

East European Think Tanks in Social Media- Towards the Model of Evaluation of Effective Communication/PR Strategies. Case Study Analysis

ABSTRACT

Taking into account the recent development of Social Media and its impact on PR practice among different organisations, the study aims to examine and assess the performance of PR practice Think tanks in Social Media. The major focus is put on Social Media application to their PR strategies and general output and outcomes of this implementation. The study is based on case study method combined with triangulated techniques of data analysis and collection. The sample is formed by the selected East European think tanks. The study applies free of charge eTools for digital communication measurement in order to detect the value of the presence and activity in various social networks. The objective of the study is to examine if East European think tanks apply 2.0 communication and to determine the best practices with its corresponding values in order to present benchmark for such organisations in this part of digital space.

KEYWORDS

Think tanks - Social Media - PR Strategies - Digital Communication Measurement

INTRODUCTION

The present study belongs to the tradition of new media research in Public Relations (Duhé 2015) in which the digital element is usually under-represented (Verčič et al. 2015). Similarly, researching the ways in which Social Media are implemented in online communication strategies of think tanks and assessment of its effectiveness belongs to wide range of studies on the Social Media phenomena, especially in non-profit organisations: factors of e-influence (Charest and Bouffard 2015), engagement on Facebook (Choe et al. 2014), digital publics (Kenneth et al. 2015), analysis of Twitter content of non-profit organisations (Waters and Jamal 2011), social interaction via new social media (Fischer and Reuber 2011), engaging stakeholders of non-profit organisations on Twitter (Lovejoy et al. 2012), social media and organizational visibility (Yang and Kent 2014), roles of community and engagement in building trust in social media (Habibi et al. 2014). Although there are relatively many publications regarding non-profit organisations, the communication of think tanks in this part of Europe is overlooked. Therefore, analysing the use of Social Media in effective communication/PR strategies of think tanks is the attempt to fill this gap with the aim to link existing Social Media theory to think tanks communication strategies in Social Media.

The emergence of Social Media has brought new opportunities and challenges to PR practice as it was known before eruption of Digital Era. Kim and Johnson (2011:77) mentioned among the advantages of digital social revolution the following features: new and multiple options for reaching the publics, direct communication with the audiences (without gatekeepers) and active participation of publics. Taking into account some of the current trends reported by media in 2015, it should be added the following: orienting communication towards a user, personalization of communication flow, the importance of interaction, content and finally an engagement. Nevertheless, these opportunities brought by Social Media might be transformed into the challenges for PR professionals

employed by organisations that are looking for new effective ways of communication (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010).

Social Media can become effective tools within the organizations to get the significant social impact on society, especially when influencing social processes is becoming key factor in strategic communication as it happens nowadays (Eyre and Littleton 2012).

PR of Think Tanks in Social Media

The concept of PR 2.0 was coined by Solis and Breakenridge (2010) and emphasizes the necessity of any kind of organisation to connect directly with publics in online ecosystem. As never before, due to Social Media development, PR communication has been oriented towards symmetric two-way communication model (Grunig and Hunt 1984). Such kind of communication takes place between PR professionals working for third sector's organisations and engaged, participative individuals with their own views, opinions and sentiments. Audiences' influence might become more determining factor while shaping public opinion than any PR efforts of the particular organisation. Therefore, Public Relations efforts in Social Media Era aim to understand and engage with stakeholders (Castillo 2009: 6).

As reported by Kim and Johnson (2011:78), during the Social Media boom, PR branch has been gradually adopting Social Media to its own communication strategies, though to various extent and with different level of advancement. In spite of the fact that importance of Social Media as conversation and relationship building tool is widely recognised, the sector is continuously learning how to implement it in the best possible manner. Certainly, some critical review of its utility in PR profession might result helpful (Valentini 2015).

PR Newswire White Paper, which was published in 2010, suggests some basic approaches to master PR in Social Media. These elements shall become key components of any PR strategy of any kind of organisation. To summarize, in the new era of Public Relations enhanced by Social Media, three main pillars of any PR strategy for third sector organisations are the following: reputation management, relationships building and nurturing, and finally content creation and diffusion to achieve some level of influence and impact (Shkolnik 2014).

In such a way, excellent and affective PR communication strategy is focused on reputation management and it is performed through building and nurturing significant relationships with target public. This can be achieved by means of meaningful conversations arisen around original content of high quality and its successful and wide dissemination among targeted publics across online and offline universe (Castillo-Esparcia and Smolak-Lozano 2012). Due to effective reputation management that applies correctly Social Media into ePR strategy, any think tank creates credible and trustable image of organisation and therefore can achieve certain level of influence and impact on its immediate and intermediary public. In the view of it, the following tactics might be distinguished, adjusted to the specific needs of particular organisations and its capacities (Kietzmann et al. 2011).

