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## TRANSFORMATIONAL OR INFORMATIONAL HOLIDAYS? AN ANALYSIS OF THE MESSAGE STRATEGIES FOR TECHNOLOGY BRANDS IN ROMANIA

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**Abstract.** In today's digital landscape, social media platforms, particularly Facebook, play a pivotal role in shaping consumer-brand interactions, especially in high-interest sectors such as the smartphone market in Romania. This study investigates which message strategies are associated with higher levels of user engagement on the Facebook pages of two leading smartphone brands, Samsung and Xiaomi. The research explores the dynamics between messaging strategies (informational and transformational) and user engagement, providing insights into the digital advertising strategies adopted by these brands during the crucial holiday shopping season. The findings suggest that the informational dimension, notably ration message strategy, generated different types of engagement. In particular, ration led to higher levels of sharing than ego. Furthermore, regarding reactions, ration resulted in greater engagement than ego, routine and sensory. This research contributes to understanding digital consumer engagement and provides valuable insights for marketers seeking to optimize social media strategies in the competitive smartphone market.

**Keywords:** digital engagement, digital persuasion, Facebook, like, comment, share

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## 1. Introduction

The evolution of digital platforms has opened new communication opportunities for companies, and digital communication strategies have become a pillar in brand communication (Anton, 2020, p. 76). In Romania, despite the TikTok app's rapid growth, Facebook remains the main social media platform (Statista, 2024a). Due to its widespread adoption, Facebook is also a brand promotion tool, while global digital advertising budgets have surpassed traditional promotion budgets (Statista, 2024b). The most prosperous season for the advertising industry is Christmas. In Romania, local brands actively launch communication campaigns specific to the holiday period (IQads, 2021, 2022, 2023). According to a study, during the holiday season, 28% of the Romanians' budget is used for Christmas gifts, and 14% of people want to receive gadget gifts (e.g., smartphones) (Reveal Marketing Research, 2023).

With a considerable share of Romanians' spending on Christmas presents, including a preference for gadgets such as smartphones, understanding the dynamics of consumer engagement on social media is crucial for brands such as Samsung and Xiaomi, which have a significant share of the Romanian smartphone market. In terms of the gadget market in Romania, Samsung occupies 44.44% of the smartphone market, Apple 24.03%, and Xiaomi 8.5% (Statcounter, 2024), a ranking that is consistent with the global mobile phone market (Counterpoint, 2024). Romanians buy 3 million smartphones annually (Barza, 2023).

Starting from Kim & Yang's (2017) message strategies (informational versus transformational), this study explores the complex relationship between these strategies and user engagement on Samsung and Xiaomi's Facebook pages. By studying 67 posts from both brands in December 2023, this research seeks to explore how these different messaging strategies correlate with user engagement on a platform that remains a dominant force in the Romanian social media landscape.

Social media engagement, characterized by likes, shares, and comments, plays a crucial role in determining the visibility and success of brand communication on platforms such as Facebook (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, pp. 63-64), which prioritizes interactivity in its algorithms (Macready, 2024). This study examines the effectiveness of informational and

transformational message dimensions in engaging users. It investigates the broader implications of such engagement for brand promotion and audience reach in the digital sphere. As brands attempt to operate in a competitive and dynamic business environment, understanding how digital engagement is essential to creating communication strategies that appeal to audiences, enhance brand visibility, and eventually contribute to business growth in the digital realm.

## **2. Companies, social media, and engagement**

Consumer engagement has become particularly important in today's digital environment, where everyone can communicate about anything at any time (Liu et al., 2018, p. 2). The advancement of technology has made customer engagement a prevalent practice specific to the online environment (Wirtz et al., 2013, p. 224). Engagement is a significant factor in a brand's success on social media. It is used both as an element of interaction between the brand and the audience (Kabadayi & Price, 2014, p. 203) and as an asset that can directly grow the business.

