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STUDENT PROJECTS AS A TOOL OF UNIVERSITY PR
AND BRAND BUILDING

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Abstract

There are new opportunities and trends in public relations and brand building and in the issue of university communication with the public and in the issue of university brand building. Knowledge of these changes and trends is a prerequisite for successful and effective communication of universities with their potential clients. What is the scope of technologies and the role of project management in production systems of culture? What are the new tools in the field of university public communications? And whether the new public relations tools act as tools for building a university brand? New findings will be used for building of university communication strategies. New communication strategies are necessary for communication with the public, especially with high school students who are potential clients of universities. The study is based on textual and content analysis of documents stored in university information networks and accessible via the Internet. Student projects have a strong potential in the processes of university communication with the public. As an effective method in the process of promotion, publishing and distribution of student projects, appears to be the use of e-marketing methods. The paper concludes that creation and on-line publication of student projects represent the initial stage in the process of university communication with public and the specific forms and the important components in the field of university brand building.

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Keywords: Student project, university PR, brand building.



1. Introduction

Building a media project represents an initial stage in the process of mass media and digital communication, which is becoming one of the key components in the competitive field of media producers. The topic of my paper is project management, whose output is a media project and a media product based on it. I deal with the place of student media projects and products in university information systems, with the relations of student media projects to student media products and with the use of student media projects and products in university PR and the media market. Before I deal with this issue, it is necessary to define the basic categories: technology, project management, media project, media product, and internet.

1.1. The Role of Technologies in the Production Systems of Culture

Technologies are key categories of production systems of culture in the broadest sense of the word. Their use, in fact, simultaneously forms the relevant communities and the behaviour of a man himself because due to their practice, the people and societies can satisfy their needs and their implications for preservation of cultural continuity and development of civilization and cultural changes (Pavelka, 2004). The technology seems to be partly the stable processes proven by social practice, partly the instructions governing such behaviour. The technology seen as a method or workflow is “nothing but a permanent and dynamic expression of individual cultures. Culture can only express itself through technologies, or survive: the alternative is a chaos” (Selin, 1997, p. 946).

From the position of technological determinism, the new technologies have become the main bearers of cultural changes (Innis, 1951; McLuhan, 1962), although their effects are long-term and their consequences difficult to predict. The communication technologies take a key position among technologies (Lax, 2009). They represent an integrating and stabilizing factor in social and human development. The essential feature of communication technologies is the ability to preserve even the most transitory cultural phenomenon for the future by means of communication media in language and visual texts of any character.

1.2. The Project Management and the Project

Project management is based on specific goals and aims to achieve the stated objectives. „Project management is the planning, organizing, directing, and controlling of company resources for relatively short-term objective that has been established to complete specific goals and objectives. Furthermore, project manager utilizes the systems approach to management by having functional personnel (the vertical hierarchy) assigned to a specific project (the horizontal hierarchy) (Kerzner, 2013, p. 4). In other words, “Project management is the application of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to project activities to meet the project requirements” (Project Management Institute, 2013).

Project management consists of [...] project management processes, which are categorized into five Process Groups. These five Process Groups are: Initiating, Planning, Executing, Monitoring and Controlling, and Closing“ (Project Management Institute, 2013). The project documentation is the key part of the planning phase. On its base, its own product is being built in the executing phase. Project management as a set of project activities, the project as design documentation and also the final product created in the production processes on the basis of the project documentation have become market commodities.

Project management is defined negatively to the older functional management focused on long-term management of relatively autonomous, individual, sub-functional areas of production and distribution companies, corporations and systems. Project management is, on the contrary, time limited by the time of assignment and the implementation of the project specifications and objectives. It represents a new effective, intensive and integrated form of marketing that falls within the paradigm of postmodern culture that gets in the context of post-industrial and information era and society (Bell, 1973; Masuda, 1980). There have been software programs of Microsoft Team Manager, Microsoft Project 2000 and Microsoft Project Central (Hyndrák, 2002, 176-211) available since the 1990's that offer procedures and templates organizing project management.

The project is a product of project management. "The project is always unique (done only once, this is something not done before), unrepeatable (and another similar project is always something different), temporary (it has a beginning and an end) and almost every other team of designers involved in the its solution" (Němec, 2005, pp. 11-12). Amount, scope, structure and hierarchy of projects generally follows the socio-cultural reality. It includes everything that the individuals and individual communities have created during their existence so far, that is why the project and product portfolio (Picard, 2012) covers the paradigmatic systems of culture.

