

Events Strategies to Increase Competitiveness by the Organizations that Communicate through Events

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Abstract. The identification of the factors that influence the features that characterize the events realized by the organizations, for and from Romania, in order to increase their competitiveness on the European market, within a sustainable development in a regional context, given the dimensions of economic growth in Romania and ways to better the competitiveness of regions. The use of different types of channels to communicate with the direct and indirect audience of an event, and new ways to extend the impact of the event upon the audience, with a view to changing their behavior and perception towards the organization.

Key words: competitiveness, communication channels, events strategies
JEL classification: M3-Marketing and Advertising, M31-Marketing

1 Introduction

In this paper, we have resorted to a qualitative research, to analyze the marketing techniques and tools used by the companies that have as main objectives of activity organizing events such as sport events, cultural, artistic, conferences, symposia, fairs, exhibitions, product launches, touring shows, workshops, general meetings of shareholders, trainings, team buildings, Happy Hours, religious holidays, special occasions and more, for other organizations that want to communicate with their stakeholders through events.

In certain research areas (Chris Gratton & Ian Jones, 2004), as events, research was dominated by positivist, quantitative approaches. Much of this research did provide useful information; however, the need to understand the underlying experiences, feelings and emotions related to behavior has been acknowledged in recent years, and, as a consequence, qualitative research is taking on increasing importance within events studies. Moreover, to better understand the needs, techniques, tools and the ways that both the companies and organizations that communicate with their stakeholders through events, it is more suitable.

Qualitative techniques (Anthony J. Veal & Simon Darcy, 2014) are better at providing an understanding of people's needs and aspirations,

although some researchers in the psychological field might disagree. Nevertheless longitudinal qualitative research (Russel W. Belk, 2006) does offer researchers a panoramic perspective that might have been overemphasized during a single or short-term immersion. Retrospective investigations are ideal tools for researching causes of events that have already occurred, because recollections of the past are based on their relevance to the present. Qualitative research (Claire Howell Major & Maggi Savin-Baden, 2010) has been valued because of its ability to provide depth of information about a particular phenomenon, in our case events. Qualitative studies allow the reader a glimpse of the lived experience of a small group of study participants. Qualitative studies (Damon P.S. Andrew & Paul M. Pedersen & Chad D. McEvoy, 2011) usually attempt to describe a problem, issue, phenomenon, or situation without quantification. They tend to incorporate emerging methods, open-ended questions, data, text or image analysis, and concluding themes, patterns or interpretations. In qualitative research trustworthiness and rigor (Allan Edwards & James Skinner, 2009) are accepted terms used to discuss the reliability and validity of the data.

Making a qualitative research involves the following two steps (Iacob Cătoiu coord., 2009): identification of the problem and

defining the purpose of the research. In the case of the events realized by organizations for other companies, these two steps are (Daniel Moise, 2014):

Decision problem - an important element of organizing events are the companies that organize events for various organizations, regardless who they addressed to, internal or external stakeholders. The extent to which they use specific tools and techniques of marketing and the use of environmental products/ services must be determined both in their relationship with customers - the organization, and in the relation with the customers of the event - the participants. Although in the case of an unsuccessful event, or bad management regarding the flow of the participants, or different types of incidents that might occur during an event, if there are not taken all the necessary procedures, first will suffer the image of the organization which sponsored the event and then the organizing company, as participants associate the organization with the event.

2 Events qualitative research

The purpose of the research - is to identify not only the use of marketing by the companies that organize events for other organizations, but also the impact the crisis had on their business.

-Setting the goals of the research depends on the problem identified:

- a. The way the company communicates with its clients – customers and organizations - participants in the event before, during and after it took place.
- b. Identifying the companies that use databases and for what purpose they are using them.
- c. Marketing tools and techniques, but also the marketing mix used in its interaction with customers.
- d. The extent to which events are organized by taking into account the environmental impact.
- e. Determining the degree and the way the economic crisis had affected the company's activity.

Choosing the procedures for gathering information regarding the problem investigated

may be obtained through focus groups, or in-depth interviews. Given the fact that people that were questioned are within leadership positions, in-depth interviews will be used, due to their lack of time and their very low availability to gather for a focus group. It was also taken into consideration that they are main competitors, and during the focus-group it would have been a greater probability not to be so open-minded to speak about their own strategies and policies that their companies are using. The sample was made using simple random method. The selection of companies that participated in the qualitative research was carried out according to the business and the type of organization: profit or nonprofit.

The recruitment of the participants and the preparation of the conditions for achieving the information-gathering phase were accomplished by identifying those companies that match the profile of the selection questionnaire. Through the selection questionnaire it was sought that only companies which have as primary goals of their activity to organize events should participate, regardless who they are addressed to. Within these categories the following can be included: specialized companies in organizing events, advertising agencies, travel agencies, PR companies, and companies specialized only in organizing events, conference centers, malls, hotels. The date and time was set by all those interviewed, and the venue was at their headquarters, or other locations agreed upon by them.

