WHAT IS A SOCIAL CAMPAIGN?

Objectives of an awareness campaign

The ultimate goal of any communication campaign is to trigger and promote change. A campaign is nothing more than a series of actions - spread over time - aimed at achieving one or more objectives. It implies a deep reflection on the current situation to be compared with an ideal future, not before having identified the factors or actions that can allow us to replicate it. Each campaign, therefore, involves a series of coordinated actions that can trigger or hinder change while spreading messages centered on an idea or goal. The success of a campaign depends on the interaction or type of support generated by the proposed goal or idea.

It is possible to classify communication campaigns according to the purposes for which they are designed:

- political campaigns, aimed at spreading the ideas or program of a particular political party or group;

- social utility campaigns (run by non-profit organizations), aimed at raising public awareness of issues of general interest based on humanitarian and solidarity values;

- social utility campaigns (by institutions), used by public authorities to disseminate information about the services offered, rights and duties of citizens;

- opinion campaigns, aimed at promoting consensus on controversial issues;

- advertising campaigns, communication activities implemented by organizations and businesses that offer goods and services and that use all the channels at their disposal to reach the widest possible audience in order to guide the choices of individuals and encourage them to "buy", as well as to improve the image of the advertised product or service and to counter the initiatives of competing businesses.

Most awareness-raising campaigns have an international resonance, aiming to raise funds, mobilize resources, people and organizations, and attract media attention. However, equally important are campaigns that involve small groups of people acting together in support of a cause they believe in.

The benefits of promoting awareness campaigns are manifold for community projects and services:

- creating awareness campaigns allows organizations, who wish to address a particular issue/need/problem, to broaden their reach and achieve their goals (e.g., an organization that disseminates information about sexual health can launch a campaign on contraception and reproductive health);

- awareness campaigns are a way to mobilize stakeholders outside the organization and encourage them to change their behaviors. In addition, they can persuade campaign recipients to demand a change in policies adopted at the national level (e.g., anti-smoking campaigns have helped enforce a ban on smoking in public spaces; think fundraising campaigns);

- at the same time, creating awareness-raising campaigns can help raise public awareness of issues that are being ignored in that context and encourage policymakers to stop burying their heads in the sand and address the problem (e.g., campaigns on mental health or against the sale of exotic animals);

- in some cases, the creation of awareness campaigns can help bring together different voices and actors with common ideas and goals in order to create a real force in the public arena (e.g., as is the case with referendum campaigns);

- National governments often launch awareness campaigns to highlight the risks of dangerous behavior (e.g., campaigns against drunk driving, pedophilia, or online child pornography) or to disseminate information about underutilized services (e.g., campaigns about fire prevention services).

What is an awareness campaign?

Raising public awareness is a key step toward creating an environment that is open to change. However, for change to occur, an effective awareness-raising campaign must also give recipients a concrete action in which to engage.

Campaigns that combine motivational and informational aspects make it possible to build a community that is aware of the possibility of making its own contribution, interested in the problem and aware of how this problem affects the internal dynamics and lives of citizens.

They have, therefore, both an "informative" and "transformative" intent and aim to:

- *push people to desire change;*
- *highlight the possibility of generating change;*
- *Identify actions that enable change to occur*