Figure 1 here (in `Figuras.docx`)

Various tactics are applied to distinct networks according to their principal functionalities as they have been summarized by Social Media Prism elaborated by Solis (2008-2014): community, content, interactivity, etc. As it can be observed, PR in Social Media has become very significant area of conversations and relations with

stakeholders in which the major shift is done towards more ‘human’ communication values such as: credibility, authenticity, respect and response.

Taking into account the aforementioned approaches, the strategic management of PR 2.0 is based on the strategy of visibility by means of Social Media reputation management (Smolak-Lozano 2012), especially for such type of ONG as think tanks. First of all, they need to adopt Social Media for effective communication objectives since nowadays digital audiences can be found mainly in these channels. Secondly, it is of great importance to interact with digital audience, connect with the publics to achieve certain level of influence and impact on these audiences as well as key political players, thanks to significant reach of Social Media and interactive tools available in social networks.

As far as think tanks are concerned, Social Media tools implementation shall be based on PR Pyramid that includes strategy, management and content production hence it would bring new role of Public Relations to organisational communication (Damásio et al. 2012). Social Media foment dialogical communication which is beneficial and ethical for organisations, however its implementation is still underdeveloped (Huang and Yang 2015).

PR Research in the age of Social Networks

It may seem that PR professionals are slowly adopting Social Media in their daily practice, however evaluation and measurement of PR effectiveness in Social Media is still under process of implementation (Castillo-Esparcia and Smolak-Lozano 2013). Therefore, such initiatives as AMEC congresses on standardization have come in aid. Social Media development has transformed the way in which PR is measured and evaluated in terms of methods, techniques, resources and knowledge required. It has also changed the way in which PR field perceives metrics and communication goals: “Rather, many suggest that concepts such as engagement, tone, authority, attention, interaction, relationship, and participation should be measured” (Kim and Johnson 2011: 79).

Although professionals seem to be sceptical about measurement and evaluation of PR in Social Media, recent works of AMEC on standardization processes and development of eTools (many with free access) give some hope that it becomes feasible reality and daily practice to the field. However, it may turn out to be costly and long process of learning).

The ‘humanisation’ shift is also observed as far as the measurement and evaluation of effectiveness is concerned which is trying to abandon KPIs and ROI dictatorship in the ‘Age of Accountability’ (Macnamara 2005: 20) applied to PR in Social Media and rather focus on real PR value assessment (Solis 2007), as it was advocated by Grunig (2009). Macnamara (2005: 2) proposes some methods that can be applied to Social Media evaluation: Benchmarking, KPIs, case studies, World’s Best Practice, Balanced Score Card, adding also ROI which has been already distinguished by Solis and Breakenridge (2010).

Due to application of eTools of PR/communication research in Social Media, the practice gains credibility and objectiveness. It also allows implementing management strategies aligned with organisation’s objectives and goals. PR research in Social Media goes under process of standardization and it becomes highly technical and scientific task based on quantitative and precise measurement. This is necessary step for organisations and it corresponds with the recent tendency (AMEC 2013), although poor application into real organisational practice can be observed (Macnamara 2005: 4). It is proposed in Macro Model of Communication (IPRA 1994). This model propose 3 levels of research

that embraces inputs (input: original piece of content), outputs (performance: exposure and publicity) and outcomes (that represents behavioural and perception level, in terms of: awareness/knowledge, interest engagement, influence, impact and advocacy in the communication cycle in case of SM) and it is based on triangulated methodology on each level.

METHODOLOGY

The objective of the study is to assess the effectiveness of Social Media presence and PR communication strategies directed to social networks' communities of East European think tanks. Assuming their great role in social-economic development in the countries that just 25 years ago left Soviet Union and having investigated the online communication tools that they use to communicate with their audiences (Castillo-Esparcia and Smolak-Lozano, 2011), we have assumed that they would further develop their communication strategies towards 2.0 presence.

As the first step, the model of evaluation has been created on the base of Macnamara's Macro Model (2005) and Bartholomew's framework (2013). As the result, the list of basic KPIs has been elaborated with their corresponding variables, according to AMEC guidelines (2013):

- a) Visibility/Exposure/Reach
- b) Interactivity Level, Type and Number
- c) Engagement Level, Percentage and by Type of Content
- d) Influence (Virality)
- e) Impact (Relevance and Dominant Audiences)
- f) Advocacy (Contributors)

Due to the limits of the study, only three first levels will be investigated being considered as the initial factors indicating the performance in reputation management concept based on relationships. Therefore, measuring visibility by presence and exposure, activity by means of employed tactics and finally engagement and interactivity in various networks would be the major focus of the study.

