

**NATIONAL SCHOOL OF POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE STUDIES
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ABSTRACT OF DOCTORAL THESIS

*Authenticity in global brand communication:
Factors influencing the building and implementation of online communication strategies
of global brands active in emerging markets*

Scientific Supervisor:

PhD Univ. Prof. Diana Maria CISMARU

PhD student:

Mădălina Teodora ION

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INTRODUCTION

The question about the topic of this PhD thesis came up during my more than five years of professional experience spent in the field of digital communication, a period in which I worked with global organizations strategic to the Romanian business market, such as McDonald's, PepsiCo, Mars Corporation and Unilever. During my professional collaboration with global brands belonging to these companies, I identified a practice they have in common, namely, importing communication campaigns from wealthier countries in Western Europe or the United States. These campaigns were delivered in the form of *communication toolkits* and then adapted to the Romanian market, often only linguistically, and communicated as such on various media, from TV channels to social media. By its nature, TV is a one-way communication channel and, as a result, feedback from consumers can hardly be analysed. But on the other hand, in *social media*, user feedback is immediate and often negative when it comes to tailored communication materials. As they want to streamline the costs and resources involved (time resources, financial resources, creative resources, etc.), many organisations communicating in an emerging market, such as Romania, approach communication based on global strategic directions, disregarding the socio-cultural characteristics of local audiences. Thus, the development of the technological context has encouraged the debate of the idea that brands should relate to a single global market; in response, they have introduced standardised communication through a mix of global strategies, implemented locally. However, contrary to this practice, along with the development of online social networks, we have also seen a recreation of local cultural identities and, as a result, of micro-communities in the digital environment. We can say that, in the context of the increasingly discussed globalisation, we are facing a paradoxical phenomenon, accentuated by the development of online communities: the world has *not* united under the umbrella of a single culture but, on the contrary, has become even more divided, raising new challenges in communicating with a brand's strategic audiences. The level of competitiveness in the market for products and services has increased with the rise of borders and the ability to purchase goods from any corner of the world. The great number of options available poses a threat to organisations operating in global, regional and local markets. No matter how much they value an organisation's image or the quality of a particular product, for the global consumer, exploring new options has never been easier, cheaper, faster or more interactive (Interbrand, 2019). This is yet another reason why we believe that organisations need to (re)define and reinforce their values in order to build and

implement communication strategies that are oriented towards social and individual issues, moral values, ethics and creating humanised connections with their audiences.

We aim to explore the factors which influence the building and implementation of online communication strategies for global brands active in the Romanian market. At the same time, we aim to explore the role of authenticity in digital communication and its influence on *social media* communication performance. In order to achieve these objectives, we propose a two-stage mixed study: (1) a qualitative stage, with the aim to understand in depth the factors influencing the process of building and implementing online campaigns for global brands communicating in Romania, followed by (2) a quantitative stage, testing and generalizing the initial results of the qualitative research, as well as checking the correlation between the main factors (authenticity, organizational values, innovation orientation, socio-cultural diversity) and the performance of digital communication campaigns.

The thesis is structured in five parts as follows: (1) the theoretical part (chapters 1-3) presents data from the research literature on the current state of academic knowledge in the field of online communication for global brands, with a focus on the concept of *authenticity* as a core value influencing consumer preferences for one brand or another; At the same time, in the first part of the paper we analyse the role that innovation plays in creating the perception of authenticity, as well as the organizational values that can influence a company's innovation orientation; (2) research methodology (Chapter 4), which argues the purpose of the research, the choice of a two-stage study, the sample and the choice of research instruments; (3) the qualitative stage of the study (chapter 5), focusing on the analysis and interpretation of the collected data; and (4) the quantitative stage (chapter 6), in which we tested and interpreted through the application of statistical tests the influence that organizational values, authenticity, innovation and socio-cultural diversity have on the communication performance of global brands; (5) the last part of the paper contains the final conclusions and a brief presentation of the prospects for further research on the process of building and implementing online communication campaigns for global brands.

We note that this abstract includes in a concise form the contents of chapters 5-6 with reference to the qualitative and quantitative research results, together with the final conclusions. The numbering of the chapters, subchapters and tables corresponds to that in the thesis. The significant bibliographical references used in the paper are presented.

CHAPTER 5

Empirical research: Identifying factors influencing the building and implementation of digital communication strategies of global brands active in emerging markets

5.4 Discussion and conclusions

The first stage of the mixed sequential study consisted of applying a qualitative method for data collection, namely, the in-depth interview. For this purpose, 10 online communication specialists managing global brands active in the Romanian market provided detailed information on the process of building and implementing digital campaigns, as well as the internal and external factors influencing this process. The interviews took place between February and March 2021 and resulted in 80 pages of transcripts, the data of which was then analysed using the ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis tool. In total, the analysis grid totalled 228 codes, a list of which can be found at the end of the paper (*Annex 4: Full list of codes*), and to determine the relationships between codes (Table 5) we used the universal semantic relations model suggested by Spradley (1979).