Gathering of information was done as a result of the discussion with the interview guide, as in this case a semi-controlled interview was carried out. The interview guide was constructed in such a way as to solve the decision problem from which this research was started and so that all the goals are reached.

In the qualitative research 20 companies were analyzed, whose main purpose is to organize events for other organizations, as national and multinational companies, legal persons, public institutions, etc. no matter if they addressed through events to those from internal or external environment.

The assessment and post assessment of the events is accomplished through a meeting with the planners, the company which commissioned the event and, in exceptional cases, even with the participants, sometimes resorting to assessment done by the team project and an assessment of the project by making a follow-up plan.

Among the main reasons for which customers turn to various companies for organizing events include: professionalism, expertise, experience, know-how, reduced costs, greater impact of the event, offering full service, transfer of responsibility for the success of the event, a better promotion among target market segments, the reputation of the company which planned the event, the fair or exhibition through which the market and the competition can be studied and, at the same time, its image can be improved.

The plan for an event cannot be generalized and standardized, as each event is unique by having certain characteristics and factors that may influence it considerably. Among them, we can mention the type of customer, the area of the event, location, number of the participants, who is addressed to, the budget available for the event, the period of time till the Z day (or the day when the event is going to take place), etc. A very important thing for all the companies involved in organizing this event is establishing and not passing the deadline. The elements that are agreed upon together with the clients include: budgeting, goals that need to be reached, conducting research, making the right choices in the triad: opportunity, quality and price; date, location, the theme of the event, catering, adopting the communication strategy by conducting press conferences, writing a plan, making a GANTT chart with key tasks and divide tasks within the team, getting the brief of the event, the creative brainstorming sessions making, actual implementation and monitoring of the action carried out within the expected parameters.

The impact of the event on the environment is a very important aspect for organizations, whether they comply with the regulations in force, or they use, from economic reasons,

certain products / services that are cheaper if organic and eco-friendly. Most organizations, that have responded, take into account the protection of the environment by adopting various measures such as recycling, selective gathering garbage, causing as little environmental damage as possible, and other important similar issues. In the communication strategy, they even state that they are using or adopting environmental strategies and policies.

Among the factors taken into account when setting the fees for organizing an event, the following can be found for profit organizations: fixed cost, the complexity and quality of the services wanted, the company's profit margins, market conditions, feedback received previously from customers, the type of the event, type of customer, estimated costs, competition, positioning, desired objectives, the resources needed, even according to the client's budget. However, non-profit organizations rely solely on attracting funds from sponsorship and self-financing by charging for the participation in the event.

Companies believe that the main reasons for choosing to work with exclusive partners in organizing events are: continuity, reciprocity, benefits for both partners, win-win situation, customer loyalty programs, free additional services for loyal customers, the guarantee of quality services, meeting deadlines, providing the importance needed to the project, seriousness, the transfer of responsibility, mutual help, good coordination, preferential fees, the audience offered, strengthening partnerships, greater visibility and professionalism.

When events are not held in the headquarters of the organizing company, they turn to external suppliers in terms of logistics (as specialized transport companies), promotional materials and planning, other services and products for the smooth passing of the event, resorting to their own car park when there is one and can meet the needs for the proper outcome of the event.

In case of promotion among clients, either to attract them, or to raise funds for nonprofit organizations, a wide range of ways to promote can be used including: newsletters, market

positioning through their clients portfolio and also by obtaining various awards, the professionalism used to carry out the event, word of mouth, sales forces, social media, mobile media, direct marketing tools to send cards on the occasion, websites and online social networks, Google and mailing, posters, flyers, stickers, flash mob sites, press conferences, business-to-business advertising, the use of caravans, barter advertising, mass media means of communication and by exceeding the expectations through the event which has as a result word-of-mouth promotion and social networking or social media. Social media has facilitated the degree in which a company can communicate with its stakeholders and promote itself at the same time.

Several years ago, it was stated that if a company is not on line with a website, it meant that it did not exist, nowadays, it is stated that a company does not exist if it does not own an account on social media networks like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Youtube etc., Even organizing companies have accounts as it is a good means of promoting and communicating with their existent and also potential customers. In this way, they can even promote past events that they organized, being at the same time a virtual portfolio that whoever is interested can have access to it and begin collaboration with that company. Using social media, the interaction with the potential public can be direct and friendly. The organizing companies can appeal also to gamification strategies in order to attract more attention and to increase the number of viewers of their account page, but this depends on the type of the events that they realize.