Awareness-raising campaigns provide information not only about an issue of public concern or possible solutions, but also about how those solutions can be implemented and sustained (e.g., think of the problem of drug shortages in animal shelters - the solution might be to give more support to animal shelters through the following activities: disseminating information, donating drugs or money, volunteering).
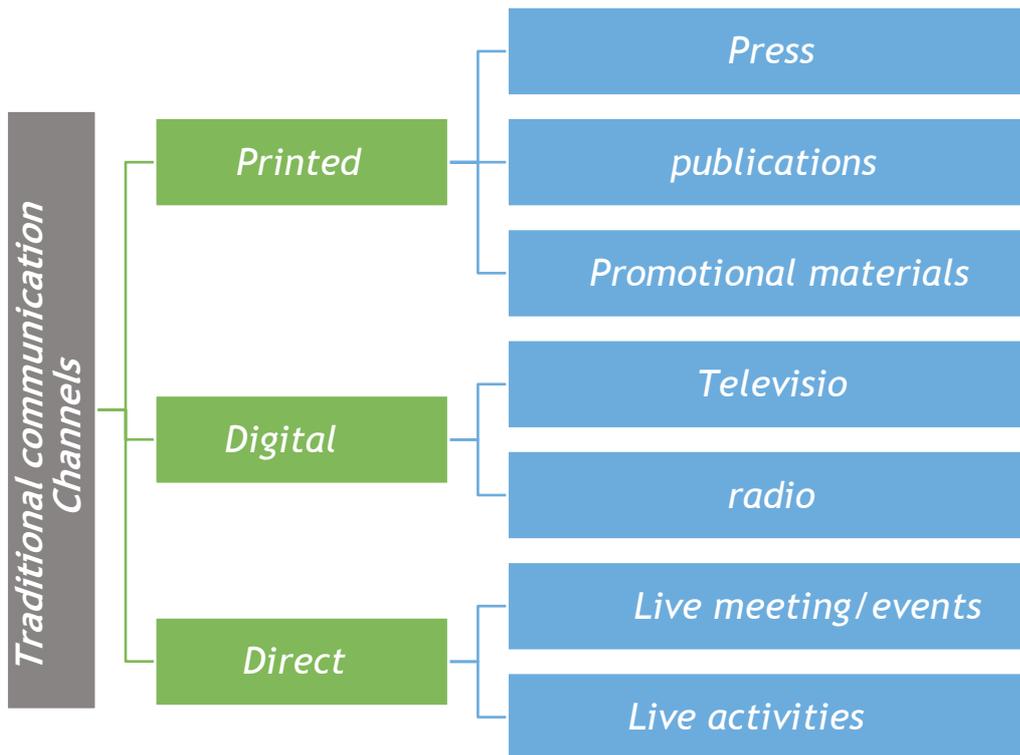
Media to be Used

When we talk about 'media', we are referring to communication channels (devices, tools) used to communicate, disseminate information, publicise or develop marketing actions and, in general, express and share views, opinions and ideas and interact with a wide audience. In order to spread the campaign message, it is necessary to use communication channels that make the information flow recognisable and accessible, as well as shared.

To be effective, communication activities must be coordinated in order to use the most appropriate communication channels for the target audience. We can define a campaign as successful when the objectives are achieved by getting the right message to the right people through the most appropriate communication channel. The The choice of communication channel contributes significantly to the success of the campaign, which is why it is important to know all the tools available. In any case, the best campaigns use several communication channels.

The benefits of promoting a multi-channel campaign are twofold, as it allows the same message to be repeated over and over again among those using multiple communication tools, and also reaches those who choose to inform themselves using only one tool.

It is possible to classify communication channels in this way:

Traditional Communication Channels

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    ├── Printed
    │       ├── Press
    │       ├── publications
    │       └── Promotional materials
    ├── Digital
    │       ├── Televisio
    │       └── radio
    └── Direct
            ├── Live meeting/events
            └── Live activities
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1) The classic or traditional media - i.e. those in vogue before the Internet age, including:

(a) PRINTED MEDIA:

They often get little attention but are excellent for reaching policy makers and opinion leaders. They are best suited to disseminating particularly complex and detailed messages to give the public an opportunity to re-read and reflect.

- Print: Newspapers, magazines and press releases

Before the rise of radio and television, the press was the only medium capable of disseminating authentic, verified and first-hand information. It enabled campaigners to describe their ideas and the issues to be addressed. The influence of the press is still significant, although the popularity of newspapers has declined due to the overwhelming power of the Internet where information is constantly updated.

- Publications: books, pamphlets, brochures

They serve to highlight the objectives of the campaign, relevant issues and arguments, guidelines that can contribute to its success. Appearance is key, therefore, booklets and brochures have an attractive design and colours.

- Promotional material: billboards, posters, brochures

Placed or distributed in public places, they are effective tools for reaching certain sections of the public (e.g. people usually excluded due to cognitive or sensory impairments). Their main characteristic is their ability to catch the eye thanks to short slogans that send incisive messages. They are easy to produce and not particularly expensive (costs only increase when large quantities are printed).

b) ELECTRONIC MEDIA - which the user can access only if he has an electrical connection:

- Radio and television

Radio and television are means of communication that appeal to the senses (hearing and sight) and are capable of reaching a very wide audience. However, they are not sufficient on their own, as it is not easy to remember the flow of information. Messages disseminated through these channels generally have a lot of credibility, but promoters have little control over the target reached. Moreover, the production process is rather expensive and, even if the costs of creative work are covered by others, a lot of time has to be spent on developing communication and networking strategies.

c) DIRECT MEDIA

- In-person activities and events: meetings, training courses, conferences, information points and word of mouth.

