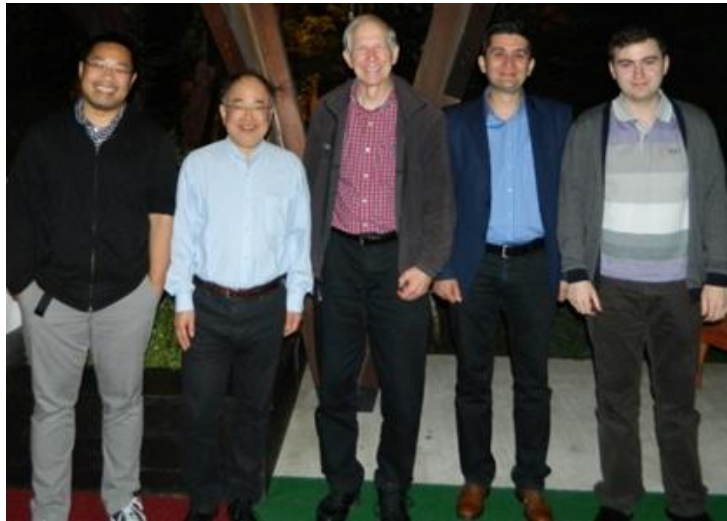


The Connection between Digital Marketing and Relevant Public Relations. The Brand Building Role of Digital Communication

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Abstract

Being under pressure of reviewing the crisis communications strategy in full digital acceleration of the business world caused by the new coronavirus crisis, on the way of protecting and promoting brand reputation it is useful to consider the connection between digital marketing and relevant public relations (PR). Marketers are carefully looking through the window of opportunity represented by the synergy between the “5Ds of Digital” and the brand building role of digital communication, struggling to better understand the digitally savvy buyer behavior and improve customer lifecycle marketing, including by considering how different channels can be utilized across different stages of the buyer’s journey. They also take into account to advance in the continued move to a digital/marketing Centre of Excellence model (DCoE) as smaller digital innovative services units. And with regard to the digital brand building in higher education, within the digital credentialing ecosystem, it is important to be community driven going from promise to reality, on the basis of both right digital marketing action plans including effective pitch writing as an essential part of PR and inspiring design, and continuously transformation of the brand’s energy into new action, creating and activating friendships, building emotional connection, better understanding that digital transformation is essential for a resilient organization.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Public Relations, Brand Building, Digital Communication,
Higher Education, Digital Transformation

JEL Classification: D83; L86; M15; M31; M37; O33

Relevant PR: Forming a mental picture of social media communications and integration, and thinking harder about the strength of the reputation intelligence

In our last HMM issue we expressed our firm conviction that digital transformation based on a very human-centered approach is a must, being a real need of adequately managing digital marketing, the new norm reshaped by technology and trends, including by better controlling company's social strategy and improving social branding, considering the integration of AI with IoT. (Negricea & Purcarea, 2020) Within this framework we reminded the words of "The Father of Modern Marketing", Philip Kotler, who said at the end of last year that: *"Ironically, as we move more into digital marketing, we might find someone earning the title of The Father of Digital Marketing... Marketing plays its greatest role when it makes life better for the majority of people. I chose marketing because at its best it lifts the Common Good"*. (Intermite, 2019)

