DIGITAL
RECAP
2020

by hoinaru

GOLIN

DIGITAL RECAP 2020

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SUMMARY

INTRO

In a world where many collaborations are limited to one-off campaigns, I am glad that this project developed with friends from Golin has been going on for 8 years now. It is probably the most consistent collaboration between a blogger and an agency in Romania.

This 9th edition of Digital Recap brings many of the sections we already know, from analyzing last year to anticipating next year's trends and the relevant figures in Romanian e-commerce and social media.

This year we have included a follow-up to last year's article on podcasts, as well as a look at AI. Podcasts are, without a doubt, the leading trend on the Romanian market in 2020, so I'm glad to see that the Golin team has identified it since the previous edition.

My final thoughts go to next year when we will be preparing a special edition of Digital Recap, since it will be the 10th issue of this series. A series started on a Sunday in November 2010, with an article on www.hoinaru.ro entitled "Sunday's Media Recap".

Alex Ciucă
Blogger @ hoinaru.ro
Managing Partner, Superior Media

We would be lying if we didn't admit that we are on cloud nine this year when Digital Recap reaches its ninth edition! We dare to believe that #DigitalRecap2020 is better, wiser, sharper. We saw 2020 as the year of relevant content, of earned first creative ideas, and of the search for a social purpose that would bring brands and companies closer to the aspirations of Millennials & Gen Z, so concerned about the social dimension and the impact on the environment. We looked at how the idea of social responsibility evolved and how this business philosophy translates today in the online communication dominating public space and in the dialogue with stakeholders.

If last year we opened the discussion about podcasts here, in Digital Recap, this year we continue approaching this topic and we follow the development of the audio content in .ro. We list the first examples of collaborations between brands and podcasts and wonder "what's next?".

We then turn our attention to technology and the future and try to see how artificial intelligence changes our office life and the impact it has on the brands we promote. We also wondered which was the impact of AI and social media in our lives beyond commercial communication, a topic we could not avoid in the year when developments such as elections or Brexit will influence us at macro level.

#Curious? We invite you to read Digital Recap 2020 and if it raises more questions than the ones we have already managed to answer, that means our job is done :)

Irina Roncea
Managing Director, Golin

JANUARY

Google gets a €50 million fine in France for non-compliance with GDPR. A record fine in Europe, the kind of fine for which GDPR legislation was introduced. Google was penalized for having information about the protection of personal data disseminated in several separate documents, and the authorities' investigation concluded that it was not easy enough to access them. In July 2019 the record was to be broken by British Airways, which received a £ 183m financial penalty for a security breach that exposed 500,000 user accounts.

More than 24 million financial documents such as loan agreements from the largest US banks were leaked online due to a security breach. This was just one of the serious cases where personal data ended up published on the internet. New such cases occur every month, and the fact that a social network lost 5-10 million user accounts is no longer headline worthy. Some Russian hackers went even further and stole, in 2019, all financial data from the Bulgarian Fiscal Authority, 5 million accounts with complete financial information.

DOR has a partnership with Libertatea, in an attempt to get out of the "bubble" and reach the mainstream public with their texts. Libertatea is going through a process of transformation, under the careful coordination of Cătălin Tolontan, while DOR is seeking more attention from the general public. It is also a validation of the changes Libertatea went through in recent years, towards a more serious journalism.

The Weather Channel app was selling users' personal data, and a California court ruled that each "victim" should receive $2500 in compensation. This is probably the first case where users whose personal data has been sold end up receiving compensation for it. The matter was resumed during the year, with other similar cases discussed by the American courts, but the Weather Channel case represents an important precedent. Until then, fines received by companies for non-compliance with personal data policies were collected exclusively by the governments of the states where the penalty was imposed.

OTHER NEWS IN BRIEF

Kanal D leaves the must-carry list, following the other important Romanian TV channels.

Netflix deletes an episode of a show at the request of Saudi Arabia.

Digi increases monthly fees for certain services as a result of the "greed tax."

IMDB launches a free streaming service for movies and shows in the US called Freedive.

The Romanian YouTube channel LooLoo Kids is the first in Eastern Europe to receive the diamond button - a distinction for accounts having over 10 million subscribers.

Altex launches a payment processor called Credex Pay.

Google wants to buy smartwatch technology from Fossil for $40 million.

The government announces the intention to tax revenues from cryptocurrencies.

Bing is blocked in China, another episode of the US-China trade war.

Easyhost buys 8.1% of Zonga for almost 1 million RON.

Romanian start-up TypingDNA receives $1.5 million in funding.

Naspers buys Avito, Russia's largest classifieds website.

treizecizero.ro launches a premium content area available starting with 140 lei per year.

Facebook was paying teens to install a phone app that monitors all their actions.

FEBRUARY

Several companies, including Nestlé, Purina, Disney and McDonald's, are withdrawing their ads from YouTube, following a scandal about underage videos. It seems that certain videos on YouTube were uploaded to the platform for various groups of pedophiles. Seemingly innocent videos featuring minors with various offensive comments. After the outbreak of the scandal, several brands took a stand and temporarily withdrew from the platform, but the measure can also be seen as a strategy to negotiate discounts.

New Facebook scandal related to personal data. In February, it was found that Facebook was retrieving information such as heart rate from certain applications that used their login. Such problems are very likely just the tip of the iceberg in terms of Facebook privacy. In fact, during 2019 other problems emerged, such as the transcription of private audio messages by subcontractors who employed people.

Digi 24 closes the local TV stations and terminates the collaboration with several journalists and show producers. By late 2018 there were worrying signs, and things have turned for the worse for Digi 24. Cost cuts, abandoned shows, journalists who chose to seek other projects and an increasingly questionable editorial policy.

Jeff Bezos claims that the National Enquirer tried to blackmail him and implies that everything has to do with Donald Trump. A brave move by the head of Amazon, which shows that he cannot be blackmailed. Rumors went so far as to claim that hackers in Saudi Arabia had broken into his phone as revenge for the Washington Post's harsh reaction to the Riyadh government after the assassination of Jamal Khashoggi.

PRO TV announces that negotiations with Telekom have stalled and that the group's channels may no longer be accessible to the telecom operator's subscribers. At first, it seemed a bold move from PRO TV, a tough negotiation, to say the least. But the same thing happened towards the end of 2019 with Discovery, and considering the problems that Telekom Romania has had lately, we can see a pattern. Eventually, the PRO group channels remained on Telekom, at no additional cost to subscribers.

OTHER NEWS IN BRIEF

\# TVR wants to become (again) a generalist TV channel and buy the rights for about 200 football matches.

\# MTV leaves the PRO group, but the channel remains in Romania.

\# Accommodation platforms such as Booking.com, Trivago or Hotels.com are required to waive hidden fees.

\# Slack is preparing to be listed on the stock exchange, but some experts say there could be a buyer before the IPO.

\# Spotify suspends free accounts that use AdBlocker.

\# Spotify buys Gimlet and Anchor (two podcast networks) for $340 million.

\# WinRAR's had an undiscovered bug for 19 years.

\# Apple is preparing to launch a newspaper subscription service.

\# Reddit gets a new round of $300 million in funding, of which $150 million from TenCent.

\# Amazon gives up on building its headquarters in New York.

\# TVH television closes. The channel started as a project at Spiru Haret University.

\# China blocks plane tickets for citizens without enough social credit.

\# TikTok receives a $5.7 million fine for failing to respect the privacy of children under 13.
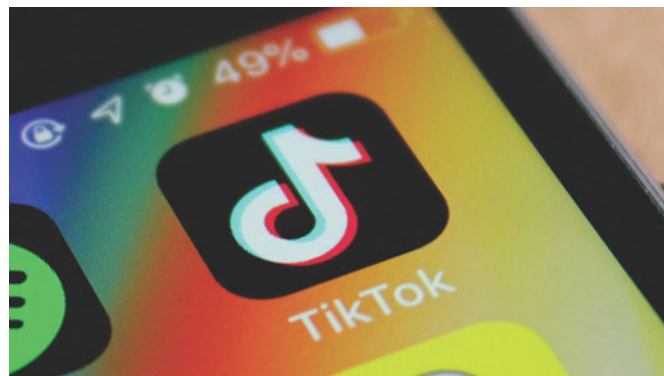
MARCH

Mark Zuckerberg explains in a lengthy note the way he sees the future of Facebook: focused on integration and privacy. As a result of this new strategy, where messaging becomes the focal point, top Facebook leaders leave the company: Chris Cox - Facebook CPO (head of NewsFeed) and Chris Daniels - Vice President of WhatsApp. This focus on privacy is probably a response to the Cambridge Analytica scandal and the many issues Facebook has had in recent years.

eMAG consolidates its position in Hungary by merging with Extreme Digital. Thus, eMAG expands in 5 countries: Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Croatia and Austria. This is eMAG's first major acquisition abroad (where it bought PC Garage) and a new step towards strengthening its position in Central and Eastern Europe. The new entity becomes an important player in the region.

EU votes the copyright law known as "Article 13", a controversial piece of legislation. Also called the "law banning memes", the Copyright Directive is to be adopted by all member states, which have 2 years to include and enforce these provisions in their laws. Although there was a great online pressure at the time to stop the adoption of this law, the story has been forgotten and it will probably take a few more years for the law to enter into force and thus return to the public's attention.

Instagram launches in the US the option to buy directly from the application, the sellers will pay a small commission. A natural step, after Instagram has tested various shopping options over time. In Europe we still have to wait, but even after implementation it remains to be seen how many companies will choose to pay that commission to Instagram. What is certain is that the social network thus opens a new source of income, which should please investors.

Revolut CFO leaves the company, and the press links the event to a potential money laundering scandal through the application. The Daily Telegraph later corrected the article, but only after dozens of other publications had already taken the erroneous information. This opens a discussion about fake news, wrong news and the growing responsibility of journalists in an age where viralization has become a matter of minutes.

OTHER NEWS IN BRIEF

\# Lyft is listed on the stock exchange and raises $2.2 billion, for a total valuation of $24 billion.

\# The Romanian government issues an emergency ordinance that outlaws UBER and Bolt.

\# Facebook promises to delete anti-vaccine content from the network and hide it from Instagram.

\# Taxify changes its name to Bolt to focus on electric scooters.

\# Facebook announces that it has deleted pages and accounts that acted as PSD propaganda machine.

\# Costi Mocanu leaves the management of PRO TV.