The methodology is based on cross –methods approach (triangulation method by Berganza and Ruiz 2010), that was previously tested by Castillo-Esparcia and Smolak-Lozano (2013) that combines multiple qualitative and quantitative methods and techniques adapted to Social Media. It allows obtaining credible and accurate results, especially in such complex and vast environments as Social Media. Such wide set of methods and techniques guarantees that the picture obtained contains enough details that are thoroughly examined as it is suggested by Paine (2007), Berganza and Ruiz (2010) and AMEC (2013). The triangulated methods of the analysis such as: benchmark study or case study are appropriate for the environment of Social Media and are proved to be efficient methods widely used in the PR field (Macnamara, 2005). Finally, content analysis is the rich source of information of organisations' activity and approach.

The principal method applied into the present research is the case study of each think tank included in the sample. It implies the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods, media monitoring, media content analysis and secondary data (online) mining as well as audience research. The research is conducted by means of both manual content analysis and business intelligence tools offered by Big Data.

In order to measure visibility, reach, interactivity and engagement, there were applied free eTools for digital communication and Social Media measurement (Vecino 2013) in order to retrieve significant data and assess some KPIs and Social Media, such

as: Simply Measured, Twazzup, Twitalyzer, Twitonomy and Kred¹. The manual content analysis and online data mining were conducted from January to July 2014 in order to gather the data for selected variables of exposure, interactivity and engagement.

Finally, all the data were passed to the Excel file for further analysis as suggested by specialists of socialmediaexaminer.com (2014). Once data was analysed and summed up by means of statistical techniques available in Excel, the EIEIA evaluation model was applied in order to assess which of the analysed think tanks is performing more effectively in Social Media. A set of corresponding data has helped to justify the reasons behind outstanding or poor performance.

The principal objects of research are social profiles, communication activities and interactions developed by organisations in question in different channels of Social Media: Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Google Plus, LinkedIn and blog as well other networks that by their nature serve to diffuse knowledge, expertise and information such as: Scribd and Academia.edu. The study includes local networks, too (eg. V Kontakte).

The timeframe of the research has been selected due to the richness of data, its real time character and data availability in various analytical tools. It embraces the first 6 months of 2014 across Facebook, Twitter, Google Plus and Youtube activity from the beginning of presence there, one month activity in case of blogs and last two weeks (previous to the time of analysis) in case of assessing the basic KPIs of think tanks' performance across different social networks such as: Twitter and Facebook.

The full list of think tanks that become the object of this analysis can be found hereunder: *Carnegie Moscow Center, Institute of World Economy and International Relations, Center for Economic and Social Research Poland, F.A. Hayek Foundation, International Center for Policy Studies, Lithuanian Free Market Institute, Polish Institute of International Affairs, Center for Liberal Strategies, Liberalni Institut, Hellenic Leadership Institute, Center for Economic and Social Research Ukraine*. There were main think tanks selected basing on the study realized within program 'Think Tanks and Civil Societies' (McGann 2015: 82-83). Additionally, we believed they would develop further their online communication strategies by means of Social Media, given the nature and interests of such organisations. The sample includes 10 randomly selected think tanks from Poland, Russia, Ukraine, Greece, Slovakia and Czech Republic. For one Greek think tanks appears to not exist anymore, it has been replaced by another Ukrainian think tanks that forms CASE think tanks network in this European region.

ANALYSIS

Visibility: Presence on SM sites and tools

The mostly used networks are Facebook and Twitter. In case of Wikipedia, the majority of think tanks' profiles were developed in the local languages. The fourth popular network was Youtube and Blog (4 cases). We found one case of presence on LinkedIn, once on Google Plus and similar pattern regarding Slideshare, Academia.edu and Scribd. Among those present on Youtube, there were observed two interesting examples. There was one think tank that has not had any channel on its own but simply would stream the uploaded videos (Institute of World Economy and International Relations). Another one has had an established channel but without any content and activity (Center for Economic and Social Research-CASE-Ukraine).

Two out of eleven of the investigated think tanks are not present at all of any of the social networks: Lithuanian Free Market Institute and Center for Liberal Strategies. One

¹ Please note that the study applied free tools in order to demonstrate that evaluation of SM nowadays can be a cost effective activity (as recommended by Paine, 2007 and AMEC, 2013).

of them has demonstrated to be ceased on the time of investigation although 3 years ago was still active organisation: Hellenic Leadership Institute therefore was excluded from the analysis.

The following networks were not used at all by the examined think tanks: Flickr, Instagram, Vimeo, Reddit, Digg, Tumblr and Pinterest. The local Russian language network: Vkontakte was applied in two cases and Livejournal as blog platform in one case. As far as the other online solutions are concerned, there were significant use of RSS (6 cases), email and Social Buttons integrated to the web (8 cases) and Social shares buttons (4 cases). Podcast, mobile contact or ecommerce solutions (book sales) were observed as the single cases.