A brand with a high level of engagement becomes more attractive to other users who are likely to interact with the content, increasing the brand's awareness potential (Macready, 2024). Online engagement is also seen as a co-creation between a brand and its users. According to Lusch and Vargo (2006, pp. 283-284), customer co-creation means involving the customer in creating the product offering.

Collaboration between the brand and its consumers can lead to the beneficial effects of co-creation, where the brand and its customers work together to add value to the products/company, such as improving existing services, creating content, or generating new and innovative perspectives, technology can facilitate this process through convenient accessibility and live interaction (Zhang et al., 2018, p. 64). Through their activities, users who interact via features such as "like" or "comment" contribute in one way or another to the company's innovation and thereby create value for the company (Zhang et al., 2018, p. 58).

The benefits of engagement in social media are linked to positive attitudes towards the brand and increased purchase intent (Zhang et al.,

2018, p. 57). Although there may be minor differences in views, marketing researchers agree that consumer engagement is a multifaceted construct encompassing various dimensions and motivations for consumer interaction with brands and communities (Baldus et al., 2015, p. 979). Consumer engagement has also been linked to activities that can significantly impact brand perception and value (Schivinski et al., 2016, p. 74), contributing to its online reputation, while co-creation in the digital environment was found to increase purchase intentions for smartphones (Rao et al., 2021, p. 317).

Since 2016, Facebook's strategy has been to focus on *interactivity*. The algorithm supports posts that encourage interaction, such as those popular in a user's circle of friends (Oremus et al., 2021).

Many researchers have offered definitions of engagement as an essential component of the new communication environments. According to Santos et al. (2022, p. 2), consumer brand engagement refers to the interaction of brand communities in social media, where the community is involved with the brand, its products, the company, and other customers. Baldus et al. (2015, p. 979) conceptualize engagement in terms of consumer activity as the compelling, intrinsic motivation to continue interacting with an online brand community.

Each engagement action weighs differently in Facebook's algorithm and thus can decide whether a post can appear on a consumer's screen (Kim & Yang, 2017, p. 441).

In this context, understanding how engagement works is essential for a company's growth in the digital landscape.

### **3. Engagement features**

Social media platforms use ranking algorithms to give higher visibility to content with higher engagement (e.g., more comments) (Gagliardi, 2024). Engagement is also particularly significant in increasing a post's popularity. Factors such as the number of reactions (e.g., likes), comments, or shares can influence whether a post is of value to other users and whether it deserves to be promoted higher by the algorithm (Macready, 2024).

One of the largest companies allowing the use of different forms of engagement is Facebook. As the most used social media platform in Romania, with an adoption rate of 88.7% (Statista, 2024c), Facebook allows companies to create their brand page where content can be posted to engage with the community (Gummerus et al., 2012, pp. 857-858). The algorithm considers various forms of engagement with Facebook posts or pages when deciding whether or not a post is worth showing to a user (Facebook, 2024). In turn, users can interact with posts, and these activities create stronger connections in brand-consumer relationships (Wallace et al., 2012, p. 140).

Yet, Facebook's algorithm has been transformed over time and has been associated with significant changes in the way the platform interacts with users (Oremus et al., 2021). Engagement, however, has continued to be a key pillar that may determine the success of a post and of the Facebook page as a whole, resulting in business growth in the online environment (Lipsman et al., 2012; Wiener, 2021).

Like, share, or comment activity on social media for posts created and shared by brands is an essential factor to consider when developing a company's social media strategy (Kabadayi & Price, 2014, p. 218). When a brand prioritizes acquiring engaged communities, it can also gain significant exposure within its network (Lipsman et al., 2012, p. 40).

Consumer engagement is essential in understanding a company's social media performance. At the same time, it serves a number of functions that directly or indirectly affect a company's online performance. A brand's Facebook engagement rate has a direct impact on the success of a post shared by the company by increasing the likelihood of its spread (Pletikosa & Michahelles, 2011, p. 168), but also includes several valuable characteristics with indirect value, such as brand loyalty (Roberts & Alpert, 2010, p. 204). Similarly, user engagement can be instrumental in creating stronger emotional connections that generate higher levels of trust between consumers and companies (Sashi, 2012, p. 268).