The first conclusion of the qualitative research is that there is no exhaustive and well-determined list of skills (*soft and hard*) that a communication specialist should have. Once asked, respondents suggested empathy, adaptability, curiosity, willingness to learn, creativity, proactivity, courage, entrepreneurship, responsiveness, presence of mind and teamwork as the main soft attributes. These are complemented by hard attributes such as responsiveness, marketing knowledge, media knowledge, communication skills, language skills, data analysis and project management. Therefore, there is a real pressure on digital communicators today, driven firstly by the changing dynamics of online social networks and secondly by the needs of global organisations to adapt quickly to these dynamic of new communication environments.

The culture of global organisations active in the Romanian market is generally described by values such as trust, innovation, alignment, consumer orientation, ethics and social responsibility, sustainability, agility, entrepreneurship, quality and teamwork. Here, again we wanted to explore the values that characterise global organisations at the local level, but without being able to identify a pattern. We thus suggest that the values listed above may vary according to a company's sector of activity, but also according to the orientation of management (people-oriented or goal-oriented) and its relation to the adoption of innovation in general. Moreover, we note that there is a general trend in the consumer goods sector to

adopt architectural innovations, which combine tools, technologies and methodologies that turn into a new innovation time on the market, a distinction primarily related to competitors. For example, one company in the consumer goods industry acquired "a global start-up to help consumers with product testing" (2:30), while another company mentioned expanding the diversity of services offered by "group-wide acquisition of a home delivery company" (6:35). Such architectural innovations involve, in effect, "looking at some things differently and putting them in a context that works for the brand the communications of which you are coordinating" (1:37). On the other hand, as expected, it is the technology segment that is testing and tackling radical and/or disruptive types of innovations that come one step closer to meeting consumer needs (7:47). In terms of communication innovation, this is generally associated with a complex communication strategy whereby the message is delivered to consumers through a mix of channels, from online social networks to the application of geo-targeted promotion tactics and communication through *influencers*.

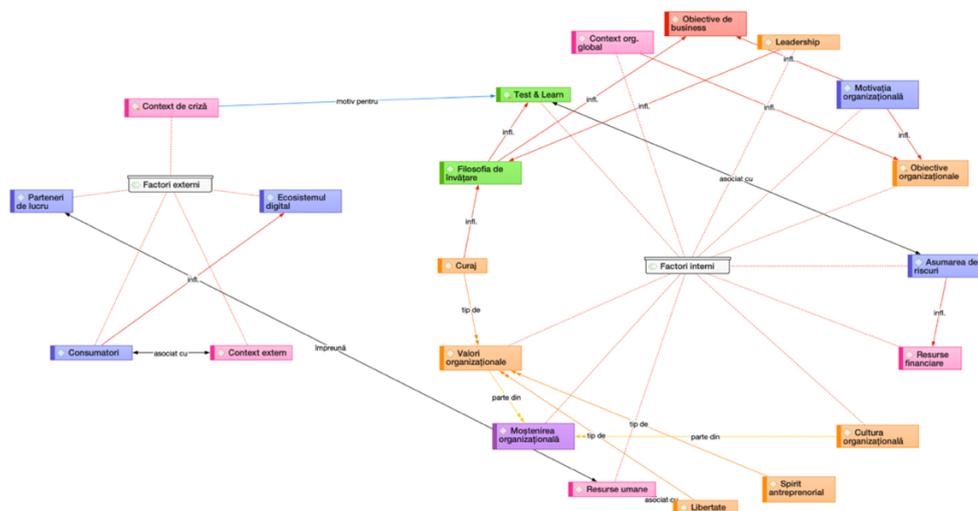


Figure 28: *External and internal factors influencing the process of adopting communication innovations*

In this step, we dare to suggest a (non-exhaustive) list of variables identified as the main factors influencing the process of adoption of communication innovations: (1) external factors: digital ecosystem (dynamics of change of online communication channels), working partners (advertising agencies, media, PR, etc.), the context (such as the crisis context describing 2020) and, last but not least, consumer habits and consumer preferences; (2) internal factors: organisational culture with all that it implies (organisational values, leadership orientation, learning and testing philosophy, risk-taking), the organisational context given by the external

framework, organisational legacy, business objectives set, together with available resources (human and financial).

