RESEARCH

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES IN THE NEW ECONOMY: THE CASE STUDIES OF WALLAPOP, WESTING AND FOTOCASA

La planificación estratégica de la comunicación en la era digital. Los casos de studio de Wallapop, Westing y Fotocasa

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ABSTRACT

Communication strategies, especially in the new economy, evolve in an increasingly accelerated way, to adapt to the complex and changing scenario of the interconnected network society.

Based on the hypothesis of the existence of an approach to communication strategy 360º, heir to the integrated marketing communication approach, the article describes the communication strategies of three digital brands in Barcelona. The city is headquarters of the Mobile World Congress, with an interconnected ecosistem of startups and digital native brands.

The results of this research come from three case studies (Wallapop, Westwing and Fotocasa), which show that its strategic planning consists of four phases (research, planning, execution and evaluation), coinciding with the Marston RACE model. The communicative strategy observed in these case studies focuses on the short term, with a growth hacker perspective, characteristic of the startup ecosystem, which takes advantage of the synergies between publicity and public relations actions. To carry out these communication actions, the digital native brands seek all the research and measurement tools at their disposal, which allow them to experiment in a controlled way and make decisions based on data, in a process of continuous learning and taking advantage of synergies between coordinated actions.

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KEY WORDS: integrated marketing communication - new economy - advertising - public relations - digital marketing - growth hacking - communication strategy - 360 communication.

RESUMEN

Las estrategias comunicativas, especialmente en la nueva economía, evolucionan de forma cada vez más acelerada, para adaptarse al complejo y cambiante escenario de la interconectada sociedad red.

Partiendo de la hipótesis de la existencia de un planteamiento de la estrategia de comunicación 360º, heredero del enfoque propio de la comunicación integrada de *marketing*, el artículo describe las estrategias de comunicación de tres marcas nativas digitales de referencia en Barcelona, sede del Mobile World Congress, donde se ha desarrollado un contexto interconectado de startups y marcas nativas digitales.

Los resultados de esta investigación provienen de tres casos de estudio (Wallapop, Westwing y Fotocasa), que muestran que su planificación estratégica consta de cuatro fases (investigación, planificación, ejecución y evaluación), coincidentes con el modelo RACE de Marston. La estrategia comunicativa que constatan estos casos de estudio pone el foco en el corto plazo, con una perspectiva *growth hacker*, característica del ecosistema startup, que aprovecha las sinergias entre acciones de publicidad y relaciones públicas. Para llevarlas a cabo estas acciones de comunicación, las marcas nativas digitales buscan sinergias entre acciones, utilizando todas las herramientas de investigación y medición a su alcance, que les permiten experimentar de forma controlada y tomar decisiones basadas en datos, en un proceso de aprendizaje continuo.

PALABRAS CLAVE: comunicación integrada de marketing – nueva economía - publicidad – relaciones públicas – marketing digital - growth hacking - estrategia de comunicación - comunicación 360.

PLANIFICAÇÃO ESTRATÉGICA DA COMUNICAÇÃO NA ERA DIGITAL. OS CASOS DOS ESTUDOS DE WALLAPOP, WESTWING E FOTOCASA

RESUME

As estratégias comunicativas, especialmente na nova economia, evolucionam de forma cada vez mais acelerada, para adaptar-se ao complexo e que tanto muda no cenário da interconectada redes sociais. Partindo da hipótese da existência de um planejamento da estratégia de comunicação 360 graus, herdeiro do enfoque próprio da comunicação integrada de marketing, o artigo descreve as estratégias de comunicação de três marcas nativas digitais de referência em Barcelona, sede do Mobile WORLD Congress, onde foi

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desenvolvido um contexto interconectado de startups e marcas nativas digitais. Os resultados desta investigação provem de três casos de estudo Wallapop, Westwing e Fotocasa, que mostram que sua planificação estratégica consta de quatro fases: (investigação, planificação, execução e avaliação), coincidentes com o modelo RACE de Marston. A estratégia comunicativa que constatam estes casos de estudo põe o foco no curto prazo, com uma perspectiva growth hacker, característica do ecossistema startup, que aproveita as sinergias entre ações de publicidade e relações públicas. Para leva-las à cabo estas ações de comunicação, as marcas nativas digitais buscam sinergias entre ações, utilizando todas as ferramentas de investigação e medição a seu alcance, que os permitem experimentar de forma controlada e tomar decoes baseadas em dados, em um processo de aprendizagem continuo.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The reflections of this study are framed in a moment in which the communication strategies of all types of organizations are being redefined, in line with the changes in the uses of the audience and the changes in the global economic ecosystem. We consider that the study of communication strategies by native digital companies (Prensky, 2001) has a value in research in the field of communication, in any of its disciplines.