\# Mozilla launches a file transfer service called Send, which allows transfers up to 2.5 GB.

\# It turns out that Google paid $105 million to employees accused of sexual harassment.

\# Google enters the gaming market with the Stadia game streaming platform.

\# Facebook admits having stored hundreds of millions of text passwords, without any encryption, that could be searched by employees.

\# MySpace loses millions of songs uploaded between 2003 and 2015.

\# UBER buys Careem, a Middle East competitor, for $3.1 billion.

\# Apple announces Apple Card, a banking service similar to Revolut.

\# Apple is also announcing a streaming service called AppleTV+, a news subscription called Apple News+ and an online gaming service called Apple Arcade.

\# It turns out that Facebook has lobbied strongly to stop similar GDPR laws.

APRIL

Researchers in Mexico reveal that **540 million Facebook accounts have been exposed.** he conclusions come from analyzing the network's security breaches. It appears that those accounts were exposed on a public server that wasn't even secured by a password. Three new privacy investigations were later launched against Facebook in Ireland, Canada and the USA.

Julian Assange, Wikileaks founder, is arrested in London, after 7 years of exile within the headquarters of the Ecuadorian embassy in the UK. Assange was to be extradited to the United States and tried for classified information publishing.

Amazon leaves the Chinese market. The decision comes in a complex context, where economic relations between the US and China are tense, Alibaba authoritatively dominates the Asian market, and CEO Jack Ma talks about the 996 system for his company's employees (working hours from 9 am to 9 pm, for 6 days a week).

UBER prepares for IPO and takes another $500 million investment from PayPal, bringing the company's estimated value to $78.8 billion.

Hertz sues Accenture because the website that was delivered to them had a lot of issues, although they paid $32 million. This is probably the most expensive website in history that did not work properly, a blow to the image of Accenture.

OTHER NEWS IN BRIEF

\# The iCEEfest festival rebrands to Upgrade 100 and targets the international market.

\# Lime enters the Romanian market, being the first scooter rental service on the local market.

\# Antena 1 local TV stations become Antena 3 regional TV channels.

\# Discovery prepares a documentary streaming service in partnership with BBC.

\# Realitatea Media goes bankrupt.

\# PayU launches a loan service called PayU Online Credit.

\# Instagram tests hiding the number of likes from a post.

\# The BBM messaging service (from Blackberry) closes.

\# Hulu buys back a percentage owned by AT&T.

\# Google is forced to introduce other browsers on Android to comply with EU laws.

\# Adrian Sârbu becomes a shareholder of Smart FM.

\# Elon Musk reaches an agreement with the US government on what he can and cannot post on Twitter.

\# Sri Lanka temporarily blocks access to social networks after bombings in order to prevent the spread of fake news.

\# Amazon allows P2P payments in India.

MAY

iPhone sales continue to drop in Q2, while iPad sales slightly increase. Apple is focusing more on the services side since the laptop and phone business can no longer grow dramatically. New services such as AppleTV+, Apple News+ and Apple Arcade are designed to strengthen the package offered by the company based on monthly subscriptions.

UiPath gets a new round of funding of $568 million, upon a valuation of $7 billion. The company led by Daniel Dineș was on the rise in 2019, the Romanian CEO also ticking an appearance on the cover of Forbes America.

UBER began to be traded at the stock exchange, however the first day was not so good, the share price decreased compared to the initial listing by 7.6%. Long awaited by investors, UBER's listing rather brought disappointment and subsequent unrest. During the year, the price of a share fell from $42 to $29, but eventually the situation improved.

Huawei is suspended by Google from any updates of the Android platform due to restrictions imposed by the US government on the Chinese manufacturer. The measure affects both Huawei phones already on the market and the models that the company is going to launch.

OTHER NEWS IN BRIEF

Glovo receives $168 million in funding.

YouTube Music and YouTube Premium were launched in Romania.

Verizon wants to sell Tumblr, PornHub wants to buy it.

Mihnea Măruță leaves PressOne.

Adrian Sârbu prepares the sale of ProSport and ProMotor.

Bogdan Enoiu and Valentin Radu join forces in the Flow scooter rental service

PRbeta Agency has a "younger sister", Blue Moon Agency, specialized in cultural communication.

Instagram closes the Direct app.

Google changes the rules for Google Play children apps.

UBER begins disabling low-rated customer accounts.

It turns out that Apple was selling data about iTunes users for 8 cents/account.

Prima TV is put up for sale by PwC.

Flipboard is hacked, and millions of passwords are lost.

Yahoo launches a crypto-exchange.

JUNE

Facebook introduces Libra, a cryptocurrency launched in partnership with many major companies. Advertised as a huge project meant to change the cryptocurrency market, Libra proved to be a failure just before launch. The companies initially presented as partners in the project included Mastercard, Visa, PayPal, Vodafone, Stripe, PayU, Spotify, eBay and many more. One by one, PayPal, Mastercard, Visa, Stripe, eBay and Mercado Pago withdrew from the Libra Association.

US - Huawei relations ease up a bit as Donald Trump allows American companies to sell parts to the Chinese giant. Nevertheless, Huawei still cannot access Google services for the new mobile phones, which makes things complicated for the Chinese.

John Ive leaves Apple after 23 years as the leader of the company's design department. Officially, John Ive said he wanted new professional challenges, but that he would continue to work on the design of new Apple devices, as an external consultant. However, one of the real reasons could be related to the declining importance of Apple devices, in an ecosystem that starts relying more and more on services.

It turns out that the La Liga app was spying on users going to bars. The Spanish federation received a fine of 250,000 euros for automatically turning on the microphones of users in certain areas close to bars, so as to check whether football matches in the Spanish championship are being broadcast illegally in those places.

OTHER NEWS IN BRIEF

\# Fiverr is listed on the stock exchange and sees a 90% share price increase on the first day.

\# Facebook closes Graph Search - what was supposed to be the search engine for posts.

\# Several Romanian vloggers promote STB in an unmarked campaign.

\# Slack is listed on the stock exchange and increases by 48% from the initial price in one day.

\# Yango, a Russian ridesharing service from Yandex, is launched in Romania.

\# Ubisoft announces its own game streaming service.

\# eMAG wants to sell and then rent the newly built warehouse.

\# UBER's head of marketing and head of operations leave the company (CMO and CCO).

\# Google pays $2.6 billion for Looker - an analytics tool for cloud applications.

\# TIFF Unlimited, the video streaming platform of TIFF Festival, is launched.

\# Spotify is preparing to launch a hardware product: a car assistant.

\# Google has saved passwords of Gsuite users in plain text over the years, but does not specify how many, from 2005 to present day.

\# Lime CEO hands over the control to the company's co-founder.

\# WhatsApp confirms the intention to introduce ads as of 2020.

\# TikTok owner launches ByteDance messaging application.

JULY

Facebook gets a $5 billion fine from US authorities for the Cambridge Analytica scandal. The company led by Mark Zuckerberg promised to change the structure of privacy policies and to provide a monitoring tool to the FTC (Federal Trade Commission), the organization that led the negotiations.

Orange is building its own optical fiber network in Romania, claiming that access to the Telekom network has become too expensive. That was just one of the problems that Telekom Romania faced during the year, in addition to the tough negotiations with PRO TV at the beginning of 2019 and with Discovery Group at the end of the year.

WeWork CEO, Adam Neumann, withdraws $700 million from the company just before going public. At the time, WeWork was preparing for the IPO, which was postponed following a major scandal.

Takeaway and Just Eat merge into a business reaching 10 billion euro market value. The merger is set to create a strong competitor for UBER Eats and other food delivery services in Europe.

OTHER NEWS IN BRIEF

\# Apple buys Intel's mobile phone modem business for $1 billion.

\# Netflix launches mobile-only subscription in India.

\# eMAG starts selling OTC drugs (without prescription).

\# UBER sets goals for diversity, inclusion and equality in the company.

\# FaceApp reaches a database of 150 million people.

\# Russian hackers steal financial data of all Bulgarian citizens.

\# American justice rules that Donald Trump is not allowed to block his critics on Twitter.

\# AT&T announces the launch of a new streaming service called HBO Max in 2020.

\# British Airways receives a £183m fine for GDPR.

\# Instagram announces an anti-bullying feature.

\# Snapchat includes shows with Serena Williams and Arnold Schwarzenegger.

\# Dropbox launches a competitor for WeTransfer.

\# China closes 26 audio applications focused on podcasting.

\# It turns out that Alexa keeps transcribing voice commands even if users request their deletion.

\# Trump announces that Huawei can buy parts from US companies again.

AUGUST

Deutsche Telekom representatives discussed the sale of Telekom Romania with government representatives. The rumors that emerged during the year regarding the sale of Telekom Romania have been confirmed, and the Germans have already started to optimize the company's operations and prepare it for sale.

Automattic (the company that owns WordPress.com) buys Tumblr from Verizon for approximatively $3 million. After negotiations between Verizon and PornHub failed, Tumblr ended up being bought by Automattic. A company once sold for $1 billion is now worth almost 1000 times less.

Huawei launches HarmonyOS, its own operating system, as an alternative to Android. The move is intended as a response to a ban from Google. Huawei Mate 30 was launched on the market without access to Google services, but Huawei is trying to build its own ecosystem of applications and services so that it no longer depends on the Americans.

Disney prepares a package including Disney+, Hulu and ESPN+ for just $13 a month. An extremely interesting move made by Disney, which is gaining a lot of users in the USA with this package that includes sports, TV shows and movies at such a low price.

First fines for GDPR in Romania. Dozens of fines were issued throughout the year, the amounts ranging from 500 to 130,000 euros. Banks, telecom operators, courier companies, but also an association of homeowners which had not properly signaled the presence of video cameras in a block of flats were fined.

OTHER NEWS IN BRIEF

Alibaba opens the first physical European store in Madrid.

French police take control of a botnet and destroy 850k malware infections.

Telegram is preparing the launch of a cryptocurrency.

Twitter blocks state-controlled media trusts from advertising on the microblogging network.

Altex exits the eMAG Marketplace.

It turns out that Facebook transcribed users' audio messages without permission.

Microsoft admits, in its privacy policy, that there may be human contractors listening to Skype Translator and Cortana Audio messages.

Turkey is applying for a license for online publishers.

FedEx terminates contract with Amazon.

It turns out that a Facebook and Instagram marketing partner was tracking millions of users through stories.