In the process of building online communication campaigns, we observe how the main objective of online communication is that of *awareness*; whether we are talking about brand image, a new product or an offer, communication campaigns are primarily aimed at reaching strategic audiences by means of the key message. This approach is similar to that of messaging at TV, as indeed interviewees stated that in some situations the objective of online communication is the same as the objective of TV communication. On the other hand, it is also important to highlight the context of the crisis brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, which has generally forced companies to reorient themselves towards online communication, thus shifting the focus of communication channels in the marketing mix from TV to digital. At the same time, despite the fact that online has so far played more of a supporting role, global companies active in developing markets are seen to be shifting this focus in the medium term.

In terms of understanding consumers, we note that there are cases where information on the target audience is missing from the initial stage of building communication campaigns, as one respondent specified: "it is not a standard in all briefs to include this socio-demographic part" (5:53), and "creative briefs don't really include data on the audience" (5:52). On the other hand, there is this inclination to build a profile of a single global consumer and to generalise their characteristics, regardless of their cultural background. We believe that this practice has led to the formation of so-called *communication toolkits*.

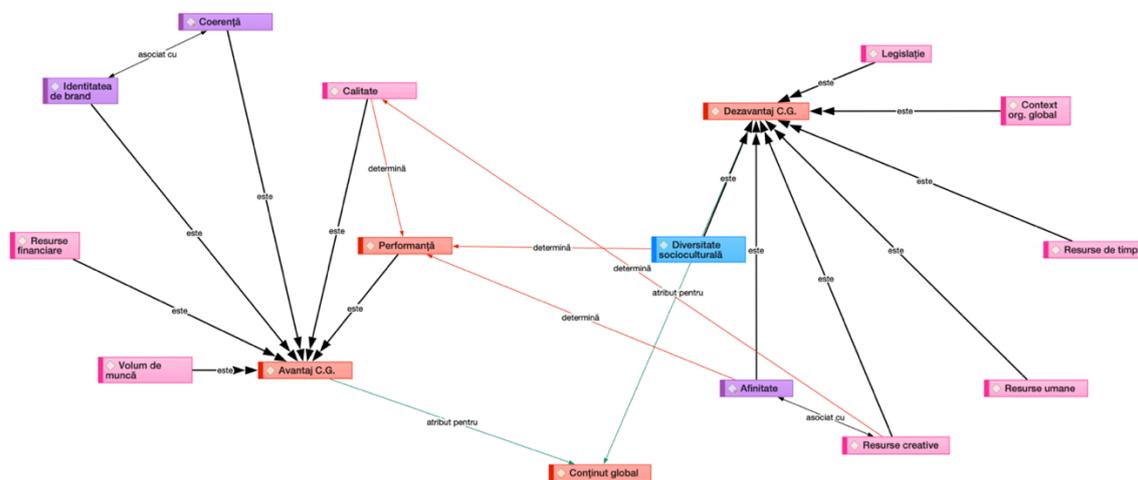


Figure 16: Advantages and disadvantages of locally adapted global content

This trend confirms one of the hypotheses of the paper, namely global brands active in emerging markets continue to adopt globally created content without necessarily considering

the socio-cultural characteristics of the local audiences they are targeting. From a more nuanced analysis of the type of content used in communicating with strategic audiences, we understand that, in general, the global content adapted locally has as main advantages the fact that it respects brand identity and values, is consistent, of high quality, and requires fewer resources for the local team to adapt (human, time and financial resources); on the other hand, this type of content does not exactly meet the needs of local audiences and, as a result, the level of affinity with it is lower. On the other hand, content created locally is closer to consumers and therefore more relevant to the market, responds to specific needs and is perceived as performing better as compared to globally adapted content; as main drawbacks, however, respondents mention the lack of coherence with the global brand identity and the resources involved in its creation.