Consumer behavior in social networks is based on three layers: low, medium, and high (Kim & Yang, 2017, p. 442). Each level of engagement is associated with behavior defined as consumption, contribution and creation (Muntinga et al., 2011, p.16). The type of behavior users engage

in online is related to the cognitive effort they spend performing an action. For example, a creative process (e.g., writing) is more cognitively demanding than a passive process, such as consuming online content (e.g., reading) (Piolat et al., 2005, pp. 305-306).

The COBRA typology (Muntinga et al., 2011, pp. 15-18) implies multiple actions specific to a given type of behavior. Content consumption is associated with low user engagement and involves passive activities. According to Muntinga et al. (2011, p.16), these could be watching brand-related videos, listening to brand-related audio, viewing brand-related images, reading product reviews, downloading branded widgets, and reading comments on brand profiles on social networking sites. Contributing is associated with a higher level of engagement, as it involves user participation in the following forms: rating products and brands, participating in brand conversations, commenting on brand-related weblogs, video, audio, images, etc. (Muntinga et al., 2011, p. 16). Finally, content creation is the highest form of engagement, as it involves increased cognitive effort, such as publishing a brand-related weblog; uploading a brand-related video, audio, images, or pictures; writing brand-related articles; writing product reviews; or creating brand-related content (Muntinga et al., 2011, p.16)

In an analysis of Facebook behavior, Kim and Yang (2017) associate specific behaviors with user actions on the platform according to the level of engagement. Like is considered the action with the lowest engagement rank from the user, as it requires a single click. At the same time, commenting and sharing require additional actions specific to higher cognitive effort, while sharing may require more cognitive effort because it involves self-representation.

### *Liking*

Social media brand pages can act as a tool for interaction between customers and brands, offering the possibility to communicate through different types of functions such as “like,” “comment,” and “share” (Kujur & Singh, 2017, p. 17). Users of the Facebook platform can express their preference for certain types of brands through the “like” function.

Through the “like” button, liking a brand allows individuals to directly affirm their interest in a particular type of content or brand. This interest may be rooted in factors such as “subscribing” to a brand’s mode of communication or self-expression (Lipsman et al., 2012, p. 43).

The engagement tools provided by Facebook represent a dialogical mode of communication between the user and the brand that can strengthen the relationship. However, each engagement action has a different implication in the user-brand-audience relationship and the algorithm. Facebook has made updates that allow users to communicate affection and messages that convey empathy with a simple click (Heath, 2016). As of 2016, the iconic “like” button is accompanied by five other types of emoji that express multiple types of reactions: “love,” “haha,” “wow,” “sad,” and “angry” (Kokalitcheva, 2016).

### *Commenting*

The average person posts about 5 comments monthly on Facebook (Datareportal, 2023). Comments provide both a technical and interactive role between brands and consumers or between consumers of the brand itself. Engagement through comments has become an established practice in digital marketing campaigns for the advantage it offers on the algorithm since comments are more valued than likes in terms of engagement (Adobe, 2023).

With the development of Web 2.0 technologies that have enabled dialogic communication between brands and users, the importance of user comments in the online experience has become a research focus (Houston et al., 2011, p. 80). A prominent factor in the research is the impact of comments on brand perception due to the impersonalization of people and their tendency to conform to in-group standards, in this instance, comments, at a perceptive, affective, and behavioral level. Thus, this theory indicates the power of comments on a brand, where communication plays a role in forming group norms and influencing group behavior and perception (Hogg & Reid, 2006, p. 23).

### *Sharing*

On average, Facebook users share 4.75 billion items daily (Fu et al., 2017, p. 23). There can be many reasons why users share content, but several features are constant in the literature (Mehdizadeh, 2010; Tennie et al., 2010; Tierney, 2010; Collins, 2015): (1) providing valuable or entertaining content to others, (2) defining ourselves to others, (3) self-promotion, (4) being about other consumers, (5) self-fulfillment, (6) promoting causes and brands. All these situations have in common the sharing of content, which, in one way or another, implies an association between the user and the content. Once shared, the content is spread on the user's page or channel, creating a link between the post and the user. Van Dijck (2013, pp. 211-212) notes that social media users take a strategic approach to self-presentation. When they present content on Facebook, they are attentive to the audience's evaluation (Rui & Stefanone, 2013, p. 1299).

