

## **THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL NETWORKS ON THE AWARENESS INCREASE OF A CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY CAMPAIGN: A CASE STUDY ON ALEX&COMP GALATI**

*Nicoleta CRISTACHE<sup>1</sup>*

*Edit LUKACS<sup>2</sup>*

*Alexandru CAPATINA<sup>3</sup>*

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper outlines the role and benefits of social networks use on the increase of a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) campaign awareness, revealing the correlations between the maximization of the positive attitudes expressed by the fans of a brand and the CSR campaign indicators. The study emphasizes that a CSR campaign which lead to a social problem solving determine a higher tendency of the consumers to follow the official page of the company - which managed the CSR campaign - on a social network. Then, the attention is focused on the decision-making influence factors regarding the follow-up of a CSR campaign in the online environment, reflecting the most relevant indicators provided by social networking process assessment.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Corporate social responsibility, social media, performance, corporate image, community.*

**JEL CLASSIFICATION:** *M14, L86*

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In order to achieve the benefits from their CSR efforts, the companies must communicate them to relevant stakeholders, as for example through online communication channels. The recent emergence of social media determines increased online interaction and the creation of relational capital (Etter & Fieseler, 2010). Social media provide significantly higher potential for interacting with stakeholders. However, the few existing studies of the interactive use of social media for CSR communication do not provide conclusive results (Fieseler, Fleck & Meckel, 2010).

Managing corporate social responsibility (CSR) campaigns on social networks, companies can not only generate favorable attitudes and better support behaviors (e.g. image, seeking employment, awareness), but also, on the long term, build corporate image, strengthen client-company relationships, and enhance fans' advocacy behaviors (Du et al., 2010). Companies should implement social media strategies in view to highlight their commitment to corporate social responsibility (CSR) to help build their social media shield and gain supporters (Hall, 2011).

CSR has shifted from an approach based on corporate philanthropy to a strategic investment for any organization, which need to be communicated to all the key stakeholders through social media (Meister, 2012). Communicating through social media creates opportunities for stakeholders to interact directly with a company about its CSR program. Through social media, companies gain followers who are interested in their CSR performance and can monitor, engage, and share in key

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<sup>1</sup> „Dunarea de Jos” University of Galati, Romania, e-mail: nicoleta.cristache@ugal.ro

<sup>2</sup> „Dunarea de Jos” University of Galati, Romania, e-mail: edit.lukacs@ugal.ro

<sup>3</sup> „Dunarea de Jos” University of Galati, Romania, e-mail: alexandru.capatana@ugal.ro

relevant CSR related information and sentiment on any emerging issue. Also, the emergence of responsible advertising via social media engagement is expected to increase (Urlaub, 2012).

A very recent survey conducted by Colleoni (2013) investigated which corporate communication strategy adopted in online social media is more effective to create convergence between corporations' corporate social responsibility (CSR) agenda and stakeholders' social expectations, and thereby, to increase corporate legitimacy. Empirical findings show that, even when engaging in a dialogue, CSR communication in social media is still conceived as a marketing practice to convey messages about companies.

The 2013 Cone Communications/Eco Global CSR Study revealed that Social media has become an appropriate tool for people to learn and discuss about critical issues, including CSR. Some 62% of surveyed global consumers say they use social media to address or engage with companies around CSR. While the majority shares positive information with their networks, 26% are communicating negative news, according to the report.

## **2. PRESENTATION OF THE CSR INITIATIVES DEVELOPED BY ALEX&COMP GALATI**

Alex & Comp is a private company with Romanian capital, which is mainly focused on the production, packaging and distribution of food products. With a tradition of over 18 years, the company provides comprehensive merchandising, marketing and logistics solutions in the following segments: condiments, basic ingredients for culinary products and additives for pastries, food additives and paintings for eggs.