1.1. Strategic planning of communication

The concept of communication strategy is defined as "an intervention orientation or an action approach for a problem that has to be solved or for a particular project to be carried out" (Xifra, 2007, p. 10). The most widely accepted strategic communication planning model (Matilla, p. 406) is the strategic decision-making process defined by Marston (1963) under the acronym RACE, consisting of four spiraling stages: Research, Action, Communication.

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Research is the first phase of the RACE model. According to Cutlip and Center (2001) this is the most difficult phase, since how to raise it is not often known and, in addition, it has the opposition of those who do not consider it necessary. In addition, its complexity has been increasing with the emergence of information technologies, which allow massive data, called big data, to be obtained (Braulio and Curto, 2015).

The second phase of the RACE model (Marston, 1963) is planning, considered to be the process of goals and objectives and determining the way to achieve them (Wilcox et al., 2012).

The third phase, execution of communication actions, is part of the line established by the two preceding phases, research and planning.

Finally, evaluation makes it possible to measure the achievement of the objectives as scientifically as possible, in order to rectify or even rethink the strategy (Xifra, 2007). The Association of Consulting Companies in Communication and Public Relations (ADECEC) published in 2016 the Practical Guide to Measurement, which notes the importance of this phase and the need to define the key indicators to evaluate the success of each communication action. (ADECEC, 2016, p. 7).

Matilla describes this spiral "as an ascending line that, starting at the beginning of research, advances towards action, moves through communication and, finally, culminates and ends in evaluation" (...) and the contribution of Marston (1963).) in defining a closed model in which "each stage inevitably leads to the next, so that the last stage (Evaluation), once overcome, will force us to resort again to the first (Research)" (Matilla, 2008, p. 74) According to Wilcox, Cameron and Xifra, the RACE model, in short, "is a process that can be considered an endless cycle" (Wilcox et al, 2012, p. 12).

1.2. From integrated communication to 'growth hacking'

As the conclusions of this study confirm, the communicative strategy of the digital native brands (Prensky, 2001) follows the principles of *Integrated Marketing Communications* (IMC), since it coordinates actions of diverse disciplines, such as marketing, advertising and public relations to take advantage of synergies (Schultz and Kitchen, 2000, Kliatchko, 2005, Schultz and Patti 2009).

The field of the IMC analyzes why consumers respond to some type of communication more positively than others and how communication actions can be coordinated and synergies availed of. At that time, the need arises to harmoniously integrate all the instruments of the communication mix in a unified set. Thus, regardless of the discipline that is considered and the instruments, means or channels used, the brand will speak to the market and its publics with a single voice. With this integration, a greater impact is achieved, in addition to coherence. Before the concept of the IMC

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emerged, leading authors in the field of communication, such as Marston, had already noted this reality by stating that "The public relations and advertising programs of a company are obviously closely connected. Why do you have a certain mental image of a particular company? Why do you know its products? Why have you met some of its people? Yes, but also because you have seen advertising" (Marston, 1963, p. 4). The IMC, according to Kotler is, in short, "a concept according to which a company integrates and carefully coordinates its various communication channels to get a clear, consistent and convincing message about the company and its products". (Kotler, 2003, p. 131).

The first theorists who addressed the impact of the Internet in the field of marketing focused mainly on studying how to take advantage of a website for commercial communication and distance selling. But, in a short time, the Internet was considered much more than a sales channel, coming to be considered a new means of mass communication and an advertising support with great future projection. According to Meeker, "Network advertising is not just about advertising and distributing messages, it also facilitates relationships with customers, the creation of cyber-brands, it provides services to consumers, generates electronic sales of marketing to the right audience and manages to create customized services for large masses of consumers, as well as direct and interactive marketing". (Meeker, 1997, p. 47-48).