### **4. Message dimensions and strategies**

Message dimensions are divided into two categories based on rational and emotional components: informational and transformational (Wells, 1980, apud Kim & Yang, 2017, p. 443)

The informational dimension addresses people's cognition, while the transformational dimension is linked to their emotional nature. According to Puto & Wells (1984, apud Cadet et al., 2017, p. 120), for an ad to be considered transformational, it must meet two criteria: (1) it must make the experience of using the product more exciting and enjoyable than it would be through an objective description of the product alone, and (2) the experience of the advertisement must be closely related to the experience of using the brand/product so that users associate the brand with the experience created by the advertisement. The informational dimension is observed in an advertisement when (1) factual information about the product is presented, (2) the advertisement presents information that is important to consumers, and (3) it provides data about customers that consumers accept as verifiable (Puto & Wells, 1984, apud Cadet et al., 2017, p. 120).



Cadet et al. (2017, p. 119) observe the major difference between the two dimensions. They suggest that the emotional ad format is driven by positive and negative feelings, resulting in a level of credibility, while the rational ad format is driven by the level of credibility, followed by positive and negative feelings.

This study includes the message strategies and dimensions addressed by Kim and Yang (2017) and includes the three message strategies for each dimension, as observed in Table 1. For the informational dimension, ration explains the user's need to access information about the product, service, or organization, including product features (Kim & Yang, 2017, p. 43), for example, price, battery life, or storage. Product features are the most influential factor in persuading users to buy a smartphone (Ling et al., 2007, p.161; Rahman & Sultana, 2022, p.10). Acute needs refer to the immediate need to satisfy a need and is usually related to urgent situations, while routine refers to the messages that are not explicitly emphasised by an effective strategy but which address people's repetitive activities (Kim & Yang, 2017, p. 43)

The transformational dimension also includes three strategies. Ego appeals to the user's ego and is related to the user's self-perception. Social is based on people's desire for social recognition. The sensory dimension appeals to the person's senses: touch, sight, hearing, smell, and taste, and provides information that appeals to those senses (Kim & Yang, 2017, p. 43)

Given the importance of Facebook engagement for a brand's business growth and the significance of message strategies, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the most used message strategy for Samsung and Xiaomi brands during the holiday season?

RQ2: What message strategy generates the best engagement for Samsung and Xiaomi brands?

RQ3: How were the Christmas messages present in the posts of the two brands?

## 5. Method

This study focused on a content analysis of Facebook posts by two technology companies: Samsung and Xiaomi. The purpose of the analysis was to observe the differences between two brands that have a different positioning and approach in the Romanian market. Since Apple does not have a Facebook page, it was removed from the analysis and replaced with the 3rd place, Xiaomi.

All posts from 1-31 December, 2023 ( $N = 67$ ) on the Samsung and Xiaomi Romanian Facebook pages were analyzed. The posts were extracted using CrowdTangle software that provides reports with tracking metrics of engagement on the post across Facebook. One-way ANOVA with Post-Hoc Tukey test was used for statistical analysis.

Table 1

Coding scheme, adapted from Kim & Yang (2017)

Message Strategy	
Ration (informational)	Message assuming an audience that makes decisions based on rational considerations; solutions to problems are provided; highlighting distinguishing features or competitive edges. E.g., "Main camera has 50MP and it pairs with the macro camera of 2MP" (Xiaomi Romania Facebook post, December 9, 2023).
Acute needs (informational)	When faced with a constrained timeframe to make a decision, swift action is needed. E.g., "Now it's the chance to win your phone" (Xiaomi Romania Facebook post, December 20, 2023).
Routine (informational)	Message making a reference to conversion behavior that does not require thoughtful consideration. Standard tactics may include message exaggeration and brand corporate recognition. E.g., "Meet the new Galaxy phones" (Samsung Romania Facebook post, December 1, 2023).
Ego (transformational)	A message focusing on vanity and self realization; satisfying emotional needs related to one's self. E.g., "Make epic moments with the camera that transforms your pictures into art pieces" (Samsung Romania Facebook post, December 15, 2023).

