

Romanian Public Administration's use of Marketing Communication for European Funded Projects regarding Environmental Protection

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Abstract

Marketing in the public administration requires an approach involving at the same time being open to the citizens' requirements, continuous adaptation to the evolution of the society, transparency, flexibility and efficiency in the functioning of public institutions, obtained as a result of the activity being focused on the citizens' needs. Institutional communication is the instrument by which the state institution aims to strengthen its image and reputation among citizens. Marketing communication in the public administration has the purpose to build a climate of trust and approval from citizens, while at the same time functioning as promotion. European funds are the Structural Instruments by which the European Union acts to eliminate gaps between regions and states, for the purpose of achieving economic and social cohesion. Member States of the European Union receive financial support in order to overcome their structural shortcomings and develop their ability to withstand the unified market. During the financial period 2007-2013, Romania, as a member state, received non-reimbursable European funds for the purpose of structural and regional development, including environmental protection. The need to adjust to the current economic climate requires from the public administration (both at European Union level and for each member state), to know exactly the social environment in which it functions and focus its marketing communication to the fundamental goal to study the citizens' requirements and needs to align the offer of public services with the market requirements.

Keywords: Marketing Communication, Public Administration, Communication Plan, European Funds, Environmental Infrastructure.

JEL Classification: M31, O52, Q58

Introduction

"Starting from the idea that the organisation is a whole that cannot be reduced to the manufactured products or sold brands and considering that everything communicates within an organisation, managers have started to pay more and more attention to corporate communication and integrating it into a consistent approach"(Popescu, 2007, p. 26). Institutional marketing sees the public sector using specific marketing techniques, but subject

to a new framework for such methods, techniques and principles. It can be defined as the system of processes and marketing relations existing between the components of the administrative system by which the activities involved in public services are also managed. For the public sector, marketing is the ability to keep the public informed directly, as it is a new solution to the frequent system of the public system in promoting its programmes, their necessity and effects. Thus, public sector marketing must focus on the necessity to satisfy the citizens' needs, as a beneficiary of the programmes developed in the name of their interests by the central and local administration.

Marketing communication involves getting information to the target audience, by which the institution of the public administration aims to strengthen its image and cause a climate of trust and openness towards it from citizens.

European funds are the "financial instruments by which the European Union acts to eliminate economic and social disparities between regions, for the purpose of achieving economic and social cohesion" (Leckey et al., 2010, p. 7). The principle that forms the foundation of a successful implementation of the European policy to implement structural instruments is partnership and cooperation between all stakeholders: national, regional and local administrations, the business environment and the civil society.

In Romania's case, a relatively recent arrival in the European Union, reforms must be implemented in the public administration to create the conditions for alignment with the relevant European standards. The marketing-oriented direction must be adopted as a fundamental principle and adhered to by both the leaders of the Romanian institutions and all public servants involved in services for the citizens. This change of view in the management of the Romanian public administration also has the role to drive European fund absorption in achieving sustainable projects for the Romanian economy, using non-reimbursable sources.

Marketing communication in the public administration

The organisation's communication ability is a special skill, which can be trained and developed. Communication is effective when the message can be decoded and understood by the recipient. This is done by sending a message that can be understood by the recipient who is also able to absorb it and follow it. To this end, public communication in the administration can be classified as follows: communication for information, for promoting services for the public, and communication for debating projects and laws for the community. For the communication process to be effective "continuous communication is required between the organisation and the target audience, and the consistency of the organisation's effort is ensured by integrated marketing communication" (Ivanov, 2012, p.56).

The external communication of public institutions for promotional purposes occurs unilaterally, from the public institution to its outside environment, with the organisation aiming to provide information about its services and promote its values, and also create a favourable image of itself in the public opinion. Thus the process of communication in the public administration includes the following elements:

a. Institutions of the public administration and citizens. City halls and other local and regional institutions, together with the central administration, in relation with the citizens, are the emitter and the recipient of administrative communication. The roles are interchangeable, as the communication relation evolves, as they take turns being emitter and recipient in the communication process. American mathematician Claude Shannon's communication scheme

can be adapted to the external communication of the public administration, for information purposes, as follows:



Fig.1. External communication of the public administration

b. Message. Each message is the content of the communication relationship. It has an ultimate goal, which can be to inform, request, motivate etc., and the citizen is informed by the public administration about a message of general or particular interest.