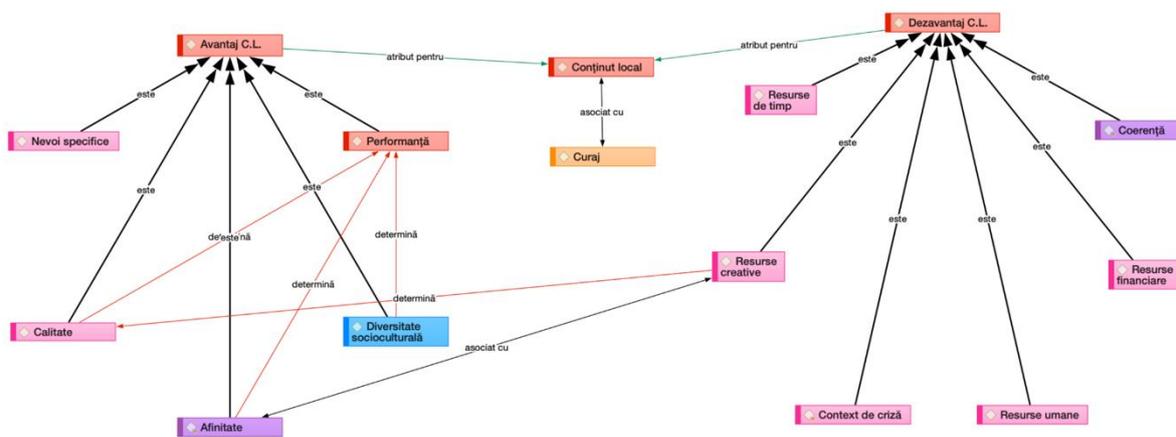


Figure 17: Advantages and disadvantages of locally created content

Last but not least, after applying the analysis grids we saw how the dimensions of authenticity perceived by consumers have changed in the view of communication specialists. Consistency, engagement, trust, affinity, entertainment and differentiation are the dimensions that can determine the level of authenticity of a global brand in communicating with local strategic audiences. *Coherence* is thus defined in relation to a brand's global identity, its heritage and the values it upholds; in general, a brand is defined as coherent when its communication campaigns are in line with its core values and principles. *Engagement* refers to two aspects - sustainability and social responsibility as a way for global brands to actively get involved in environmental and community needs. *Trust* is associated with the level of transparency that global brands display in communicating with their audience segments, as well as a freedom that communication and marketing teams have in weighing, taking risks and making decisions, a value that underpins the culture that describes the organisation. *Affinity* is

defined as the level to which consumers feel a positive connection to the brand based on a validation of self, associated with the extent to which people and brands share the same values.

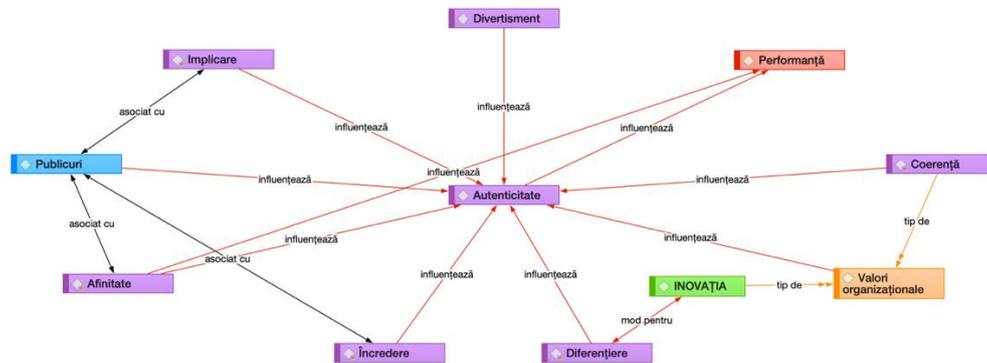


Figure 25: Dimensions of perceived authenticity

Entertainment represents the extent to which the brand can generate positive feelings and provide authentic experiences to its consumers. Last but not least, *differentiation* requires unique products and/or services, as well as recognisable communication and memorable experiences for a brand's target audiences (Figure 25). We thus outline a new theoretical model, which we propose to test in the second part of the research and explore in more detail in the quantitative phase of the study.

CHAPTER 6

Empirical research: Testing the influence of organisational culture, authenticity, innovation and socio-cultural diversity on the communication performance of global brands

6.3 Discussion and conclusions

In the second research stage of the study we aimed to explore the role that organizational culture described by values, authenticity, socio-cultural diversity and innovation orientation have on the online communication performance of global brands active in an emerging market such as Romania. For the quantitative analysis we applied the questionnaire as a research tool, the sample being composed of digital communication specialists who coordinate the process of building and implementing campaigns for global brands present on

