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PHD THESIS SUMMARY

**DIGITAL COMMUNICATION IN THE TRANSYLVIAN
BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT**

— CORPORATE BRAND IDENTITY AND THE IT INDUSTRY —

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KEYWORDS

Digital communication, corporate brand identity, organizational communication, internal communication, branding, external communication, brand personality, business environment, Human Resources initiatives, digital promotion, visual identity, organization-employee relationship, employee loyalty, work from home, IT industry, Transylvania, digital communication in the Covid-19 era

INTRODUCTION

From the beginning of his existence, man has searched to discover and understand the essence of his life to be able to identify the best ways to live with others. The process of communication has gradually evolved over several centuries and has helped the human being to claim supremacy over other living creatures. Humans are still evolving, and the environment and the society does not cease to influence the way they communicate with others and with themselves.

This paper illustrates the importance of communication and its role in the society and business environment, without overshadowing the revolutionary steps taken until today, and how people evolved to a society conquered by technology. We had the opportunity to develop this research in a special period, Covid-19 era. In this thesis we will provide a clear vision of the digital communication process and we will present the corporate brand identity elements present in the Transylvanian IT organizations, and we hope to inspire our colleagues to develop similar papers in this field. With over ten years of experience in communication and marketing, the author had the chance to observe participatively how people communicate in different circumstances, how they work from home, what are the processes of interaction within the different groups etc. However, there is no doubt that the communication process changes from one organization to another, even if the activity is similar.

Communication and technology - two essential elements of the society of yesterday, today, and tomorrow. We all know that from Gutenberg to the Internet has been a long way, sprinkled with successes and obstacles.

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We are slowly approaching the centenary of the discovery of the modern computing technology, and our goal is to see how the two elements intertwine to become a real support for every person and organization that is using the modern technology daily. Managing and synthesizing the amount of information is the starting point for understanding the concept of communication in an information society, developed through new technologies.

The researcher classifies the new forms of communication according to the following terms: (a) digital communication, facilitated by the Internet and information technology; (b) brand identity and marketing, used as promotional tools to increase the customers loyalty; (c) organizational identity, primarily responsible to maintain the employee loyalty.

These new methods of communication have spread like a real pandemic, and their effects have been obvious, influencing the way people work in the workplace, and beyond. We must recognize that we are living of change, a time when we all are addicted to computers, Internet, mobile phones, tablets, and other similar tech products, which has influenced the way they communicate. We believe that this "union" between communication and technology is meant to give a solemn character to the society found in a constant development, evolution, and adaptation to the new. In fact, 2020 marked a new beginning, being the year in which the entire population was "forced" to interact online more than ever, due to restrictions imposed at national and local level. Video conferencing has become more popular, and messaging applications have grown rapidly to meet demand.

We will try to find a balance in the presentation of the two key terms, because the aim of the paper is to provide an objective view on how people communicate internally and externally in the IT organizations. In this context, we will bring to the readers' attention the term *corporate brand identity*, which we consider to be the cornerstone of communication in the business environment. In fact, we see the communication process as a jewel often unappreciated. It is a "powerful weapon" that deserves to be treated seriously.

Two or three decades ago, companies communicated with customers, employees and suppliers face to face or by phone, but now everything is just one click away. Digital communication has triggered a revolution in the organization, as they started using the new technologies daily. Our interactions and discussions with specialists in management, leadership, communication, marketing, and human resources can serve as a guide for those companies who want to discover the secret of a successful business or learn from the mistakes of others.

The theoretical framework is focused on two concepts: communication and technology, as we previously mentioned. In the first part we present the main stages in the history of human communication, which evolved progressively, until they reached the form we know today. They coexist and constantly provide new value indicators to balance life.

Communication has accompanied the human being throughout its existence and growth, being noticed from its early experience on Earth. The evolution from the age of writing to the age of technology has taken place gradually over several centuries. The ethics and deontology of communication in the society and the business environment takes us to the past and helps us to discover how the process of communication has evolved through different stages. The discoveries done by different researchers intrigued to find out the best definition of the process of communication helped us get where we are today. The Age of Discovery has radically changed the way individuals interact, just as technology and the Internet have revolutionized the society in which we live today. Returning to the roots of communication helped us see how communication has been reinvented and adapted to the evolution of society.