Google is testing PlayPass, a gaming subscription meant to compete with Apple Arcade.

Facebook announces a news section created in partnership with major publishers.

Instagram and WhatsApp have their brand names completed by the particle "from Facebook".

# GitHub blocks access for programmers from Iran, Syria and Crimea.

SEPTEMBER

Facebook is testing the option to hide the number of likes from posts in Australia. Both Facebook and Instagram have begun to perform such tests, arguing that people should focus less on the number of likes someone else gets.

Apple launches a streaming service called AppleTV+ and Apple Arcade, a video streaming service and a gaming service. American company is thus trying to provide users in the Apple ecosystem with all the services they need. Even if AppleTV+ and Apple Arcade do not aim to conquer the market in their niches, they are a new monthly source of income.
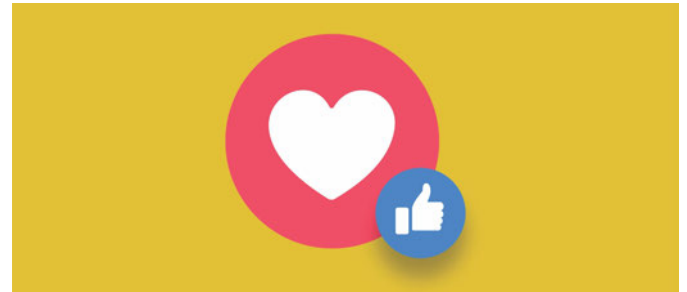
Facebook launches the Dating feature, currently only in the US. A move that has been discussed for many years, after the spectacular growth of Tinder. The dating app could become available worldwide by mid 2020.

Alibaba Group buys NetEase Kaola (China's second platform) for $2 billion. The transaction gives rise to the largest e-commerce platform in China, and in this context it is understandable that Amazon decided to leave the Chinese market.

OTHER NEWS IN BRIEF

eMAG joins an alliance of European marketplaces with retailers from France, Italy and Germany.

Facebook announces Horizon, an entire universe in VR, similar to Second Life, which will be available from 2020.

WeWork CEO resigns.

Devin Wenig resigns as CEO of eBay.

NBC announces the launch of its own streaming service called Peacock.

Facebook launches Portal TV, a $149 device that can be used to video chat on Messenger.

Amazon wants to buy 100,000 electric trucks.

Firefox blocks third-party tracking.

Automatic, the company that produces WordPress, gets a $300 million round of funding, for a total valuation of over $3 billion.

Stripe launches a credit card.

Mozilla launches a VPN called Firefox Private Network VPN.

The phone numbers of 419 million Facebook users are discovered online.

Google reaches an agreement with US authorities and pays a $170 million fine for collecting children's personal data without parental permission.

YouTube deletes 30,000 hate speech videos.

eMAG invests in the EuCeMănânc food delivery platform.

OCTOBER

Google buys Fitbit for $2.1 billion. Google did not have a strong position on the smartwatch market, and with this acquisition it is trying to gain market share and integrate a strong team that can help develop new products in the coming years.

CME, the company that owns PRO TV, has a new owner: an investment group controlled by the richest man in the Czech Republic. Although it was rumored that the Czechs will keep only the televisions from certain countries and will sell, among others, the businesses in Romania, the situation has not been clarified yet. What is certain is that PRO TV has a new owner.

Facebook adds Facebook News, a news section, in the USA, with news selected from the most important media companies. Throughout the conversation about fake news and fake accounts, Facebook is trying to partner with reputable online publications to repair its image.

Twitter and TikTok announce they will no longer allow political advertising. In the light of the US presidential elections to be held in 2020, the two networks have chosen to suspend any political advertising. Facebook, instead, not only keeps political ads, but considers them an important method of informing the public.

SoftBank Group provides an $8 billion capital infusion to WeWork. Not only did WeWork postpone its listing on the stock exchange, force CEO Adam Neumann to resign and lay off 5000 people, but it also needed a substantial capital infusion in order to be able to continue its operations. The rise and fall of WeWork has been one of the major topics of 2019.

OTHER NEWS IN BRIEF

\# Visa, Mastercard, Stripe and eBay abandon Libra, the cryptocurrency project announced by Facebook.

\# Realitatea TV shuts down, but the broadcast is moved to Realitatea Plus.

\# Revolut enters the US market through a partnership with Mastercard.

\# Adrian Sârbu sells Gândul, ApropoTV, Go4IT and other brands to Radu Budeanu (founder of Cancan.ro).

\# Yahoo closes Groups, a service launched in 2001.

\# UBER also wants to enter the shopping delivery market.

\# Apple removes HKmap from the App Store, an app used by pro-democracy protesters in Hong Kong, and heavily criticized by the Chinese government.

\# Grammarly receives $90 million in funding, valued at over $1 billion.

\# Twitter admits that it used the emails and phone numbers of users collected for security purposes to target ads.

\# Instagram ditches the Following tab, which was rather used for stalking.

\# Instagram launches Threads, a photo messaging app.

\# Discovery works with Amazon to develop a streaming service for cooking enthusiasts.

\# Google launches a personal safety app in the US.

\# Samsung gives up phone production in China.

NOVEMBER

Disney officially launches the Disney+ streaming platform. Long awaited by the media, the Disney platform is only available in the USA and Canada, at a price of $7 per month. Disney+ quickly becomes the most downloaded app in the US in Q4, and the number of users at the end of the year exceeds 10 million.

Russia bans the sale of gadgets that do not have Russian software pre-installed. Any gadget on the Russian market should come with a Russian software alternative. The measure has been criticized by all gadget manufacturers, seen as a move by Russia to spy on its citizens.

AirBnb announces that it is starting a long process of verifying all the 7 million listed properties. The measure comes as a result of several problems and following the death of 5 people at a Halloween party organized in an AirBnb property.

Netflix is long-term renting The Paris Theater, a famous NY movie theater. Netflix has had trouble screening movies to theaters in recent years. In order to be able to compete for prizes, they need distribution in cinemas, and without prizes they cannot contract great directors. The large movie theater chains refuse to accept the distribution of Netflix movies because they do not agree with the simultaneous launch of productions in theaters and on the streaming platform. Therefore, the solution that the company came up with was to rent long-term several important movie theaters in the USA, in order to be able to meet the requirements for Academy Awards, Golden Globes Awards and other competitions.
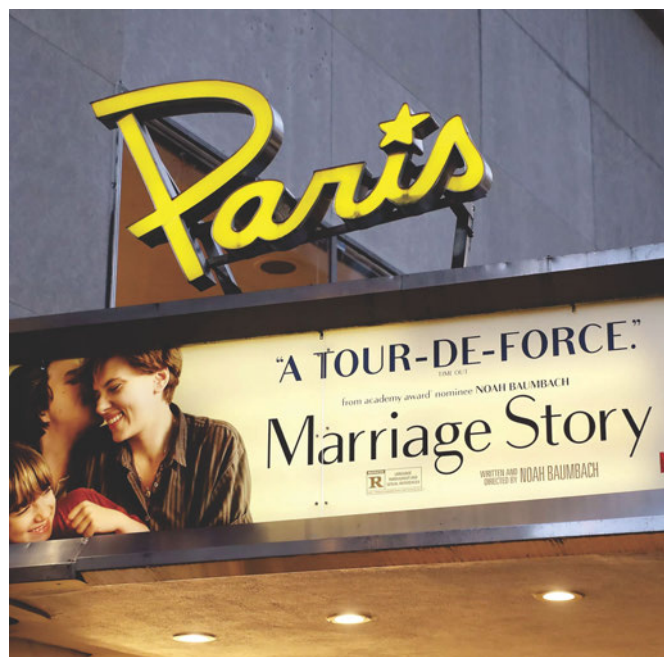
OTHER NEWS IN BRIEF

\# Twitter wants to delete inactive accounts but is considering an "in memoriam" version for the accounts of users who have died.

\# 20 million accounts exposed in a Mixcloud data breach.

\# eBay sells StubHub ticket marketplace to viagogo for $4 billion.

\# PayPal buys Honey shopping platform for $4 billion.

\# 1.2 billion accounts have been exposed in the largest data breach in years.

\# Facebook buys the VR studio that created Beat Saber.

\# HP rejects Xerox's takeover bid again.

\# PressHub is launched - a market that sells advertising in local headlines.

\# Facebook closes 5.5 billion fake accounts in 2019.

\# Instagram launches in Reels, a TikTok clone, in Brazil.

\# Nike no longer sells its products directly through Amazon.

\# Marie Claire magazine closes.

\# Microsoft has launched a mobile application called Office, which combines Word, Excel and PowerPoint.
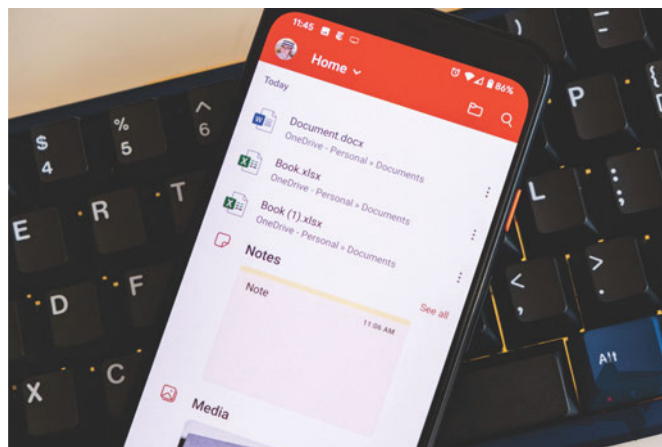
DECEMBER

China bans foreign software and hardware from state institutions. The move is meant to secure all state-owned computers and is set to take place over the next 3 years. It is, of course, another measure against the backdrop of the US-China trade war.