With the emergence of social networks, the term web 2.0 begins, which was coined by O'Reilly (2005) to refer to a second generation of the web that, thanks to the intensive use of dynamic pages and applications known as social software, benefits from collective intelligence to provide interactive services and where users have control over information.

Among the factors that define web 2.0, Marquina highlights the importance of "applications in a perpetual experimental situation or in tests (beta phase), that is, in constant evolution". (Marquina, 2013, p. 12).

Another essential factor of web 2.0, beyond technology, but promoted by it, is "the new attitude" of users (Marquina, 2013, p. 12). The public has an increasingly active role in the communication processes that are generated between a brand and its clients, since, according to Martí (2010, p. 206), web 2.0 "democratizes the knowledge and participation of users in the media; encourages the co-creation of the contents generated in it; and allows the transfer of these contents among the different interactive digital media at the service of the user".

Therefore, with the emergence of the Internet and the social networks, the IMC concept evolves towards communication 360º. As authors such as Véliz (2006, p. 93) or Pintado and Sánchez (2009, p. 19) emphasize, communication 360º must be characterized by dialogue and the relationship with the environment in a constant way.

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Therefore, as indicated by Sánchez Herrera (2012: 13), communication 360º is an evolution of integrated marketing communication, which combines "the corporate image, internal communication, traditional advertising campaigns, public relations, online advertising, etc., always oriented to achieve the same objective".

As evolution of this approach, within the operation of these digital native brands (Prensky, 2001) the so-called growth hacking is born (Ellis, 2010, Ellis and Brown, 2018), a multidiscipline that is characterized by its goal of growth: "a growth hacker is a person whose true aim is growth. (...) You must have the creativity to discover unique ways to boost growth, in addition to testing or evolving the techniques tested by other companies". (Ellis, 2010).

2. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative piece of research is to describe the strategic communication planning model of digital native brands. For this purpose, we chose companies whose marketing and communication department is located in Barcelona and which digital reference brands in their sector, starting from a previous in-depth interview with the executive director of 4YFN Mobile World Capital, Esteban Redolfi.

The selected case studies, which are finally presented, upon finding that they offered sufficient information to be able to approach this piece of research are:

Wallapop: the first geolocalized purchase and sale mobile Spanish app, founded in Barcelona in 2013. The platform focuses its interest on second-hand objects, since it allows users to sell what they no longer use.

Westwing: founded in Germany in 2011, it is the first European e-commerce platform dedicated exclusively to the Home & Living sector. Westwing leads the Spanish furniture sales market.

Fotocasa: a real estate portal born in 2004 from the merger of Anuntis and Vivendum portals, which currently belongs to Schibsted Spain, the largest and most diversified classified-ads and job-offering company in Spain.

The collection of information in this study starts from the triangulation of the methods of observation, documentary analysis and the interview. Research consists of three phases of successive and complementary in-depth interviews, to the different professionals involved in the communication strategy of the brands of the new economy under study and in its execution. The informants who participated in each of the three rounds of interviews were chosen by each brand according to the needs raised by research.

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Three phases of interviews are carried out for each case study. The first is an in-depth interview, via an open questionnaire, to those responsible for the marketing and communication strategy of each of the brands under study. The second phase of face-to-face and group interviews is carried out with the people in charge of executing the communication plan for each one of them. This second phase is carried out in the workplace of the communication team of each of the brands and includes an intensive observation task. The field observation makes it possible "to go through the scene" both before and during the interviews, in order to better interpret the information provided by the study subjects. This observation, in this case for three years, is considered long-haul taking into account that it is part of the ecosystem of the new economy. In parallel, data collection includes, in addition to the annotations and records of the observation and interviews, the collection and analysis of more than 12,000 documents.

After this second phase, considering that there is already enough relevant information to draw conclusions, it is decided to carry out a third round of interviews to pool all the gathered information, as an element of validation and updating before finalizing the field work. This third phase, which is done via telematics, consists of a questionnaire that includes the main concepts collected from the completion of the three case studies.