Experience, quality of raw materials and technologies for the production and packaging of products has led to the presence of the company among the top five major players in this market. Actually, the company develops collaborations with international key accounts such as Billa, Real, Lidl, Interex, Auchan, Cora.

Regarding CSR projects, the company Alex & Comp is involved mainly in the field of education. The top management and the employees of the company Alex & Comp perceive CSR as a communication tool, which allows highlighting, the values promoted at his part-holders, on the one hand, and, the value the company brings to the community in which it acts, on the other hand.

In what concern the characteristics of the CSR initiatives developed by Alex & Comp, we can mention:

- the main constraint for the launch and development of SAR projects is the financial availability;
- the company is in a growth phase and, despite the unstable environment, it seeks new opportunities to expand the business. In this context, the company is able to manage several CSR projects within the constraints settled at each fiscal year budget;
- the company is aware of the necessity to design and implement a reporting system of the outcomes related to CSR campaigns at both internal and external levels;
- CSR initiatives are profitable in terms of the reputation of the company, only if they are known, both internally, and externally;
- on long term, CSR initiatives can contribute to organizational performance;
- the CEO of the company considered it does not seek to be integrated in the global tendencies regarding CSR approaches, as he considers that CSR is primarily a moral duty.

The main reasons for which the company is involved in the development of CSR initiatives are the following: communication of its involvement in social life with the representatives of the target audience, development of an internal environment characterized by a high level of confidence and pride of employees, brand differentiation and increased trust and support from the community in which the company acts.

The company promoted collaborations with various NGOs and non-profit organisations in view to help the local community, the support being materialized in the financing of various activities and making its employees available for certain actions (on voluntary basis). The CSR budget is

allocated entirely to the enterprise level, in the majority of CSR projects and the company developed partnerships with local media in order to increase the visibility of its CSR initiatives. The most relevant initiatives related to environmental and social problems developed within Alex&Comp are:

- ❖ Referrals to different institutions and NGOs (e.g. Faculty of Economics Galati, AIESEC club handball Danubius, Retirees Alliance, Phoenix Sports Club Galati, the Cultural Association Armonia - Cluj, the National College "Al I. Cuza" Galati, The Patronage of SMEs etc.).
- ❖ Project/competition "An appreciation for talented children and youth" - the goal of this project is to promote the Romanian traditions related to the occasion of Easter, such as painted eggs, among children and young people. Schools have received technical support from the part of the company for the development of activities and best achievements were rewarded by computers and HP multifunction systems.
- ❖ Project dedicated to students of primary and secondary schools, who had the opportunity to visit the organisation Alex & Comp and discover the industrial processes occurring in all sections. In addition, students have performed greeting cards, using the raw materials available.
- ❖ Project "Student in the kitchen", focused on a competition between the best chefs - students from Galati and Iasi, in which raw materials for the competition and the prizes were provided by Alex & Comp.

The main categories of stakeholders that take part, the benefit of CSR projects of the company are members of the local community. Among the concrete results of the quantification of CSR projects, it should be noted: the feedback at the end of projects (the level of satisfaction of the stakeholders involved), analysis of the involvement of the general public in such activities and the analysis of the relationship between goals achieved and planned objectives.

The major benefits of CSR initiatives are focused on a better relationship with the target audience, development of an internal environment in which the concern for social problems is permanently present, the increase of brand awareness and the confidence of the consumers.

Manuscript must contain answers to following questions: what is the problem, what has been done by other researchers and where you can contribute, what have you done, which method or tools you used, what are your results, what is new and good, what is not good.

### **3. ASSESSMENT OF THE INDICATORS RELATED TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CSR CAMPAIGN "ALEX FROM OLD TO YOUNG" MANAGED BY ALEX&COMP GALATI**

The event „Alex from old to young” is an extra-curricular activity, organised for the pupils from 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade, which have the opportunity to visit the company Alex&Comp in order to see the industrial processes that take place in the production department, to attend a workshop where each pupil will make a card using spices and other ingredients and to discover the utility of spices and their impact on healthy food.

