

PROMOTING SOCIAL INNOVATION USING MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION TOOLS

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Abstract: The complexity of social problems involves sustained interventions not only from state actors but also from non-profit organizations. These initiators are called upon to address various issues, of a large group of beneficiaries, in the most creative way and with the few available resources. In this sense, social innovation is required to create sustainable and impactful projects. Social innovation needs marketing and communication tools to get the help of the beneficiaries and the public opinion to support these projects, including financial contributions. In this paper we seek out to obtain some answers on the role of marketing and communication in promoting and sustaining social innovation. In order to obtain the support of stakeholders on the long-run, social innovation can rely on the help of marketing and communication techniques. The positive results of social innovation projects need to be disseminated and multiplied so that stakeholders benefit from them. In the absence of sustained communication, solid projects of social innovation might not reach their goals and disappear in their infancy.

JEL classification: M30, M31

Key words: marketing tools, social innovations, organizational communication, organizational identity, stakeholders

1. INTRODUCTION

Social innovation has emerged in response to the increasingly numerous, complex, multidimensional social, environmental and demographic challenges that involve a multitude of stakeholders. These challenges are numerous and they are the result, among other things, of the failure of involvement of the state in social matters, the failure of conventional market capitalism, the lack of resources and climate change, the costs of the population aging and health care, the impact of globalization, the urbanization with its inherent problems.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2011) defines social innovation as opposed to economic innovation. This is due to the fact that

social innovation does not aim at “introducing new types of production or opening new markets for the purpose of profit, but it is about satisfying needs that are not tempting for the market, even if the markets later intervene”.

There are several approaches to interpret the social innovation. The term social innovation is used to describe “the transformation of society, a model of organizational management, social entrepreneurship, the development of new products, services and programs, a model of governance, empowerment and capacity building” (The Young Foundation, 2012). The transformation of the society is reflected in the innovative way in which the relationships between individuals and organizations are restructured. The organizational management imposed by the social innovation implies not only the pursuit of profit, as the sole purpose of an organization, but also the consideration of social causes. Solving social problems from an entrepreneurial perspective has led to the development of social entrepreneurship. New social services are required to address the needs of beneficiaries, in a continuous diversity and complexity. Cooperation between all stakeholders is necessary to ensure synergistic effects of social innovation and to replicate examples of good practice.

The organization implementing social innovation projects needs a wide range of communication tools to promote their ideas and projects within the community. Successful projects are those that benefit from the participation of both staff and beneficiaries. The beneficiaries must be involved in the development of social innovation or its governance. This is achieved either directly or through intermediaries or other actors who have direct contact with the beneficiaries. This commitment often contributes to ensuring that social innovation serves legitimate purposes and involves members of the target group in solving their own problems.

2. IDENTIFYING THE BENEFICIARIES AND THEIR NEEDS

The beneficiaries of the social innovation projects have different needs. These needs can be identified through a wide range of research techniques: observation, survey, ethnographic research.

Observation is a method of exploratory or descriptive research, used for collecting primary data on persons, objects or phenomena, in which the researcher does not communicate directly with the subjects, objects or situations under investigation. Qualitative techniques include the class of observation methods - techniques in which the researcher relies rather on his ability to observe than on communicating with a person in order to obtain information. Observation requires something to observe, and because our memories are imperfect, researchers depend on audio-video recording devices. At first glance, it would seem that observational research can be conducted without any underlying structure; however, it is important to adhere to a plan so that observations are consistent. In the specific case of social innovation, observation can retrieve data directly from the field, from disadvantaged groups. Also, by observation, you can adapt a product or service destined to the economic markets and redirect it to the markets with low income.

The survey is the most widely used method of obtaining primary data. By primary data or primary information we mean any verbal, written, numerical or in the form of symbols, which reflect behaviours, opinions, evaluations, attitudes, motives, intentions, preferences, etc., obtained for the first time, by one method or another, from those who own them (individuals, organizations, etc.). The survey, in the case of descriptive or explanatory research, implies the existence of a questionnaire and a

representative sample for the population considered. The units of the sample can be contacted directly, by telephone, by mail, by Internet, etc. Given the fact that conducting research requires conducting an investigation, then the problem of sampling becomes a distinct phase of research. This will involve, first of all, identifying the population from which the sample will be drawn. There is also the problem of establishing the sampling unit: natural person, family, household, firm, etc. A particular problem of sampling is the determination of the sample size so that it is representative for the population considered. The survey within the social innovation must be conducted so that the respondents can answer openly without the intention to mask certain mentalities or behaviours. Surveys can be conducted not only to identify new needs but also to test new social products or the viability of social innovation projects.