3. OBJECTIVES

This article intends to contribute to knowledge in the field of communication strategies, heirs of integrated marketing communication, based on the analysis of three reference practical cases in the field of the new economy in Barcelona, the headquarters of the international mobile technology fair World Congress and the fifth hub European volume of startups, with more than 1,200 emerging technology companies installed in the city and its surroundings (Atómico, 2018).

This piece of research also allows us to verify that the methodology of the case studies is especially indicated for the analysis of recent phenomena and, therefore, it constitutes a useful analysis path for the changing context in which the communicative environment is increasingly developing in the network society (Castells, 2001).

4. RESULTS

The results of research are presented in the form of three case studies, which are presented according to the same structure: the RACE strategic communication planning model (Marston, 1963) which consists of four phases: research, planning, execution and evaluation.

4.1. The Wallapop case study

Wallapop, the first Spanish mobile geolocalized purchase app, was founded in Barcelona in September 2013 with the aim of creating an alternative of sustainable economy adapted to new forms of consumption, characterized by being fast, local and easy to use. The platform focuses its interest mainly on second-hand objects, since it allows users to put on sale what they no longer use so that other people around them can buy them. Currently, Wallapop has 20 million users who make an average of 70,000 daily transactions of any of the more than 100 million products uploaded to the application. Wallapop's communication strategy follows the RACE model (Marston, 1963), the most widely accepted strategic planning scheme in the field of communication.

The study shows, as detailed below, that the sequence in which the Wallapop communication strategy is carried out consists of the four stages that we will deal with below: research, planning, execution and evaluation.

4.1.1. Research in Wallapop

The first stage of research, in the case of Wallapop, is an unavoidable stage in any strategic communication planning, since its decisions, prior to the launching of any future action, are always supported by data, as verified by triangulation of the data obtained through observation, documentary analysis and successive in-depth interviews with its communication team. In this sense, as a usual practice in this research phase, it is worth highlighting the performance of A/B tests, testing two possible communication proposals in order to verify which of them maximizes the conversion.

4.1.2. Planning in Wallapop

The second stage in which Wallapop's communication strategy is developed is planning in which clear, quantifiable, ponderable, realistic and time-bound objectives are defined and then the means chosen.

To cope with the imperative of speed, the communication plans at Wallapop are addressed a few months ahead. The startup communication team considers semi-annual planning to be long-term, quarterly planning to be medium-term and monthly planning to be short-term.

4.1.3. Execution in Wallapop

The triangulation of the data obtained through the techniques of participant observation, documentary analysis and the different phases of in-depth interviews shows that Wallapop's communication strategy is defined as 360°, with a *growth hacker* view that combines advertising campaigns and publicity actions, marketing communication and

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influencer marketing, combining all possible on- and off-line channels that, in combination, make it possible to obtain better metrics in the evaluation phase. In this sense, television advertising, financed through media *for equity* agreements, combined with digital marketing and *publicity*, are the key to the startup communicative strategy.

4.1.4. Evaluation in Wallapop

The measurement of results is a key element in Wallapop's communication strategy. The data close the circle constantly, inevitably lead to action and, therefore, are those that direct any decision that affects the communication actions of Wallapop and also serve to provide the necessary information for communication with another of its key audiences, which are the investors, for those who measure, especially, the conversion in downloads and active users. In this sense, the media plan is dynamic and adjusted according to the results.

4.2. The Westwing case study

Westwing.es belongs to the group Westwing Group GmbH founded in Germany in 2011 by the expert in decoration Delia Fischer, which entailed the creation of the first European e-commerce platform exclusively dedicated to the Home & Living sector. It leads the Spanish furniture sales market. Every 5 seconds Westwing sells a product around the world and about 50% of the revenue is generated through mobile devices.

Westwing's communication strategy follows the RACE model (Marston, 1963), the most widely accepted strategic planning scheme in the field of communication.

4.2.1. Research in Westwing

The triangulation of the data obtained through the successive in-depth interviews carried out during the piece of research to the communication team of the firm, the documentary analysis of its entire historical archive and the observation made allows us to affirm that the first stage of research is key and determined by the large amount of data generated by *e-commerce*, which are analyzed to maximize the chances of success of communication actions.