Among the most used media of communication with customers – organizations and customers – partners, the following can be found: sales force, emails, websites, letters, faxes, telephones, newsletters, face-to-face meeting, press conferences and even the use of specialized software "constant contact" to keep in touch with the customers.

Interactive communication during the event occurs mostly through one of the people from the organizational team that is always present at

the event, he can be the project manager, the person from the sales department with whom the contract was negotiated and who knows the contract, a member of the organizational team responsible for the proper running of the event or even the whole team and the information is given by telephone, email, video, sound system, flipchart, face-to-face, it is often customized depending on the type of event.

Feedback is an important element that all organizations participating in the research wish to obtain both from the clients and the participants. This is carried out by conducting face-to-face discussions, applying of questionnaires, on-site or after the event, online, follow-up phone calls. All of them use databases utilized for different purposes: as a database with current customers, with history of the contracts, potential customers, offer rates and prices of third parties; within these databases, there are contact information so that they are able to get in touch with them by sending emails with invitations, or newsletters every two weeks.

The share of using marketing research has decreased significantly compared to previous years, but those who still adopt it are using it only in order to study the target group of the event, by adopting new strategies, by maintaining or modifying the old ones according to performance; by adapting services addressed to customers.

The following can be said regarding the personnel policy of the companies that realize events for other organizations, we have discovered the following:

- Recruitment is done through interviews and recommendations of the future employee;
- Trainings and teambuilding;
- Motivation through performance bonuses and commissions, self-improvement and the idea of continuity, offering travel packages and also multilateral motivation.

Most organizations, especially non-profit ones place a strong emphasis on events addressed to their own employees. The key elements that a good organizer of events should have are: education, human quality, preparation,

enthusiasm, attitude, and the ability to integrate easily in a team, as well.

Organizing events and the events market were also affected by the international crisis. It can be concluded that they were influenced not only by the prices and fees of these organizations, but also by the amount of funds raised by non-profit organizations. To attract customers they resort to discounts, loyalty programs so that they could keep the current customers and also attract new ones, etc.

The crisis has led to more specific demands from the customer and lower requirements, non-professional organizations have gone bankrupt, and organizations have been forced to improve their offer, the growth and multiplication of channels of communication, in particular communication via fax and emails, mobile media, social media and the databases have increased considerably. Although prices initially fell, market restriction in some cases led to major price increases.

Budgets for events have faced a downward trend, given that the marketing department budgets are among the first to be reduced, and thus, events budgets were frozen, reduced, or dropped altogether.

Events such as conferences, product launches, team management and customer relationship management are among the few that have increased. Trainings have remained constant, but teambuilding has lowered in frequency. Traditional fairs and exhibitions are no longer demanded because not even visitors have money for purchasing products / services promoted. However, several fairs and exhibitions have developed in various niche markets. The motivational events and those addressed to their own employees have diminished, on the other hand, the share of private events has increased.

The structure of the events has changed so that the focus is on quantifiable outcomes for customers, or ROI (return of investment), several tasks are solved at the same time, ingenious communication solutions are obtained, efficient in terms of cost and innovative ideas, the location where the event takes place needs to be closer to the premises of

the customers' company, only basic things are required, the event has a much smaller scale, they are no longer grand, value added packages are sold, the same offer also includes the advertising space, the focus is on related events, but the number of participants and the days for the event have decreased.

Most respondents have confidence that their own business will succeed in increasing its market share, gaining more recognition of creativity and efficiency to communicate and even hope to become leaders and have monopoly on the market.

3. Conclusions

Out of the main factors that influence the events market in Romania, we can mention the International economic Crisis that influenced almost all economic sectors, and especially events sector, as most organizations usually cut the budgets from marketing, this has led to an increase in specialization and creation of niche events. The interactive and the interaction communication between the organizing companies, organizations and participants, still uses the traditional communicational channels like radio, TV, newspapers and internet to promote different types of events, but a new area that is developing and gathers greater attention for both types of organizations are social media and mobile media that offer the necessary tools to target the potential audience to an event and also to estimate the number of participants, although it is not always very accurate, as people, clicking that they want to attend an event, may end up not attending and others, who do not click, go because of their friends, colleagues or peers. Ingenious communication solutions are obtained with the customers and participants, efficient in terms of cost and innovative ideas, especially using social media network, the location where the event takes place needs to be closer to the premises of the customers' company, only basic things are required, the event has a much smaller scale, they are no longer grand. These strategies work together to increase the

competitiveness on the European market, in a regional context, especially in the events field.

Organizations will still appeal to events in order to transmit a message and to gain notoriety and at the same time, to influence the behavior of the stakeholders regarding their corporate image and the image of their products and services, as events have a ROI (return of investment) more easily to be quantified and measured and only in the short term.

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