ThinkDigital launches the first advertising network in Romania dedicated to podcasts. It was only a matter of time before such advertising network would appear, amid the launch of more and more Romanian podcasts. The network created by Dragoș Stanca's agency gathered at the time of launch over 30 Romanian podcasts, from various categories.
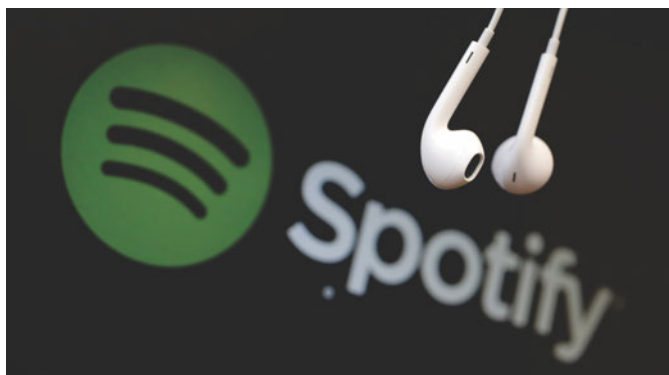
Spotify stops running political ads for now. The second half of 2019 saw increasing debates on the suitability of political advertisements on social networks. TikTok were the first to pause them, then it was Twitter's turn to ban political advertising. Facebook refused to do the same, saying it is the right of candidates to present their political programs and the right of voters to find out as much information about the election as possible. Instead, Spotify seems to have given in to pressure and stopped, for the time being, running any political ads, especially in the context of the presidential elections to be held in 2020 in the USA.

UBER sells UBER Eats operations in India to Zomato for $400 million. UBER's exit from the Indian food market is just one of the optimization measures the company took during 2019, especially after the listing on the stock exchange. UBER is trying to reduce losses and thus improve its financial results.

OTHER NEWS IN BRIEF

\# Evenimentul Zilei to be published in print for the last time.

\# Turkey launches an electric car brand called TOGG.

\# Facebook is considering developing its own operating system and giving up Android so that it no longer depends on Google.

\# PayPal becomes the first foreign platform to offer payment services on the Chinese market, by completing the GoPay acquisition.

\# The US Navy bans the use of TikTok by active members.

\# Facebook buys PlayGiga - a cloud gaming startup.

\# Instagram announces that it considers the automatically marking of fake news.

\# The Pirate Bay is testing a streaming platform called BayStream.

\# Influencers will no longer be allowed to promote cigarettes and weapons on Facebook and Instagram.

\# Away CEO resigns after the company's toxic culture scandal.

\# Google founders take a step back and leave current Alphabet CEO Sundar Pichai in charge of Alphabet.

\# Deutsche Telekom closes the Romanian IT services division.

\# The print version of Femeia magazine is closing, a title that has been constantly published for the past 150 years.

FEMEIA.

KEY TOPICS IN 2019

The Cambridge Analytica fine

The whole Cambridge Analytica scandal ended with a $5 billion fine for Facebook issued by the American authorities. The company led by Mark Zuckerberg promised to change the structure of privacy policies and to provide a monitoring tool to the FTC (Federal Trade Commission), the organization that led the negotiations.

This, while researchers from Mexico published a study according to which 540 million Facebook accounts were exposed on an insecure public server not even protected by a password. Even though Mark Zuckerberg has given several presentations throughout the year emphasizing the idea of privacy and moving the conversation to private messaging, the subject is far from over.

Telekom Romania issues

Telekom Romania had a complicated year,

starting with tough negotiations with ProTV and ending with a similar stalemate with the Discovery group. Orange announced that it will build its own optical fiber network in Romania, claiming that access to the Telekom network has become too expensive.

Meanwhile, Deutsche Telekom representatives were discussing with government officials the sale of Telekom Romania. Also, employees of Telekom Sport were made redundant and the IT services division in Romania was closed.

The failure of the Libra project

Advertised as a huge project meant to change the cryptocurrency market, Libra proved to be a failure just before launch. The companies initially presented as partners in the project included Mastercard, Visa, PayPal, Vodafone, Stripe, PayU, Spotify, eBay and many more.

One by one, PayPal, Mastercard, Visa,

Stripe, eBay and Mercado Pago withdrew from the Libra Association, the NGO meant to bring the 28 founding companies to the table. Some companies came up with rather vague reasons, others said they would analyze the situation based on how well Libra met regulatory requirements.

What's certain is the project has already lost momentum, it has run out of payment processors on its partner list, and Mark Zuckerberg's mission to change the way we make payments is becoming increasingly difficult.

New streaming platforms

2019 was the year when big companies competed in launching or announcing streaming services. Disney launched Disney+ and managed to get some impressive figures, reaching directly the top 3 services, along with Netflix and Prime Video.

AT&T announced HBO's third streaming service, called HBO Max, which joins HBO Now and HBO Go in WarnerMedia's digital offer.

Apple has launched AppleTV+, a service already available in 100 countries for $5 a month, while NBC has announced its own streaming service called Peacock.

A surprising announcement was related to Quibi, a mobile-first service that will focus on short videos of no more than 15 minutes. The platform is founded by Jeffrey Katzenberg, former president of Walt Disney Studios in the most recent golden era of the studios ('84-'94, when classic animated films such as Aladdin, The Little Mermaid, Lion King, etc. were released), and Meg Whitman, former CEO of eBay between '98 and '08.

First GDPR fines in Romania

2019 also brought the first fines for non-compliance with GDPR in Romania. Dozens of fines were issued throughout the year, the amounts ranging from 500 to 130,000 euros. Banks, telecom operators, courier companies, but also an association of homeowners which had not properly signaled the presence of video cameras in a block of flats were fined.

Political advertisements on social networks

An interesting topic was the way social networks chose to manage political advertisements, especially in the context of the approaching presidential elections in the USA.

Twitter announced in November that it was banning all political advertising shortly after TikTok did the same. Towards the end of the year, even Spotify announced that it would stop running political advertising, at least for a while.

Facebook, on the other hand, has systematically refused to stop running political ads, claiming only 0.5% of the total advertising budget comes from such advertising and that it's the candidates' right to present their programs to voters.

Huawei's problems in the US-China trade war

Huawei had a complicated 2019 amid the economic conflict between China and the US. They were first suspended by Google from any updates to the Android platform, due to restrictions imposed by the US government on the Chinese manufacturer.

In response, Huawei announced its own operating system, HarmonyOS, and launched the Mate 30 without Google applications. Even though the relations between the Americans and the Chinese giant have eased a bit during the year, Huawei will still have difficulties from the lack of access to Google applications and to Android operating system.

UBER's IPO listing

UBER's estimated value reached $78.8 billion in 2019, before the listing, and some experts expected the listing to bring the company to $100-120 billion.

This did not happen, on the contrary, on the first day the share price decreased by 7.6% compared to the initial listing. The price went from $45 per share to $41.57 per share, and the year ended pretty badly at $30 per share.

UBER has already begun optimizing the company's operations by selling UBER Eats from India to Zomato, its main local competitor, for $400 million. Other similar actions are expected in the near future.

The rise and fall of WeWork

WeWork seemed to be another success story of a young company, with a CEO admired by investors and a lot of potential. They were preparing for listing on the stock exchange, they were valued at $47 billion, and planned to expand further globally.

The first concerns emerged in July, when CEO Adam Neumann withdrew $700 million from the company, just before the alleged listing.

Shortly afterwards, various articles were published in the media recounting Neumann's strange behavior, also involving drug abuse. This delayed the listing process and forced Neumann to step down. In October, the company laid off 5000 employees (nearly a third of the total) and asked $8 billion from SoftBank to continue operating.

In less than a year, WeWork has gone from a star start-up to a company struggling to remain on the market.

Alibaba's quasi-monopoly in China

Until 2019, Alibaba had a dominant position in China, but it had serious competition. With the acquisition of NetEase Kaola (China's second largest platform) for $2 billion, Alibaba Group is creating China's largest e-commerce platform.

In the light of this transaction and the trade disagreements between the USA and China, Amazon chooses to leave the market, after 15 years of trying to fight on an equal footing with giants such as Alibaba and JD.com.

MAGIC IS JUST TECHNOLOGY WE HAVEN'T YET DISCOVERED

1. EMBRACING A.I.

"Question everything!". This is how I began my previous article in last year's Digital Recap, in which I talked about the challenges of telling apart the real from the fake as well as A.I.'s growing hold on culture and society. #Deepfake had already spread, both as an efficient means of tampering with images and videos as well as an entertainment tool for viral videos on social media. Deepfake technology uses machine learning (a branch of A.I tech) to create hyper-real videos of people saying things that aren't based in reality[1].

Deepfake was eventually banned a year later (details in chapter 2.2) providing us with a place where we can clearly see just how much artificial intelligence has evolved nowadays and how situations previously seen in shows like Black Mirror play out in real life. I'm referring to a YouTube Originals[2] documentary called "The Age of A.I.". These 8, 35-minute episodes, show us a wide range of uses for this newly emerged science in areas such as FMCG, medicine, music, film, architecture, emergencies and civil protection.

People and nature are predictable. Everything we currently know about them can help us predict their behaviors. However, if we were to be stripped of our technological prowess, we alone couldn't be able to learn so much in our lifetime, not at this scale at least.
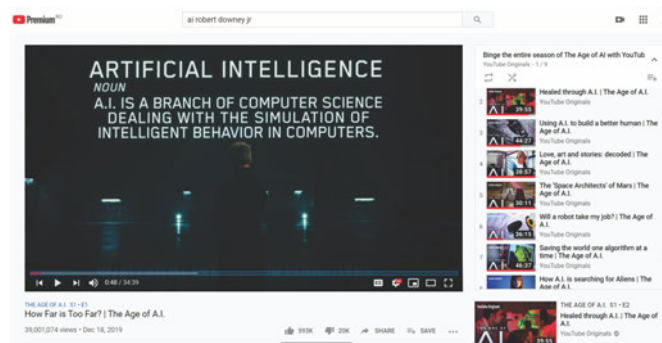
Source: YouTube.com

Artificial intelligence systems can predict actions, make goal-attaining decisions, and even create new cultural products provided these systems are fed with large quantities of detailed, heavily organized information.

The examples presented above prove that artificial intelligence shouldn't be considered a human substitute but rather a way of solving complex situations, sometimes even dangerous ones that require substantial physical and intellectual capabilities.

2. HOW AI CHANGES OUR #OFFICELIFE

2.1. A.I.'s impact on the brands we promote

**Technical abilities and copywriting. A love story.**

Even though the documentary was made by a US production team, the examples shown were taken from around the world, Europe included. A new revolution is about to occur for XXI century industries even though it may not seem so at first glance. If we take a closer look at Romania's private sector, where companies inject overwhelming amounts of foreign capital, we can see how A.I. is already influencing how marketing and communications specialists operate. Moreover, Romanian specialists working in academic areas have already started projects where A.I. is consistently applied to better products and services.

