

THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN MEDIUM ENTERPRISES LEADERSHIP COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

The Business Leadership Communication is undergoing rapid changes. The use of New Social Media has provided new opportunities for enterprises. The number of research-based reports in this field in Kosovo has been very limited. In these researches, the forms of e- communication have been explored and the use of social media has been mentioned, but there is no specific evidence on the level of its usage and possible impacts in the Leadership Communication. Therefore, the purpose of this study is: (1) to explore the most effective written communication mediums; (2) to show how social media can change the leadership communication inside the medium-sized enterprises and (3) to reveal whether e-communication strategy has been established. The research methodology includes a survey; the instrument used is a questionnaire which has been delivered in persona to the leaders of 25 ME's of Kosovo and 230 employees. The quantitative data are analyzed via using the statistical software STATA. This study measures the impact of the use of new social media in official communication of the leadership in SME-s. The findings are sent to ME's, in Kosovo or EU partners and will be appealing for leaders of the small and medium enterprises (ME's) as well as the researchers in Business Communication.

Keywords: Leadership Communication; ME's; Social Media.

1. Social Media as A Tool for Establishing a Social Business

New Social Media has played a crucial role in establishing a new generation of business enterprises. Those enterprises are not anymore based on the marketing strategies which use the web sites as a toll of promotion of their work. Nowadays, they have been more focused in creating network societies, which allows them to be more proactive and to generate new forms of communication with the staff and stakeholders. Kosovo has quite many web users. The web-based communities have been developed and the businesses have been oriented in using electronic communication as a form of communicating with the customers. The web-based communication has given an opportunity to the users to interact with the businesses (Sweeney and Randall, pp. 16, 2011), but the new role of customers has been possible only with the use of a new social media and with the establishment of a new transformational leadership inside the Medium Enterprises. This new transformational leadership directs the enterprises to use new social media as a tool for creating a new generation of business enterprises in Kosovo. The use of a new social media has imposed a new profile of the Business Leaderships. As a result, an effort to promote communication forms and strategies has been developed. However, being only 0.22 % (221 enterprises) of the total number of Enterprises in Kosovo, ME's do not represent a huge number and they have not been spreading new business culture in Kosovo (see: ARBK site). However, ME's have developed new ways of communication and have followed new trends of transformation of the business from web-based businesses to a new social-media-based generation. The new strategies for the ME's consists in establishing social-network-based enterprises instead of online-based companies. The development of a strategy of using new social media, therefore, has become crucial for ME's of 21-st century. This action has changed, however, the role of employees and of the communication staff. The communication strategies

are not based anymore only in the management's point of views or in the communication strategies prepared by the communication offices or with external sources. Each employee "advocates on a company's behalf" (Sweeney & Randall, 2011, p. 14)

2. The Use of Personal Profiles

ME's in Kosovo focus more and more in using Social Media initiatives to promote the companies' name. The use of personal profiles of the employees is perceived as a new tool for marketing strategy and for promoting the new role of the customers. Asking employees to follow certain policies and to promote them has played a crucial role in creating new ways of communicating with all stakeholders, but also to build a successful Personal Profile as a tool of advocacy for the ME's purposes. However, developing this profile has created a predisposal for changing the role of management and a spokespersons' role inside the enterprises. As the employees have become key promoters, the senior-level employees or the communication officers have won an opportunity to be focused in developing new blogs and connect the employees in a Social Media network. They also have developed new objectives, which are mostly based on the personal profile of employees and have been used as online objectives. For the leaders, it has been an opportunity to change the directional strategies to a more active one and to identify the Social Media activities as tools for building new strategic profiles, based mostly on a personal profile. Therefore, some online objectives have been designed very precisely and have been used to promote the objectives of the ME's. Sweeney and Randall have listed some of new possible online objectives: place high in search results; do more business online; build a permission-based mailing list; generate significant targeted traffic; improve our branding; improve our conversion rate and, finally, to sell more in the down season (pp. 2, 2011). Our research shows that promotion of the brand or the company's profile as a whole is the main purpose why the ME's managers use Social Media in addressing to the opinion. 91.7 per cent of the ME's in Kosovo have placed the improvement of the brand of ME's as the most important objective and have been using this objective as a tool for designing their own communication strategies. Managers see Social Media as a perfect tool for creating a new public opinion perception or changing it through the dynamic use of these media. Only 8.3 per cent use Social Media for other purposes rather than the promotion of the company. However, the research shows that managers of the Medium Enterprises are spending a lot of time and energy in promotion of the companies, more than for other purposes, like delivering information (58.3 per cent) or imposing new tasks (16.7 per cent) or reporting (33.3 per cent).

3. Brand Promotion in an (un)stable Internal Market

The reason why the ME's are defining online objectives as the most important objective is the Business Environment in Kosovo. ME's are facing a transformational culture which characterizes the developing countries like Kosovo and are becoming more connected to the challenges of the market; Kosovo has gone through the economic system transformation from the state controlled economy to the free market economy. Since ME's produce mostly for the internal market and the most companies are still small commercial businesses (29.8 % in 2014), Social Media has been used mainly from the owners or the high management. 16.7 per cent of the ME's the new media are used by the owners, as far as they are serving at the same time as the principal manager of the company. In the ME's who have a clear structure and the owner is not ruling as the principal manager, this duty has been transformed to the high management of the companies – in 58.3 per cent of the responding companies the high managers have been identified as responsible persons for using the Social Media Communication inside the companies. As the article will show, this is one of the challenges which the Medium Enterprises are facing with, as far as there is a huge flow of information. Only in 25 per cent of ME's this role is played by the communication officers / directors. The research underlines that ME's oriented

in internal market feel the instability of economy and the transition of the economic system. Therefore, they have a strong feeling toward the use of new social media in promoting the brand of the company as a main objective comparing to all above mentioned online objectives.