the Romanian market. Given that there is no available list of all communication specialists in Romania, to which the company is assigned, as well as the position they hold within the company, we aimed to create such a database of experts, communication specialists holding positions within a global organization using the social network LinkedIn. Thus, we have identified 364 elements, specialists in the field of online communication who coordinate global brands active on the Romanian market. The process of contacting respondents took place in two stages, as follows: (1) we sent LinkedIn connection request to all 364 people; one of the limitations of this social network is that it does not allow free contact by direct message to network members who are not connected to each other (LinkedIn, 2018); of the 364 people, 86 did not respond to the connection request; (2) subsequently, 278 people received the message with the invitation to participate in the study on global brands communication (185 brands), and 104 of them agreed to answer the questionnaire (101 global brands). The very specific characteristics of the sample represented a barrier to achieving the required number of responses to have a valid research. These are educated individuals in senior management positions in major global companies, and the data collection process was a difficult one that took place over 10 weeks and two days (27th of April – 30th of June 2021). Therefore, following the application of the questionnaire, we measured the perceptions of 104 respondents ($N = 104$), which we then analysed using the SPSS Statistics tool. We recall that, according to the original research design, data for measuring the dependent variable, namely, performance (specifically, the performance of content published on the Facebook page of global brands), were collected using the SocialInsider performance indicator collection tool. We were thus able to collect quantitative data on variables such as the number of fans, the number of posts published in 2020, the total number of reactions, comments and shares, and the average interaction rate per post in 2020. The idea of correlating these performance indicators from SocialInsider with the perceptions measured through the applied questionnaire seemed feasible in the first instance, only that, after applying the Shapiro-Wilk distribution test, we observed that we were facing a non-parametric distribution for each of the collected indicators: $W(101) = 0.239$, $p < 0.001$ for comments ($M = 12,698.88$, $SD = 50,370.47$), $W(101) = 0.286$, $p < 0.001$ for total reactions ($M = 188,922.81$, $SD = 657,900.94$), $W(101) = 0.157$, $p < 0.001$ ($M = 19,329.75$, $SD = 108,981.05$) for the number of distributions, and $W(101) = 0.231$, $p < 0.001$ ($M = 0.76\%$, $SD = 3.14\%$) for the mean interaction rate per post. Even so, we decided to apply a correlation test for non-parametric distribution, and the results showed a lack of correlation between the organizational values and the indicators collected from Facebook (as shown in Table 34). One of the arguments identified was that performance indicators can be influenced

by a large number of factors such as the budget invested in content promotion, the type of industry the global brand belongs to, the type of Facebook page (which can be global or local), even the format of the content posted (photo, video, text), which can be displayed differently depending on the Facebook algorithm. All these factors are independent of the perception of the measured sample and therefore the correlations thus tested cannot be validated. Given these arguments, we decided to remove the data collected from SocialInsider and replace it with respondents' perceived performance for global brand communication in 2020, rated as generally stronger (35.58%) and much stronger (34.62%) as compared to 2019 performance (Chart 26). Thus, we aimed to test the correlations between the independent variables namely, organizational values, authenticity, socio-cultural diversity and innovation orientation, and the dependent variable of performance. Following the application of the Spearman test associated with non-parametric distributions, we observed positive correlations between them, moderate in terms of statistical significance, as shown in Table 50. The most significant correlation exists between performance and innovation ($r_s = .452, p < .001, N = 104$), followed closely by the correlation between organizational values and performance ($r_s = .443, p < .001, N = 104$). At the opposite pole, a weaker correlation is observed between socio-cultural diversity and performance ($r_s = .390, p < .001, N = 104$).

		Performance in 2020	
Spearman's rho	VO	Correlation coefficient	.443**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001
		N	104
	Authenticity	Correlation coefficient	.411**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001
		N	104
	DSC	Correlation coefficient	.390**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001
		N	104
	Innovation	Correlation coefficient	.452**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001
		N	104

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level. (2-tailed).

Table 52: Correlation between dependent variable and independent variables

We can conclude that, in general, organizational values influence the online communication performance of global brands, the most statistically significant being

orientation towards *sustainability* ($r_s = .396, p < .001, N = 104$), *quality* ($r_s = .393, p < .001, N = 104$), *social responsibility* ($r_s = .374, p < .001, N = 104$), *transparency* ($r_s = .373, p < .001, N = 104$), *professionalism* ($r_s = .364, p < .001, N = 104$) and *team spirit* ($r_s = .340, p < .001, N = 104$). At the same time, we point out that despite the fact that many respondents mentioned consumer orientation as the value by which global brands' communication actions are guided, the correlation between this and performance resulted as lower in terms of coefficient ($r_s = .265, p < .001, N = 104$). Therefore, in terms of organisational values, global companies should be more oriented towards mirroring in communication their orientation towards adopting qualitative, sustainable and socially responsible solutions to meet consumer needs. At the same time, fostering an organisational culture where professionalism, team spirit and transparent communication between management and teams will also positively influence the results of online communication campaigns.

In terms of authenticity, we observe a strong correlation with perception on leadership's orientation towards testing communication innovations ($r_s = .640, p < .001, N = 104$). Thus, we can suggest that the extent to which leadership is generally oriented towards testing certain aspects of communication, such as alternating audience segments and communicating with micro-communities, creating local content, changing digital goals, changing the marketing mix and bringing focus to online channels, and testing new online social platforms may positively influence perceived authenticity. At the same time, we observe that there is a statistically significant correlation between innovation and leadership orientation towards testing certain aspects of communication ($r_s = .551, p < .001, N = 104$); at the same time, innovation and performance are positively correlated ($r_s = .452, p < .001, N = 104$), allowing us to suggest that authenticity may influence communication performance of global brands. In turn, socio-cultural diversity is significantly correlated with authenticity ($r_s = .563, p < .001, N = 104$), with the most strongly correlated dimension being that of trust ($r_s = .589, p < .001, N = 104$), which implies that in its communication, the brand places the consumer's needs first, taking an honest, transparent approach.