Over 20 years ago Philip Kotler wrote the Foreword to the book *"Value-Added Public Relations: The Secret Weapon of Integrated Marketing"* (McGraw-Hill, 1 edition, December 11, 1999) by Thomas L. Harris, a management consultant specializing in marketing and public relations, and Kotler's colleague at Northwestern University. Over 35 years ago (First Published 1984, eBook Published 17 April 2018, Routledge, 1 edition, 10 April 2018) in a book written by Frank Jefkins, and entitled *"Public Relations for Management Success"* it was underlined the following definition (as the so-called "Mexican Statement" issued on the occasion of the International Conference of PR Institutes which took place in August 1978 in Mexico City): *"Public relation practice is the art and science of analysing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organization leaders, and implementing planned programmes of action which will serve both the 'organizations' and the public interest"*. Within this framework it was highlighted that management has to communicate at all levels, appreciating firstly the situation, in other words "communication audit" (also being underlined, among other aspects, that the PR practitioner should report to the CEO and co-operate with all other departments). Over 40 years ago (1976) the American academic Rex Harlow argued that he produced the first all-inclusive definition of PR (after identifying 472 definitions): *"Public Relations is the distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and co-operation between an organization and its publics; involves the management of problems and issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and emphasizes the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management keep abreast of and effectively utilize change, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and sound and ethical communication as its principal tools"*. (Butterick, 2011) Over 90 years ago (1928) Edward Bernays, "the father of public relations", promoted the term "public relations", being considered today as pioneering a form of branding. (Gunderman, 2015) According to his opinion: "Public relations are the engineering of public consent" (Crystallizing Public Opinion, 1923).

Without entering in other details with regard, for example, to the link between public relations (PR) and reputation (according to the definition given by the Chartered Institute of Public Relations, UK, which *equates PR with reputation management* – as underlined by Keith Butterick in 2011, work cited) or other different emphasis put by the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA: “*Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics*”), which also consider PR as encompassing protecting the reputation of an organization, reputation management being considered both a function of public relations, and (often) a priority in crisis management, allow us to reveal some significant issues:

- The coincidence between the above mentioned idea of management’s need of firstly making the “communication audit”, and both the event name chosen by PRWeek UK (recognized as the leading source of news, analysis, features jobs and social media for the PR industry) for its online Conference from June 30, 2020, “*Crisis Communications*”, and its message: “*We are living in the greatest global crisis of recent times, with the COVID-19 pandemic and resultant social restrictions drastically altering the way that consumers can interact with brands.*” It was a suggestive invitation to review the crisis communications strategy.

- The suggestion made very recently by PRWeek’s Editor-in-Chief Danny Rogers that: “*COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement may have accelerated 'purpose' marketing so swiftly as to leave many brand campaigns appearing out of touch*”. (PRWeek Creative Inspiration Bulletin, 2020)

- The suggestive point of view told on June 30, 2020 to PRWeek by the former advertising industry legend Sir Martin Sorrell that (within the context of COVID-19 crisis which has led to a “digital acceleration” of the business world, with more “dispersed” companies and workers on the way of recovery taking a “reverse square root” shape, in his opinion): “*Public relations conjures up images of writing press releases... It feels analogue to many of our people. To be relevant today it should conjure up social media communications and integration*”. (Rogers, 2020)

- The invitation made (from the beginning of this year) by PRWeek to think harder about the strength of the company’s reputation intelligence, taking into account that for anyone in PR a crucial focus is to protect and promote brand reputation, comparing to the company’s peers, and identifying the proper way of building a realistic picture of the company’s profile and reputation across traditional and digital media. And in this respect PRWeek recommended Kantar Brand Reputation Benchmark which “*brought together the most comprehensive and actionable intelligence on media consumption, performance and value to create a holistic picture of the changing media landscape*”. (PRWeek, 2020) Allow us to add within this framework that: the Kantar Consulting’s new Business Purpose practice (The Purpose 2020 report; there were surveyed more than 20,000 consumers and carried out 100 deep dive interviews with leading

brands) outlined three key steps to inspiring purpose-led growth: *Articulation* (the findings revealing that brands are over-investing in purpose “articulation”), *Infusion* (brands are under-investing in the “infusion” phase) and *Amplification* (brands are under-investing in the “amplification” phase) – the last two phases embedding the purpose within the organisation and customer base (Kantar pledging for the need to reverse the current 80-20 investment model - KANTAR CONSULTING, Purpose holds the key to igniting brand growth); on August 12, 2020, will took place the Finalist Announcement for the PRWeek Purpose Awards: *“The global COVID-19 pandemic has many searching for meaning... As consumers and potential staffers increasingly insist on brands they engage with and organizations they work for communicating what they believe in and standing up publicly for those values, winning a Purpose Award is the perfect way to demonstrate your organization’s authenticity in this crucial area”*.

