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THE ROLE OF PERSONAL BRAND IN THE ADVOCACY ACTIVITY, IN ROMANIA

Case
study

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Abstract

The advocacy activity is of significant importance for the business community, the perception of its need to influence the legislative process in order to have a transparent legislative procedure, the necessity of understanding the way in which the decisions are taken and the desire of the business community to assist the changing of laws and norms linking elements of the advocacy activity to the business environment.

The branding impact is practically immeasurable in social and cultural terms as it over exceeded the commercial origins. It has spread in education, sports, fashion, tourism, arts, theater, literature, regional and national politics and in almost all other fields that we could think of. The non-profit and charitable organizations that compete with the commercial brands in the emotional territory of the minds and hearts of people, for the money in their pockets, use branding more and more.

1. Introduction

Beyond the theoretical aspects highlighted in this study, the importance of the research is even greater as no similar research has been done so far, and as the development of the personal brand and of the advocacy activity are new exclusivist fields and we could not dare to catalogue them as elite.

The goal of this research is to establish if there is a connection between personalities with personal brand from Romania and the advocacy activity.

The study is based on a questionnaire applied only to persons with higher education, with experience or education in marketing and has got as main objective the commensuration of theory / practice regarding the advocacy activity and the influence that the personal brand has upon this activity.

This research has special implications for the civil society and for the advocacy activity, all the more, so as the competitive advantage of those who perform or involve in the advocacy activity can confer a competitive advantage or, on the contrary, lead to fail from the start.

The originality and the value of this work comes first from the novelty of the advocacy activity, but also from the complexity that the personal brand demonstrates, looked upon from the perspective of a marketing process.

2. Literature review

Impressive through depth and multitude of usages, in the most different activity fields, the concept of "advocacy" has been taboo for Romanians, often assimilated to terms not very orthodox, like bribe, graft, or method to convince somebody by not very legal means to sustain a certain cause.

In reality, though business advocacy message comes from business people, politicians or organizations interested in

changing something in politics, legislation, resource allocation, public implication and in attracting and increasing the attention of the mass-media regarding problems or causes; it transmits through a variety of channels in order to reach the targets – business people, leaders or persons with power of decision. In other words, the advocacy activity refers to someone who wants to convince somebody to sustain a certain idea, a cause about which he cares.

Starting from this assertion, through advocacy, as a persuasive act, we can convince the leaders or the decision makers to use their power and influence to sustain the cause, elaborating or modifying laws, politics or programs by allocating resources.

Theoretically, there are different interpretations of the advocacy concept, without being an internationally recognized definition.

In essence, advocacy is based on communication, considering the definition of communication given by J. J. Van Cuilenburg, O. Scholten and G. W. Noomen, in "Science of Communication" as being "a process where the transmitter transmits information to the receiver through a channel, in order to produce certain effects upon the receiver" (Tran and St nciugelu, 2001).

A civil society that is well informed and participates to taking public decisions is the main pillar upon which the democracy is built. The difference through which a certain community or nation identifies and is on the path of democracy and market economy is shown by situations where the citizens start to involve in expressing opinions in a public and well-defined way, when these can identify and suggest solving solutions to some public problems that affect them. In order to take part in the public decision, the electorate must be well-prepared, well educated in elaborating public politics and legislative procedures. The indicator on

the resources allocated involves the identification and evaluation of resources subcategories affected in the organization by the collaborative structure. For example:

1. Human resources – individuals (actors) involved in interactions between organizations estimated both in number and as attributes; Social capital – measures the intensity and amount of opportunities to connect and network expansion;
2. Financial Resources – critical inputs that can affect both stages of incubation of ideas, experimentation and support stages of launching and marketing innovations; (Serghie, 2013)

Advocacy is the process that concerns both creation or reform of the public politics and their efficient implementation.

According to Webster's Dictionary 1913, advocacy means “The act of pleading for something or sustaining an idea, an interest; effort made for this purpose, intervention.”

“Advocacy is a planned set of actions that aims at changing the laws, politics and institution programs, and / or beliefs, attitudes and citizens’ behaviors, in order to achieve social justice.” (Gladkikh, 2006)

“Advocacy is made of different strategies meant to locally, provincially, nationally and internationally influence the decision factors. The politics and the decisions are solutions to concrete problems. An efficient advocacy requests fully understanding and analyzing of the identified problem and achieving concrete proposals for solving.” — InterAction: Women’s Advocacy Workshop materials.

Starting from the different definitions given by associates and groups of interest to the notion of advocacy, we have formulated a definition for the notion of business advocacy, as being a process that implies the coordinated effort of the business community, of influencing the local, national and international decision

factors for changing the public politics, the existent practices, the attitudes towards business community and its solicitations, as well as sustaining this community in better representing its points of view before the legislative organs, the press representatives, the public as well as before other potential decision.