Social (transformational)	Message focusing on the value of others' perceptions (opinions, judgments); mentioning social interactions and contexts; members of the target being marked as socially significant to others. E.g., "The new Xiaomi Pro keeps you connected with your dear ones (Xiaomi Romania Facebook post, December 1, 2023)".
Sensory (transformational)	Message appealing to the human's senses; focused on sensory satisfaction. E.g., "Want to see a Christmas movie while drinking hot chocolate? (Samsung Romania Facebook post, December 31, 2023)".

The specific coding for each post was divided into the three elements of engagement: reactions, comments, and shares (see Table 2).

Table 2

Interactions with Samsung and Xiaomi Facebook Pages

Brands	Total Posts	Total Interactions	Reactions	Comments	Shares
Samsung	30	3231	2860	277	94
Xiaomi	37	36206	30302	4717	1187

As observed in Table 2, Xiaomi ( $n = 37$ ) had more posts than Samsung ( $N = 30$ ) which triggered more reactions, comments, and shares.

## 6. Results

### 6.1. Message type and engagement

We examined the effectiveness of different messaging strategies used by Samsung and Xiaomi on their Facebook pages, categorized into informational (ration, acute needs, routine) and transformational (ego, social, sensory) dimensions in terms of engagement. Our analysis focuses on the differences between these strategies and user engagement metrics such as comments, shares, and reactions.

RQ 1 examined which message strategy is the most used for Samsung and Xiaomi.

The analysis revealed that the most frequently used message strategy is ration (informational) for both Samsung (53,3%,  $N = 16$ ) and Xiaomi (37,8%,  $N = 14$ ). In the case of Samsung, the following two strategies used are exclusively in the informational dimension with routine (20%,  $N = 6$ ) and acute needs (13,3%,  $N = 4$ ), which are followed by social (6.6%,  $N = 2$ ), ego (3.3%,  $N = 1$ ), and sensory (3.3%,  $n = 1$ ). The following two strategies Xiaomi used are in the transformational dimension with social (32,43%,  $N = 12$ ) and ego (10,8%,  $N = 4$ ). These are followed by acute needs (8.1%,  $N = 3$ ), routine (5.4%,  $N = 2$ ), and sensory (8.1%,  $N = 2$ ).

The results show that Samsung's holiday communication strategy is mostly informational, while Xiaomi's strategy combines both.

RQ 2 asked what message strategy drives the best engagement for Samsung and Xiaomi brands.

To answer this question, we performed One-Way ANOVA with Post-Hoc tests.

### *Liking*

For Xiaomi, ration displayed a significant difference in how message strategies generated engagement. Ration ( $M = 794$ ,  $SD = 464.90$ ) led to more reactions than routine ( $M = 163.14$ ,  $SD = 414.70$ ),  $p < 0.05$ , ego ( $M = 105.64$ ,  $SD = 232.39$ ),  $p < 0.01$ , and sensory ( $M = 11.5$ ,  $SD = 284.93$ ),  $p < 0.01$ . No significant results were found between the other types of message strategies: acute needs ( $M = 345.64$ ,  $SD = 925.02$ ), and social ( $M = 644.50$ ,  $SD = 457.96$ ).