Another relevant finding is that innovation is strongly correlated with organizational values ($r_s = .734, p < .001, N = 104$). Among these, *consistency* ($r_s = .616, p < .001, N = 104$), *professionalism* ($r_s = .599, p < .001, N = 104$), *quality* ($r_s = .571, p < .001, N = 104$), *courage* ($r_s = .538, p < .001, N = 104$) and *trust* ($r_s = .521, p < .001, N = 104$) stood out. Regarding the type of content, we would like to highlight some descriptive findings, namely that, in general, global brands active on the Romanian market communicate locally created content (61.17%), to the detriment of globally adapted content (39.83%). Moreover, locally created content is generally

perceived as performing better than globally adapted content, due to the high level of personalisation and affinity. However, local content is generally perceived to be less qualitative and less consistent than content sourced from the global via communication kits, and in addition, its creation requires more resources. At the same time, strong correlations are observed between authenticity and CL ($r_s = .543$, $p < .001$, $N = 10$) and CG ($r_s = .588$, $p < .001$, $N = 10$). The difference between the two types of content lies, however, in the fact that, in general, there is a stronger correlation between local content and two of the dimensions of authenticity, namely *trust* and *entertainment*, while for global content the stronger correlation is between the dimensions of *coherence* and *differentiation*.

FINAL CONCLUSIONS

As we saw in the qualitative stage of the study, global brands active on the Romanian market continue to import content from richer countries in Western Europe or the United States, in a context where consumers are able to assess the quality of the content a brand communicates, even more so in *social media*, where negative reactions can be immediate. Moreover, the research literature in recent years supports mass personalisation as a communication practice for global brands, all the more so in the Big Data context that characterises the present, otherwise a cyclical, back-and-forth process between the outside world and online communication teams building campaigns based on the data collected (Kotras, 2020). Therefore, there should be a continuous alignment of global brands with the needs of strategic audiences, and for this to happen, they need to turn their attention to the characteristics of local audiences. However, standardised communication practices continue to be adopted, even more so in emerging markets where there are insufficient resources to create local content. Thus, our objective in initiating this two-stage study was precisely to identify the factors that influence the overall decision-making process for building and implementing communication campaigns, as well as to investigate the dimensions of authenticity and explore the correlation between perceived authenticity and communication performance of global brands. This was the background against which we set up a two-stage study: (1) qualitative research using in-depth interviews as data collection method and (2) quantitative research for which we used questionnaires as data collection method, the purpose of which was to test and generalize the findings of the first stage. In both stages, the sample elements were represented by digital communication specialists, who are in charge of coordinating important global brands for the Romanian market. Data collection took place between February and June 2021

(both stages) and resulted in ten in-depth interviews and 104 responses obtained from the questionnaire. Finally, we used ATLAS.ti and SPSS Statistics for data analysis and interpretation, hypothesis testing and outlining final conclusions.

Organisational culture described by values. In general, an organizational culture that encourages innovative behaviours is associated with increased company performance relative to competitors (Hogan and Coote, 2013). More nuanced than this, the measurement of communication specialists' perceptions revealed a significant correlation between values that support innovation (*Annex 6.4*) and communication performance of global brands. There is also a positive, statistically significant correlation between organisational values and leadership orientation towards testing certain aspects of communication, such as adopting the latest communication platforms, testing audience types or even creating local content for personalised communication with micro-communities or strategic audiences. Last but not least, as far as organisational values are concerned, they are also significantly correlated with the level of socio-cultural diversity, suggesting that the internal environment is an important factor in the process of building and implementing communication campaigns, directly influencing the way teams (marketing, communication) dedicate themselves to projects.

Authenticity. As we have seen in the literature review, authenticity is an important concept for *Millennials* around the world (Keating and Singh, 2020), who perceive a brand's authenticity as a balance between supported values, projected ideal identity and how it actually behaves (Pattuglia et al., 2015). Moreover, from a consumer perspective, it emerged that authenticity is characterised by the following four dimensions: (1) *continuity*, the ongoing nature of the brand, its history and its ability to transcend any trend; (2) *credibility*, associated with the transparency and honesty of brands to consumers, along with their willingness and ability to deliver as promised; (3) *integrity*, based on the virtue reflected in the brand's intentions and the values it communicates, as well as its orientation to act fairly, ethically, without a hidden economic agenda; and (4) *symbolism*, reflecting the values that consumers consider important, as well as the brand's potential to be an important source in building consumer identity by providing cues that represent their values, habits and relationships (Morhart et al. , 2015). The in-depth interviews revealed, however, that from the perspective of communication specialists, these dimensions take on new nuances, thus outlining an important conclusion of the study, namely, a new theoretical model that proposes six dimensions describing authenticity: (1) *coherence*, defined in relation to the brand's global identity, its heritage and the values it upholds; in general, a brand is defined as coherent when its communication campaigns are in line with its core values and principles; (2) *engagement*