This paper has the ambition to offer a few keys to conquer the Epicurean world seen from the perspective of communication in the digital age. When we talk about the Internet, we cannot say that we are promoting a pious myth, because humanity and society are constantly evolving, and technology has only led to the creation of a global system of interconnections.

The practical framework is dedicated to identifying the way in which the IT companies from Transylvania (Cluj, Brasov and Sibiu counties) communicate in the first part of 2021, after a period of challenges and restrictions generated by Covid-19. We must recognize that this unique situation has placed our daily activities under scrutiny. The states isolated the people with a lack of delicacy, out of the desire to limit the number of diseases, but the companies had to go further with an optimistic attitude. In fact, technology organizations have sent their employees to work from home without interrupting or affecting their daily work. The researcher aims to find out if this period determined the companies to review their activity, communication, marketing and human resources strategies. Sending employees to work from home has certainly been an inspired move, but did this affect the company's productivity and evolution?

We have five dimensions that underlie our research:

- (1) Initiatives of the Human Resources department.
- (2) The importance of attitude towards customers and employees.
- (3) Brand personality and reputation.

- (4) The visual identity of the organization.
- (5) Principles of effective communication.

Corporate brand identity is a new term, which we have never encountered in the scientific papers from our country, but we believe that can be successfully applied in companies that have more than ten employees. Out of the desire to identify how it is reflected in the IT companies from Transylvania, we launched five general research questions and five general research hypotheses, corresponding to each dimension. These questions helped us to build our case study, to organize the research methods and to develop the set of specific questions. We tested the proposed hypotheses by applying the research methods (content analysis, opinion poll, structured questions, and semi-structured questions).

The general research questions from which we started the research are the following:

1. How is the visual image of the organization reflected in the virtual environment?
2. How does the visual identity influence the brand personality?
3. How do the participants in the study characterize the brand identity?
4. What are the initiatives of the Human Resources department in the development of an organizational culture?
5. How do the study participants describe the organization-audience relationship?

The general research hypotheses are:

1. The visual image plays an important role in the virtual environment.
2. The visual identity influences the personality of the brand, and the way it is perceived by the internal and external environment.
3. Managers and employees perceive the brand as being important.
4. The Human Resources Department understands the importance of developing a beneficial relationship with employees, and develops various training sessions in order to develop their skills.
5. The relationship between the organization and the audience plays an important role in the communication strategy.

The author considers that this research can be generalized to other companies from Romania that operate in the field of technology, information, and communications. With the

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help of this research paper, we wanted to bring to the readers' attention the importance of the corporate brand identity, because we all know that the organization cannot function without dedicated employees and satisfied customers. From the beginning, we viewed employees as the "soul of the organization", and customers as the "heralds of success".

Internal communication is closely linked to external communication, these two processes being seen like two intertwined circles. This subject is important for the business community and specialists in the field of communication sciences because it offers a new vision on digital communication and approaches the corporate brand identity from five different angles.

MOTIVATION RESEARCH

This doctoral thesis had arisen from the researcher's desire to see how IT organizations perceive the term *corporate brand identity*. The context was unique, the analysis being performed a few months after the Covid-19 pandemic. The paper is structured on five pillars: the initiatives of the Human Resources department, the importance of the attitude towards customers and employees, the personality and reputation of the brand, the visual identity of the organization and the principles of efficient communication. These topics are addressed in the case study, where we applied different research methods to see how people communicate in IT institutions. The researcher considers that the organization-employee-customer relationship is very important and deserves special attention.

The original contribution to the Romanian literature is represented by the analysis of the corporate brand identity in a period with numerous challenges and restrictions. Internal and external communication directly contribute to maintaining a fragile balance during these uncertain days. The attention paid to these types of activities has a major impact on the image of the organization, and digital communication has given people the chance to continue their work and cope with the changes imposed.

Until this thesis was published, no similar case studies have been identified. Moreover, the term corporate brand identity is proposed and promoted by the author of the doctoral thesis out of the desire to provide a strategic vision on how the brand is seen in the organizations.

The development of this analysis in the field of communication sciences can be seen as a challenge because the process is very dynamic, and its constantly changing. Globalization is shaping the society, and the technology tools are creating a knowledge-based society.

SYNTETIC PRESENTATION OF THE PHD THESIS

This research paper has two essential parts. The first part is dedicated to the theoretical framework and presents the communication methods and principles. The second part focuses on practical activities started to test the main research questions. Regarding the structure, we mention that the paper has six chapters, each being divided into four or six sub-chapters.