Ethnography uses different types of research methods, including participant observation, immersion and informal depth interviewing. Ethnographers look for words, metaphors, symbols and stories that people use to talk and describe their lives and communicate with one another. Sociologists have increasingly used ethnographic research to study social needs. Ethnographic research involves direct observation, interviews and audio-video recordings of consumers. Ethnographic research is not done at a certain point in time, like most other research. Ethnography can be done both in urban and rural areas in order to identify problems and create the premises for sustainable and inclusive development (Popescu et al., 2018).

3. MARKETING COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE SOCIAL INNOVATION ACTIVITIES

Organizational communication relies to a large extent on media support to generate audience and transmit messages to the target audience. Technological evolutions have amplified the scope and diversity of the media used to transmit messages (Criveanu & Popescu, 2018). The communication within the social innovation is two-directional: on the one hand it is addressed to the beneficiaries and on the other hand it is addressed to the general public in order to increase its awareness and involvement.

To communicate, organizations use various tools, media and messages that constitute the mix of marketing communication: advertising, sales promotion, direct marketing, personal sales and public relations marketing. The media range is expanding, thanks to digital and online media. The messages used to influence the public represent a balance between the need to provide information and the desire to develop long-term values by resorting to emotional elements. The way the mix is configured varies depending on the nature of the relationship with the stakeholders, the task to be performed and other contextual problems (Constantinescu, 2008).

Regarding traditional offline media, it is worth noting the longevity that has been used to support organizational communication initiatives.

Television offers a visual entertainment perspective, although it is a relatively expensive opportunity to reach stakeholders. The message is predominantly unidirectional and offers poor feedback or no opportunity for interaction with stakeholders. The television offers a number of advantages for the sender of a message: creativity and sustained impact, good coverage and the lowest cost per view, capturing the public's attention especially in the broadcasts with public audience, selectivity and flexibility. But these advantages are counterbalanced by the disadvantages of television: the high cost of production and transmission of messages, the lack of selectivity of the audience, the ephemerality of the message and the lack of organization within the

commercial spots. The use of television in the communication of social innovation is made difficult, in some cases, by the lack of access of the beneficiaries to this service.

Radio is declining in importance in the media landscape. Nowadays, increased creativity is needed to benefit from the advantages of the radio: low cost and efficiency, selectivity, flexibility. The disadvantages of the radio are related to the creative limitations, the fragmented audience due to the large number of radio stations, the low attention of the listeners and the lack of relevant information regarding the efficiency of the radio messages.

Traditional media is strongly competed by digital media which is cheaper and allows better interaction. This does not suggest that the role of traditional media has ended or is about to end in the field of contemporary communications. More likely is that offline and online communication will work together to offer better results to organizations.

Digital media has transformed the way organizations communicate with stakeholders. Also, the digital media has challenged the way in which the sending of messages is organized and structured. Although some of the principles associated with the way traditional media work still apply, digital media requires a different approach and offers new opportunities for organizations.

The website is the online business card of a social innovation project or non-profit organization. A site must have a name and be hosted by a server. A site must offer a pleasant design and provide information about the products and services offered by the company. Contact details are also essential. A site does not have to be very loaded, but must be harmonized with the objectives of social innovation project. The presentation of the activities involved can be complemented by small stories that have the role of connecting with the public.

Social networks are an excellent way to communicate with the target group of stakeholders. An organization page is often free. The company can distribute images with products and services or create events that appeal to stakeholders. Through distribution and redistribution or through stakeholder's appreciation, messages can be popularized with a large number of potential stakeholders. Social networks are excellent for personalized and targeted advertising with high accuracy. Through social networks, social innovation projects can quickly gain the support and involvement of the general public.

Online advertising can be placed through banners, videos or sponsored searches. Thus online advertising can be very effective and can help meet customer needs. For an online campaign the organisation can implement an in-house campaign or to appeal to a company specialized in digital communication.

E-mail marketing is a form of online communication that involves sending newsletters to clients in a database. The newsletter is an effective way to develop relationships with current and potential clients, as well as to support fundraising activities.