refers to two aspects - sustainability and social responsibility as a way for global brands to actively engage with environmental and community needs; (3) *trust* is associated with the level of transparency that global brands display in communicating with their audience segments, as well as a freedom that communication and marketing teams have in weighing, taking risks and making decisions, a value that underpins the culture that describes the organisation; (4) *affinity* is defined as the level to which consumers feel a positive connection to the brand based on a validation of self associated with the extent to which people and brands share the same values; (5) *entertainment* is the extent to which the brand can generate positive feelings and provide authentic experiences for its consumers through online communication; and (6) *differentiation* involves unique products and/or services as well as recognizable communication and memorable experiences for the audiences a brand is targeting (Figure 25). The statistical tests applied showed that there is a strong correlation between the level of perceived authenticity and leadership test orientation of some aspects of brand communication in the online environment. At the same time, authenticity is strongly correlated with socio-cultural diversity, and among its dimensions, *trust* stands out as having a strong influence on the degree of socio-cultural diversity. We can thus conclude that a high degree of transparency in communication, both internally and externally, can have a positive influence on the perceived authenticity of global brands. In terms of performance, the statistical tests applied indicated that performance is moderately influenced by authenticity.

Innovation. The concept of innovation is intensively discussed in the research literature. According to theorists, the adoption of online information and communication technologies helps to shape an innovative image of organizations and has a direct positive impact on the efficiency with which they achieve their business goals (Molinillo and Japutra, 2017). For the purpose of this study, we set out to explore the internal perception of the innovation orientation of global organizations, but locally. Thus, the qualitative stage showed that there is a general tendency in the consumer goods sector to adopt architectural innovations, which combine tools, technologies and methodologies that transform them into a new innovation time in the market, a distinction primarily reported to competitors. On the other hand, as expected, it is the technology segment that is testing and tackling radical and/or disruptive types of innovations that come one step closer to meeting consumer needs.

The quantitative analysis also allowed the drafting of a (non-exhaustive) list of the variables identified as the main factors influencing the process of adoption of communication innovations: (1) external factors: digital ecosystem (dynamics of change in online communication channels), working partners (advertising agencies, media, PR, etc.), the

context (such as the crisis context describing 2020) and, last but not least, consumer habits and consumer preferences; (2) internal factors: organisational culture with all that it implies (organisational values, leadership orientation, learning and testing philosophy, risk-taking), the organisational context given by the external framework, the organisational legacy, the business objectives set, together with the available resources (human and financial) (Figure 29). We thus also report a highly significant correlation between innovation and organisational values, among which values such as coherence, professionalism, quality, courage, and trust stand out.

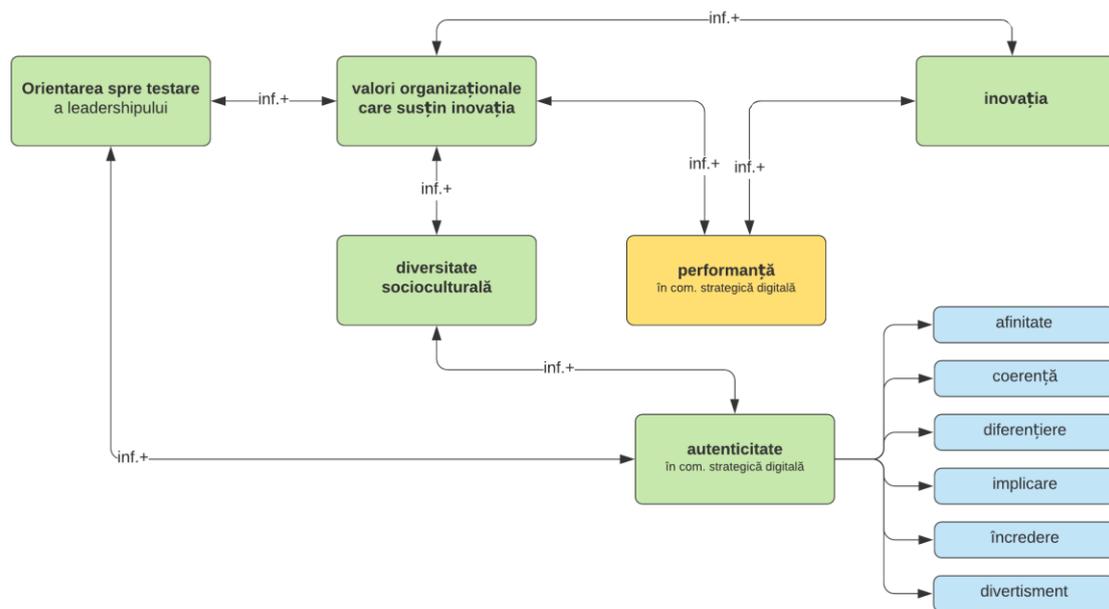


Figure 29: The proposed theoretical model: Test orientation of leadership, organisational values which support innovation, innovation, sociocultural diversity, performance in the online strategic community, authenticity in the online strategic community, affinity, coherence, differentiation, engagement, trust, entertainment