The One-Way ANOVA showed no significant effect of content type on the reactions for Samsung,  $F(5, 23) = 1.42$ ,  $p = 0.2217$ . This finding suggests that users' reactions to posts did not depend on whether the post was informational or transformational. Therefore, while users may not be more likely to interact with a post of a particular content type, other factors not analyzed here may influence their engagement. On the informational dimension, ration ( $M = 91.25$ ,  $SD = 192.72$ ) did not lead to more reactions than acute needs ( $M = 12.37$ ,  $SD = 36.55$ ) or routine ( $M = 10.43$ ,  $SD = 14.37$ ). There were also no significant differences between the message strategies used in the transformational dimension,

ego ( $M = 3.68$ ,  $SD = 14.75$ ), social ( $M = 54.12$ ,  $SD = 210.70$ ), sensory ( $M = 6.87$ ,  $SD = 27.50$ ),  $F(5, 23) = 1.42$ ,  $p = 0.2217$ .

### *Commentting*

The analysis of Samsung Facebook posts showed that on the informational dimension, ration ( $M = 6.31$ ,  $SD = 4.96$ ) did not generate significantly more comments than acute needs ( $M = 4.00$ ,  $SD = 14.17$ ) or routine ( $M = 1.18$ ,  $SD = 1.79$ ). There were also no significant differences between the message strategies used in the transformational dimension, ego ( $M = 0.62$ ,  $SD = 2.50$ ), social ( $M = 0.93$ ,  $SD = 2.56$ ), and sensory ( $M = 4.25$ ,  $SD = 17.00$ ),  $F(5, 23) = 0.96$ ,  $p = 0.4444$ . These results showed that the type of content, whether informational or transformational, does not significantly influence the number of comments the posts receive.

The results of the analysis of Xiaomi's Facebook posts showed that there was no statistically significant difference in the number of comments between these categories. The three types attributed to both informational and transformational dimensions did not lead to a significant number of comments with ration ( $M = 27.21$ ,  $SD = 23.92$ ), acute needs ( $M = 241.50$ ,  $SD = 873.63$ ), routine ( $M = 2.21$ ,  $SD = 6.02$ ), ego ( $M = 36.14$ ,  $SD = 127.85$ ), social ( $M = 26.71$ ,  $SD = 26.64$ ), sensory ( $M = 3.14$ ,  $SD = 9.47$ ),  $F(5, 25) = 90$ ,  $p = 0.4808$ . The results showed that regardless of the type of content, it did not affect the audience to post comments. For Xiaomi, acute needs showed a high mean for comments compared to other message strategies, but the high standard deviation suggests this may be due to anomalies,  $p > 0.05$ .

Although the results did not display significant results, we can see a difference in mean values. For each post category, Xiaomi had a higher average number of comments than Samsung. In the case of Xiaomi, a single post generated a high number of comments ( $N = 3276$ ). The post is a giveaway involving an acute needs message strategy for holidays. It encourages people to leave comments on the post quickly to enter a contest for winning a mobile phone: "The holidays are magical with a Redmi Note 12 Pro 5G in hand, and now's your chance to win it! Enter the giveaway and be renewed with a prize from Xiaomi. All you have to

do is: Tell us in the comments: What Holiday moment would you immortalize if you won a Redmi Note 12 Pro 5G?" (Xiaomi Romania Facebook post, December 12, 2023).

### *Sharing*

The results of the one-way ANOVA indicated a significant difference between content types for Samsung,  $F(5, 23) = 2.50, p < 0.05$ . This suggests that certain types of content on the Samsung Facebook page were more likely to be shared than others. Ration (informational) had the highest mean of shares ( $M = 2.62, SD = 1.40$ ),  $F(2.50), p < 0.05$ , suggesting that the ration dimension might be particularly effective in generating shares. Among the six types, ration and ego ( $M = 0.18, SD = 0.75$ ) seemed to differ in how often they are shared, with ration content being shared more often than ego ( $p = 0.02$ ). There were no significant results found between the other types of message strategies: acute needs ( $M = 0.75, SD = 2.23$ ), routine ( $M = 0.75, SD = 1.06$ ), social ( $M = 1.00, SD = 3.74$ ), and sensory ( $M = 0.56, SD = 2.25$ ).