In the latest years there was an abundance of practitioners’ approaches with regard to the relation between PR and Digital Marketing, such as: *“Public Relations is certainly evolving with the influence of digital marketing”* (Franziska Pirkel, Public Relations, SEO, Social Media at Online Optimism), (Pirkel, 2016) *“Why PR and digital marketing are connected – and how to capitalize”* (Michelle Garrett, PR consultant and writer for Garrett Public Relations), (Garrett, 2018), *“Role of Public Relation in digital marketing”* (Curvearro, a leading, award winning digital marketing agency), (Curvearro, Dec 19, 2019)

According to Digital Marketing Institute: *“Ideally, digital PR (aiming more to increase traffic and awareness) and marketing (more focused on conversions) should work together, with each strategy complementing and enriching the other”*. There is no doubt, as Michelle Garrett wrote last year, that: *“The value of public relations is increasing, as PR pros continue to prove their worth as storytellers who can write and place stories, building links in the process and getting the word out on social media which further enhances a brand’s SEO”*. (Garrett, 2019) Curvearro, the above mentioned leading, award winning digital marketing agency underlined in December 2019 that: *“In digital marketing, PR is the most effective method to communicate and relate to the market. It is one of the most cost-effective methods of all promotional activities... public relations is a vital component of digital marketing that truly wants to dominate the market and provide a better experience to both marketers as well as customers. As a marketer, you must include a public relations management strategy to get the best result from your marketing and also you can amalgamate it with an SEO campaign”*.

And, of course, taking into account that, as also recently highlighted by Eric Lebowitz, Director of Marketing at Critical Mention (which provides real-time tracking of TV, radio, online news sources, and social media - according to the Bloomberg profile), the rapid evolution of the way PR and communications professionals communicate with the media has been accelerated even more by the COVID-19 pandemic. (Lebowitz, 2020) There is a clear awareness of the fact that the landscape for communicators and PR professionals was drastically changed by the COVID-19 crisis, as revealed in May this year by the new report of PR Daily entitled *“The Future of the Role of the PR Pro”* (there were surveyed 315 communicators). It was

highlighted between this PR Daily framework that “COVID-19 highlights power of collaboration for PR pros”, (Kitterman, T. (2020) collaboration being considered crucial (the C-suite ranking appearing as the top partner for better communication and reputation management), and respondents also confirming flexibility and creativity as top skill sets for media relations professionals.

Digital Marketing, the “5Ds of Digital”, Digital Communication and Lifecycle Marketing

As the reputed digital strategist Dr. Dave Chaffey (we referred to him many times in our HMM issues) showed in April this year, digital marketing (which is, simply said, about utilizing digital technology and media in order to achieve marketing objectives) represents the term most frequently used today, that is why he considered useful to offer a graphical summary definition of the scope of digital marketing, breaking it down into easier to manage areas (activities across the customer lifecycle) that can then be planned, managed and optimized on the basis of the valuable RACE Digital Marketing Planning framework, as shown in the figure below: (Chaffey, 2020)