c. Communication channels. They define the form of communication, and may be written or oral. The main prerequisite for the information to have an effect on the public is that the messages are received and formulated in a manner that is accessible for each of the participants in the communication process.

d. Interference. Usually interference elements act upon the transmission channel, but they also affect the recipient, reducing their attention to the message content. Regardless of the form of communication, interference has a negative influence on the quality and effectiveness of the communication relationship between the emitter and the recipient.

e. Feedback consists of a message in the opposite direction to the one sent by the emitter. In an organisational context, feedback is “information sent from an entity (individual or group) regarding their prior behaviour, so that the entity may adjust its current and future behaviour to achieve the desired outcome” (Business Dictionary, n.d.). The responsible person in the administration must pay particular attention to feedback, being able to obtain assessments of the quality and usefulness of their work and of the effectiveness of communication in public relations. It is usually sent through a different channel than the direct communication.

“Communications fulfil three basic functions in marketing: inform, convince and remind” (Cetină, 2009, p. 110). Public administrations must find adequate methods to ensure interactive involvement from citizens in decision making, and the communication policy of the public institution has the role to promote its activities and services and monitor citizen feedback.

The functioning framework of the Management Authority for the Sectoral Operational Programme Environment

“Economic and social gaps in Europe are substantial and have deepened significantly with the latest accessions. Luxembourg, the most prosperous member state in terms of income per capita, is now seven times richer than the poorest one”(Hübner, 2008, p. 4). To access European funds, Romania has created the institutional and legislative framework for the management, coordination and implementation of the Structural Instruments, by appointing institutional structures that are similar to the specific European structures and by harmonising the Romanian laws with the European ones. European funds are accessed under Operational Programmes, management instruments used to achieve objectives that were set by Romania together with representatives of the Commission. To this end, Romania has developed 7 operational programmes: 1. Sectoral Operational Programme - Human Resources Development; 2. Sectoral Operational Programme – Increasing Economic Competitiveness; 3. Sectoral Operational Programme - Transport; 4. Sectoral Operational Programme -

Environment; 5. Operational Programme - Administrative Capacity Development; 6. Operational Programme - Regional; 7. Operational Programme – Technical Assistance.

The Management Authorities are institutions designated by the Government, responsible for managing the Operational Programme managing the financial support from European funds. The Management Authority for the Sectoral Operational Programme Environment (MA SOP Environment) is the institution providing monitoring and support for beneficiaries implementing projects with a role in environmental protection, in the public or private sector. “The Sectoral Operational Programme Environment is the planning document for Structural and Cohesion Funds (SCF), setting the strategy for allocating European funds for the development of the environment sector in Romania, during the period 2007-2013” (Ministry of Environment and Forests, 2012a) with an allocated implementation time until and including 2015. SOP Environment – the most important financial assistance programme for the environmental infrastructure – is designed to be a catalyst for a more competitive economy, a cleaner environment and balanced regional development. “The overall goal of the SOP Environment is to improve population living standards and environmental standards, involving mainly compliance with the *acquis communautaire* for the environment and aiming to reduce the difference in environmental infrastructure that exists between Romania and the European Union, both quantitatively and qualitatively. The implementation of the programme will result in more effective and better performing public services in water supply, sewerage and heating, taking into account the principle of sustainable development and the principle <<the polluter pays>>” (Ministry of European Funds, 2012). As part of the SOP Environment, in order to achieve the objectives assumed by Romania, for the “environment” chapter, 6 priority investment axes have been identified, in partnership, by the Romanian Government and the European Commission, as sectors of major importance that are eligible for European funding, as follows: Priority axis 1 – Extension and modernisation of water and wastewater systems; Priority axis 2 – Development of integrated waste management systems and rehabilitation of historically contaminated sites; Priority axis 3 – Reduction of pollution and mitigation of climate change by restructuring and renovating urban heating systems towards energy efficiency targets in the identified local environmental hotspots; Priority axis 4 – Implementation of adequate management systems for nature protection; Priority axis 5 – Implementation of adequate infrastructure of natural risk prevention most vulnerable areas and Priority axis 6 – Technical assistance for the Operational Programme.

The Marketing Communication Activity of the Management Authority for the Sectoral Operational Programme Environment

During the last years, the European Commission has given major importance to communication with citizens, acknowledging the need to develop informing activities to promote the positive impact of the financial instruments made available to member states. In Romania, accessing European funds is first of all a process characterised by the contractual relationship between the Management Authority and the beneficiary. Communication between them is decisive in the quantitative and qualitative process of European funds absorption, as it ensures correct implementation of projects, both from a technical and legislative standpoint.