By its very nature, by exploration of its functions, strategies and tactics used by the business community in order to sustain the legislative initiatives, the advocacy in the business environment consolidates its role as a communication process between the business associations and the decision factors from the political and legislative field, to increase the implication of the business men in achieving legislative initiations to improve the business environment.

Regarding the personal brand, Montoya and Vandehey (2009) believe that the most fitted definition for the personal brand is that it represents a clear public image, strong and especially persuasive about a certain individual. The personal brand is firstly a mental image upon the perspectives that you have in order to get what clients want or need. This mental image represents your values, your personality, the experience and qualities that make you unique amongst your competitors. That is why it is so important to remain authentic, linked to your brand, as you created it. People will want to work with you, not with a specialist “dodger” in creative marketing. Secondly, a personal brand is a promise. It tells about the perspectives that can be drawn when clients make business with you.

Personal branding is a concept about taking control of the way in which others perceive you before coming into direct contact with you.

Obtaining and using the power of influence in an intelligent and responsible way is one of the premises of the successful personal branding. The targeted

public or audience that you want to influence will transfer the values of the branding to their own self-definition.

Tom Peters encourages and sustains personal branding, he himself being a proof of the power of influence of this concept. He wrote in the famous article an advice that should be considered a motto for those who want their personal brand to be efficient: "It's this simple: You are a brand. You are in charge of your brand. There is no single path to success. And there is no one right way to create the brand called You."
(<http://www.fastcompany.com/magazine/10/brandyou.html>).

The Personal Brand is a pragmatic and purely commercial idea. It refers to opportunity and definition – self-definition. A brand is "a trusted brand, a simplification, a sorting instrument" (Peters, 2009). The experts agree that a brand equally refers to what a product "is not" and to what it "is". The personal brand refers to surpassing the limits and creating projects with unmistakable added value for easily identify receptors. The personal projects become the stories with which you can brag about yourself. You will be recognized for the mastery you prove, winning, thus, notability.

3. Methodological approach

This study wants to highlight the way in which the personal brand positively influences the advocacy campaigns.

To optimize the results, a quantitative research method was chosen, the investigation, that is, and as research tool – the questionnaire.

Philip Kotler considers that, in order to collect the necessary data for the marketing research, "two categories of tools can be used: the questionnaire and the specialized equipment."

In the literature of specialty and the practice of the marketing researches, the questionnaire is considered the most important and most frequent tool used to

collect the necessary information for market prospecting.

The study is based upon 362 questionnaires declared valid, applied during January 2014 – February 2014 by social media (social networks, mail, groups of interest).

4. Study results

At the question regarding the effective implication in an advocacy activity, as it results from Figure 1, the majority of the persons who answered had a negative response, only a third of them participating to an activity of this kind. These answers can implicitly lead to two simple conclusions: the campaigns were not interesting for the participants to the study or, even if they were interesting, they were not well made to involve the persons to answer to the questionnaire.

The second question of the study tried to highlight, through the results obtained and illustrated in Figure 2 what could determine somebody to participate to such an advocacy campaign. More than half of the participants declared that a public image, a personality with personal brand associated to the campaign would make them participate to this kind of civic manifestation. Approximately one third of the participants would be convinced to participate to such a campaign through the approached subject, that is a smaller percentage of the persons who answered that would militate for a certain subject, that could affect them in a way or another, compared to the majority percentage of those who would join in an advocacy campaign just because they like the person, the personality of the one that represents the image of the campaign. Only a percentage of 14% is interested in the addressing of an advocacy campaign and this aspect could influence them in the decision to participate or not to a campaign. An insignificant percentage of 2% of the participants would be influenced in participating to an advocacy campaign

because of the message the campaign transmits.

Figure 3 that shows the answers to the question regarding the grade of importance for the participants to the campaign image confirms the results obtained at the second question, meaning that the majority of the persons who answered (more than 51%) have declared that the image of the campaign is very important for the campaign and its success. On the other side, approximately a third of them thinks that the image of a campaign is neither important nor they would ignore it. A small percentage, of only 2% believes that the image is not important in a campaign, even more as the approached message or theme is of general interest or speaks about pressing problems.

Considering the fact that the majority of the participants considers the image of the campaign an important aspect for its development, the following question, whose answers are illustrated in Figure 4, refers to the most relevant characteristic that a person embodying the image of the advocacy campaign should have. The results show that most of the participants, (over 27%), considers that the image of an advocacy campaign should be a notorious opinion leader, at least in the field where he is professionally active. A quarter of the participants believes that the success of the campaign, from the image point of view, depends on the notoriety that the chosen image has got among the decision factors. Approximately 5% believes that the notoriety in the public opinion of the person representing the campaign image is relevant and his involvement in an activity linked to the campaign is least important. 14 % believes that the image of the campaign should be represented by a specialist in a field linked to the campaign.