Public relations are a function of management that evaluates the attitudes of the public, identify the policies and procedures of the organization that are of public interest and implements the program of actions and communication to win the sympathy and acceptance of the public. Public relations programs can be directed to a wide audience, represented by the internal and external audience, company employees, sponsors and interest holders, beneficiaries and suppliers, media, non-governmental and governmental organizations, various financial groups. Organizations that implement

social innovation projects must master the art of public affairs in order to manage their relations with external stakeholders.

The press release is a common form of media relations activity. A written report on certain changes or evolutions in the organization is made available to the press, inviting the press to mention it as a news item. Traditionally this was sent to journalists, but at present, such information is transmitted by email or a message is sent in which journalists are informed about the press release posted on the website. The message is deliberately concise, synthetic and presented in writing so as to attract the publisher's attention. Further information can be obtained if the article presented is to be detailed or is only disseminated to the news. Media relations are a form of storytelling. For a story to be used and published, it must be of interest, that is, to bring value to the public. This allows the public to understand the context in which the storyteller wishes to interpret the story, thus ensuring coherence, integration and strengthening of the desired positioning.

The organization of events is an important activity of public relations but the impact of the events of public relations is not as strong as in the case of relations with the press. Community-targeted events contribute to the life of the local community, for example by sponsoring children's play areas, cleaning the parks, making contributions to local community centres and charity centres (Barbu and Bratu, 2018). The organization that implements social innovation projects is trying to become more involved in the local community as a good member of the community. This helps to develop the image of the organization and to raise awareness of its presence in the community.

4. BRAND MANAGEMENT IN SOCIAL INNOVATION

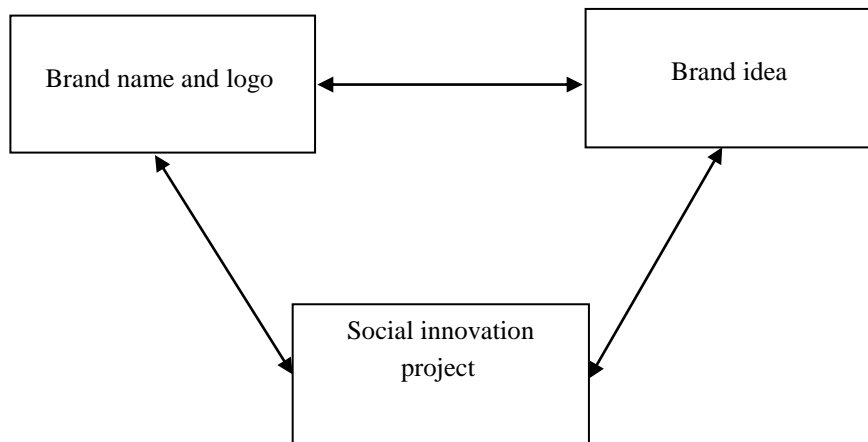
Brands embody linguistic and visual identities, but their substance is more than that: they are the emotional and rational relationship between the buyer and an organization, a relationship based in particular on the set of values that the brand proclaims (Bogdan 2010).

We can imagine the brand as an iceberg. A small part, represented by tangible and perceptible elements, is on the surface. It's the product, name, symbol, colour palette associated with the brand. The invisible part is the one that matters most, is more consistent, provides the brand's capital and is represented by the meanings of the brand. The trademark is the mechanism that legally protects the brand and ensures ownership of this intangible asset. Branding without brand protection can result in unfavourable results as the copying mechanism can easily appear or, moreover, the brand can be registered by someone else.

Brands are intangible assets that have value only when viewed in a system together with other elements of the organization such as the products offered, the human resources, the technology used, the purchasing and consumption experience it offers to the beneficiary. Without the support of the product or service that the attraction of a brand designates, it is quite limited. In this way, the primacy of the brand gets a resonance for consumers. A brand gives a better clarity and understanding of the portfolio of products and services proposed by the organization (Nistorescu et al., 2014).

Kapferer (2008) admits the existence of three poles of the brand: the social innovation project, the brand idea and the name and the symbol. The three elements combine to form the brand system. To win people's acceptance a brand must turn an

idea into a successful project, to be appreciated, discussed by people, to be delivered to the market in a tangible form (Figure 1).



Source: Adapted from Jean Noel Kapferer, The New Strategic Brand management, Kogan Page, 2008, p. 12.