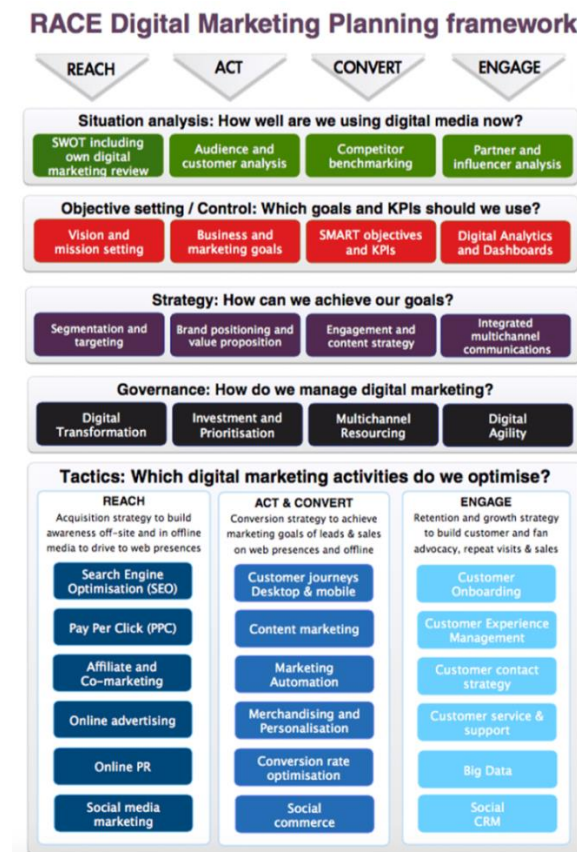


Figure no.1: RACE Digital Marketing Planning framework

Source: Chaffey, D. (2020). What is Digital Marketing? A visual summary, Smart Insights, 20 Apr, 2020 (work cited)

Chaffey started here from the fact that digital marketing today involves managing and harnessing what he coined as the “5Ds of Digital” (Digital devices, Digital platforms, Digital media, Digital data, Digital technology) which define both consumers’ opportunities (to interact with brands) and businesses’ opportunities (to reach and learn from their audiences in different ways). For example, businesses need to collect the insight about their audience profiles and their interactions with businesses (digital data, which now needs at their turn to be protected by law).

Chaffey argues that there is still a digital marketing’s necessity for integration of the online communications techniques (such as: the likes of search engine marketing, social media marketing, online advertising, e-mail marketing and partnership arrangements with other websites) with traditional media (such as print, TV and direct mail as part of multichannel marketing communications) to be successful, developing the customer relationship through E-CRM and marketing automation.

It is useful within this context to recall that three years ago Chaffey thanked (as co-founder and Content Director of online marketing training platform and publisher Smart Insights) to Debbie Inglis (author of the Smart Insights members guide to Digital Branding; a strategist and brand planner with many years’ experience building consumer brands based on strong consumer insights) for sharing her advice and opinions with regard to digital branding as digital communication (considering digital branding’s role in the context of the business strategy and brand planning). Inglis showed how branding concepts should be applied to digital media and technology in order to develop brands through interactions with consumers on their digital devices, brand marketers communicating directly and interactively with their target consumers or customers. (Inglis, 2020)

Allow us to remind that Chaffey highlighted in the above mentioned April 2020 article his preference to use the terminology “digital marketing channels” rather than “types” (considering that the complexity of each channel used to reach potential customers is depending on the level of integration and tactics applied across company’s digital marketing strategy and campaigns).

In turn, Inglis underlined her perspective on digital branding as follows: *“Digital channels and assets are used to communicate a brand’s positioning (or purpose) as part of multichannel brand communication or engagement programmes”*. Within this framework Inglis made reference including to the brand building role of digital communications (as shown in the figure below), giving suggestive examples of where brands putted the brand-building principles into practice, and underlining how more ways of delivering engaging, consumer-centered brand experiences are provided by new buying behaviours, channels and technologies, recommending an integrated approach of online activities with offline brand events so as to deliver both an authentic and consistent total brand experience.