The schools attending the event „Alex from old to young” are selected during the online contest from the official website [www.alexcomp.ro](http://www.alexcomp.ro) and the Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/ALEXCOMP.Galati>. Thus, the website or Facebook page visitors can give a vote (Like) for a school.

The online contest is open for all schools in the Galati and Braila districts. Only 3 schools are selected for the first phase of the project (from the city of Galați) and 4 schools for the second stage (the cities of Braila and Tecuci, plus Braila and Galati rural area), which will be invited to the event "Alex from old to young." The contest consists of accumulating as many votes by each school.

The last phase of the project is the contest “Like my work”; at this stage, the children make greeting cards which will be posted on the official website [www.alexcomp.ro](http://www.alexcomp.ro) and the Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/ALEXCOMP.Galati>, where visitors can vote their favourite greeting card. Three people whose cards will get the most votes will win (on stage):

- ✓ First place - a Nintendo Wii console;
- ✓ Second and third place - schoolbags with school supplies.

The CSR campaign was carried out in two districts (Galati and Braila), being divided in two stages, as it follows:

First stage involves only the city of Galati, being divided in three activities:

- 12.02.2013 – 19.02.2013, online contest based on which three schools attending the project were selected;
- 21.02.2013 -01.03.2013, activities, workshops, gifts, surprises;
- 04.03.2013 - 13.03.2013, the contest “Like my work” – awarding the results of the workshops.

The second stage involved the cities of Braila and Tecuci and the rural area of Braila and Galati districts:

- 21.03.2013 – 28.03.2013, online contest based on which four schools attending the project were selected;
- 01.04.2013 – 05.04.2013, activities, workshops, gifts, surprises;
- 06.04.2013 - 15.04.2013, the contest “Like my work” – awarding the results of the workshops.

### 3.1. CSR project results

The winners of the first stage (schools from the city of Galați) are the following:

- ❖ School No.29 with 311 Likes;
- ❖ School No.28 with 211 Likes;
- ❖ School No.20 with 186 Likes.

In the case of the contest “Like my work”, the ranking is the following:

- First place - 856 Likes;
- Second place - 450 Likes;
- Third place - 328 Likes.

The winners of the second stage (schools from the cities of Braila and Tecuci and the rural area of Braila and Galati districts) are the following:

- ❖ School “Emil Panaitescu” from Cudalbi (rural area of Galati district) with 344 Likes;
- ❖ School No.1 Fântânele (rural area of Galati district) with 274 Likes;
- ❖ School No.1 Cudalbi (rural area of Galati district) with 149 Likes;
- ❖ School from Râmnicelu (rural area of Braila district) - 133 Likes.

In what concerns the second stage of the contest “Like my work”, the ranking is the following:

- First place - 340 Likes;
- Second place - 319 Likes;
- Third place - 289 Likes.

### 3.2 Results regarding the online activity on the official Facebook page of Alex&Comp

- Likes on the official Facebook page:
  - before the starting date of the campaign (12.02.2013) - 338 Likes
  - at the end of the campaign (19.04.2013) 2,232 Likes
- Overall spreading throughout the project - **113,608** (number of people who have seen any content associated with Alex&Comp Facebook page);

- Users which interacted with the Facebook page during all the campaign - **13,053** (Interaction includes any click or post on the page)
- Number of clicks to any content on the Facebook page - **41,427**.

Due to this project, Alex&Comp brand awareness in the online environment increased. This fact is proved by the high number of fans on the official Facebook page of the company. Taking into account the peculiarities of this CSR project, we found that it stimulated a significant flow of users, which appreciated the company Facebook page for their involvement in the support of talented pupils.