There is nothing better than an authentic discussion. In the course of in-person activities it is easier to control the message and make sure it gets across to the target group without intermediaries or other means. Such events give the opportunity to deepen the content of the campaign and to collect impressions, opinions and needs that were not identified in the analysis phase or that have emerged in that context and could influence the campaign.

It is not necessary to plan expensive events involving large numbers of employees or volunteers. Messages disseminated in this way have an average credibility - lower than that of newspapers or television (due to the fact that they are passed on by people who have a clear point of view), but higher than that of advertising (since the messages come directly from organisations who care about the fate of society). Moreover, they reach a small number of people: those who take part in the event.

This form of communication cannot be the only one chosen by campaign promoters: at the end of each event, it is important to produce videos, photos or articles or a short but incisive press release to be

spread on the internet, social media, but also in the press, in newspapers and on their websites, preferably combined with campaign material (such as infographics).

2) Digital or new media - i.e. all the tools used for communication on the Internet. The Internet has opened up new avenues for mass communication, helping to reconfigure it. Moreover, thanks to smartphones, it is possible to communicate anywhere and at any time:
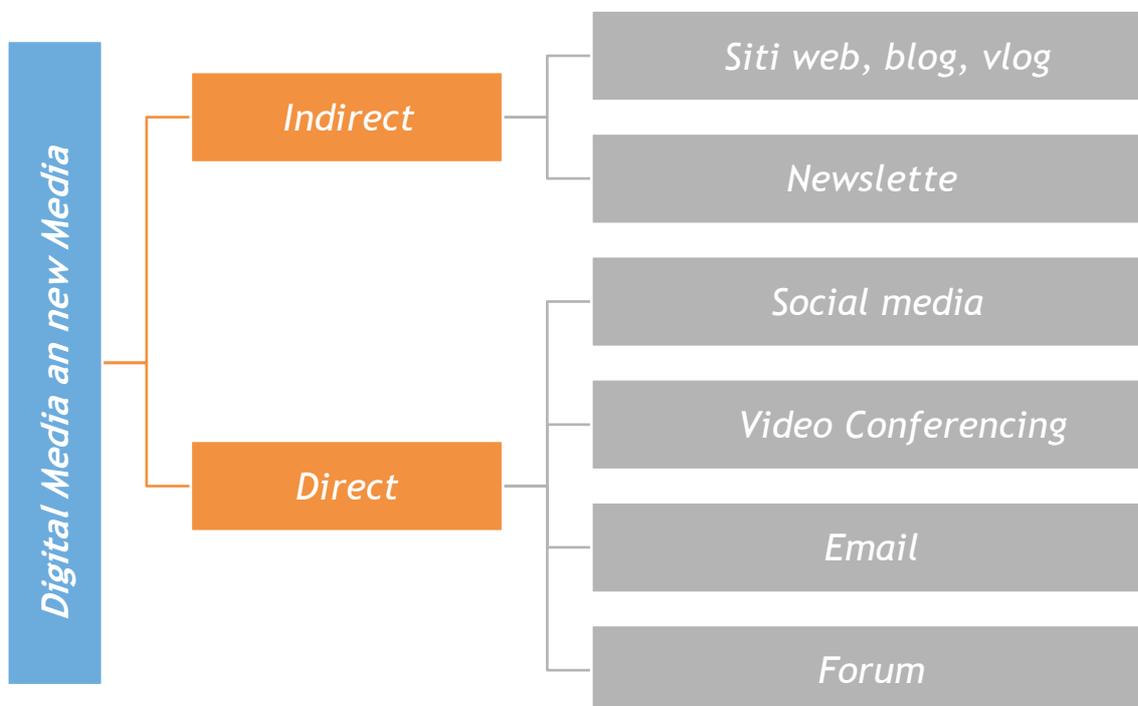
(a) INDIRECT

- Websites, blogs, vlogs

A blog is nothing more than a web page on which posts appear in anti-chronological order, readers are invited to participate in the conversation by leaving a comment. In contrast, a website can contain anything (information, files to download, other communication tools), is static and offers limited possibilities for interaction. Websites can contain different tools useful for communication, while blogs are mostly aimed at building a dialogue with readers.