Artificial intelligence is becoming more and more apparent in client briefs, and technical know-how is becoming a must-have for our teams at Golin. A.I. has become an integral part of many products and services that, in order to be understood and used by a greater number of people, need to be integrated in traditional communication tactics: social media posts, online explanatory videos, special content projects focusing on the emotional benefits of technology, influencer communication, press releases etc.

Thus, communication agency recruiters are increasingly pursuing professionals with IT&C know-how, even for drafting texts. Nowadays, your

run of the mill humanities graduate that doesn't have a background or passion for technology has become a niche.


Source: https://www.elementsofai.com/eu2019fi
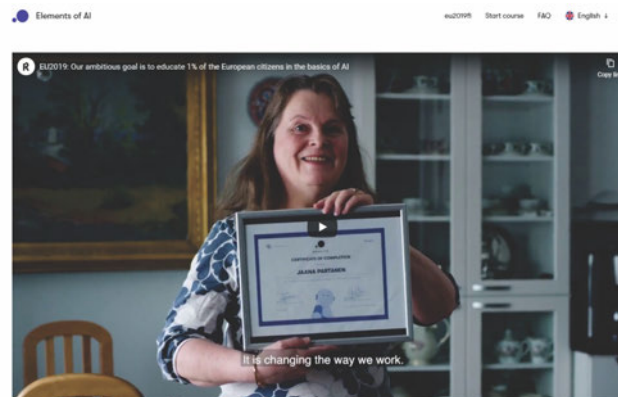
I expect artificial intelligence to become a shaping force for future professionals in the communication field. Free courses on the subject have already been made available by Google, and Finland is one of the first countries where European citizens can benefit from online courses[3], imeant to educate on A.I.[4] It is possible, thus, for future generations in Romania to study this subject from an early age at school and unravel its secrets, regardless of their career preferences.

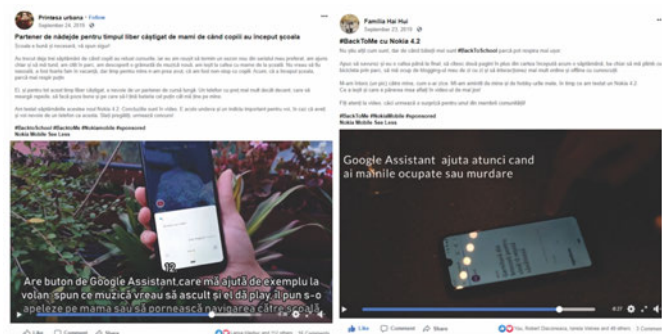**A.I. on the agenda: auto, banking, telco**

Google Lens and Google Assistant are two subjects we constantly write about when creating content for our clients. Nokia smartphones run on Pure Android OS, so these 2 functionalities are core attributes for when we communicate anything

related to mobiles. Google Lens uses artificial intelligence to help users better pinpoint objects in photos and Google Assistant is a virtual assistant that communicates with users to fulfil tasks. Both were heavily promoted in press releases, social media posts and special influencer projects.
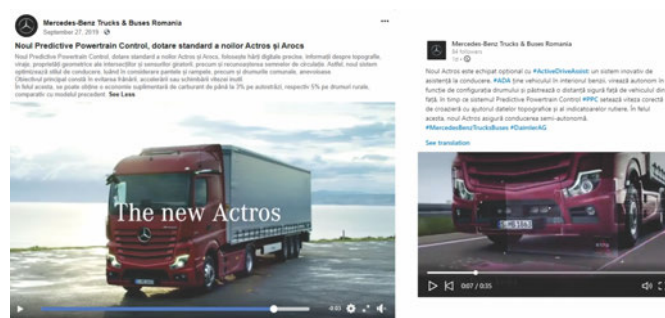

Source: https://www.facebook.com/NokiamobileRO/
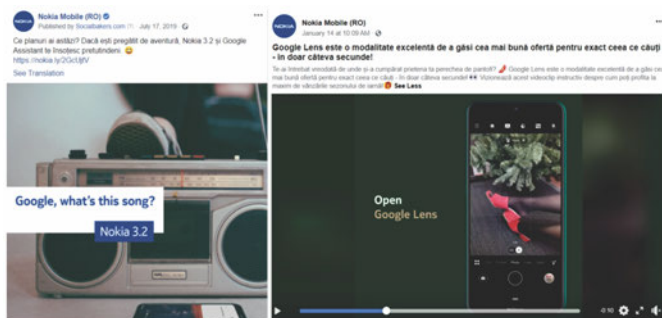
For example, during our #BackToSchool campaign in the fall of 2019, we offered parenting bloggers the chance to test the Nokia 4.2 smartphone. They discovered that the smartphone could help them take full advantage of their free time while their kids are at school.

Sources: https://www.facebook.com/watch/printesaurbana/
https://www.facebook.com/watch/FamiliaHaiHui/

Active Drive Assist, the system which allows **Mercedes-Benz Actros** trucks to drive themselves semi-autonomously, is a subject we constantly tackled on our Mercedes-Benz Trucks & Buses social media pages, ever since November 2018.

Sources: https://www.facebook.com/mb.trucksandbuses.ro/
https://www.linkedin.com/company/mercedes-benz-trucks-buses-romania

Artificial intelligence also has big plans for the Cars & Vans divisions. MBUX, an A.I. integrated multimedia system of **Mercedes-Benz** vehicles, has already been on the Romanian market for 2 years and was thoroughly communicated by Golin in promoting all models that have this feature.

The teams at central HQ are already working on newer technologies that will be implemented in the following series models. These models are brought together every year in a concept model event held at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, where all concept models are self-driving and self-sufficient thanks to A.I..

Romanian innovations that use artificial intelligence to solve fintech-related problems are also consistently talked about on our **BRD - Groupe Société Générale** social media pages, who are a sponsor for start-up pre-accelerator, **Innovation Labs**.

In 2019, I talked about the top teams inside this program, among which are Finbot and Sales Lead Generator (which use machine learning to make bank processing more efficient), AI Statistics (which identify business opportunities) and the smart financial assistant, Franc, who won an award from BRD as part of the program. The award meant that Franc would get full project development support from BRD's business and development specialists.

"From a thought to a unicorn: how a successful start-up is born", the online show about entrepreneurship produced for BRD by journalist and blogger, Vlad Petreanu, posed a new challenge for the production team in understanding how A.I. can be used in Romanian industries, then followed by properly communicating their findings to the masses.

In fact, robots prove to be much closer to us, to our daily lives, and very different from the threatening robots in Sci-fi movies.

Even if we look at stronger threats, such as making humans obsolete at the workplace, we can see that A.I.'s role is first and foremost to make our work easier. So, we opened up a dialogue with our online community in order to better share our positive stories involving robots in society, a topic tackled in two of our **#ConversatiiDespreViitor** posts on BRD's social media pages.

Source: https://www.linkedin.com/company/brd
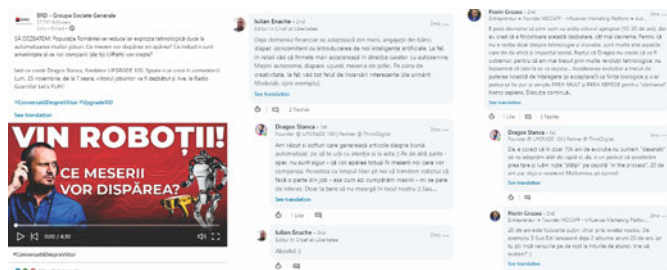
Source: https://www.facebook.com/BRDGroupeSocieteGenerale

2.2. How A.I. impacts the way we communicate

Virtual influencers generate conversions

While in last year's Digital Recap we talked about **computer generated influencers**, this time we're talking about how they are moving into the mainstream. Fashion and beauty brands use these means to effectively communicate their identity, making way to new agency departments in the process. These new departments produce 100% digitally generated images and write texts that capture the identity of their virtual persona. Even KFC has opted to communicate through such an influencer, specially created for the brand: A hipster version of Colonel Sanders[5].

Studies show that 55% of users who follow virtual influencers are influenced by them when buying a product[6].

Source: https://www.instagram.com/kfc/

The dangerous triangle that influences our votes: A.I., Facebook and Fake News

Amid the upcoming 2020 presidential election, Facebook had announced[7] that it will remove all Deep Fake videos from its platform with the exception of parodies. Through a partnership with Microsoft and other highly esteemed US universities, Facebook announced the Deepfake Detection Challenge (DFDC)[8], a technology that can be used by any user to verify if a video was made with A.I. or not.

The move is not at all surprising if we are to remember the Cambridge Analytica scandal, in which Facebook was involved in 2018. It was then when millions of users' accounts were used in political ads meant to influence the election. A 2019 Netflix documentary called the Great Hack[9] showcased several behind the scenes details offered by whistle-blowers, of which it was found that Romania was one of the countries targeted by Cambridge Analytica.

Meanwhile in Gen Z land...

Snapchat and **TikTok** opted to encourage the use of DeepFake by launching a series of features based on the technology. Snapchat had already launched a Face-Swap option in 2016[10], and by the end of 2019 they announced another feature called Cameo[11].

Tech Crunch recently announced[12] that TikTok is also secretly working on a similar feature, one that involves scanning human faces and using them in different scenarios.

The publishing regulations belonging to both platforms state that misinformation materials are prohibited, but that democratizing a high-risk tool in this regard and thus collecting a huge volume of biometric data deserves to attract the vigilance of their users and beyond.

AR or VR? How about both?

MR otherwise known as Mixed Reality is a technology that overlaps our reality with interactable virtual objects. This new form of tech combines virtual and augmented reality. The term could be traced back all the way to 1994[13] in several specialized publications, however, I believe that the trend will be truly visible in 2020 thanks to rapid technological development, high level of expertise in global A.I. and availability of 5G on devices around the world.

Source: https://www.forbes.com/sites/solrogers/2018/12/04/what-is-mixed-reality-and-what-does-it-mean-for-enterprise/#3909bc035df9

VR headset companies are already working on producing new versions of these headphones,

which allow interaction with the real environment and which can be applied in areas beyond entertainment. In the video game industry, MR already exists, Oculus Rift serving as an example.

We can expect that, in a few years, in Romania, we will produce MR filters to promote a brand; for example, we can invite users from many corners of the country to play soccer with a virtual ball.

Google Photos has a video stabilization feature and life seems great all of a sudden

This isn't breaking news[14], but it's a feature that hasn't yet reached content creators. The A.I.-based option can stabilize uploaded videos in the Google Photos app.