Figure 1. Brand system in social innovation projects

Branding in social innovations is needed to raise awareness and commitment. A social cause is not something that will be in the mind of the public every day. Organizations implementing social projects are interested to create strong brands so that individuals will engage those brands in the same manner as with the commercial brands. In this respect, branding should guide every component of the organization and must oversee the communication strategy with the general public. It is worth noticing that under the brand's umbrella the activities of the organization become more coherent (Olins 2009). Also, the brand is an excellent medium for innovation and social initiatives often rely on new forms of implementing their projects.

Branding becomes the channel through which the organization presents itself internally and in front of different external environments. Branding influences every part of the organization and every audience. A brand is highlighted by the set of evocations and meanings with which the public relates emotionally and rationally; a brand has a higher value as it has more meanings relevant to its audience. A brand is all the more valuable as there is a larger community of people who share its values. If an organization is brand-oriented it may have more satisfied stakeholders (Chovancová et al., 2015).

The value of the brand is in the minds of the people but the organization that owns the brand is the one who picks the fruit. The brand offers recognition to an organization, helps differentiate and position. The brand allows an organization to offer a wide range of meanings, of associations with which the consumers make a bond and hence the attachment.

5. ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY. IDENTIFICATION WITH INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL BENEFICIARIES

At present, organizations are more and more concerned with the concept of identity. Identities need to be communicated in a perfect symbiosis with the

organizational strategy both to internal and external audiences. The image of the organization and the identity of the organization are in a strong relationship: the identity of the organization is what the organization transmits and the image is what is reflected from the target audience.

Regarding the definition of organizational identity, this has to do with the boundaries of the organization and the specification of "who we are" and "what we do" (Cheney et al., 2011). Organizational identity refers to how we can recognize an organization from the perspective of its fundamental and specific elements.

In the current context, characterized by increasing interdependencies, increasing interaction between organizations and increasing the speed of transformations, the boundaries of organizations are increasingly difficult to establish. There are levels of overlap of organizational identity, in the way that they are difficult to establish distinct and persistent elements of identification for each organization. There are a multitude of social innovation projects, which can contribute to diluting their significance and impact. Organisations need stable identities that are favourable and unique. In what degree organizational identities can be stable today, when there are a lot of social innovation initiatives? How could social innovation projects resonate with the beneficiary or the supporting public?

The question that arises is how organizational identity can develop among the interested stakeholders. We consider that social innovation projects can find their vocation only if they respond to a real need of the target audience. In addition, they can benefit from the support of the stakeholders only if the problem addressed by these projects also affects them, in one way or another.

The management of a program of communication of the organizational identity of an organization that implement projects of social character can include the following sequence of steps: a) establishing the rationale of being an organization; b) defining the mission of the organization and c) establishing the desired organizational identity (figure 2).

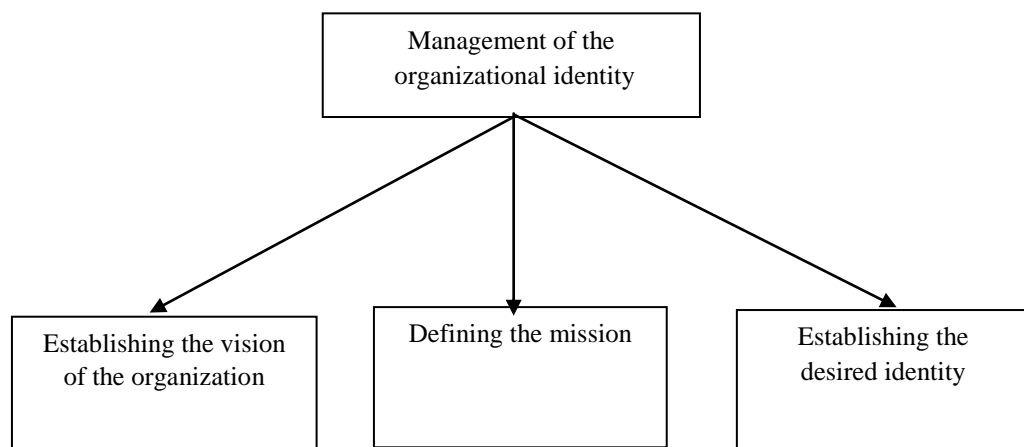


Figure 2. Management of the organizational identity

The strategic management of the communication of the organizational identity is the management process oriented towards the knowledge of the identity by a large public and obtaining the synergies of image, in order to achieve the organizational

objectives. Communicating the organizational identity includes: vision, objectives, implementation and evaluation of the strategy.