The think tanks with the most extended Social Media presence are the following: Carnegie Moscow Centre and International Centre for Policy Studies. The other organisations such as: Institute of World Economy and International Relations, Center for Economic and Social Research Poland and Ukraine are developing less extensive SM strategies. However, there are observed that the following organisations indicate underperformance in this area: Liberalni Insititute, Polish Institute of International Affairs and F.A. Hayek Foundation. In case of underperformance, the presence on Social Media sites is limited or conducted only in local language and in irregular manner. However, in case of Polish Institute of International Affairs we can observe much more focused tactic that is based on the maximized use of two major social networks: Facebook and Twitter. It must be stated that the extended Social Media presence does not always mean the correct use of Social Media or excellent performance on a particular social network. Those organisations present on multiple social networks do not implement them to the equal extent. In few networks performance may result better than in the others. Nevertheless, it is difficult to conclude if this situation occurs due to limited internal resources or rather strategic choice of focusing efforts on those sites that work better for given organisation as at this stage of the study no interviews or surveys with communication professionals were conducted.

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As we can see, the visibility of think tanks is mostly achieved by means of community building efforts on Facebook, messages/news dissemination by Twitter and some particular content development tactics: audio-visual by means of Youtube and own expertise content and information published on the own blog. In summary, the community, information spreading, audio-visual content and expertise analysis are the most common strategies of Social Media strategies among the investigated think tanks. However, the communication efforts are rather directed to local public and stakeholders given that the local languages dominate the communication and only in three cases we could observe social networks presence managed in English as primarily directed to the international audience.

As far as the history of this presence is concerned, the majority of the think tanks analysed have started the strategies of Social Media in the majority of the networks² mainly in 2010-2011 (years of social networks boom). It seems that it was the answer to growing popularity of online social networks and logic step to establish the communication channel with stakeholders in their natural environment. However, the tactical application of Social Media strategies of communication in the majority of examined cases does not indicate high levels of advancement. In general, the lack of

² Only two joined social networks recently in 2014 and one started its own Youtube channel in 2007.

strategic planning, vision and professional approach might be noticed on their social profiles. This can be demonstrated by such examples as: not regular posts, lack of interaction with audience, quite large intervals of silence that might suggest that there is not one person dedicated to manage these channels and finally focusing mostly on redistributing the content across the Social Media channels with promotion purposes rather than to raise the dialogue. Nevertheless, it must be stated that the core part of the content is created internally by think tanks and it proceeds from their own rich resources. Their content includes current issues of major importance and is related to the area of expertise of the given think tank. However, the adventure with Social Media is quite young (3-4 years) that does not give much experience yet in ever changing prism and mechanism of this part of online world. Finally, it seems rather the result of joining the trend in online communication than strategic decision.

Activity on SM sites

- 1. Youtube.** Those think tanks present on Youtube (three cases) uploaded from 151 up to more than 400 videos. In general, YouTube presence started in 2007 so before social media era or already during social media boom: in 2010. On average, the updates frequency is 1 video per week however at closer look, the updates are much less regular, for example: 5 days ago, few weeks ago or even few months ago. Only two think tanks of those with Youtube presence (four in total) manage the channel with significant number of videos organized in playlists (by content topics) or results (number of views): Carnegie Moscow Center and International Center for Policy Studies. The others present on Youtube either does not apply it properly (streaming of videos but with no channel created) or with channel created but with no video content.
- 2. Twitter.** As far as Twitter is concerned, those who opt for this social network (mainly in 2010 and in one case in 2011) are divided in two groups: those with more solid followers base that update every few hours or days and those with small number of followers and less frequent updates (weeks or even months). The most active Polish Institute of International Affairs updates its profile 11 times a day on average. The activity of those organisations counted by numbers of tweets (published from the beginning of the presence until time of analysis) is disperse: from 93 tweets through few hundred tweets up to over 2600 and 5500 tweets during lifespan of their profile. The main days of activity are the beginning and middle of the week in some cases or rather the end of the week in case of others. The messages are distributed throughout whole day, although mainly on the mornings. If we examine last 50 tweets activity, we can see that it counts with multiple contributions and rather varied structure of tweets, however mostly composed of publisher's own tweets. Polish Institute of International Affairs sets the record with 48% of retweets from others in its tweets' structure, having multiple mentions and up to 32 contributors to its Twitter daily activity. It means that this think tank relies as much on its own activity as on third party contributions by interacting and exposing both own and others' content. This think tank and Carnegie are also the ones with the highest number of hashtags applied which means they intend to set trends and organize topics of their Twitter publication activity. As it can be observed, they are the most active ones on Twitter and mostly using this microblogging network for their content and interaction purposes within PR strategy.