The opposite case is with internationally market oriented ME's. They have developed a marketing strategy compatible with the European ME's and EU market or they use the same marketing strategy (including Social Media and marketing techniques). Stone Castle i.e., one of the biggest wineries in the Balkan region exports abroad most of its 12 million liters produced. To be compatible in the international market, Stone Castle employs an up-to-date marketing strategy and it follows the marketing trends in the winery world. The most prominent marketing strategies used are: Social Media Marketing and Article Marketing (with a special emphasis on Blogs). Considering the shift of marketing in this technology era, Stone Castle's marketing strategy is well-aligned with the marketing strategies of its international competitors. Only 16.7 percent of the responding companies who are internal-market oriented use blog as a media.

1.1. Social Media Marketing

The excessive usage of internet, technology and mobile devices has increased the usage of social media marketing and its efficiency. Most businesses use social media marketing to: "increase brand awareness; advertising; feedback on products or services; promotional offers; directing to the organizations website, and inexpensive reach of potential customers and market intelligence gathering" (Cader and Tenaiji, 2013). Stone Castle uses Facebook, Twitter and Instagram as the main social media platforms. As a company, they appear very active in social media where they advertise their products, the process of producing wines and success stories. Their social media profiles are modern and attention catching because they use attractive pictures and modern quotes. Moreover, Stone Castle has a very updated website and is part of the Wine-Searcher engine which adds up to the social media presence and influence.

3.2. Article Marketing

One other strategy that the MEs' who are externally-market oriented, like StoneCastle, use Article Marketing (Ekanem, 2015) as online objectives in promoting business and targeting new markets and new profiles of costumers. They have more structured communication offices and use mostly the personal profiles of the employees to promote new services and products. In these ME's, the senior staff take care for blogs and ask employees to "advocate" the new market oriented strategies. Article Marketing helped them to involve drafting and publishing articles in relation to the product – usually these articles are success stories of the company and it contains direct links to the official website or social media accounts of the company. The most used type of article marketing used by Stone Castle are press releases and blog posts by wine connoisseurs that have a lot of followers in their blogs. For instance, Slander Trade LLC published an article showing that Mr. Richard, a wine connoisseur with a blog that has almost 84,000 clicks (Virginia Wine Time, 2016), will taste Stone Castle wines and tweet about them (Sandler, 2011). Moreover, there is a lot of article marketing present in different worldwide organizations in support of Stone Castle and widening their audience; United States Trade Tasting being one of them (USATT, 2017).

2. The Challenge of "To Much Updates"

Establishing a new social network strategy hyper estimates the role of the management and the communication staff. Their role is becoming more centralised into the ME's, being responsible for the diverse ways and channels of communication. A refreshment of the old information, posting videos in YouTube and new posts in Facebook, refreshing the information, responding to all readers and updating the news are becoming a challenge. Interacting to the needs of the costumers, getting a lot of feedback and responding to it, selecting the useful information and

transporting it to the higher management are key factors for the new role of Public Relations officers inside the ME's, but also a new challenge to the management to create a platform how to respond to this information' surge. Today's quote: "too much updates" is reflecting the challenge the enterprises are facing with and the need they feel to hire a new staff in communication offices. Updating the web site, manage search engine optimization, update blog, update Facebook profile or Facebook fun page; upload videos on YouTube; update LinkedIn profile, tweet etc., takes a lot of time for the ME's communication officers and the management. We have analysed the structure of the responding ME's and found out that only in 25 per cent of them are the communication officers ruling the communication with employees or customers. The major number of ME's still do not have Communication Offices neither have hired communication officers. ME's in Kosovo have not established communication offices and, as it was underlined, in most of them are the owners or managers are directing a communication strategy. Only ME's who work for international market or are part of international consortia have established a sustainable press or communication offices. If we take into consideration that Social Media strategy means "a lot of updates" and a lot of interactivity with the employees (their personal profile) and customers, it means that concentrating the use of social media into the manager's hands is strategically wrong.

The research shows that ME's are using more Social Media in 2017 comparing with the 2016, even though they are using the same Social Media as in the previous period. E-mail is used as a main channel for communication with the employees, and Facebook for the promotion of the brand of the company. Only 8.3 per cent of them have extended the number of the media they are using to promote their business or to communicate with stakeholders. In posting videos in YouTube, or posting in LinkedIn, tweeting in Twitter or Instagram is still a lack. However, the leadership of ME's is using more and more time communication with the staff or other stakeholders. The research shows that 41.4 per cent of the managers spend more than two hours daily to communicate electronically Only 16.7 per cent use social media less than one hour for this purpose. That means that leaders are becoming more and more engaged in communication with the employees or consumers. This period is part of working daily hours. We can resume that leaders are spending more and more time in interacting with costumers or other stakeholders and less in leading the ME's vision.

Conclusions

The transformation of economic system in Kosovo from state-controlled system to the free-market system has created a new opportunity to the Enterprises to develop a new structure of communication. They have developed new strategies of communication and have started using new social media as a tool for becoming more active into the economic market, but also to design new ways of communication with the employees, customers and other stakeholders. The new communication strategies have been focused in developing a new concept of social-network-based enterprises. That means that they have understood the challenges of the market and the needs for giving a new role to the customers. Therefore, they have designed new channels of communication. Using new Social Media and creating a new social network with employees and customers has helped to the ME's to use social media and personal profiles of the employees to build awareness on the importance of the customers and employees. However, being still not so big and working into an unstable market, the ME's of Kosovo do not cope well with the new challenges: the lack of the communication offices, communication officers etc., has created a new pressure to the managements of those companies. They do spend more and more time in communicating with the different stakeholders instead of managing internal and external issues.

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