**What's really new in Google Photos**

As of 2019, Google Photos allows users to look up images by the texts associated with them[15]. You could also use said texts to, for example, convert screenshots in text documents or to move copied texts from one picture to a folder[16]. The backbone for this feature is a technology called OCR[17] (Optical Character Recognition), which, in turn, is based on machine learning.

Automatic image recognition

Facebook can immediately recognize friends in a selfie and automatically tags them, so long as they haven't turned off the feature in the privacy settings. And on Google and Shutterstock you can search for images that are several years old.

Moreover, Pinterest has significantly expanded its search options based on machine learning, offering image suggestions based on those selected by the user or even based on image fragments[18]. The platform had announced on January 2020 that it will debut an AR filter that allows user to test make-up products before purchase[19], an option already made available by other brands.

But what if we had a system through which we could find and centralize all images where our logo was used? Thanks to artificial intelligence, this system is already present in several company portfolios throughout the international market and is expected to be used by Romanian brands in the near future.

Source: https://indatalabs.com/
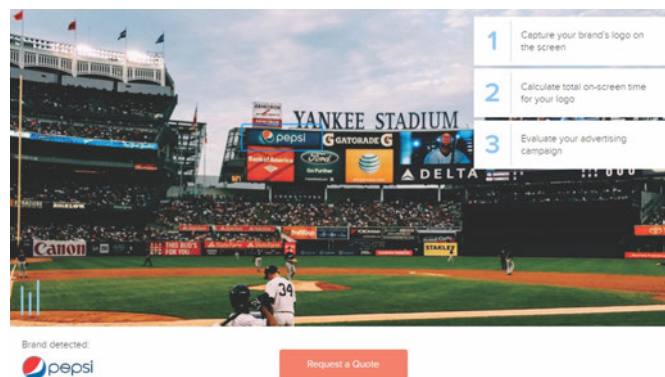
Automatic text translations

A more efficient version of Google Translation, Smartling can translate texts from any language and allows users to quickly verify if the translations are correct. The service is used by our Golin

Romania clients, and speaking from experience with the Romanian language, I can rightfully say that all translations made with this software have been accurate.

Accelerated photo-video production

Video editing can be an arduous and time-consuming process, especially if you try correcting and error in post or you're required to resize your video. Machine-learning A.I can save countless hours of tinkering with videos and a prime example through which you can do this is Adobe Sensei. This software allows users to quickly remove elements from a clip, without altering its quality and can also cut a video to any size required, keeping in only the desired elements.

Adobe Sensei started [2020] by introducing the Elements package, in which you can find a tool that allows users to immediately colorize black-and-white photos as well as raising the resolution[21] of poor-quality photos.

Source: https://www.slrlounge.com/adobe-announces-premiere-and-photoshop-elements-2020-adding-powerful-adobe-sensei-ai-features/

Product-placement in movies at the speed with which we make Facebook Ads

A simple mental exercise can help us understand just how many people and financial resources are required for product-placement in movies or videos altogether. There needs to be a consistent train of thought coupled with consistent and on-point approvals and implementations, especially considering that it's very hard to correct a video after filming a product-placement sequence. This is especially evident in Romania.

Mirriad, a London-based startup, has recently provided users with a method[22] that allows brand product-placement while in post. By using artificial intelligence, the system can detect empty areas in a scene and can fill in with the appropriate brand products or logos. Thus, product-placement can be achieved very quickly and easily from a logistics perspective.

Moreover, Mirriad allows brand customization by placing the appropriate products depending on the target demographic, or even by taking into account the time of day in which the video is posted.

If the owner of a streaming platform has data pertaining to user's interests, he can thus establish how a product (a car for example) will be displayed to interested parties while at the same time another group will be targeted by another type of product all-together. A video that is posted in the morning would contain products associated with morning time (coffee for example) while a new batch of products would appear in the evening (alcohol for example).

The software uses A.I. makes product-placement operationally easy, akin to making Facebook ads: deciding what, when and who receives messages.

We live in a time full of palpable possibilities and technological achievements. A time where creative and solution-oriented people will decide what happens in the communication industry. The following years will see a battle of wills unfold, where the most original ideas and solutions will battle each other in order to become the new status quo. Artificial intelligence will be at our side to help us achieve our goals. And seeing as these last few years have been saturated with various red flags pertaining to user data security and ethics,

everything created with the help of A.I., at least from a European perspective, will be heavily regulated by relevant authorities.

Roxana Ionescu
Digital Director, Golin

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19) https://newsroom.pinterest.com/en/post/pinterests-new-ar-tech-lets-you-try-on-makeup-before-you-buy, January 2020

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CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY, O NOUĂ DEFINIŢIE

„Business started long centuries before the dawn of history, but business as we know it is new – new in its broadening scope, new in its social significance. Business has not learned to handle these changes, nor does it recognize the magnitude of its responsibilties for the future of civilization." - **Wallace B. Donham, Dean of Harvard Business School, commented within an address delivered at North Western University in 1929**[1]

The evolution of Social Responsibility

The concept of *(corporate)* social responsibility is not new, it seems to have appeared along with the development of society and, implicitly, of the civilization. As the society evolved, the concept of CSR has transformed in order to protect the environment and the community from the negative effects that diverse activities could have, and to support the communities where the economic actors perform their activities.

The most distant moment in history, in which specialists have identified such a movement, is located around the year 1700 BC[2], when king Hammurabi introduced a code in which builders, innkeepers or farmers were put to death if their negligence caused the death of others, or major incovenience to local citizens. A few hundreds of years later, in Ancient Rome, senators commented about the failure of businesses to contribute

sufficient taxes to fund their military campaigns. Following the course of history, in 1622, angry stakholders in the Dutch East India started distributing pamphlets complaining about management secrecy and accused the heads of the company of self-enrichment practices. (Narasimhan, R. 2006; BRASS Centre, 2007; Asongu, 2007; Souran and Rao, 2011).
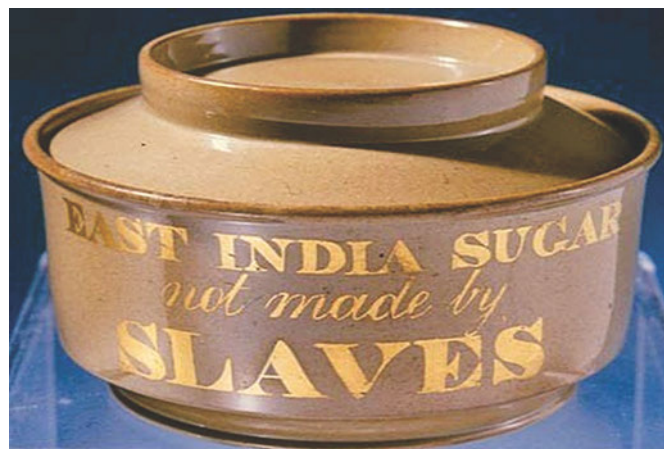
In 1790 there was a first large-scale boycott[3] in England, which finally forced importers to fully adopt the system of free labour (free labour sourcing), according to which, the workers were able to negociate the value of their work and their remuneration. In just a few years, over 300.000 Brittons refused to buy sugar, the major product of

the British West Indian slave plantations. Nearly 400.000 signed petitions to Parliament demanding an end to the slave trade. Thus, in 1792, The House of Commons became the first national legislative body in the world to vote to end the slave trade.

The well-known philosopher and economist Adam Smith[4] has written extensively on the subject of social responsibility, expressing his belief that the needs and desire of the society could best be met by the free interaction of individuals and organizations in the marketplace. Of course, in order for these interactions to become successful long-term, all marketplace participants must act honestly.

CThe successful companies of the eighteenth century have quicky integrated this concept in their business practices, for instance the Cadbury[5] family, who offered their employees pension funds and education, medical care, but also trainings for their professional evolution.

The official recognition of the concept and the first measures

At the begining of the nineteenth century, when the industrialization began, the new technologies lead to the creation of jobs and helped improve the living standard. Although the businesses flourished and the industrialists of Europe and USA were gaining huge fortunes, the wellbeing of the employees wasn't (always) one of their major concerns. Until the 1920s few companies were aware of the impact they have on the society and even the environment,

and until the '70s, even though there were a lot of specialists constantly publishing documents that demonstrated the need for the business environment to get involved in the construction and the protection of the society, major boycotts were necessary in order to bring change in the business practices of the time.

Therefore, the rise of activism[6] oriented towards human rights support and environmental protection, expressed through major international boycotts in the 70s and 80s, has created a change in the attitude and modus operandi of companies when it comes to social problems and environment protection, and even in the government, hence the development of dedicated legislation and global strategies meant to solve the major problemes that

were identified as distructive agents: poverty, population pressure, social inequities and so on.

In 1984, Peter Drucker[7], who is known as the father of modern management, wrote about the imperative to transform social issues into economic opportunities which will benefit both the companies as well as the society.

Until 1990s[8], dthe definition of CSR was limited only to corporate philantrophy. From the early 1990s, the concept was enlarged and new ways and practices have appeared. As globalization intensified and the level of awareness over the environment grew, the need for a responsible business model became imperative and specialized institutions were set in place to regulate and control this area, such as The Bruntland Commission, World Business Council for Sustainable Development ot the United Nations Global Impact. At the end of the 1990s, ONGs and people started to support and to get involved in the CSR activities of the companies, whether the latter were simple employees, volunteers or even shareholders and members of the Administration Councils.

The maturity of the CSR concept

Starting with the years 2000 more legislative bodies and instruments have appeared to regulate and monitor the impact of economical activities over the environment and the society, and in the past years the concept of CSR has grown, gaining more and more significance and weight.

This maturity also comes with a clarity concerning the level of commitment and responsibility of every

participant in the marketplace, and it becomes more and more necessary that the government, the companies and the consumers to colaborate towards building a sustainable future for the generations to come.

In order to have consistent actions, to create an authentic personality and to be able to monitor long term the impact they have over society, most of the companies turn towards identifying a higher goal - purpose - through which they can contribute to settling some of the problems faced by the community they are a part of.

Such a purpose, effected in steady actions with concrete results, is now one of the most important pillars when building the image of a company with an active social consciousness. And such an image, supported by quality products or services, can influence the long term customer loyalty and, implicitly, the reputation of the company.

Nowadays, a brand can no longer be a love-brand only through quality products and advertising techniques. A brand must constantly prove its costumers, employees or potential employees, that it is deserving of their attention online, in the store or when choosing a new job.