“Practically, an institution must survey the market and identify the needs of the taxpayers it serves” (Nedelea, n.d.). To disseminate information to the wide public and the stakeholders, MA SOP Environment has placed two communication instruments at the beneficiaries’ disposal, supplementing their marketing activity. These are:

- Communication plan: was designed for the implementation of the activities for information and promotion of the operational programme. The communication plan covers various categories of target groups: central, regional and local public authorities, potential beneficiaries, civil society, public, and mass media.
- Visual Identity Manual: contributes to building the image of the programme and achieving the information and publicity goals. Projects and Operational Programmes supported from European funds have the obligation to mention the fact that the European Union provides co-financing, and to announce the activities that received financing. This manual contributes to an integrated marketing communication ensuring consistency and uniformity in all the promotion media, from personalised stationery, prints, to outdoor and indoor advertising, web pages and audio-video materials, etc. The specifications of the Visual Identity Manual are an integral part of the financing contracts between the beneficiaries and the MA SOP Environment and ensure that the principle of transparency is obeyed.

A department was established in the Management Authority with personnel specialising in communication, responsible for providing information and publicity for the SOP Environment. They closely cooperate with the beneficiaries to coordinate information and publicity activities and follow the communication plan.

The communication plan for the SOP Environment provides a coherent image for the period 2007-2013 and defines a set of objectives: target groups, information and publicity measures, responsible departments or administrative bodies, communication instruments and also the estimated budget required for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the measures included in the plan. The goal of the communication strategy for the SOP Environment is to identify the objectives, target groups, the most adequate communication instruments and determine the measures for information and publicity.

According to the Communication Plan for SOP Environment 2007-2013, its specific objectives are (Ministry of Environment and Forests, 2012b):

- development of an adequate communication framework for providing information to target groups;
- informing potential beneficiaries about financing opportunities for environmental infrastructure projects, as well as the responsibility they have in connection with information and publicity;
- informing the public about the purpose, importance and priorities of the SOP Environment regarding the development and modernisation of Romania's environmental infrastructure;
- informing target groups about the effects/results of the projects financed through SOP Environment, ensuring transparency for the programme implementation;
- ensuring effective coordination for MA SOP Environment activities in connection with information and publicity, with communication activities of the other Management Authorities implementing operational programmes;
- ensuring transparency with respect to financing obtained from the Structural Instruments under the SOP Environment.

Effective publicity of the SOP Environment has the role to inform the population about the beneficial effects of this programme on environmental protection, increase the awareness of the population regarding the beneficial contribution of the European Union to Romania's

development, and at the same time to strengthen the cooperation between the stakeholders in the implementation process, in order to increase the absorption of European funds.

Conclusions

The public administration must respect and take the citizens into account, must always be open for dialogue. The institutions of the state must keep in contact with the citizens at all times and use marketing communication to monitor how the general interests of the population are satisfied. For Romania, European funds are an opportunity for social and economic consolidation, by promoting and financing programmes and projects that contribute to sectoral and regional development, with the goal of eliminating disparities between the regions of the country and between the country and other Member States of the Union.

All these efforts for the development of Romania must be known by the public, so that citizens may fully benefit from the investments. The communication plan of the MA SOP Environment, together with the Visual Identity Manual, provides a cohesive image of the objectives and achievements of the programme as regards project financing for environmental infrastructure and environmental protection in Romania, for the planning period 2007-2013. Furthermore, they provide better visibility of how projects funded under the SOP Environment are implemented and ensure transparency in connection with the usage of European Union funds and national co-financing.

Managerial Implications

Given the current social and economic context, the role of external communication in an organisation tends to become increasingly diversified and varied, in direct correlation with the needs of the public audience, and the communication strategy must provide solutions for the implication of the end users. In the public administration, the role of integrated marketing communication is to cause a series of changes in the mentalities and communication habits with public partners. The management of state institutions can only implement its decisions through effective communication with the citizens. An important role in this process is played by communication used as an instrument to ensure transparency in administration, as a necessary prerequisite to increasing managerial performance, for the purpose of mobilising all stakeholders in the absorption of European funds. Thus, an effective public administration must have continuous communication with the citizens, in order to ensure that the public function is fulfilled correctly and public money is managed with honesty.

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