The first three chapters are part of the theoretical framework and creates the necessary structure for development and presentation of the empirical research. The specialized literature brings a great praise to the evolution of the communication process in the society. Its history has remained beautifully framed in the pages of textbooks dedicated to communication sciences.

The first chapter, **Evolution of communication — from the writing era to the Internet era**, presents the progress of the communication process and how it has evolved from the age of writing to the present day. The researcher presented the definitions and the etymological meaning of communication to emphasize its importance and role in the society. Among the most eloquent definitions we mention those proposed by Watzlawick, Sfez, McQuail, Newton, Shannon, Weaver, Dance, etc. We would like to add one important thing - although this concept began to be used only in the fourteenth century, we strongly believe that it has always existed and will last for a long time to come in various forms.

Next, we presented the most important elements of the communication process, communication methods and communication objectives, sub-chapter in which we looked at communication as a procedure in which we have a sender and a receiver who send each other messages. At the end, we presented the Palo Alto Model and the axioms of communication, considered processes of absolute truth, and the main methods of communication (Laswell, Shannon and Weaver and the interactive model of communication).

The general objective of the first chapter is to review the main aspects of the communication process and to briefly present its evolution in society. People have evolved in tandem with spiritual, religious, scientific, and technological discoveries. For many researchers, its appearance is still a mystery.

Researchers have launched many theories about the origins of human beings and their development, but one thing is certain – the human communication is influenced directly by the

numerous techniques of transmitting information. We would like to mention here the main eras of communication evolution: the age of signs and signals, the age of speech and language, the age of writing, the age of printing, the age of mass media and the age of information.

Defining the term *communication* continues to be a challenge for the scientific community due to its dynamic nature. Most definitions present communication as a rational process that supports the interpretation of the transmission and interpretation of messages, whether verbal or non-verbal. As we mentioned before, communication is an integral part of our society. It is the element that supports and develops the activity of human beings, which is why we consider it important to take a brief look at the past and praise the achievements of our ancestors.

The five axioms of communication, identified in the literature also under the name of the "axiomatic model of communication", confirmed the assumption that people do not have control over evolution. Often the facts of the past dictate the present, situation accepted in the rules presented by the Palo Alto School. Although it has been about 70 years since their appearance, they continue to be a landmark in the study of communication. In addition to these axioms, the author wanted to analyze the main methods of communication. Most of them appeared in the second half of the twentieth century, using conceptual theories in the wake of the dominant epistemology at the time of its formulation. The specialists who formulated these theories carried out their activity in the undisputed, and calm glory of the post-war era and managed to carry out their activity in a period of media evolution.

The second chapter, **Digital communication, and the new paradigms of communication**, takes the reader back to the present day, in the Information age. Communication in the digital age is our main topic, and we covered the most important events from the evolution of the Internet and how technology has changed human interactions. The author illustrated his course both globally and nationally, because although they have a similar story, they painted their path with their own pen. Another important topic presented was the interaction between organizations and the digital environment. The last part was dedicated to communication strategy within IT companies where we described what *virtual enterprise* and *distributed team*¹ means. Given the current context and the effects created by the Coronavirus

¹ Teams composed of employees who work remotely from all around the world.

pandemic at the organization level, we considered it is essential to see how these concepts are defined in the literature.

The Internet is everywhere - in public spaces, in restaurants and cafes, in public transport, in people's homes. Therefore, mobile phones and laptops are seen as essential communication tools. One thing is for sure, this new form of communication gives people the opportunity to be permanently connected regardless of their location.

The new knowledge-based economy has integrated sustainable development strategies into society, equal opportunities regardless of age, religion, ethnicity or sexual orientation, reorganization of the business environment and public space and free access to information. We can say that this society is based on three pillars: information technology, communication technology and digital content production and promotion.

Nowadays, people can communicate through messages, emails, messaging applications or online dialogue on social networking sites and forums, regardless of geographical location. The Internet connection is no longer a novelty, becoming as widespread as electricity. The Internet and technological tools offer a wide range of services, the aim of which is to facilitate consumer access to information, education, and professional and personal development.

This chapter helped us to gain a clear vision of the evolution of technology, which created the "virtual reality" that people are experiencing today. In the last 30 years, this field has gained popularity with the advent of search engines (Google, Yahoo, etc.), social networks (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram) and billions of blogs and web pages that have started to be read by many users.