The online communication

The fast technological development in the past twenty years has not only favored the easy transfer of information, but the fast access to a variety of products and prices as well. The costumer becomes more and more responsible in his actions, but mostly, more and more aware of the power he

possesses in the marketplace, given by the possibility to boycott or support the actions of a company or the government's. And social media fosters the viral spread of positive information and even more the spread of negative information.

If in the beginning social media was just another advertising playground, the main social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or YouTube have become *mainstream* sources of information, entertainment, major tools of advertising or sales, customer interaction, online hangout hubs and more. To attract and retain consumer attention, companies or brands must offer a balanced mix of information regarding its actions, and to use a tone of voice appropriate for the intended audience. Thus, in order to maintain the same image long term, the company should advocate this personality not only in a declarative view, but to demonstrate it through offline actions and through the level of commitment it invests in the wellbeing of the community.

The manner in which the purpose and the actions of a company are communicated could also be a factor that would helps build the desired image. Although it is said that sometimes it is best to leave the facts talk for themselves, in the avalanche of information the costumers face on a daily basis, it may be that facts won't be loud enough to reach the ears or eyes of all those interested in the matter. Therefore, if a company doesn't have a communication strategy dedicated to supporting its image long term, it can lose the potential customers that don't get the full picture, it can lose ground to competition or even facilitate the spread of false or distorted information.

The new consumer generations evaluate a product or a company by taking into account the way it communicates and interacts with them, from the point of view of channels used for sharing an information, posting frequency, quality of the shared content, and from how the company maintains dialogue with the community.

The array of choices the consumers face daily offers them the possibility to express a new set of values as base for a buying decision, and that's why knowing the audience and creating a communication strategy for the CSR program, through which the information reaches the intended audience, are strategic steps that help set a well established route of necessary actions in order to create and sustain the image of *purpose driven* and socially committed company.

What the numbers say[9]

According to the study „The Business of Doing Good", launched in November 2019 by Golin in partnership with iSense Solutions, the consumers want to know about the CSR initiatives of the companies, they would talk about them in their social circles (68% of the respondents) and they would get actively involved both by material donations (65% of the respondents), the acquisition of products that donate a part of the price to a certain cause they believe in (81% of the respondents), and volunteering (15% of the respondents).

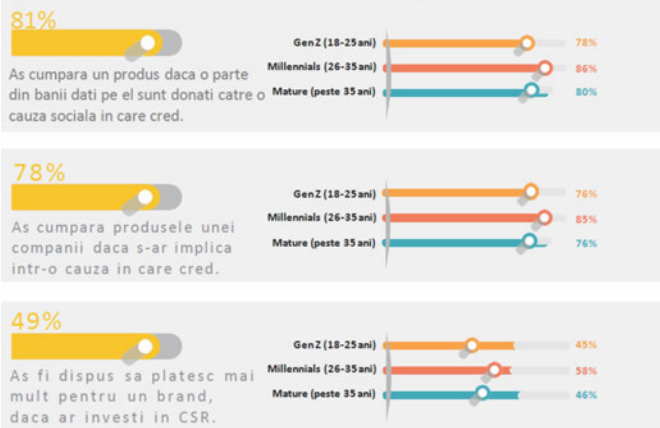One of the study's conclusions show us that in order

to have impact for the consumer, the CSR communication must be clear, show results, be visible, creative and emotional, anchored in the community's tensions, and the messages must be distributed with a frequency that is neither disturbing nor obtrusive for the consumer.

THE BUSINESS OF DOING GOOD

CSR & INTENȚIA DE ACHIZIȚIE
studiu #BOLD by LoweGroup
#ask   #curiosity   #onebrightband

81%
As cumpara un produs daca o parte din banii dati pe el sunt donati catre o cauza sociala in care cred.
GenZ (18-25 ani) 78%
Millennials (26-35 ani) 86%
Mature (peste 35 ani) 80%

78%
As cumpara produsele unei companii daca s-ar implica intr-o cauza in care cred.
GenZ (18-25 ani) 76%
Millennials (26-35 ani) 85%
Mature (peste 35 ani) 76%

49%
As fi dispus sa platesc mai mult pentru un brand, daca ar investi in CSR.
GenZ (18-25 ani) 45%
Millennials (26-35 ani) 58%
Mature (peste 35 ani) 46%

Turns out that the online communication, made through various media or social media channels, occupies the first place, with 66% of the respondents affirming that they saw CSR campaigns on the internet (social media – Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube; forums, blogs); the online communnication with influencers is becoming quite the amplifier, with 32% of the respondents saying that they heard about the CSR campaigns of the brands from VIPs involved in the communication of those campaigns.

Endorsing a *social purpose* through these channels becomes more and more complex and demands from the companies and their communication partners to be authentic, to constantly discover new ways to deliver the information, to have more creativity in their approaches and also, to involve members from the community in the initiatives that concern them.

#proud to be part of:

In conclusion

Social Responsability should not be a matter for the state and administration only, it should also be a matter for the companies and the citizens, whether they are consumers or employees. The consumer boycotts and protests have lead to the creation of legislative instruments that regulated, with time, the corporate level of responsibility towards the environment, instruments that can also monitor the

effects the companies have in the community where they perform their activity. These tools are available for the public, and the consumers and employees are paying more and more attention to the way companies treat the CSR area.

For a company, commiting to CSR can generate WOM, more loyalty from the employees and costumers, can influence the buying decision and enforce the brand communication as an employer.

The manner in which the campaigns are communicated is crucial for building a socially active and *purpose driven* company image. Social media and the influencers' channels can amplify the communication objectives, while through the association with the latter in CSR campaigns, the companies receive access to bigger or even newer groups of consumers audiences, they benefit from a certain reputation transfer from the influencer towards the company, can generate more engagement and more authentic content.

In order to be successful, a CSR campaign must be clear, visible and to show results.

Do's:

• Create a clear strategy

CSR campaigns must be quantifiable and embeded in the culture and values of the company.

• Plan and discuss ideas

The CSR ideas will always work better if they are discussed and planned in advance.

• Communicate with stakeholders

Define ways in which you can quantify the result of the communication with stakeholders. Maintain communication on all levels and analyse the feedback you receive.

• Create CSR training programs

Not everyone is familiar with the idea and CSR practices; besides, through these programs you can create more *awareness* within the company and outside it.

• Report the results

Honesty is the best policy: CSR reports ensure transparency and empower company image.

• Encourage teamwork

Encouraging teamwork helps develop socially responsible attitudes toward the company.

• Make long-term plans

Evaluating the social impact of a company is another challenge, because most of the times the results can't be seen immediately, it is an image that must be built strategically and planned long-term.

• Amplify the efforts and the results online

Besides the traditional PR and marketing communication, it is important to have online visibility. Use social media and influencers' channels to generate visibility in areas where the traditional communication tools won't reach.

Don'ts

• Don't overpromise

It's important to deliver on your promises. Begin with small steps and ways to generate *engagement* and *awareness* regarding CSR campaigns. If you overpromise, you will create imbalance.

• Don't consider CSR just a PR action

Remember that CSR is about giving something back to the community, because it is the right thing to do and not for self-promotion only.

• Don't forget the record of your achievements

Create reports and keep track of the accomplishments in the CSR campaigns, establish and monitor KPIs, so that you will always know where you are and where you will be at the end.

• Don't think CSR is only about the environment

Try to keep a balance between the social dimension and the impact over the environment, catalyzed by ethical principles of the business model. Don't think that CSR is only about money donations. Invest time, resources, goods and services in the CSR causes you support.

• Don't think about it as a no results activity that is hard to explain to the management

Just because you can't see or gather results immediately, it doesn't mean it's a waste of time and resources. Establish and monitor quality and quantity indicators, measure and periodically record the progress on each indicator from the beginning to the end of the CSR project or program.

• Don't get caught in previous actions and results

Keep your mind open to new ideas and possibilities; innovation has always contributed to building a more sustainable development.

• Don't praise yourself too much

It is important to keep a balance between the value of the action and the magnitude of the communication campaign. When you communicate too much for too little, you risk losing the stakeholders' attention, the campaign's vilification or even the company's.

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CONTENT IN THE 20S– OR HOW CONTENT IS BECOMING SHORT AND PERSONAL

The secret to a successful online communication strategy is still content, whether it's text, pictures, video or audio. The old way of doing things revolved around content quantity appealing to that "let's put something on the web, let's do it just so people know we're there" mentality. Brands who still behave in such a way nowadays are criticized by consumers. Yes, content still remains king in the online medium, however, if we were to read this statement everywhere we go, then its truthfulness, while still there, rings hollow and can even lose value over time. And yes, some content can be elevated to "royal" status, however, in order to reach this superlative level, there needs to be quota present in terms of quality, one that brings in worthwhile results and gives the community relevant information. A recipe that worked for your content last month may very well be ineffective now. Thus, adapting to social media's every-changing flows as well as innovating on existing strategies is a must.

The use of the term 'content marketing' isn't new in any way as it was used even before the internet, in a less crowded era. While the term was first used in 1996 by newsman John F. Oppedahl, the concept of educating and informing the masses of a brand's products was applied by manufacturing company,

John Deere, in 1895[1]. And even though the company was extremely in tune with the needs of its target market during that time, they indirectly became the forefathers of content marketing with their magazine, "The Furrow", which served as a vehicle for educating farmers on how to increase work profitability. Fast forward a century later, and we can see how brands continue to focus their efforts on providing content that engages and educates consumers.

During these last few years, online content marketing has slowly managed to surpass traditional forms of advertisement, firstly due to the increasing high demand of online content and secondly because consumers want to know companies better. However, due to an oversaturation of online information, consumers have turned more selective and overall picky when it comes to their brand choices, and companies had to adapt, think and rethink how they could share their identity with consumers.

Bite sized video

Video content is fast becoming the go-to communication vehicle for brands, as more and more businesses are investing in formats that

attract consumers. This, of course, is no coincidence, as more people exclusively watch videos on their phones. It's expected this year that [2]82% of all online traffic will be done in search of video content[2], while by 2022, 82% of all online content will be video[3].

Video content has the best results when it comes to awareness on existing social media platforms, due to its easy accessibility and rapid dispersal of information. Plus, it comes in various shapes and sizes that can fit any user's preference and schedule. Apps like TikTok that encourage fast distribution and creation of video content offer a sneak peek at the future of social media channels. Nowadays, TikTok is the go-to app for the Z Generation, making up for 66% of the app's userbase[4].