For Xiaomi the ANOVA results did not reveal a significant difference in shares between the message strategies with ration ( $M = 7.28, SD = 4.84$ ), acute needs ( $M = 63.85, SD = 230.64$ ), routine ( $M = 1.21, SD = 3.14$ ), ego ( $M = 5.42, SD = 16.79$ ), social ( $M = 6.00, SD = 5.90$ ), sensory ( $M = 1.00, SD = 2.54$ ),  $F(5, 25) = 0.94, p = 0.4592$ . Therefore, it can be inferred that the type of content did not significantly affect how often posts were shared on Xiaomi's Facebook page.

The results of One-Way Anova with Post-Hoc test showed that for Samsung, the informational dimension appears to be the most effective in generating shares. At the same time, the analysis suggests no significant difference between the two strategies for comments and reactions. For Xiaomi, the informational dimension significantly drove more reactions, indicating that it is highly effective. Another messaging strategy, acute needs (informational), showed high means for both comments and shares, but these appeared to be influenced by outliers, and there was no statistical significance to establish.

The research suggests that informational strategies, particularly ration, could be beneficial for both brands in engaging their audiences. However, it is also important to consider the variability and presence of outliers.

### *6.2. Christmas message in online posts of technology brands*

Samsung and Xiaomi had integrated ration in their communication by linking across the holiday context in posts such: “Discover the joy of capturing epic Christmas moments with a 50MP camera” (Samsung Romania Facebook post, December 16, 2023), or “Enjoy the immersive Christmas experience of a 6.74-inch display.” (Xiaomi Romania Facebook post, December 12, 2023). Although some posts had keywords referring to Christmas such as “Carols”, “Santa Claus” or “Holiday cheer” they contain mainly rational messages that present information about the product (E.g., more prominent display, better camera).

The posts that included ration focused on messages describing the technological capabilities of the phones, such as battery life, screen response time (0.03ms), or refresh rate (240Hz). Although the messages were aimed at a holiday context, such as “Light up the holiday magic with perfect photos on the new long exposure Samsung camera” (Samsung Romania Facebook post, December 21, 2023), they were only used as introductory messages to convey factual product information. Samsung’s second day of Christmas’ post received 58 reactions and addressed a rational messaging strategy: “Longer exposure time ensures the image quality of your photos. Learn quick and easy tips from the Holiday Picks&Tricks series,” (Samsung Romania Facebook post, December 26, 2023). This message begins with a rational message that references a mobile camera benefit, and then contextualizes the post with keywords that reference the holidays, such as “Holiday Picks & Tricks.”

The social strategy was also linked to increasing smartphone buying behavior (Rai et al., 2022, p. 19). In Xiaomi’s case, the social strategy focuses entirely on messaging that addresses Christmas, despite ration being the most used strategy in December’s posts. With keywords such as “gifts,” “light and joy,” or “magic” that are integrated into the context of friendship or family, Xiaomi has a communication focused

entirely on the holidays and the related context. The message that got the most interactions ( $N = 1985$ ), for to the social category is the Christmas greeting: “We wish you a Merry Christmas full of light and joy with your family! Don’t forget that Xiaomi technologies bring you a touch of magic every day, so you and your loved ones can have a wonderful holiday!” (Xiaomi Romania Facebook post, December 25, 2023). The post got 82 comments, the highest number in the social category, as well as 23 shares and 1880 reactions, a sign that the community appreciated Christmas messages. Although it implies a mention of Xiaomi technology, it was presented by integrating it in a family context, where the brand had a social character, being an enabler for joy with loved ones. Social interactions during holidays, such as being together with family as mentioned in the Facebook posts, had also been found to contribute significantly to overall well-being (Kasser & Sheldon, 2002, p. 323).

It is also important to note that Samsung did not have a Christmas wish post dedicated to its users in December.

Samsung’s communication does not feature Christmas-related themes prominently. Although each message strategy within the informational or transformational dimensions included at least one reference to Christmas, these references were often indirect. They mention “holiday charm” or incorporate winter elements in broader contexts. For instance, examples include posts like: “Winter is here, cover my phone with something” (Samsung Romania Facebook post, December 8, 2023) or “Light up the magic of the holidays with Galaxy” (Samsung Romania Facebook post, December 14, 2023).