S. Levy described the Internet as a form of interactivity that brings the consumer closer to the provider, offering an unlimited number of communication channels.

The Internet promotes a world without borders, a universe where people can communicate with other people located in other parts of the world, in real time. The past will always be present, but this new technology is the key that opens the door to the future. Organizations could not ignore the "shrill crawl" of new technology devices and began to adopt them within the organization. In the beginning it was the programmable computing machine, then came the programming languages that led to the creation of a virtual world with infinite possibilities. The most popular digital communication tools are email, instant messaging applications and programs, social networks, newsletter, and video conferencing.

According to a report provided by PwC Global Entertainment in 2018, the digital segments will experience a dynamic growth, in Romania being estimated revenues of USD 3.7

billion by 2022. In fact, the IT industry is one of the most important industries of the future, recording annual spectacular increases.

In Romania, the IT sector is conventionally made up of four industries, each segment being divided into different activities:

- "Information technology industry"
- "Electronic communications industry"
- "Information and Computer Technology (ICT) equipment manufacturing industry"
- "Trade in the Information and Computer Technology (ICT) equipment industry"

The communication and branding strategy within these companies is very important, as it is often accompanied by branding and public relations. It comes to complete and support the business plan by providing steps for a more effective internal and external communication. The company image is worth a thousand words. Without this guide there is a risk of carrying out communication activities that are not helping them achieve their goals.

The third chapter, **Corporate branding and organizational identity in the digital era**, is covering the most important elements of the organizational identity and branding concept processes. The Internet has become more than just a network of computers through which people manage to send messages to the other side of the world. We brought to the reader's attention the term corporate brand identity, a relatively new concept, but extremely important for this research. Branding has gained popularity in recent decades, which is why we see brand identity as being vital for any organization. Virtual branding has evolved in tandem with the Internet and digital communication and directly contributes to the company's success or failure. Organizational identity is a ubiquitous communication tool that defines the character of the organization and how it is perceived by their employees and customers.

The Internet is more than a global network of computers. Specialists around the world perform miracles almost every day. The evolution of technological tools has radically changed the way companies operate, and the epidemiological crisis from 2020 marks a new wave of change within organizations.

Defining the term *brand* seems to be a difficult, due to its complexity. It seems to have appeared somewhere during 950 BC and was used with the following meaning: "to light a piece of wood". In 1500 it acquired a new connotation, being used to "mark the right of ownership". Each farm had a brand for easier identification of animals. With the passage of time and the

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evolution of man in society, the connotation has come closer to the present essence. In the 1960s, people working in the field of public relations associated brands with emotional benefits. One of the most popular slogans of this period (1979) is the one promoted by Coca-Cola, "Have a Coke and a Smile!".

De Chernatony sees the brand as being identified with a great product so that the buyer perceives it unique, and with values close to his needs. In addition, it needs to be different and more attractive than their competitors.

Organizational identity offers more details about the internal communication and how the message is communicated. In this situation, the inside elements overlap with the outside elements, influencing each other. It is a powerful tool and can regulate various aspects of the organization and has two important parts:

1. The way in which employees are aware of belonging to the organization.
2. The way in which the organization projects its image on the outside.

If the communication actions are coherent, they will support the definition of the organization's personality. In 1978, Ollins Wolff pointed out in the "Corporate Personality" guide that it's the soul, person, and spirit of the organization.

As evolution defines the human condition, identity, culture, and climate are considered the keys to the growth of any organization. Identity sustains and protects the company's image, culture drives people to act and uphold the organization's values, and climate refers to employees' perceptions of the workplace.

In this chapter we also mentioned Maslow's pyramid, which is the basis of organizational communication, because it discloses the needs and expectations of employees. He shows that people have several levels of needs:

- "Physiological needs"
- "Security and safety needs"
- "Social needs"
- "Esteem needs"
- "Self-actualization needs, personal fulfillment"

His pyramid is mirroring the modern times, punctually describing the breath of society. This classification of the needs of individuals can also be identified as "D needs", D coming from the word "deficit". The first four needs are clear and concrete, while the need for self-

realization is more abstract, because fulfillment can mean different things. By deficit we understand the need to act, to fill the gaps created by society.