In a book published at the beginning of this year – and entitled *“Principles of Marketing for a Digital Age”* – Tracy L. Tuten, a Professor of Marketing and author of several books (such as: *“Advertising 2.0: Social Media Marketing in a Web 2.0 World”*, Greenwood Publishing Group, 2008; *“Advertisers at Work”*, Apress, 7 sept. 2012) including co-author of the award-winning textbook *“Social Media Marketing”* (Tracy L. Tuten, Michael R. Solomo, SAGE, 9 dec. 2014), also author of articles published in *“Journal of Marketing Communications”*, *“Psychology & Marketing”*, and *“Journal of Business Research”*, argued that the most influential source of information across marketing decision making is perhaps understanding buyer behavior, digital advances having a double impact, they have both forced marketing to evolve, and changed forever the context, roles, and process of buying, the digitally savvy buyers using and being influenced by digitally enabled devices, channels, applications, and experiences (digital customer experiences benefitting from AI, VR, mobile apps, and digital payment systems, and occurring moment by moment, offering marketers the possibility to identify the opportunities at different points in the customer journey, clarifying both pleasurable moments and pain points, and focusing on good moments to outweigh the bad ones). She attracted our attention on the fact that we are all customers, and the traditional consumer behavior patterns have been disrupted by the digital age. (Tuten, 2020)

At the beginning of October last year Dr. Dave Chaffey argued that in order to boost conversions and retention is recommendable to build companies’ and brands’ relationships with their customers by integrating communications across multiple digital channels (within a planned always-on marketing approach), on the basis of a coordinated always-on contact strategy (engaging through automated email marketing, display ad retargeting, on-site personalization, social media retargeting, traditional channels like direct mail or phone contact) for the whole customer lifecycle.

In other words, using customer lifecycle marketing (which was coined originally as a term to explain their services by the CRM provider Infusionsoft, their marketing approach including three stages: attract, sell, wow), defined by Chaffey as: *“Creating a managed communications or contact strategy to prioritise and integrate the full range of marketing communications channels and experiences to support prospects and customers on their path-to-purchase using techniques such as persuasive personalised messaging and re-targeting”*. (Chaffey, 2019)

Chaffey showed the importance of lifecycle marketing to managing communications by developing a visual used as a gap analysis for typical lifecycle marketing activities managed by retailers and Ecommerce across the lifecycle for across the valuable Smart Insights RACE planning framework (see the figure below).

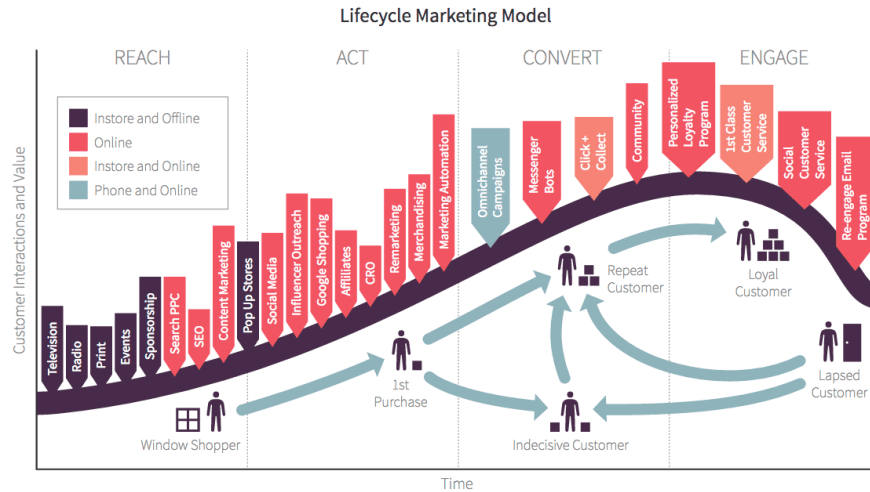


Figure no. 2: Lifecycle Marketing Model

Source: Chaffey, D. (2019). What is customer lifecycle marketing? Smart Insights, 01 Oct, 2019 (work cited)

And as when formulating a lifecycle marketing plan it is critical to consider how different channels can be utilized across different stages of the buyer's journey, Chaffey recommended the chart shown in the figure below:

