies, since they can provide new tools for communicating Europe.

In order to verify EU’s media communication system, we will briefly analyze the EU NEWSROOM that is the official news platform of the European institutions - http://europa.eu/newsroom/index_en.htm .

The multimedia platform “provides online access to the latest official press material released by all EU institutions, as well as practical information for journalists”, as stated on the website.

The online newsroom functions as a single entry point to all EU news gathering the content from the previous four websites: EU press room, EU news, EU calendar and Media Center.

Compared to the four mentioned initial websites, the main features of the new media communication project include an “improved navigation (a horizontal navigation on every page to give direct access to all sections and subsections of the site); Improved readability; new look (better use of audiovisual material, new typography, and better coherence with the rest of the europa.eu site), as explained by the Europa WebTeam from EC (<http://blogs.ec.europa.eu/> accessed 2014).

Source: http://europa.eu/newsroom/index_en.htm accessed 2014

The main communication services provided by the EU Newsroom are:

1. *The press releases and statements* section that is being permanently updated. Users may filter their search using a browser that sort information by topic, by sources, within the current day, within the last seven or thirty days. There is an impressive quantity of information distributed through press releases and statements (there could be up to more than twenty press releases per day);
2. *The calendar* section provides structured information about forthcoming events, pointing practical details about the topic, the organizer, the location and the date of the scheduled action. This section offers a short background and websites linked to the event. Another filter helps the user to sort the information by date, by topic, by organizer and so on. \

3. *The Audiovisual* section provides *video, photo* and *audio content* that is again sorted by topic (such as culture, local development, science and technology, employment and others). This section includes a list of links to other media communication services of the European Union: *Europe by Satellite* (that covers through LIVE streaming the most important European events, and the service is available in natural sound in up to 20 EU languages); *EuroparlTV* (that is the web television of the European Parliament; LIVE streaming of parliamentary sessions, news, debates and educational videos with subtitles available for all videos in the 22 official languages of the EU, according to its website).

The screenshot shows the 'Audiovisual' section of the European Union Newsroom. It includes three columns for 'VIDEOS – LAST 30 DAYS', 'PHOTOS – LAST 30 DAYS', and 'AUDIO – LAST 30 DAYS'. Each column has a 'By topic' dropdown menu and a link to 'All latest [category] and list of other [category] galleries'. Below these is a 'Video' section with a video player showing a glass of water on a blue surface with the EU flag. To the right, there is a 'Showing today' section with links to 'Watch EbS', 'Watch EbS+', 'Europe by Satellite (EbS) schedule', 'Conseil LIVE – Programme', and 'EuroparlTV schedule'. At the bottom right, there is a 'Help us improve' section with a 'Find what you wanted?' survey.

Source: http://europa.eu/newsroom/index_en.htm accessed 2014

All these news material is offered free of charge for EU-related information and education purposes; video content presented as "documentaries" may not be edited while all other kinds of video material may be edited and broadcasted with credit to EU, according to the official website.

Conclusions

Media communication and media relations have been going through some major changes during the last decade due to the technological development. Audiences are consuming news in a different way, using numerous gadgets for accessing information, while professional communicators are adapting their strategies to the new needs of media

organizations. Communication offices do no longer depend only on media to share their messages, but they have access to sophisticated new channels of communication such as multimedia platforms, live streaming channels, virtual press conferences and others.

European Union has understood the challenges of the digital era and has developed its previous forms of communication into the new EU NEWSROOM, a complex media communication project that is functioning as a single entry point to all EU news. Journalists around the globe have quick access to diverse information, for free, sometimes even in real time through the LIVE coverage provided by the EU newsroom. Media newsrooms have the possibility to cover European affairs without necessarily having a correspondent located in Brussels.

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