The next three chapters are part of the empirical research, which are focused on the *corporate brand identity*, a term mentioned in an analysis conducted by Coleman, Chernatony and Christodoulides, who investigated how managers interact in IT companies in the UK. The three authors proposed this model consisting of the five dimensions mentioned: (1) Initiatives of the Human Resources department, (2) The importance of attitude towards customers and employees, (3) Personality and reputation of the brand, (4) The visual identity of the organization and (5) The principles of effective communication.

We will investigate this concept from the perspective of the company's management and employees which will help us see the organization as a complete system.

Balmer believes that organizational identity includes specific values and characteristics, which together with the visual image or corporate brand creates the organization and their products and services. Given that this term was crystallized especially in the '90s we can say that it developed with the help of the World Wide Web.

The fourth chapter, **Content analysis: the visual identity of the IT companies in the digital environment**, is the first chapter dedicated to research methodology. In this part we clearly presented the general research questions and hypotheses, we defined the content analysis. We chose the three companies included in this research and we established the analysis parameters. Our goal was to see how the visual identity is reflected in the virtual environment and to understand how they communicate with their audience.

The author included companies from Transylvania that have over 460,000 inhabitants and more than 10 employees. Another condition was the main caen code, our aim being to include in the sample only the following companies from the Information and Communications sector: 582 - "Software publishing activities", 620 - "Technology service activities information" and 631 - "Web portal activities, data processing, web page administration and related activities". We created a list with 60 companies from Transylvania (20 small and medium companies, 20 large companies and 20 companies with over 250 employees). The organizations were chosen randomly using a Microsoft Excel formula.

This research is comparative, illustrating the visual identity of the organization. The parameters that formed the basis of the analysis are the logo, the design, the basic sections of

the website, the text, the colors, the services offered, the applications that helps to easier interact with the visitor, the style of writing the content, call-to-action buttons and the presence of icons for social networks.

Following the analysis, we noticed that the chosen organizations pay special attention to the website design, graphic elements, content, and message, which is most of the time clear and concise. This chapter is of particular significance for our because provides important details about on the visual image and identity in the digital environment.

The conclusion obtained was that the three websites understand the role of a website in a business, and they try to virtually connect with their internal and external audience. The comparative analysis showed us that Wolfpack Digital and Cognizant Softvision promote customer-oriented and team-oriented content, while Ropardo addresses mainly to customers with experience in software development, the language being technical. Also, the analysis indicators showed us that organizations perceive the importance of visual identity for building a strong brand strategy that will help them grow their business.

The fifth chapter, **Survey analysis: Managers' perception of organizational brand identity**, presents the second research method: survey data collection. Out of the desire to understand the reflection of the corporate brand identity within the companies from Cluj, Braşov and Sibiu, we created a Likert scale questionnaire, to see how managers perceive the relationship between organizational identity and their brand, how they describe the relation between organization-employees-customers, and how they have worked in the last 12 months (from the office or from home).

We included in this analysis managers that are working in a small and medium-sized company, a large company or a company with more than 250 employees; the organization's headquarters had to be in Cluj, Brasov or Sibiu counties (urban and rural), and the main caen codes are 582 - "Software publishing activities", 620 - "Information technology service activities" and 631 - "Information technology activities" web portals, data processing, web page administration and related activities".

The questionnaires were distributed online through social media platforms, email, messaging applications, and we analyzed the data using the IBM SPSS statistical program, Grad Pack 27.0 PREMIUM version. In the last part, we presented the results obtained and we described each variable separately through the filter of the statistical tests. We were able to

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discover that the corporate brand identity plays a big part, and visual identity and digital communication have a vital role in their business.

According to the function it has in the study, we can say that the survey is the main research study, because we consider it as the basic technique for obtaining data.

The questionnaire has 25 statements, which we see as stimulus questions in the form of text. Respondents were encouraged to agree or disagree, on a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 means "Total agreement" and 1 "Total disagreement". The researcher considers that the application of the Likert scale is relevant to identify the way in which managers within IT companies perceive the term corporate brand identity. We attributed five affirmations to each dimension.

The study relates to the current situation created by Covid-19, by adding value to this analysis. Communication is a dynamic process, constantly changing, and it is important to see how the major events are changing the way people communicate and work. This analysis was started in parallel with the structured and semi-structured interviews, because these two studies are complementary - the management vision is intertwined with the employees' vision and the external environment formed by clients or potential clients. We also wanted to present the results of the quantitative analysis, before the qualitative one implemented with the help of the interview, thanks to the respondents included in the sample. The data was collected in February – April 2021.