		DISCOVERY Stimulus and inspiration	LOOK Develop preference	PERSUADE Remind, explain features benefits	BOOK Buy-instore, by phone or online
1. Integrated Communications for awareness	Offline (TV, Print)	TRADITIONAL			
	Paid (Display, AdWords)	Display, AdWords			
	Owned (Social)	Social			
	Earned (PR, SEO)	PR, SEO			
2. Decision content	Desktop/mobile site		Responsive website		
	Mobile app		App option		
	Brochure		Interactive		
3. Follow-up remarketing communications	Phone call			Automated call / chat	
	Email			Automated email	
	SMS			Automated SMS	
	Display retargeting			Automated retargeting	
4. Sales channel	Desktop/mobile site/app			Site personalization	ONLINE BOOKING
	In-store			TRADITIONAL	TRADITIONAL
	Phone			TRADITIONAL	TRADITIONAL

Figure no. 3: Lifecycle Marketing Model

Source: Chaffey, D. (2019). What is customer lifecycle marketing? Smart Insights, 01 Oct, 2019 (work cited)

It was not coincidentally that Chaffey introduced (from the very beginning of 2020) Lifecycle Marketing as the first essential marketing trend for 2020 (together with: conversational

marketing; insights-driven marketing; marketing technology; consumer privacy and know your customer – KYC, as new identify management; digital transformation and marketing transformation). Chaffey pledged within this framework for integrating always-on digital marketing activities with brand and product marketing in the business, one hand, with the improvement (on the basis of a roadmap) of the digital capabilities and skills, and this considering the aim of digital transformation, being expected, in his opinion, a continued move to a digital/marketing Centre of Excellence model (DCoE) as smaller digital services units tracking the latest developments (with regard to the development, advising on new digital techniques and technologies). (Chaffey, 2020) As Smart Insights demonstrated, a “*DCoE or Marketing Centre of Excellence encourages the adoption of the best practice in deploying relevant digital media, experiences, insight and technology across an organization*”, its role being “*to maximise the potential opportunities of digital media and technology to meet the multichannel marketing goals of an organization*”.

Digital brand building in higher education

Four years ago, in a Foreword to a book – entitled “*The Future of University Credentials: New Developments at the Intersection of Higher Education and Hiring*”, Harvard Education Press, September 6, 2016, Author Sean R. Gallagher – Diana G. Oblinger, President Emerita EDUCAUSE, U.S., showed that: “*Communications skills, problem solving, and critical thinking have long been goals of education... Credentials signal education and skills. And the emerging digital credentialing ecosystem provides an increasingly better opportunity to align pathways, needs and skills...*” (Gallagher, 2016) On May 18, 2020 John O’Brien, President and CEO of EDUCAUSE, stated – in an article entitled “Digital Ethics in Higher Education: 2020” – that: “*New technologies, especially those relying on artificial intelligence or data analytics, are exciting but also present ethical challenges that deserve our attention and action. Higher education can and must lead the way... I believe we are at a crucial point in the evolution of technology. We must come to grips with digital ethics, which I define simply as << doing the right thing at the intersection of technology innovation and accepted social values>>*”. (O’Brien, 2020)

In the latest years there was also an abundance of approaches with regard to the brand building in higher education, about good marketing and bad marketing: 2015, “... *marketing can much too easily damage the perception of those very aspects of the university it purports to promote: critical thinking, independence, originality, innovation, rigour, prestige, and, if we really must, << brand >>*” (“Words fail us: university marketing-speak”, Professor Philip Moriarty, University of Nottingham); (Moriarty, 2015) 2016, “*Looking at the current maturity of universities’ digital brands shows a remarkable opportunity for the forward thinkers and an established order waiting to be upset. As with so many other markets, those who master the ability to connect will reap benefits and those Luddites that don’t will slip into irrelevance*” (“To build digital brands, universities need to relinquish control”, Max du Bois, Executive Director of