Figure 5 shows the answers given to the question if the participants believe that the personal brand developed in time, personal brand of a person that is to

become the image of an advocacy campaign, may lead to a positive result of the campaign. Three quarters answered affirmatively, while only 24.03% believe the personal brand of the image of the advocacy campaign is not relevant in the development of the advocacy campaign.

5. Conclusions

The Advocacy has got a major role in creating a strong “voice” for a group of persons, affected by a specific problem. Getting the support for a certain cause is one of the main links between citizens and decision factors. As it has been presented in this work, the concept of *advocacy* begins to come alive in our country too, to become a very strong tool that can produce social changes, changes of attitudes.

Assuring the representation of the community and the development of the advocacy abilities through the process of improving the institutional and the legal framework supposes that, firstly the operators of the civil society have the capacity to articulate the requests that come from the citizens regarding the rights and obligations they have and the implications of the actions and decisions they make in a certain moment, by an active participation to the community’s life. Secondly, the citizens must acknowledge and understand very well the objectives and what this process implies.

Briefly, the conclusions of this study show the following aspects regarding the advocacy campaigns developed in Romania: the majority of the participants to the study has never participated to an advocacy campaign developed in Romania. The majority would be convinced to participate to such a campaign by a personality that would be the image of the campaign. Beyond the message or addressing, the participants give importance to the person representing the image of the advocacy campaign. The message of the advocacy campaign is the least important in taking the decision to

participate or not to an advocacy campaign, as it results from the analysis of the study data. The image of the advocacy campaign should be a notorious opinion leader among the decision factors. The majority of the participants agree that the personal brand of the advocacy campaign image positively influences the development of the advocacy campaign.

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Appendices

Fig. 1 – Have you ever participated to an advocacy activity, no matter of the involvement type?

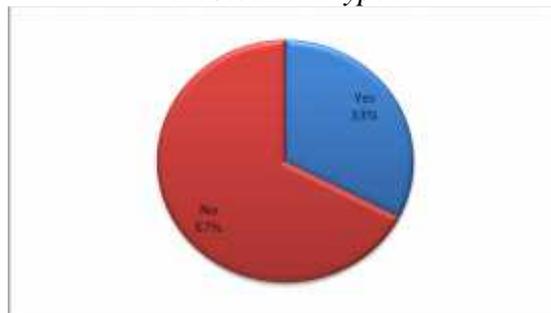


Fig. 2 – What would influence you to participate to such a campaign in the future?

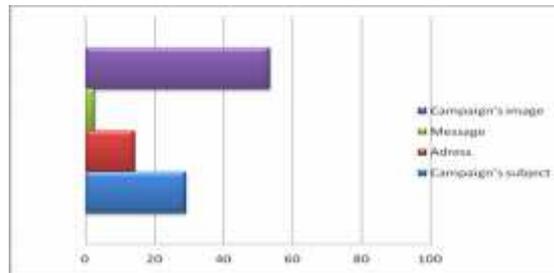


Fig. 3 – How important is the campaign image for the campaign, in your point of view?

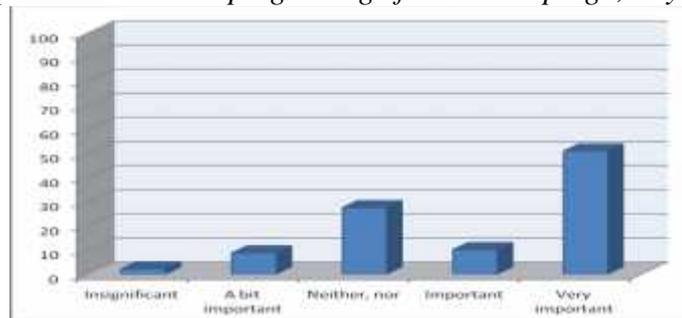


Fig. 4 – What is the most important characteristic that a person representing the image of an advocacy campaign should have?

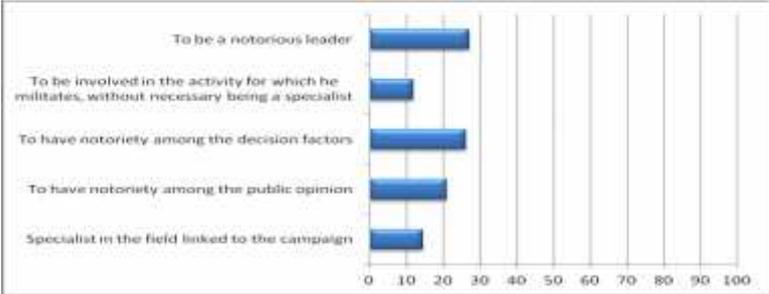


Fig. 5 – Do you consider that the personal brand developed in time, the personal brand of a person who is to become the image of an advocacy campaign can lead towards a positive result of the campaign?