The frequency analysis showed us that managers consider that the organization focuses on employees and customers, the management team providing superior products and services.

Regarding the visual identity of the organization, we were able to see that it supports the development and evolution of the brand, which helps to easily identify the promoted messages, the company logo, the campaigns carried out in the online environment, etc. Managers consider that the brand is the core of their communication process. They believe that the Communication and Marketing team understands the importance of developing a strong brand that resonates with the public. We strongly believe that without a dedicated team it is not possible to develop and maintain a brand. We must not forget that the brand, although not an easily measurable marketing tool, it supports the success of the organization. Transmitting a clear message to the target audience is essential, but the way it is conveyed also plays a vital role. Digital tools create an environment conducive to attracting new customers, and the more famous a brand is, the easier it will be for the customers to make the purchase decision.

People tend to have more confidence in established brands. According to our results, managers believe that teams that are often in direct contact with customers (Communication

and Marketing, Sales and Support) are educated to easily communicate the benefits of the offered products. The role of the Sales and Support departments is vital, as the members interact with customers daily. Employees who are at the forefront of communicating with the external environment are often assimilated with the brand.

Internal communication has also gained popularity in the last 12 months, with training and instruction programs developed within the company, having the role of supporting the identification and consolidation of new skills and abilities needed in the workplace. Companies are increasingly investing in employees to get the best out of them.

The researcher considers that the year 2020 represents the beginning of a new era in the business environment, a period that brings changes in the organization. Distributed teams are no longer a myth and have become a reality. Luckily, the results have shown us that people remain loyal even if they work from home.

The sixth chapter, **Interview analysis: employees' and customers' perceptions of corporate brand identity**, includes information about the structured and semi-structured interviews and the results obtained in the analysis process. In this part of the research, we focused on employees and customers or potential customers. Given the social context and the restrictions generated by Covid-19, the interviews were conducted online.

Internal and external communication directly contribute to maintaining a fragile balance in an uncertain period. The attention paid to these activities has a major impact on the organization's image, and digital communication has given people the chance to continue their work and cope with the changes imposed.

We divided the respondents into several categories, out of the desire to receive information from qualified people, which could bring value to the study. Employees in the Human Resources and Communication and Marketing departments are seen as the parents of internal and external communication, and they play a key role in our research. We do not want to minimize the importance of these specialists before the Covid era, but according to the results obtained by us they became the basic pawns of the organization in a period of major challenges.

During the semi-structured interviews, we discovered that Human Resources employees carry out numerous activities to meet the needs of employees and take the pulse of the situation by sending internal questionnaires. Most of them consider that the connection between internal and external communication is close because the organizational identity can

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affect the company's brand. Given that we included companies of all sizes, we noticed that the smaller companies require their employees to go to the office more often than those with a larger team. Some of them had the opportunity to interact more often with colleagues face to face, while others collaborated with them using various applications for online meetings.

If we were to analyze the results according to the size of the company, we would have the following results:

- Small and medium-sized companies were least affected by the changes brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic in terms of business organization and organizational communication. Many of employees continued to go to the office and had the chance to interact more often with their colleagues face-to-face.
- Large companies and companies with more than 250 employees have chosen to send their employees to work from home most of the time, trying to develop digital activities to maintain their loyalty.
- The brand identity is important for all companies.

Respondents unanimously replied that the brand is essential. The way companies communicate has become more important than ever. The ones that answered to the semi-structured interviews revealed that employees in the Human Resources and Communication and Marketing departments needed to be more creative, innovative, and dedicated in the last 12 months, while the structured interviews revealed the vision of those who benefit of their services.

Employees in departments such as Finance, Quality Assurance and Sales are just a few of those who enjoy the activities and initiatives carried out by Human Resources specialists. They said they were largely satisfied with the way the business was conducted and understanding. Most use digital communication applications for Skype, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, etc. In fact, the information was also confirmed by the managers, which shows us that the teams successfully use the technology in carrying out their professional activities.

The activity in the digital environment is considered essential by all the respondents of the structured and semi-structured interviews, which confirms the fact that the digital tools have infiltrated in all the fields of activity.