Therefore, as a result of hypothesis testing, the conceptual matrix transforms as follows: organisational values strongly influence innovation and socio-cultural diversity and have a positive impact on the online communication performance of global brands; at the same time, authenticity is significantly correlated with leadership orientation towards testing certain aspects of online communication, as thus we can suggest that it has an indirect, moderately correlated influence on performance.

Content created locally and globally adapted content. Research literature approaches the topic of content from the perspective of communication practices without separating the two types of content. In-depth interviews allowed us to understand this practice of importing

communication campaigns from Western European countries or the US in more detail, clearly delineating the advantages and disadvantages of both types of content. Thus, we conclude that, in general, the main advantages of global content adapted locally are the fact it respects brand identity and values, is consistent, of high quality, and involves fewer resources for the local team (human, time and financial resources); on the other hand, this type of content does not exactly meet the needs of local audiences and, as a result, the level of affinity with it is lower. On the other hand, content created locally is closer to consumers and therefore more relevant to the market, responds to specific needs and is perceived as performing better compared to globally adapted content; as main drawbacks, however, respondents mention the lack of coherence with the global brand identity and the resources involved in its creation. In terms of measured perception, locally created content is generally perceived as performing better than globally adapted content, due to the high level of personalisation and affinity. However, local content is generally perceived to be less qualitative and less consistent than content sourced from the global via communication kits, and is more resource consuming to create. At the same time, strong correlations are observed between authenticity and local content. The difference between the two types of content, however, is that in general there is a stronger correlation between local content and two of the dimensions of authenticity, namely *trust* and *entertainment*, whereas for global content the stronger correlation is between the dimensions of *coherence* and *differentiation*.

Beyond the proposed theoretical model, we consider that a particularity of the study is precisely the fact that it provides a detailed retrospective of the practices of building and implementing online communication strategies for global brands active on the Romanian market, thus providing support to all local practitioners who want to evaluate the communication of the brands that they manage with the objective of improving their performance.

Research limitations

We believe that one of the limitations of the research is the sample size for the qualitative stage. As specified in the chapter on research methodology, the high degree of education of the sample elements, as well as the important functions they occupy within global organisations, represented the main barriers in the data collection process - in general, digital communication specialists have a low willingness to participate in such studies, the argument being precisely the dynamics of communication channels and the speed with which they have

to respond to day-to-day challenges. We suggest that a larger sample (over 217 respondents for a population of 500 study items and a 5% error) would have helped us to demonstrate the parametric distribution of the data (which can be easily seen from the graphical evaluation of the data) and, finally, the application of a statistical test to help us in the creation of a mathematical model through which the proposed theoretical model could be checked (multiple regression). On the other hand, we consider the intention to collect quantitative performance data directly from Facebook as a good one, but the multitude of factors that can influence those indicators is a limitation in trying to normalize the data, thus facing more than non-parametric distributions. At the same time, from a methodological point of view, an important limitation was that LinkedIn does not allow private messages to be sent between members who are not connected. At this point we mention that 86 people did not respond to the request to connect and, as a result, could not be invited to participate in the interview. On the same note, we also consider it a limitation that not all digital communication specialists may be present on LinkedIn and, as a result, part of the study population. Last but not least, one of the limitations of this qualitative research method is that, in some cases, interviewees might find it difficult to express what they think or believe about a given topic, might not have access to all the information they wanted or might even express a will not to answer certain questions, in which context the relevance of the data obtained through the interview method depended on the interviewer's skills, their ability to ask questions and interpret the answers obtained.

Prospects for future research

One of the directions we suggest for further analysis of the influence that authenticity has on communication performance is to initiate case studies exploring the dimensions of authenticity, but at an internal level, so that concrete data on the communication performance of global brands can be accessed. In general, global organisations have a varied portfolio of brands, and the perspective that all this data can be collected in one place would make the process easier and also allow for comparisons of results on a brand-by-brand basis. Last but not least, in an absolutely ideal case, this case study could be applied in different countries, precisely to compare the dimensions of authenticity in an emerging market with an already developed market where the typology of values is changing.

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