### **3.3 The application of the mathematical model "Theory of Reasoned Action" in the case of the CSR campaign "Alex from old to young"**

Based on the model "Theory of Reasoned Action", we identified the elements which motivate an Internet user to join a community on social networks (such as Facebook). In the case of a CSR campaign, these elements are the following:

- Award value - (V) involves two relevant features:
  1. Price relevance (referring to the target group) (Vr)
  2. Price (Vp)
- Target public - (P)
- Public from the area - (A) :
  1. Rural (Ar)
  2. Urban (Au)
- Brand credibility - (C)
- Number of users involved in the campaign - (Ni)
- Emotional aspect of the content - (Ec)

In order to insure a brand promotion success, respecting all the conditions, namely the involvement of a CSR campaign and the implementation of an online contest, we propose the formula:

$$BP = V * Ec * \{[(P+A) * Ni] / C\} \quad (1)$$

BP = Brand Promotion

The prize and the emotional aspect of content are independent elements, while the remaining elements are interdependent.

Analysing the project's results, based on reports available on the company's Facebook page (see Appendix), we observed the tendency of fans to join the Facebook page during all the stages of the campaign „Alex from old to young”. Starting from 338 Likes, the project collected 2232 Likes at the end of the campaign, representing an increase of 660%.

The number of appreciations (Likes) is directly influenced by a series of factors:

- Price value
- Public target
- Area
- Brand credibility
- Number of users involved in the campaign
- Emotional aspect of the content

For a better understanding of these factors' importance, we will assign values (1= relevant/high, respectively 2= less relevant/low), according to their relevance in each stage of the project. Although during the second stage, a larger territory was involved, it allows us to conduct the research, given that the number of schools involved in the campaign is about the same (schools that participated to the vote).

### First stage

$$BP_1 = V * Ec * \{[(P+Au)*Ni]/ C\} (2)$$

Au= 1 (higher weight of users)

V=1 (ratio relevance/maximal price)

Ec=1 (CSR campaign has an increased emotional impact)

Ni=1 (high number of persons involved, due to the contest included in the campaign)

C=2 (low credibility in the urban area due to scepticism)

P=2 (constant value)

I=2 (low involvement)

$$BP_1 = 1 * 1 * \{[(2+1)*1]/ 2\} = 1,5$$

### Second stage

$$BP_2 = V * Ec * \{[(P+Ar)*Ni]/ C\} (3)$$

Ar = 2 (lower weight of users)

V= 1 (ratio relevance/maximal price)

Ec = 1 (CSR campaign has an increased emotional impact)

Ni = 1 (high number of persons involved, due to the contest included in the campaign)

C = 1 (high credibility in the rural area)

P = 2 (constant value)

I = 1 (high involvement)

$$BP_2 = 1 * 1 * \{[(2+2)*1]/ 2\} = 2$$

In conclusion, the area is an important element in the CSR campaigns and increased opportunities to involve more people and to popularize the brand we can find in rural areas, as demonstrated by the statistics at the end of the campaign on Facebook.

**Table no. 1. The results of the CSR campaign „Alex from old to young” on stages**

Key Performance Indicators	First stage	Second stage
Number of impressions on the Facebook page	96,040	157,355
Organic impressions of posts	56,700	73,530
Viral impressions of the posts on the page	6,590	55,316
Clicks on page	20,075	21,352
Negative feedback	55	37
Negative opinions of the users	125	79
Persons which discuss about the project	3,979	126,546
Posts from the page	95,407	301,389
New appreciations - Total Likes	875	1,137
Unlikes	39	59
Users which interacted with the Facebook page	6,316	6,737

Source : [https://www.facebook.com/ALEXCOMP.Galati?sk=page\\_insights](https://www.facebook.com/ALEXCOMP.Galati?sk=page_insights)

We can state that Internet users from rural areas are less apprehensive and more open, but the theory “Threshold Rule” must be taken into account, as it can explain the greater tendency for people to decide to engage in online activities promoted on Facebook, because there is already a considerable number of people which was involved during this CSR campaign in social media.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

In the Internet age, when the information is available at any moment in the online environment, social media was expected to attract significant segments of CSR budgets settled by the firms. Since 2010, there has been a growing trend of CSR campaigns within social networks.