This research can be generalized to other companies in Romania that operate in the field of technology, information, and communications. With the help of this paper, we wanted to bring to the readers' attention the importance of the corporate brand identity, because we all

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know that the organization cannot function without dedicated employees and satisfied customers. The topic is of great interest to the business community and specialists in the field of communication sciences because it has a new vision on digital communication and approaches the organizational identity from five different angles. As we mentioned at the beginning, we hope that our topic will inspire other researchers to initiate similar studies to discover what are the elements that underlie digital communication within organizations.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

The PhD thesis originality consists in the analysis of the brand organizational identity in the Covid era, a period that challenged the organizations to act quickly and efficiently to maintain their position on the market. We turned our attention to the IT industry because it is considered the pillar of resistance of the Romanian economy. Our case study was applied to companies in this area of activity in the counties of Cluj, Braşov and Sibiu, because we considered it important and useful to know how they adapted to the new work rules, how they communicate with employees and customers, how perceive brand organizational identity.

The paper has two parts: the theoretical part and the practical part. In the first part we turned our attention to the evolution of communication and the Internet, respectively to the new perspectives of communication in contemporary society. We discussed the definitions of communication, its elements, methods, and objectives; the Palo Alto School and the axioms of communication; the main models of communication; organization and digital environment; digital communication tools within organizations and finally about branding and organizational identity. All these elements helped us to analyze the term corporate brand identity, unprecedented in other similar works in Romania. The term was coined by Coleman, Chernatony and Christodoulides and we can say that it supported us in establishing and fulfilling the purpose of the paper - identifying how IT organizations from Cluj, Brasov and Sibiu perceive and implement internal and external communication strategies through technology, in a historical period of activities reorganization. Our believe was that the digital communication is found in all structures of the organization, and we are glad to see that our statement is valid.

We had five research directions, which allowed us to interact with different pawns within the companies. The directions are as follows: the initiatives of the human resources department, the importance of the attitude towards customers and employees, the personality and reputation of the brand, the visual identity of the organization and the principles of effective communication. The people included in this study are managers, specialists in Human Resources, specialists in Communication and Marketing, employees from various departments and clients.

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In the first part, we discovered how IT organizations position themselves in the online environment. We analyzed three websites, the purpose of the study being to see how the visual identity of the brand is reflected. Content analysis was the best method for this part, because it allowed us to see how organizations communicate, how important the brand is to them, what messages they choose to promote and many other useful information. We believe that a website helps the business, which is why the message they choose to publish plays an important role in the perception of the brand. The results pleasantly surprised us, and we could see that two of them understand the importance of visual identity, the message being clear, easy to identify and concise. The period in which we monitored the websites coincided with the one-year anniversary since Covid-19 extended all over the globe, which we consider to be beneficial for us. The study was developed to see how IT organizations communicate in the digital environment in a world affected by restrictions, in a world where organizations have gone through shock and panic and rethought how they will work to increase profit.

In the second part of the research, we applied the questionnaire addressed to the managers. The way they perceive the corporate brand identity is essential and the results have shown us that most of them maintain a positive attitude despite the difficulties brought by the pandemic and that they understand the importance of effective communication both internally and externally.

In the third stage, we talked to the Human Resources and Communication and Marketing specialists, employees, and clients. We chose to apply structured and semi-structured interviews, to find out as many details as possible about how they perceive the present events and how they communicated with their team during the pandemic, what is important to them and what recommendations they must strengthen the relationship employee-organization and customer-organization.

The research methods (content analysis, opinion poll, structured interview, and semi-structured interview) helped us to obtain answers to the study's questions and to provide captivating and relevant information on the business environment in Romania, and beyond.

To have a clearer view of the effects of digital communication, the author recommends that companies pay more attention to how they communicate within organizations, whether it is a form of formal or informal communication. Also, we noticed that in some companies the Human Resources department is missing, and the attributions are given to other specialists. Our advice is to not neglect the role of internal communication and delegate these tasks to the communication and marketing specialists who understand the role of communication. This is

a valid solution until the company decided to form the Human Resources department dedicated exclusively to organizational communication.

IT organizations understand the power of communication, the teams being made up of people with higher education and specialized in the chosen field of activity.

The present study highlights the fact that this industry has the capacity to live in a vitreous environment, having the necessary resources to survive when other industries decline. Digital communication plays a key role in this scheme, because with its help, the business can be moved in the online environment without affecting the productivity. We encounter this situation in companies that have sent their employees to work from home, without creating negative effects of organizational identity and brand personality.