4.2.2. Planning in Westwing

Planning in Westwing is carried out, in a generic way, annually, but the actions are developed in a detailed way on a quarterly basis, in order to have a greater reaction capacity. Its objectives, clear and measurable, are clearly oriented to increase the notoriety of the brand among its target audience, consisting of decoration buyers and their prescribers.

4.2.3. Execution in Westwing

The triangulation based on documental analysis, observation and the in-depth interviews confirm that Westwing is clearly committed to the strategy of generating relevant content in all types of formats to position itself as a benchmark in its field. We have our own editorial office, an internal editorial team of journalists and photographers dedicated specifically to content, which they disseminate daily through the sending of a *newsletter* and on social networks.

Westwing's communication strategy combines a powerful digital content marketing strategy, with on- and off-line advertising campaigns and public relations actions.

The actions are proposed and executed in an integrated manner, with a 360º view and a *growth hacker* approach, through creativity and synergy among channels to achieve the goal of maximum visibility.

4.2.4. Evaluation in Westwing

The fourth phase of Westwing's communication strategy is evaluation that includes the constant and real-time follow-up of the actions that are executed, to evaluate the return on investment.

4.3. The case study of Fotocasa

Fotocasa real estate portal was born in 2004 from the merger of two portals, Anuntis and Vivendum. It currently belongs to Schibsted Spain, the largest and most diversified classified-ads and job-offering company in Spain, which has other portals such as InfoJobs, Vibbo, Coches.net and Milanuncios, and which is part of the Norwegian multinational Schibsted Media Group.

Fotocasa's communication strategy also follows the RACE model (Marston, 1963), with four phases in its strategic planning.

4.3.1. Research in Fotocasa

Any communication plan in Fotocasa starts from research, since, as verified by triangulation, most of its communication actions are based on data, some of them obtained through tests consisting of impacting on a percentage of the target audience to be able to measure previously its effectiveness.

4.3.2. Planning in Fotocasa

In Fotocasa, planning is based on the definition of communication objectives that are established annually, aligned with the business objectives, measurable with key

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indicators, among which *share of voice* stands out and with actions that are detailed quarterly. Besides, it has a tactical plan adjustable to the needs of the moment, with agile decision making and based on data.

4.3.3. Execution in Fotocasa

The execution of the communication plan of Fotocasa combines public relations actions, including press office, content marketing and influencer marketing, and advertising, which are addressed in a coordinated and integrated manner, with both on- and off-line actions that reinforce each other, with a 360º view and aligned with a *growth hacker* approach. Any action that is considered is analyzed taking into account how it can be exploited from any area or how it can affect the other areas.

4.3.4. Evaluation in Fotocasa

Monitoring the result of the communication actions is carried out constantly and is taken into account when planning new actions, in line with the spiral described by the RACE model (Marston, 1963).

This is verified by the analysis of the data obtained through triangulation, in which the use of metrics such as the *PR Value* and the monthly *top of mind* is detected, as well as the analysis of the ROI and the SOV in order to assess the effectiveness of the actions.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The results of the study show that strategic communication planning in the digital native brands under study (Wallapop, Westwing and Fotocasa) responds to a four-phase model -research, planning, execution and evaluation-, which coincides with the RACE model of Marston (1963).

The particularities presented by the communication strategy of the digital economy brands under study derive from the functioning of the economic ecosystem in which they are immersed, where speed and data-based decision making prevail. In this sense, the study finds that decision making is agile and based on data from both previous research and evaluation, with real-time tracking of actions, creative and analytical with a *growth hacker* approach that is heir to integrated marketing communication, which are planned and executed with flexibility, always guided by quantifiable and measurable objectives.

The digital native brands under study use both advertising and public relations, both online and offline, with a prominent presence of marketing communication actions such as content marketing and *influencer* marketing.

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The communication strategy, therefore, is integrated, with a 360° view that fosters synergies among the actions carried out in four phases - research, planning, execution and evaluation - to achieve its objectives, which are clear and measurable.

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