- Newsletters

Newsletters are informative e-mails sent to subscribers of a dedicated mailing list. They make it possible to reach specific target groups. It is important that they are linked, whenever possible, to the campaign website and that they invite users to engage in specific activities.

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b) DIRECT

- Social media: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, etc.

Social media is an umbrella term referring to the set of online communication channels that are based on community building, interaction, content sharing and collaboration. They are based on building a relationship with the user/follower/contact and, for this, a lot of time is needed. Unlike radio or television, however, social media allow people to respond and react to information, interact with the channel by levelling out power relations and relying on word of mouth. However, one should not rely solely on social networks, especially for campaigns with a long duration. Times change, new social networks are born and die every day according to fashion, users easily migrate from one site to another.

FACEBOOK: *With over 1.6 billion users, Facebook is a platform frequented by people of all ages. It is a great tool for reaching all kinds of target groups globally. Paid advertisements can be added to Facebook to ensure that the campaign message reaches the desired target group.*

TWITTER: *This is based on constant updates, news and articles and hashtags. Hashtags help attract followers and are constantly changing according to popular trends.*

LINKEDIN: *is the most suitable social media for businesses and those who want to carry out networking activities. It allows you to reach every group of professionals. Businesses find the features offered by LinkedIn groups where professionals can exchange information extremely useful.*

INSTAGRAM: *is an increasingly popular platform that allows users to share photos accompanied by short texts. Perfect for those who want to intercept the target of millennials and for campaigns with high quality visual content. Every communication activity on Instagram must focus on pushing users to post and share new photos using hashtags.*

YOUTUBE: *is the second most important search engine in the world (owned by Google). It is based on uploading and sharing videos, which is why it is extremely useful for those who have a campaign idea that includes videos, interviews, speeches, and so on..*

Snapchat, Pinterest, Tumblr, Flickr and the other social networks are very popular and interesting, but their number of users is very small compared to those mentioned above.

- Video conferencing and video chat

Video chats provide a fluid dialogue between people far apart - they allow you to spread the campaign message in different places, ignoring the limitations imposed by an in-person conversation.

- Email

Designed to mimic traditional letters, they allow people to communicate with one or more recipients, facilitating networking activities. Messages are usually text but can also include attachments such as images or short videos.

- Forums

Are based on multiple, potentially endless conversations hosted on the web. The pool of interested users depends on the popularity of the topic being addressed. Discussions usually revolve around a narrow topic, extend over months or years, and involve dozens, if not hundreds, of participants.

Launch a social media awareness campaign

The advent and spread of new technologies and the internet have allowed people to access information at any time. The new digital tools are more flexible, open to all thanks to the multiplicity of resources and have unlimited potential. Today it is possible to communicate anywhere and at any time. However, it is always advisable to integrate media in order to exploit their full potential. The choice of tools to combine with social media varies depending on the content of the campaign. Campaigns that try to combine the use of social media with 3 to 5 other media are the most effective.

While it may seem extremely simple from a technical standpoint, those who choose to start a social media campaign must think long and hard about the following aspects:

- *the type of message to be spread;*

- *The way the message will be delivered;*

- *how to make the message interesting to users.*

The Internet has created a space for a huge variety of communication channels: today you can write posts on a blog, on a website, on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, create Google ads, send emails, etc. But social networks are not all the same: each of them has a different purpose and it is important to select them according to the purposes of the campaign and the designated target group.

In fact, social networks differ based on the type of users who use them. Some are generalists, such as Facebook; others have a fairly homogeneous user base, such as Snapchat, used mostly by the very young. Instagram and Facebook are perfect for targeting millennials - while the former is not very popular with the baby boomer generation. It's important to know which social networks are best suited to reach the campaign's target group.

The message should be in line with the chosen channel. Therefore, the next step in the communication strategy is to align the message with the characteristics of the social network, taking into account the differences presented above.