- 3. Facebook** is widely applied by all of the think tanks examined. Similarly to Twitter, the official fanpages were created during Social Media boom: mostly 2010 and 2011. However, Center for Economic and Social Research (CASE Ukraine) was created just in 2014³. As far as the activity is concerned, we observe from 20 to over 100 posts published in 2014 (until date of analysis in mid July 2014). Carnegie Moscow Center (more popular in terms of fans' number) has published 95 posts and Institute of World Economy and International Relations (small in terms of number of fans) has published 113 posts. Polish Institute of International Affairs set up record here with 140 posts. In total, the most active think tanks altogether published 458 posts in the first 6 months of 2014. On average, it gives the frequency of between 1 to 1.5 post per day up to 1 post per 3 days in case of less active organisations. We have found cases in which the latest update was few days or weeks ago or even one month before the day of analysis (Liberalni Institute and CASE Ukraine). International Center for Policy Studies and Polish Institute of International Affairs, followed by Carnegie Moscow Center are those that mostly publish brand- oriented posts. In few cases, there was possible to retrieve the information on publishing patterns (five think tanks): time and days. The perfect time for publication was mainly Wednesday, Monday or Sunday early in the morning or in the middle of the night. Facebook activity is higher in comparison with the activity in other networks. Four of analysed think tanks published more posts on Facebook on regular basis that were focused on their own organisation branding.
- 4. Blog.** Only two of examined think tanks provide blog in English so it can be investigated outside the region: CASE Poland and Carnegie Moscow Center. The rest of organisations do not have blog at all or like International Center for Policy Studies write blog only in local language. Only Carnegie Moscow Center (having blog since 2013) and CASE Poland (information regarding beginning date is not available) have got blogs in English. The first think tank published 40 posts in only two months (May-June) whereas the latter published 10 post since the beginning of 2014 until mid-July. Carnegie seems to not have very specific policy on frequency since the posts are published in irregular way: sometimes every day, sometimes few posts a day and occasionally with few days break between posts but on average with one post per day. CASE Poland publishes 1 or 2 posts per month with the last update observed 2 weeks before the date of analysis. Carnegie counts officially with 8 collaborators that contribute to the blog content development, being the only think tank with more organised strategy for publishing although the frequency is not the strong point here. It is surprising that the basic tool for valuable content creation is not used more widely by think tanks in questions and in case of those organisations that take advantage of them it is not driven to its full potential. Blog can become a terrain of meaningful conversations that are easy to assess and valuable tool of information and content dissemination for public opinion shaping purposes. In analysed cases, the blog is mainly overlooked even though think tanks dispose of interesting and high quality content on daily basis.

³ Probably on the wave of events of "Ukraine Winter" this year.

In summary, these 4 aforementioned SM sites and networks are widely or rather mainly used by think tanks being the main platforms of contact and pillars of strategy. Nevertheless, it can be observed that the analysed organisations have taken sufficient advantage only of Twitter and Facebook as the tactical tools in terms of regular and frequent activity oriented to content publishing. Occasionally, the examined think tanks extend their presence to Youtube and blogs but in many cases they lack more international focus, do not take maximum advantage of available tools on these platforms, do not programme their activity nor structure their content. Therefore, it is more complicated for them to maximize the opportunities of content exposure and contact with stakeholders.

Interactivity⁴ and Engagement

Generally speaking, the interactivity of users on Youtube is poor in all examined cases, presenting extended lack of comments or rankings for the majority of the videos uploaded. Even those with better developed Youtube presence such as Carnegie Moscow Center and International Center for Policy Studies demonstrate scarce level of interaction on the published content.

Similarly, having blog available for the analysis only in case of Carnegie, the posts published until July 2014 has provoked barely 0.9 comments per post on average, with the comment as the dominant type of interaction. In total, the blog has accumulated 30 social actions for all posts published, including shares, likes, +1 of Google Plus, etc. on any social network in the period of analysis. This rather means that the blog presents limited level of interaction with the public in spite of fairly developed organisation's activity on the blog.

As far as the level of interactivity on Twitter is concerned, the results show very modest interaction of think tanks, both in terms of treating their followers as the sources of information and in terms of involving them in conversations by means of replies. Carnegie and Polish Institute present the highest level of interaction (5% and 4%, respectively) while International Center only 1%. Only Polish Institute of International Affairs demonstrates significant level of interactivity: 272 favourites, and together with Carnegie some over 100 replies, using retweeting tactic from 28% up to 50% in its tweets publishing strategy. However, we can also observe that exist few think tanks (Institute of World Economy and International Institute of Policy Studies) whose audiences are few times more active than the organisations themselves.

As far as interactivity on Facebook is concerned, the most liked fanpages of think tanks are not the ones that gather significant number of comments. therefore the general level of conversation is rather low. In this area, some small think tanks proved to be more interactive in their conversations, as for example F.A. Hayek Foundation, with 58 comments posted below the content on the timeline.