## **7. Discussion**

The study suggests that the content focusing on the ration message strategy generated more engagement in terms of shares compared to ego message strategies and more reactions compared to messages focused on routine, ego, and sensory content. This may suggest that providing information (ration) may appeal more to an audience. The ration strategy includes information about price, phone battery, or storage related to the factors that drive smartphone purchases (Bali et al., 2023, p. 4).



Ration (informational dimension) was the most used message strategy by both companies, a result which is in line with other studies (Ashley & Tuten, 2015, p. 15), underlining that brands primarily use functional appeals in their content. The use of the rational strategy in communication during the holiday season may contrast with the popular opinion in the advertising field, which is that brands communicate mostly emotionally during this period (Lundberg, 2017; Lepitak, 2023). The informational dimension was also found to be the only one generating engagement in the form of shares and reactions. In contrast, the transformational dimension produced no significantly statistical results for any type of engagement.

Looking at the shares metric, the results revealed a significant difference between content types, suggesting that ration (informational) is more likely to be shared than other types of engagement. This is also consistent with other studies (Kim & Yang, 2017, p.446), which showed that ration message strategies were positive predictors of share. Users were more likely to share informational messages (Saxton & Waters, 2014, pp. 290-291). Also, product information strategies specific to the informational dimension were linked to analytical cognition, which refers to the logical processing of ad content (Chaudhuri & Buck, 1995, pp. 424-425).

The research suggests that user interactions varied according to the type of content being distributed. In particular, there were noticeable differences in the effectiveness of different strategies, exemplified by the increased engagement observed in response to tactics such as rationing. Conversely, a notable finding was that the effect of content type on audience response failed to reach statistical significance in some instances. This observation highlights a consistent and uniform audience response across different messaging strategies, regardless of content variation. Such nuanced insights reveal the dynamic interplay between content composition and user engagement in digital communication contexts.

The analysis shows that the type of content, whether informational or transformational, had no significant effect on the number of comments a post receives.

The study's findings indicate that marketers should prioritize informational strategies. Even if brands tailor their communication

approaches for the holiday season with messages such as “Discover the magic of holidays with the Xiaomi phone with triple 50MP camera” (Xiaomi Romania Facebook post, December 4, 2023), it is essential to incorporate factual references to the product to enhance consumer engagement.

## 8. Conclusions

This research contributes to understanding digital consumer engagement by differentiating between the effectiveness of informational and transformational message strategies in social media marketing during the Romanian holidays. It highlights the importance of engaging with different types of content.

This study underscores a nuanced relationship between messaging strategies and user engagement on social media. This complexity illustrates the challenge of predicting social media engagement. It highlights the importance of a nuanced, multifaceted approach to content strategy that should consider the diverse preferences and behaviors of audiences. By recognizing that different strategies can yield different engaging results depending on the brand and context, marketers can better navigate the complexities of digital engagement.

The research on informational and transformational message strategies in the context of the Romanian holiday season has several limitations. First, the sample size of 67 posts from only two brands, Samsung and Xiaomi, over a month (December) limits the generalization of the findings. This narrow sample may not capture broader trends or seasonal variations in consumer engagement. Secondly, the study relies on using Facebook as the single platform for analysis, which may have overlooked engagement behavior on other major social media platforms such as Instagram or TikTok. Understanding how informational and transformational message strategies perform across these platforms could provide a more comprehensive view of digital advertising effectiveness.

Additionally, incorporating more brands from different industries could reveal whether the effectiveness of informational versus transformational strategies is industry-specific or broadly applicable. Expanding the research beyond the holiday season might also reveal whether these strategies are

specific to the holiday context or generally compelling throughout the year. Finally, relying on quantitative metrics such as likes, shares, and comments does not fully capture the qualitative aspects of user engagement and sentiment, which could provide deeper insights into consumer behavior and preferences.

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