According to a study by the human resources consulting company AIMS², IT companies continued to evolve during the crisis created by the Coronavirus³ pandemic and 89% of employers increased employees' salaries. According to this research, companies have managed not only to maintain their brand, but even to strengthen their position vis-à-vis their competitors.

The paper aims to answer the question of **how the IT organizations in Cluj, Braşov and Sibiu counties communicate one year after the global pandemic**. The research revealed the power of digital communication and how important it was in the months of isolation and restrictions. We believe that it brings a sense of hope in a difficult period, the road to success being paved with the power of companies to adapt to the new.

The relationship between the organization and employees seems to be a positive one in most cases, the latter being satisfied with the way the management has coordinated the activity in the last 12 months. The Human Resources department has carried out a series of activities designed to help employees adapt to the new way of working. We mention some of the answers received: sports activities, online competitions, online nutrition courses, virtual meetings, online parties, etc.

Regarding the clients, we can say that they are looking to collaborate with efficient teams. Communication also takes place in this case mainly in the digital environment through messaging applications or video conferencing.

² <https://alephnews.ro/economie/anul-pandemiei-a-fost-unul-prosper-pentru-firmele-de-it-majoritatea-angajatorilor-au-crescut-salariile-si-ofera-mai-multe-beneficii>, accesat în 14.06.2021.

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The use of research methods helped us to have an overview of how communication is perceived within the organization, giving us the chance to present quantifiable evidence on how key actors (managers, employees, and customers) perceive the corporate brand identity.

The results obtained can be used as a benchmark for future research in other counties of the country or in other industries. Communication is a powerful tool that directly influences the profitability and success of a business, which is why we consider it important to occasionally analyze its evolution, especially in historical moments that bring visible changes in society.

The researcher aims to present and develop the paper in future scientific articles in academic journals in the country or abroad.

LIMITS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research has a few limitations that we consider important to mention, and the author is aware that the limits have both negative and positive sides.

First, we would like to mention that we had limits in terms of the respondents' openness to answer our research questions. The research methods have been built to draw valuable ideas and conclusions for as many people as possible. In this paper we included three counties from Transylvania, because we encountered difficulties in interacting with people from other counties of the region - Salaj, Bistrita-Nasaud, Alba, Hunedoara, Mureş, Covasna and Harghita.

The number of the IT companies in this region is smaller, as the IT industry is not so developed. Fortunately, we realised that the inclusion of these counties in our study would not have added any value, because our goal was to target the counties where we have a larger number of companies active in the IT field.

The second limitation is about the research methods and how they have been developed and applied. In the first part we carried out a data analysis where we randomly selected three companies from Transylvania. We would like to emphasize that the results obtained from the indicators in the analysis cannot be generalized to all organizations. However, these analyses can provide recommendations, including good and bad practices. In the second stage, we implemented the survey addressed to the managers, considering the size and the location of the company.

We consider that the third limitation is generated by the restrictions imposed by Covid-19 pandemic which limited the interactions face-to-face. It is possible that this type of communication could have brought little color to the research by analyzing the non-verbal language of the respondents.

Given the main theme of the research (digital communication) we considered it is auspicious to develop and implement a study in the online environment, but certainly a more direct approach would have brought a new perspective. 50% of respondents work from home, about 25% have implemented a mix system (they share their working time between office and home) and 25% are going to the office.

We hope that this research will inspire specialists in the field of communication, public relations, management and marketing and contribute to the development and continuation of

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the analysis of corporate brand identity within IT companies in Cluj, Brasov and Sibiu counties, during the return to office process or the implementation of the hybrid model. A comparison between the results obtained in this research and the results obtained in a period of relaxation / elimination of restrictions would be interesting and captivating. Communication is evolving in tandem with society, and it would be fascinating to see how the IT organizations evolve and learn to adapt to the new way of doing things.

Another research direction that we want to mention refers to the development of a study that covers all counties in Romania that have active IT companies, such as Bucharest, Timisoara, Iasi, Oradea. It would be interesting to see how they survived in this unique period and how they are planning to evolve. We believe that a paper on this topic would be useful for a large audience and could provide captivating data.

Digital communication encourages researchers to be creative and attentive to market developments, which helps researchers to create works of art that will remain in the memory of readers for a long time.

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