Engagement was mainly examined on Facebook, due to proper characteristic of the platform. The level of engagement expressed by measure of percentage of engaged users is rather low. Generally speaking, the differences between the organisations are insignificant. Carnegie has managed to engage 1.3% of its fans, Polish Institute 1%, while the most successful ones: 1.8% and 3.7% (International Institute and Hayek Foundation, respectively). Hayek Foundation is the think tank that maintains significant level of interaction and engagement in spite of its limited fans' community. In all analysed fanpages, the dominant type of engagement is "like" together with shares

⁴ Please note that some data on Interactivity are not available for all the think tanks although they are present on the given social network due to limits of the tool or because there were too little data for analysis.

with scarce commenting activity (lack of conversations) with average of 2 social actions per post and links as mostly engaging type of content (except International Institute which engages more by photos).

According to data, the highest levels of interactivity may be observed on Twitter and Facebook, however the size of communities (number of fans/followers) do not determine the level of interactive conversation maintained and conducted by organisations. In general, think tanks do not demonstrate very significant levels of interactivity in their conversations flows, neither its audiences. The lowest levels of interactivity may be noted on the single blog investigated which proves the inability of Carnegie to create a channel for significant conversations by taking advantage of its own original content. Rather poor level of mutual interactions indicates that the SM channels serves principally as the source of content distribution and information dissemination for these organisations. Due to various reasons, think tanks do not properly apply Social Media as conversations or interactions channels. Therefore, the relations created are rather short- term, based on the interests and information relevance in given moment, barely encouraging people to take part in the conversation and long-term interaction. On the other hand, it must be noted that Facebook shares were frequent type of interactivity which means that the content gets chances to get viral and get the impact on the target public. Shares are considered the most valuable type of interaction⁵. The original content of such sites as YouTube and blog lack the appropriate interactivity level or any strategy focused on this part of strategic PR presence in SM. We could identify some leaders on Facebook as far as interactivity is concerned: Carnegie Moscow Center, Hayek Foundation and Polish Institute of International Affairs, proving that satisfying level of interaction does not depend on the fans´ number. However, high level of interactivity on Facebook does not coincide completely with Twitter interactivity whereby Carnegie, Polish Institute and International Institute are mostly interacted think tanks. It must be admitted that Carnegie and Polish Institute have managed to develop the most interactive strategies towards their Facebook community and Twitter audiences.

Popularity

As far as Twitter is concerned, the think tanks are divided in two groups: those with more than 4000 and 6000 followers (Carnegie and Polish Institute, for example) and those with few hundreds (one case with only 11 followers). Those with more solid followers´ base are also more active ones on this network. In general, the think tanks follow from 40 up to 1600 users, in some cases following more people than having the followers themselves. This means that they demonstrate rather low influence in general. The most successful cases embrace Carnegie Moscow Hall, which is listed on over 300 times or Polish Institute (being listed on 167 lists), whereas the rest of the organisations can be found on only few lists. Being present on the major number of the lists proves that they are considered worthy sources of information to follow in affinity with the category of interests of their stakeholders.

As far as YouTube is concerned, being aware that Carnegie has published twice less videos than the International Center (151 vs 297) and they are only two think tanks with Youtube channel presence, Carnegie has gathered over 1200 subscriptions meanwhile the latter only 29. In these terms, Carnegie is the only one that is susceptible to popularity measurement, getting more popularity than other think tanks on this network in comparison to other organisations.

⁵ According to definitions issued by Sotrender.com and Hatalaska.com (2014).

As general trend, most of the organizations in question possess few hundreds of fans on Facebook. There are observed three exceptions: Carnegie Moscow Center (1941 fans) and Polish Institute of International Affairs (over 4400 fans) and International Center for Policy Studies (over 1000 fans), being the biggest fanpages and therefore the most popular among those examined.

In summary, both Twitter and Facebook perform the similar level of popularity in case of think tanks analysed. Nevertheless, Twitter is considered more relevant source of information. We can observe that smaller think tanks focused only on one or two tactics in few social networks perform better on Facebook or both networks. Meanwhile, the bigger think tanks with international presence are more popular and relevant on Twitter. Therefore, active community management based on content interaction at least on the level of like and popularity among the fans seems to be better strategy for those more focused on community relations or limited to particular tactics for various reasons (strategy design or resources). On the other hand, international and strong local organisations with clear strategies manage their popularity and relevance more effectively on Twitter with its conversation and information dissemination tactics. Youtube has turned out to be the channel with less popularity and relevance for its content and presence in comparison to Twitter or Facebook. However, if it is managed with more active approach, it can convert in very influential tool, especially with solid starting point in case of Carnegie or Polish Institute.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of East European think tanks in advanced stage of Social Media Era has demonstrated that social media management and community management in those media are still challenge for those organisations.