The vision of the organization offers the direction in which the organization intends to perform in the future. The three elements of the vision of the organization, respectively the values, the mission and the environment in which they operate, must be harmonized to give consistency and strength to the organization.

The vision refers to how organizational identity can contribute to long-term stakeholder satisfaction. Values are central elements of organizational identity. The values determine a certain behaviour on the part of both the staff and the public, which leads to the increase of the attachment to organizations. Examples of organizational values adequate for social innovation include: help for the disadvantaged groups, care for the children and elderly, innovation, social responsibility, environmental protection, etc. Regardless of their form, organizational values are important as the stakeholders know about what the organization is fighting for and thus more easily adhere to the mission of the organization. In addition, the stakeholders are more motivated, and people who believe in the values of an organization are more inclined to sustain, one way or another, that company (Bocean et al., 2018).

Organizational identity management involves clearly establishing the messages that will be transmitted and interpreting these messages by the public. Organizations implementing social innovations projects must ensure that the target audience has decoded the message in the way the organization wants. Balmer and Greyser (2003) consider that identity management aims at designing, developing and communicating the mission of an organization, its philosophy and its ethos. The identity comes from within the organization and this will be related to the dominant culture of the organization.

Organizations, like individuals, seek to gain social recognition. For an individual, her set of skills and competencies, her achievements, represents her identity reflected through the prism of others. Another measure of identity is given by the individual's affiliation to various social groups or his various material possessions. For a social oriented organization, identity is measured by associating with its defining features: a responsible organization, a trustworthy organization, an organization committed to the well-being of the society.

For the person working for a social innovation organization, material rewards are just a part of the motivational factors. Many individual offer their help and expertise in a voluntary manner, free of any financial benefits. A strong identifying force for an individual is with the organization she works for. Often, the organization to which the individual is affiliated offers her prestige and recognition. The organizations themselves have realized this and support the interest and loyalty of their employees by offering certain incentives. In addition, organizations also offer a sense of belonging and sharing of common values with employees. Thus the organization is regarded as the larger family or the extended family of the individual.

Organizational identification at the personal level occurs when a person's beliefs about the organization become reference or defining. When the members of an organization identify with the organization itself, it means that they have internalized their mission, vision, goals. The individual who identifies herself with the organization is willing to help the organization in different ways: increasing commitment and efficiency at work, more cooperative behaviour towards colleagues, more assertive towards clients (Taehee et al., 2010).

The relationship between employee and organization is both symbiotic but also self-perpetuating: working for an organization with a positive reputation increases the self-image of the members and vice versa, strong employee identification with the organization allows maintaining a good image, because employees share experiences positive with other people. In the same register, if employees are motivated by the association with a poor organizational image they are prone to transmit negative images. An organization that manages to successfully convey its goals and values is also an organization that succeeds in determining employees to identify with it (Barbu, 2011).

The literature has shown that there is a correlation between organizational identification and job satisfaction, employee well-being and civic behaviour of employees (Cheney et al., 2011). Thus, the management of the organization wants to control the organizational identification in order to benefit the previously identified benefits.

Organizational identification in a few cases is a spontaneous feeling. Rather, the top management is concerned with transmitting to the staff symbolic messages that help to increase the identification, as well as a whole arsenal of techniques specific to the organizational culture: uniforms, rituals, ceremonies and other symbols of the community. Group cohesion is often considered a powerful source of organizational identification.

5. CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, organizations that implement social innovation projects need to have a consistent communication strategy. All activities from the communication mix can be successfully deployed to raise the awareness of potential beneficiaries and general public. In addressing the relationship with its stakeholders, organizations can adopt an offensive strategy or a defensive strategy. The offensive strategy aims at a constant flow of messages and a pressure of stakeholder-oriented communication to keep them connected to the problems of the organization. The defensive strategy search to strengthen the communication with the stakeholders when a problem appear at the horizons or in every other cases in which the interests of the organization request for it. For social innovation, the construction of a brand is important as it emphasizes the need for staff and beneficiaries to adhere to a cause. Successful brands help organizations focus on the relationship with the market, on the management of the public experience. In the long term, a singular project of social innovation can turn into a sustainable activity, it can become a brand. A strong brand can lead to a better identification of the beneficiaries and general public with the organization. Organizations that implement social innovation projects need to get the support of a large group of people, including personnel of the organization, beneficiaries of social innovation projects and general public. Both internal and external audiences, in order to fully contribute to the success of social innovation projects, are called to manifest a strong identification with the organization.

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