1.3. The Media Product and the Internet

Project management can be applied to all production areas of culture, and thus to the complex system of human communication and its projects, on the basis of which it is possible to create a media product. Media products are primarily designed for interpersonal communication, group, corporate, public, mass or network communication. Only a small part of media products is produced as a product intended for the media market, and therefore a commercial use. In terms of project management, media projects have the status of specific products, so that they can become a commodity.

The media industry and the market has long been a successful and rapidly developing area of business. This is, among other things, due to those new digital information technologies and new digital communication media connected to the network (World Wide Web) in these areas have been applied. For example, e-mail marketing and mobile marketing have been created.

"The Internet impacts upon marketing in two main ways: distribution and communication. The first concerns distribution and marketing channels. The Internet provides a new, more direct route to customers, which can either replace or supplement current distribution/channel arrangement. The second element concerns the Internet as a communication medium. It provides a means of reaching huge new audiences and enabling the provision of vast amount of information" (Fill, 2009, p. 737). It is a combination of „e-business and e-commerce“, which is profitable to both sellers and buyers.

2. Problem Statement

After the Velvet Revolution in 1989 in Czech Republic, significant legislative, procedural and functional changes took place on the Czech education market. New universities and new fields of academic education were established, while the number of secondary school graduates and thus the number of

students interested in study at public universities decreased dramatically (Pavelka, 2014). Universities have begun to change their communication with public (Seitel, 2007), because they have been forced to fight for students.

There are new opportunities and trends in public relations (Singh, 2018; Breakenridge, 2012) and brand building (Franzen, & Moriarty, 2015; Juříková, Jurášková, Kocourek, & Kovářová, 2016) and in the issue of university communication with the public and in the issue of university brand building. Knowledge of these changes and trends is a prerequisite for successful and effective communication of universities with their potential clients.

3. Research Questions

I deal with the place of the media projects in media production systems, with the relation of a student media projects to a media products and with the possibilities of using student projects in university public relations. In this context, I ask the following questions: What is the scope of technologies and the role of project management in production systems of culture. What are the new tools in the field of university public communications? And do new university public relations tools also function as tools for building a university brand?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to identify and to reflect forms of media projects and products whose authors are university students in the fields of media studies and marketing communication, i.e. potential future media and marketing specialists, and that are published on university information portals and become new, innovative tools of university PR and brand building. New findings will be used for building of university communication strategies (Kocourek, Jurášková, & Juříková, 2016a). New communication strategies are especially necessary for communication with high school students who are potential clients of universities.

5. Research Methods

There are ten public universities in the Czech Republic that offer education in humanities and social sciences at faculty level and where techniques and methods are being taught how to build media projects and products. The study is based on textual and content analysis of university documents (McKee, 2003; Krippendorff, 2004; Flick, 2014), on the interpretation and the evaluation of two selected student projects and products stored in university information networks and accessible via the Internet. I decided to find and evaluate student projects at two universities, at Masaryk University in Brno, which has developed one of the best university information systems in Europe, and at Tomas Bata University in Zlin, which has created a highly rated study program in marketing communications.

6. Findings

Based on online document research, I have identified two innovative projects on university networks whose authors are Czech university students. Students in the field of media studies and journalism (Faculty

of Social Studies at Masaryk University) created an interactive website within the university information system (<https://www.fss.muni.cz/>) which has the ambition to act as a media projects "stock" exchange. Students in the field of marketing communication (Faculty of Multimedia Communications at Tomas Bata University) have created an interactive website within the university portal (<https://stag.utb.cz/portal>) which has the ambition to function as a communication channel in the field of student scientific and research activities. Both projects archived the media products of the students, in the first case the project documentation, which contained instructions on how to create media products and which had the potential to be realized on the media market, in the second case the student seminar works, which took the form of professional studies and which had the potential to be published in professional journals and presented at

The Media Projects Exchange is the output of the course “A Media Project, Media Product and their Web Presentation” taught at the Department of Media Studies and Journalism at the Faculty of Social Studies at Masaryk University in Brno and supported by a grant from the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport. The main objective of the course is to acquire some basic information on the form, rules and functioning of the media market, especially in the area of media policy, media economics and media, project and web project management (Friedlein, 2000; Stachoň, Kubíček, Konečný, Pavelka, & Geryk, 2009). Other goal of the course is to gain the ability to analyze and evaluate the production of media organizations, to gain the ability to communicate with the representatives of media organizations with the intention of offering them media projects and to train and to cultivate skills in creation of media projects and presentations of a media project.