Data show rather simplifying attitude towards social media strategy: setting up the profile, promoting it, gathering fans and reaching them with the brand related content and then repeating this process again, e.g. on other network.

As we could initially observe from SM presence analysis, the East European think tanks put the major attention on two main tactics: community building via most popular network such as Facebook and content/information dissemination via other popular worldwide tool: Twitter. The extend use of Twitter and Facebook is conditioned also by its popularity that guarantees the major magnitude of visibility and professional content exposure. The choice of horizontal and popular networks ensures exposure of content and visibility of organisation to wide and distinct segments of society (media, journalists, experts, politicians, citizens, etc.). Moreover, the dominant choice of horizontal and global networks assures major universalism as far as the diverse tactics are concerned. Four main SM sites give the possibility to perform variety of functions simultaneously, such as: content exposure, interactivity with content and community management.

The tactics that refer particularly to expertise content or professional communities building (Linkedin Groups or Google Plus) are exceptional and those oriented to audiovisual content (Flickr, Instagram or Pinterest) or virality (Digg, Tumblr or Reddit) are virtually non-existent. However, it must be admitted that the use of tactic that promotes direct contact by means of SM buttons, SM tools and interactive tools such as: RSS, podcast and email have expanded significantly since the last research in 2010, even starting the limited use of ecommerce solution in one case.

To summarize, the most common tactic applied by East European think tanks is the visibility magnitude of the organisations on various global social media sites: Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and blog, whereas other more specialized networks are

implemented only occasionally. Low levels of engaging activity, mainly promotional focus or poor base of fans indicate this kind of strategy.

The management process indicates low level of engagement and interactivity as the results of not coherent tactics regarding the activity on the profiles in the majority of the cases. The general style of Social Media communication and the way the relations with stakeholders present on those media are managed resembles rather early stages of Social Media communication development that was then focused mainly on publicity. Obviously, there are observed few exceptions such as: Moscow Carnegie Center, Polish Institute of International Affairs or International Institute for Policy Studies. Nevertheless, the exceptions refer to particular networks or dimensions and do not demonstrate the excellent performance globally across all the networks and diverse types of tactics. There can be observed the certain patterns regarding financial and organizational potential (being part of wider network a sin case of Carnegie) that determines the bigger scale of success in social media management which is measured as the performance of this organisation in the particular channel. As it can be observed, the presence is mostly limited to two main networks: Facebook and Twitter. Similarly, the majority of these efforts are dedicated these two networks. The main two perspectives of the strategy is visibility magnitude and community management, generally based on the content promotion and exposure (mainly via Twitter and Facebook). Therefore, the principal pillar of the digital strategy is horizontal networking rather than vertical, in-deep expert community nurturing.

The integration across the social media channels and networks is rather limited and mostly present on blogs by means of Social Media buttons. The focus on community management on Facebook and information spreading via Twitter are dominating the strategy of visibility. Content -based tactics such as YouTube or blog are very limited and not always developed professionally (lack of proper channel, lack of consequence in blog publishing, local focus, availability in the local language exclusively, etc.). It is worthy to mention that those organisations in spite of great content publishing potential are not taking advantage of blogs and in the case of application of this channel the level of interaction is rather low and activity not coherent. As we can observe, marking the presence on different social media networks is the priority for the organisations, however this presence is not further developed or leveraged in order to establish and nurture beneficial and significant relations with the stakeholders. Creation of the community is based mainly on distribution of the own content that these organisations create internally, however with general limited levels of engagement and interaction. Given the 3-4 years history of SM presence of think tanks in this ever changing environment, we can conclude that the adoption of SM media by think tanks is rather forced from outside as the result of digital revolution. The strategies seem to be more focused on media and audience outreach as well as media relations than building significant community relationships. Therefore, these strategies require further modifications, development and more professional focus, given the latest changes in digital communication approach that are focused on narrative aspects, original content importance, key role of the community and significance of the relations.

All analysed indicators confirm that pattern. The general level of interaction and engagement on all social networks and in all cases is pretty low. It indicates some issues in community creation and content management as well as in professional focus of the relational strategy. The conversations flow is rather limited, not dialogical as it would be demanded by modern SM standards and almost not present more widely across other social media channels (not paid or owned, such as aggregators of news). The limited flow of conversations with its mass media communication style is more proper to the

previous era of media and can negatively impact community creation: the processes of establishing and nurturing the significant relationships with stakeholders.

The main errors are typical to previous Social Media stage when the presence and contact with audience via organisational content was enough to obtain considerable results. Among the errors there can be found the following ones: communication exclusively in local language, not extended use of audiovisual content and multimedia, poor integration across social networks, limited use of other social networks especially those of professional application and expertise content distribution, not taking advantage of blog and poor development of YouTube, rather limited conversational character of communication that does not foment interaction or engagement, exclusive focus on visibility and exposure tactics rather than interaction with the content and finally the lack of community building orientation. We could observe cases of think tanks such as CASE Ukraine in which the efforts to build coherent communication strategy via SM channels have failed totally and has not been fulfilled in the moment of analysis.