Spencer du Bois); (Du Bois, 2016) 2018, *“Branding comes from within. It must be believed in and supported by all members of your community. Great brands are those whose missions people want to be a part of because they are the aspirations of the community. When a brand is community driven, it goes from promise to reality”* (“How to Improve Your Institution’s Brand Identity”, George Mattis, Digital Content Marketing Executive, QS); (Mattis, 2018) 2019, *“Scott Lucas, professor of international politics at the University of Birmingham... recommends that academics take a dialogue approach when engaging with the media and avoid preaching”* (“Careers intelligence: how to talk to the media”, Anna McKie, Times Higher Education); (McKie, 2019) 2020, *“Students can be influenced 24/7 and be inspired to bond with your brand. Thus, here are 15 useful digital marketing action plans that you need to consider...: Mobile Optimization, Technical SEO, Link Building, Re-targeting Campaigns, Managed Ad Placement, On-page SEO, Conversion Oriented Content, Traffic Oriented Content, Social Sharing Oriented Content, Stakeholder Networking, **Effective Pitch Writing (must be an essential part of PR process for higher education institutions)**, Gather Media Attention, Identify your Podium, Go Live!, Engage 24/7 with Chatbots”* (“15 Digital Marketing Action Plans for Educational Institutes in 2020”, Akshay Rao, Professor of Marketing, Carlson School of Management, University of Minnesota); (Rao, 2020) 2020, *“... for a higher education institutional rebrand to be successful, it is necessary to ensure that mid-level administration and management are aware of the benefits of branding... while a brand launch event was important, ongoing brand reinforcement and education is also valuable and necessary... internal communications supporting institutional re-branding activities have a powerful and valuable role for an institution’s re-brand strategy”* (“Branding higher education: an exploration of the role of internal branding on middle management in a university rebrand”, Paul Clark, Thompson Rivers University, Canada, Chris Chapleo Bournemouth University, UK & Kati Suomi Turku School of Economics, University of Turku, Pori Unit, Finland); (Clark, Chapleo & Suomi, 2020)

It is useful to come back to one of the above mentioned articles (that written by Max du Bois) to highlight a comment: *“How academic communities (in particular) perceive this notion of 'brands' is itself a major obstacle to overcome. Experienced design thinkers acknowledge that when we talk about 'brands' we are describing not only the visual manifestation through corporate identity but also the tone-of-voice through our marketing and communications. Importantly, we are also talking about the personality of an organisation - how it interacts with its clients and partners; how it acts out its values. Extolling the virtues of 'brand' to a community of sceptics and developing dynamic global university brands will only be possible, I argue, through bold leadership and inspiring design. **We might enroll students, alumni and staff in the co-creation process, but ultimately we're all looking for inspiration and motivation emergent from design- and people-led leaders**”* (submitted by PartisReputo on April 11, 2016 - 3:27pm).

A few years ago it was highlighted in one of our HMM issues how the Romanian-American University (RAU) learned values and ideals (that inspired RAU Brand and the professions that it serves) from interactions and experiences impacted RAU Alumni, confirming the continuous remarkable transformation of RAU Brand’s energy into new action, revealing the

inseparably threaded together of the RAU brand and student experience, being also suggested that this RAU Brand's energy is powered by the fuel which is emotion (in spirit and letter of the valuable Forrester research), this emotion-driven RAU approach to branding being built on the interrelatedness of experience, perception, and outcome. (Purcarea, 2017) In the same HMM issue we showed that technology adoption is powered by emotion, hyperadoption being a defining characteristic, and the digital customer experience evolving step by step, the customer being one (offline and online) and challenging marketers to offer relevant content and messaging within the customer journey in which there is a real need for increasingly personalized interactions at all points. (Negricea & Purcarea, 2017)

Next year, in 2018, we made reference, among other aspects, to: the invitation made by Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan to carefully look at some critical changes including the necessary shift from "Brand Positioning and Differentiation" to "Brand Characters and Codes"; the fact that we are witnessing an acceleration of the convergence of both the offline and on line worlds of businesses and customers (an evolution specific to the concept of Marketing 4.0), being an increasing need for marketers to create and activate friendships, building emotional connection. (Negricea & Purcarea, 2018)