In order to stimulate users' involvement in CSR campaigns, two important factors must be emphasized, namely, the involvement of Internet users in joint activities and the stimulation of their emotional state. To be successful in the online environment it is recommended not to dwell on irrelevant content, as it can stimulate the reluctance of Internet users, which are surfing on the organization webpage or Facebook page.

Alex & Comp is one of the most dynamic companies in the region of Galati. On its CSR policy, we can say that there is a mixed approach, more proactive than reactive. The company regularly conducts CSR projects, but do not have sustainability, especially since they are correlated with the specific needs of local communities. In general, the company is seeking for a better positioning, based on growing its awareness and differentiation from competitors. We believe that the company will align with the overall trend of CSR projects, focusing on their importance to the internal and external level.

The CSR campaign promoted through Facebook brought a double benefit to Alex&Comp. On one hand, the low cost of promotion, and on the other hand the awareness increase related to the company's official Facebook page. Competitions in CSR campaigns can bring greater visibility to the project promoted. However, although the online environment is characterized by a constant growth and the number of Internet users is growing, there are also negative reactions, which must be investigated and managed separately.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

This research was conducted within the activities related to the project « Développement durable, responsabilité sociale, culture et performance d'entreprise », Projet de coopération Wallonie-Bruxelles / Roumanie 2012-2014, Références WBI: GL/AS/CAS/SOR/2012/70098.

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## APPENDIX

**APPENDIX**

*Metrics related to the online CSR campaign "Alex from old to young" carried out on Facebook*

<b>WEEK</b>	<b>Total number of impressions</b>	<b>Organic impressions of posts</b>	<b>Viral impressions of posts</b>	<b>Total number of consumers</b>	<b>Clicks on page</b>
<b>1</b>	19,765	13,175	6,590	2,464	9,362
<b>2</b>	8,224	5,560	2,664	696	2,218
<b>3</b>	22,250	12,484	9,766	774	2,999
<b>4</b>	23,519	14,159	9,360	658	2,873
<b>5</b>	22,282	11,322	10,960	663	2,623
<b>6</b>	45,176	16,667	28,509	1,759	5,862
<b>7</b>	44,959	16,349	28,610	1,645	5,531
<b>8</b>	25,906	16,471	9,435	847	4,145
<b>9</b>	31,643	19,340	12,303	869	4,465
<b>10</b>	9,671	4,703	4,968	319	1,349
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>253,395</b>	<b>130,230</b>	<b>123,165</b>	<b>10,694</b>	<b>41,427</b>

Source : [https://www.facebook.com/ALEXCOMP.Galati?sk=page\\_insights](https://www.facebook.com/ALEXCOMP.Galati?sk=page_insights)

<b>WEEK</b>	<b>Persons discussing on this topic</b>	<b>Posts on the page</b>	<b>New Likes</b>	<b>Unlikes</b>	<b>Users which interacted with the page</b>
<b>1</b>	2,260	51,811	381	13	2,981
<b>2</b>	566	14,853	92	3	832
<b>3</b>	446	19,005	121	10	910
<b>4</b>	386	6,500	118	4	783
<b>5</b>	321	3,238	163	9	810
<b>6</b>	1,576	126,546	280	14	2,144
<b>7</b>	1,343	112,327	265	18	2,013
<b>8</b>	461	45,836	186	9	1,018
<b>9</b>	687	13,341	329	13	1,170
<b>10</b>	165	3,339	77	5	392
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>8,211</b>	<b>396,796</b>	<b>2,012</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>13,053</b>

Source : [https://www.facebook.com/ALEXCOMP.Galati?sk=page\\_insights](https://www.facebook.com/ALEXCOMP.Galati?sk=page_insights)