Taking into the account aforementioned conclusions, SM management in all analysed cases regarding the initial stages of AMEC model of PR for third sector: visibility/activity, interactivity and engagement phases is rather based on outbound approach, publicity model and two-way asymmetrical model of communication which does not support creation of strong community by means of significant relationships with stakeholders, as the relatively poor results of engagement and interactivity demonstrate. Therefore, it may be concluded that although 2.0 communications is widely applied, including the usage of interactive tools, with strong Social Media presence, overall performance is considerably limited and rather close to press models (high activity) rather than human and social approach of digital communication (due to limited interaction and engagement regarding community).

As far as extraordinary performance is concerned, we can distinguish the following top performing think tanks: Carnegie Moscow Center, International Center for Policy Studies and Polish Institute of International Affairs. They are those that are benchmarking some standards for SM presence and management. These were the most powerful and successful organisation on multiple communication dimensions such as: visibility, interactivity and engagement and in general.

Nevertheless, it is worthy to mention that smaller think tanks with limited scope of tactics and presence such as Hayek Foundation managed to demonstrate higher results on engagement and interactivity on Facebook. Sometimes focusing communication efforts on the single network proves to be right tactic, especially for those organisations with limited resources.

In summary, taking into account these three top performing think tanks, the set of benchmarks to follow shall be the following:

- Well marked and developed presence on the most important social media sites by means of professionally created channels and profiles/fanpages
- Global SM presence shall be complementary to presence on the professional social media sites
- Regular updates and participation in the conversations- 2-3 posts daily on Twitter and Facebook and at least 1 on YouTube and blog per week
- Fanbase on Twitter and Facebook starting from more than 3500 fans and followers and rounding up to 2000 in case of YouTube
- Communication language in English as the main language or complementary to local language in order to reach international community

- Updated and rich blog content with considerable interactivity level (at least 2-3 comments per posts or the similar amount of shares, likes or tweets), with social buttons integrated
- Interactive and engaged public on Twitter and Facebook (at least 3 activities per Facebook post and 2-3 RT or mentions on Twitter per tweet)
- High level of popularity- reach over 50k users and 30% of tweets retweeted or favourite; being listed at least 150 times as the reference
- Limited self-promotion by means of content but story-telling instead
- Visibility on other social media sites which are not managed directly by organisation but are social sources of information (news pages, portals, aggregators)
- Wide range of tactics focused on community nurturing and content interaction with stakeholders by means of professional approach to the relationships with them via specially designed professional social media channels and tools

There are general indicators of overall good performance that shall be demanded from any successful social media management within think tanks nowadays. It is especially important if the primary focus of think tank present in SM prism is on Public Relations objectives regarding visibility, publicity and interactive relationships with stakeholders. Modern social media and its richness offer variety of tools that are very helpful in promoting ideas and issues for third sector organisations. Finally, any SM strategy must be aligned with organisation's profile, goals and line of activity as well as form the integral part of general PR communication strategy. SM implementation for ePR purposes requires the careful planning and execution with professional approach and constant monitoring. All the aforementioned elements must be taken into account since they form integral and core part of overall communication strategy.

In spite of the fact that the think tanks implemented widely 2.0 communication strategies resulting in relatively well developed presence and besides considerable levels of activity in these channels, the general performance in terms of engagement and interaction within the community building strategy is limited and rather not sufficient, except top 3 performing organisations. The think tanks in general follow the digital trends of communication, applying them to their PR strategies, although to not great extent. Nevertheless, in order to improve their effectiveness, they shall take into account the recent changes in SM environment and general digital transformation taking place currently and constantly

I'd love to say that by 2015 we will truly see digital strategies that are integrated across digital, social, mobile, advertising, marketing, communications, et al. But, we won't. What we will see though is a more conscious effort to bring disparate groups to the table to learn how to collaborate across screens, channels, and moments of truth to deliver ONE experience to customers wherever they are in the lifecycle (Solis 2014).

The analysed organisations present rather publicity orientation and two-way asymmetrical approach to 2.0 communications that does not result in significant levels of performance in creating the strong community or effective communication with publics and stakeholders. Therefore, as part of the overall change, these organisations shall replace their traditional approach to SM communication and consider 2015 trends: narrative trends in content and story-telling, growing importance of relationships (human factor of connecting), the maximum impact of audio-visual and multimedia content that outnumber other types of communication (YouTube importance) and

finally the change of Facebook and Twitter business models towards paid forms of promotion and advertising. The traditional model of SM management based on press/publicity model and asymmetrical relationships is no longer valid due to above mentioned changes and overall digital 'humanization'.

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