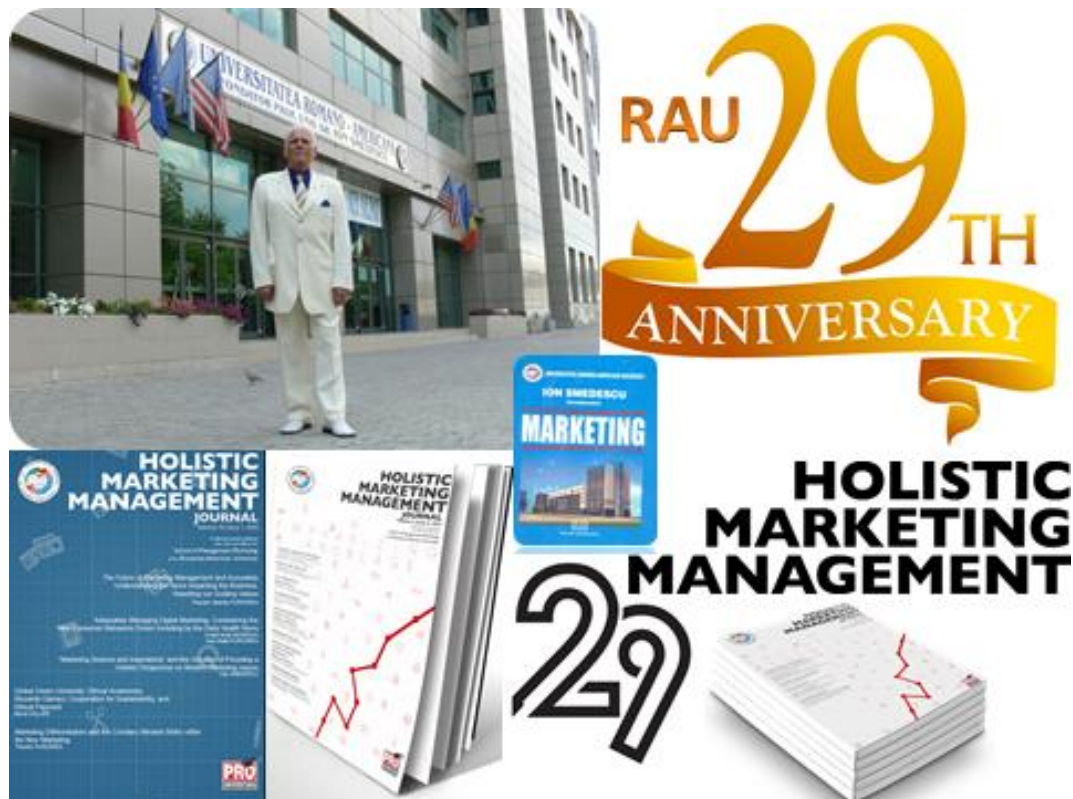


Figure no.4: April 17, 2020, Romanian-American University's 29th Anniversary, an Opportunity for Reflection as well as Celebration

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/HolisticMarketingManagement/>

Conclusions

Starting from the above mentioned reflection in our HMM April 17, 2020 message, and paraphrasing a SAP's representative, (Snell, 2020) we can say that considering now it is the moment to reevaluate what is necessary to successful brand building, we tried to make sure we answered the right questions involved by the path forward, better understanding that digital transformation is essential for a resilient organization.

On the other hand paraphrasing McKinsey's representatives, (Blackburn et al., 2020) we can say that we were taking the opportunity of gaining unique insights to both inform our response and help ensure that our digital future is more robust coming out of COVID-19 than it was coming in, considering that in this time of crisis our changing needs are driving rapid shifts in our mindsets and behaviors so as to innovate and valorize our talented team members and stakeholders, including our Customer Lifecycle Marketing, by an improved collaboration and sharing data and learnings.

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