Engage in conversation

Social media isn't just a huge bulletin board that allows you to display messages. Content on social media is a stream of opinion continually enriched by users. No matter how many likes a piece of content is capable of generating, it will not be useful for campaign purposes if it fails to also engage users.

Interactions are nothing more than the reactions generated by a message, and they ask the content creator to enter into an ongoing dialogue with recipients. Reactions such as comments, likes, shares and other activities provided by the social network are means potentially capable of engaging users in a personal dialogue.

Whoever promotes an awareness campaign must add value to the conversation and take advantage of every opportunity, in this sense, to get the message and activities related to the campaign across. By engaging in dialogue with users, it is possible to reduce their mistrust of the campaign, its promoters and their proposals. In order to gain the trust and interest of users, campaign promoters should always be ready to respond to their comments and questions: only then will they feel appreciated and therefore more likely to accept the campaign message and understand how their problems can be addressed and resolved. In this way, they will feel valued and therefore more likely to embrace the campaign message and understand how their problems can be addressed and resolved.

It is important, therefore, to remember to:

- Do not repeat the same message or concept over and over again. Communication must evolve with the recipients: if it remains flat and static, it will not get the kind of attention and success desired;

- Don't be too pushy. The general rule is to start from a common and generic topic - related to the post or theme from which the dialogue originated - or even from a user comment. Then, once the dialogue has started, find in the user reasons of interest and understand what kind of approach to use to generate more interactions.

In addition, conversations with social media users can provide valuable insights and suggestions for improving the campaign: negative comments or criticism are opportunities to make changes and engage with the audience. When we welcome negative feedback, the user feels heard and appreciated and therefore ready to interact.

Dialogue on social networks should be promoted not only through official channels, but also through groups, communities and other spaces related to the campaign theme.

DEFINE THE COMMUNICATION PLAN

Once the theme, context, audience and other means of communication have been identified, the next step is to define the communication plan, budget and resources allocated to disseminate the strategy. It is important to have these documents in place, especially in case of difficulties.

The communication plan must also include the schedule of activities with clear deadlines that will help evaluate the campaign and define the results and any changes in order to achieve the final objective. It is also essential to include events and publications to be prepared.

An appropriate communications plan must take into account the following aspects:

- *chosen means of communication*

- *Creation of messages in the required format for each channel;*

- *Budget for implementing campaign activities through the selected channels;*

- *initiatives to implement each campaign activity;*

- *schedule: duration of the campaign and planned activities;*

- *objectives to be achieved;*

actions to be taken in order to achieve each objective, distribute tasks and set deadlines.

The program and the list of activities to be carried out constitute the most important part of the communication plan. Each activity should be considered as a separate project that will contribute to the achievement of the campaign objectives. Here are some examples of activities: creating a visual identity, networking with local decision-makers, filming an event to be broadcast online, etc.

Monitoring and evaluation of results

It is necessary to evaluate the impact of the campaign on the target group. Was it successful? Was it able to attract interest and engage the target audience? The ability to measure progress and evaluate results enables you to produce more effective content over the course of the campaign by constantly analyzing the reactions of the target group. In addition, it screens the usefulness of the campaign in achieving the overall goal, gathering feedback and elements to use in subsequent phases.

Monitoring and evaluation should focus on:

***activities** - assessing the results of what has been done based on the campaign program;*

***content** - verifying that the messages conveyed by the campaign have reached the target audience (e.g., the number of readers of an article or visitors to a site, number of visitors to an exhibit, or comments collected during the focus group);*

Reactions - verify that the target audience understood the campaign message (through qualitative research, surveys or interviews). What the recipients understood is more important than the meaning of the message itself;

outcomes - assessing effects: what progress was made in changing public opinion and behavior as a result of the campaign's efforts, significant changes that helped the campaign achieve its goals;

impact: the effects of the campaign on the programs, systems, or attitudes it was intended to change.

Tag to be used in our social campaign

@ecaonlus

@ideaeuropa

@youth_bridges_budapest

@a.t.i.c._romania

@Εύνικος Στάδιο Evnikos Stadium

@Veiklus žmogus

Hashtag to be used in our social campaign

#Gendereequality

#Europeanfunds

#Sportshavenogender

#Erasmusplus