Short form video content will continue to gain popularity and grow, and in 2020 at least, we will see TikTok and Instagram dominating the stage. Instagram reached a whopping 1 billion users on the platform a feat most probably made possible by the app's ephemeral content feature. TikTok didn't remain idle, however, as the app currently has about 750 million users[5].

People are slowly abandoning the idea of taking part in large-scale communities pivoting towards smaller communities and groups which lean more on shared micro interests and similar mentalities. Thus, consumers are searching for experiences with which they can resonate, a tendency carried over when looking at brands.

It is also worthwhile to have a look at live video content. Live content creates a sense of urgency that prompts consumers to engage, even after the video remains on the platform.

Whether it's Facebook, Instagram or YouTube, social media live content is a trend that will continue to grow and a great way to boost engagement rates – with a catch – it needs to be quality content.

Although most consumers watch "rough" video content, when it comes to brand-created material, they are a lot more pretentious. Audiences nowadays prefer the authentic, which is not to say they want negligence. Post-production efforts aren't required to go one step beyond, however, the approach and quality in which information is played out may make all the difference in the eyes of consumers.

User Generated Content - Word of Mouth Redux

User generated content varies from video clips, pictures, comments about brand products and

even reviews. Ratings and reviews may very well tip the scales on whether or not a user should buy a product from a brand.

User generated content can drive 6.9 times more engagement than a regular post posted by a brand[6], however quality content of this kind is very hard to come by. According to marketing platform, Mavrck, there are 3 types of UGC that build engagement: UGC that informs, UGC that inspires, and UGC that converts, the latter being the most valuable form of UGC for brand.

Additionally, for a user to want to speak their mind on a product or an idea, that message must be either aesthetically appealing or emotionally resonant. Nowadays, people are more susceptible to visual content rather than written[7].
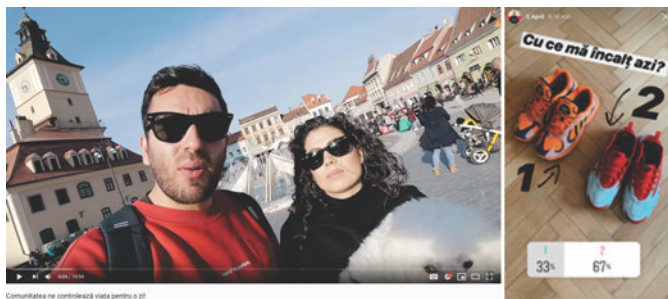
Take Marian and Georgiana Ionescu for example, old friends of the KFC brand who began a journey that explored User Generated Decisions, a campaign specially created for the KFC show, Random. Through the Random Challenge, the two content creators were guided for a day by their social media followers via Instagram polls.

Information To Go

It's true that our attention span has shortened, a truth made apparent by how we now process information. This means that the relationship between brand and consumer boils down to micro moments, a "do or bust" mentality in which every word, message or video needs to captivate and to convince. Whether it's through images, stories, live videos or user generated content, 2020 will be about the evolution of Generation Z and how they will use these new buying powers to influence how brands communicate.

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IT'S THE YEAR OF PODCASTS IN ROMANIA

Last year, we presented podcasts as a new communication trend, in an article written by Roxana Ionescu, Senior Digital Manager at Golin.

At that time, we were mentioning approximatively 30 Romanian podcasts, with another 20 active podcasts at the beginning of 2019.

Meanwhile, their numbers tripled. From about 50 podcasts, we've grown to over 150 in just one year.

It has become fashionable among content creators to start a podcast. We are living a moment similar to what happened in Romania in 2006-2007, when blogs were in trend, a period marked by a contagious enthusiasm.

And, just as with blogs, we will have a lot of noise until things settle down and podcasts are sifted. We will probably have at least 500 Romanian podcasts by the end of 2020, but some of them will have already been abandoned by their creators.

For now, there is a lot of potential, which has already been anticipated by agencies. Think Digital launched at the end of 2019 the first dedicated advertising network, **Think Digital Podcast Network**, with over 30 audio productions from different categories already included in the commercial offer for brands.

However, while there are dozens of content creators launching projects every month, podcasts have not yet gained enough traction, since it's a product mainly consumed by early adopters.

Comparing to what happens abroad, we realize that this is just the beginning. In the US, 30% of the population listens to podcasts at least once a month (that means about 90 million people, according to Edison Research).

In this case, it is not surprising the interest that Spotify has in this area. The American streaming service invested approximately $500 million in 2019 for podcasting services or networks (among others, they purchased the Anchor.fm platform). Recently, they also bought The Ringer network, which gathers over 30 podcasts with over 100 million monthly downloads, a team of 90 people and revenues of $15 million in 2018.

If we turn to China, the figures are impressive. Lizhi, one of the most important audio content platforms (podcasts and audiobooks) was recently listed on the Nasdaq Stock Exchange. Ximalaya, their main competitor, is preparing for the IPO in 2020. Lizhi had an average of 46.6 million active mobile users and **5.7 million content producers** in the third quarter of 2019.

Podcasts are a hot topic in Europe, too, with France

having more than 4 million monthly listeners in 2019, up 25% from 2018. Majelan, one of the major French platforms (along with Binge Audio and Louie Media), aims at becoming a "Netflix of podcasts" and has received funding of over 10 million euros in the past 2 years.

Majelan is based on a freemium system, with a lot of content available for free, and with a network of exclusive podcasts available based on a monthly subscription of 5 euros.

The main problem at the moment in Romania is that podcasts are difficult to discover. One can learn about them from friends, from various random recommendations, or from the proximal circle of connections on Facebook, Instagram or LinkedIn. This was one of the reasons why **StarCast.ro** was launched, **the first podcasting platform in Romania.**

StarCast has a threefold role:

- podcast directory listing all Romanian podcasts - new podcasts are added every day, the platform having over 150 Romanian podcasts at the time of launch;

- distribution channel for partner podcasts - platform users can listen to partner podcasts, which are highlighted by a "Listen" tag;
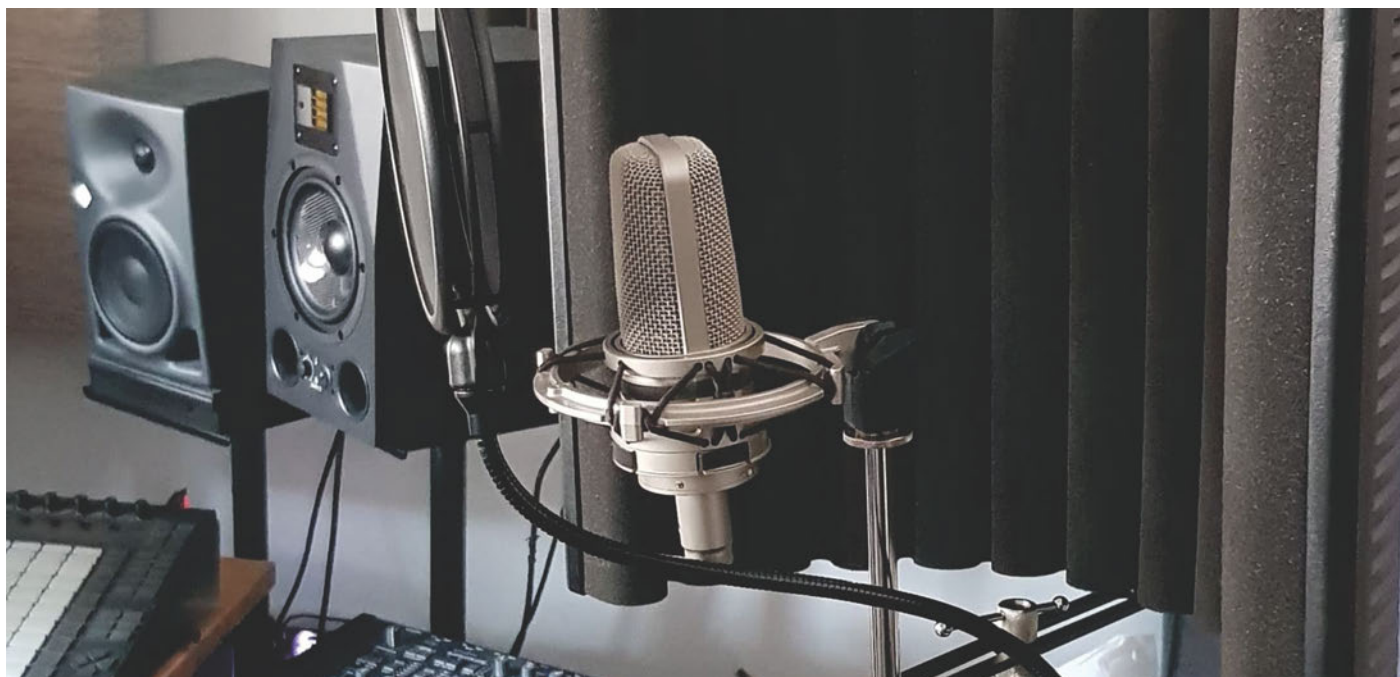
- podcast network – built from the podcast archive of the UrbanSunsets.com online radio, the StarCast+ network starts with 6 podcasts made by writer Marius Chivu (All you can read, All you can listen), radio anchors Mihai Dinu (Lista Dinu) and Bogdan Strătulă (UrbanSunsets, Mixtapes) and the author of this article, Alex Ciucă (Primii trei ani).

For brands, too, this is a trend worth addressing, given that the podcast can be the focal point in a content marketing strategy. Starting with a well-thought-out podcast, you can spread the word on social media (audio + video stories, quote posts), improve your brand's ranking in search engines (through transcripts and show notes), and build a community around the newsletter.

There are already several companies in Romania that have entered the conversation, either by sponsoring podcasts or by developing their own podcasts (which you can find in the Branded section on StarCast.ro). But, at the moment, there are many uncovered niches, from food to health and more. Brands that make such an effort on the long run will have a huge advantage when podcasts go mainstream..

In conclusion, the Romanian podcast market is just starting out, but there is a lot of room for growth. We need more complex productions, beyond the "general" niche of podcast-interviews, we need brand involvement and easy access to the many productions that have emerged. In 2020 some of these challenges will be solved, so that we can expect this phenomenon to truly boom..

Alex Ciucă
StarCast.ro Co-founder

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