Students create project documentation. They present their media projects through the Power-Point in front of their peers and teachers and submit them in the printed forms as manuals for evaluating by the head of the subject. Students rework their projects according to comments and recommendations and expose their projects on the web portal of Media Projects (cf. Media Projects, 2013), whose design and administration they are also involved in. The ambition of the portal is to act as a media project exchange for the state, public and private institutions and to succeed with projects in the media market (cf. Banka projektů, 2016).

Student project documentation take the form of instructions according to which it is possible to create a media project. Building a media project belongs to – along with the media market research – the stage of pre-production media product, where a media project becomes, within the media production systems, a media project, too, entering the media market as a commodity. In case of a commercial media project involved in the field of mass or network communications, it even becomes a crucial item in the competitive field of media producers (media institutions). Some student projects have been implemented. They took the form of printed products (e.g. books, brochures, calendars, posters) and digital products (e.g. videos, information portals, online presentations of cultural events). Other student projects have a chance to be realized in the future.

The second project, the interactive website within the university portal (<https://stag.utb.cz/portal>), was created in 2013 at the Department of Marketing Communications (Faculty of Multimedia Communications at Tomas Bata University). This project was funded by a grant “Support of scientific and research activities of students of the study program of marketing communication at FMC TBU in Zlin” (IGA). The project team consisted of teachers, the holders of the grant, and the students of Department of

marketing communication, who have shown interest to participate in the project. First, an interactive website was created according to suggestions and with the help of students (cf. Seminar, 20018). The ambition of the website was to act as a communication channel among students and between students and teachers in the field of student scientific and research activities.

The Department of Marketing Communications announced a competition for the best student seminary works that arose in the year 2013 in the courses taught in the department. Students and teachers were asked to nominate the best works and to save them in the appropriate box on the website. Subsequently, the commission of experts selected six winning works from several dozen nominated works. Results of the competition were announced and the winners get financial awards - scholarships. The website recorded all these activities and also offered a chat communication.

From the project team were selected two students who edited the awarded works. At the same time a student of the graphic design from the Faculty of Multimedia Communications was co-opted into a project team. This student created a typographic template of the proceedings of the student works and several draft of book cover of that proceedings. Then the digital version of the proceedings of the student works was published on the university network and then was printed as a book under the title *Cesty marketingových komunikací* (2015, Marketing Communications Routes, see Figure 01).

The ability of creators and producers to create and enforce media projects in the media market and also the ability to influence the behaviour of media audiences through media products belong to highly appreciated values in the media market. The first pre-production period is the period of searching and forming a subject matter of a media project which is demanded in the market, looking for makers who are able to handle the topic, seeking for organizations willing to support, fund, redeem or implement the planned media project and product. After launching the “final” version of the media project itself as a manual, there are other no less dramatic phases – phases of production (production), editing (post-production), media coverage, distribution, sale, and consumption of the media product. The author of the media project usually enters them, too, if he/she becomes a member of the team implementing the media product.

For these reasons, it is necessary to reflect the media pre-production and production processes and systems, to acquire practical skills in media project management, to simulate the creation of media projects and to offer these projects to public and to media institutions. As far as the most efficient in this context seems to be the use of the Internet as a learning medium (learning techniques) and as a tool of marketing communication (Pelsmacker, Geuens, & Bergh, 2003) by the creation of an electronic version of a media project (Clow, & Baack, 2008). The Internet also represents a business opportunity for universities (Vrabec, & Winter, 2000).



Figure 01. Front cover of the student proceedings *The Routes of Marketing Communications* (2015)

7. Conclusion

Student projects presented on university networks are usually parts of teaching and / or grant activities (Kocourek, Jurášková, & Juříková, 2016b), and in this context they also set and solve specific tasks and goals. If media projects are viewed through the optics of product management as a commodity product, the web site or a web portal where a university publishes student projects, are not only a proof of work results and performance of the institution and individual students and teachers, but it is also an important segment of a school product portfolio and an important tool in building its media public image and university brand (Franzen, & Moriarty, 2015).

The media image of the university is strongly dependent on the quality of student media projects and products. The university affairs of poor and plagiarist bachelor and master theses are clear evidence for it. The more imaginative and sophisticated student media projects and products are published the more prestigious media image of the university they create.

The paper has shown that public institutions such public universities, which are not functionally oriented to generate profits primarily, show activities in on-line marketing communications. In this area, they follow the usual practice on www (World Wide Web). Some of their activities, such as an attempt to create a communication channel for scientific student working at the Faculty of Multimedia Communications at Tomas Bata University in Zlin or an attempt to create a media projects exchange at the Faculty of Social Studies at Masaryk University in Brno, can also be inspiring for the players in the international media market.

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