Media Strategies for Promoting Sustainable Development Goals

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Abstract

The Agenda 2030 created a global commitment towards achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. This paper examines the strategic communication process that the UN Global Compact Network Lebanon (GCNL) is implementing to foster and spread this mission among stakeholders through the scope of the media and a hybrid approach. Thus, this research uses framing and social capital theories, through quantitative and qualitative methods, to investigate the campaigns, programs, and activities, as well as their impact on building the public agenda, strengthening trust, loyalty, and reputation. The results provide benchmarking of evaluation and impact indicators of the GCNL in perspective of the various SDGs adopted by the stakeholders.

Introduction

Global partnerships and commitments are the new trends towards innovative and sustainable social, environmental, and economic structures that are intended to help the world survive and potentially thrive. Considering the many challenges that threaten the lives and growth of populations, businesses, and nations, the focus of this study revolves around the actions and social justice initiatives (i.e., sustainable development goals (SDGs)) that were adopted by the United Nations for its Agenda 2030. The Agenda 2030 was adopted by 193 nations that committed to changing the world for the better. These nations agreed, with the help of the United Nations, to bring "together their respective governments, businesses, media, institutions of higher education, and local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to improve the lives of the people in their country by the year 2030" (United Nations Sustainable Development Summit 2015). Hence, in order to advance the Agenda 2030, effective communication is needed.

Communication plays a key role in the successful implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) especially since the processes have to be carried out across the social, economic, institutional, and governmental

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sectors. Thus, to ensure success, the media is needed; because it is the responsibility of the media to inform, speak truth, and give voice to the voiceless (Freeman et al. 2011). It is also the media's mission to be committed to current issues (e.g., sustainable development goals) that are impacting their respective communities and the broader world to regain their grassroots foundation (Mamadouh 2004). The media can, therefore, advance and assist in promoting the SDGs by putting them on the agenda. In Lebanon, a number of media vehicles were mobilized to promote the SDGS (e.g., Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation International's 2030 Program, Radio du Liban's Agenda 2030 show, Sharika wa Laken's online platform) were specifically created to highlight the Agenda 2030.

This paper investigates the effectiveness of the online communication done by the Global Compact Network Lebanon (GCNL) for its multiple stakeholders around the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. The GCNL stakeholders are companies, private and public institutions, NGOs, the UN, and any individual who is involved with GCNL and is committed to helping in his/her capacity in advancing the Agenda 2030. It specifically examines the impact that GCNL's Instagram posts that deal with SDGs have on the reputations of stakeholders' companies and action imitation. It also looks at whether these posts enhance stakeholders' trust in GCNL and lead to online cooperation and sharing through electronic word-of-mouth. The GCNL is the official representative body affiliated to the United Nations and responsible for the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs.

It is important to address the issue of polarized media in Lebanon, in order to promote media pluralism and ensure that citizens have access to a diversity of perspectives and reliable information. The polarization of the media in Lebanon has contributed to the country's political and social divisions, as different media outlets present opposing narratives and viewpoints, making it difficult for citizens to access reliable and objective information. This has a significant impact on the ability of citizens to engage in informed and productive discussions and to make informed decisions. In addition, the polarization of the media in Lebanon can also restrict freedom of expression and limit the diversity of perspectives that are represented. This can restrict the growth of a vibrant and healthy democracy, and undermine efforts to build a more inclusive and harmonious society.

The Lebanese media landscape has pushed journalists to act like political activists due to the media's involvement in national politics and international influence peddling. Although the Lebanese State does not control media outlets, contrary to what happens in many other Arab countries, political parties have the power, as investors, to abuse the media as a mouthpiece for political propaganda (Trombetta, 2017; Dajani, 2005).

It then becomes more important to assess the strategic communication of the UN affiliated networks, such as the GCNL, as they may help in

suggesting potential guidelines and frameworks for improving future similar campaigns. Also, it is significant to carry out this research initiative because Lebanon has been among the first countries to adopt and publicize the SDGs through its media channels. It is capable of doing so through the support of the GCNL. One of 68 networks around the world, GCNL operates through a signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the UN Global Compact Headquarters. GCNL was launched in 2015 and closely coordinates with the UN Global Compact (UNGC) headquarters to grant opportunities for learning, policy dialogue, and partnerships aimed towards advancing the 17 SDGs. It integrated them within its public and private sector agendas and action plans with joint partnerships within many ministries. Lebanon was selected as a benchmark due to its early commitment to the UN framework with diplomat Charles Malek, who contributed to drafting the International Convention of Human Rights. Additionally, the SDGs provide a comprehensive scheme for sustainable development, addressing issues such as poverty, inequality, and climate change that are relevant to the current challenges faced by Lebanon.

In the midst of the COVID-19 outbreak and dire socio-economic circumstances, the reinforcement of the SDGs is more relevant and crucial than ever, providing an even greater reason to examine it. Investigating its communication frames and bond with stakeholders allows for a local perspective (attempts at attaining social justice and a call for action in a most critical timeframe) that has to be upheld with global standards.

Literature Review

In September 2015, Lebanon, an active member of the United Nations, endorsed the Agenda 2030 for SDGs, making it one of the signatories. The 17 SDGs are of the utmost importance to a society dealing with social and economic challenges (e.g., poverty, unemployment, injustices, threats to human rights, freedom of expression), such as is the case with Lebanon - arguably even more so today (in 2023) than when they were first adopted.

The Lebanese Case: SDGs in Lebanon

In terms of progress toward the SDGs, Lebanon has met at least seven Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), particularly in health, primary education, and gender equality in education. The remaining goals yielded mixed results, were not relevant, or were not planned adequately to meet the deadline, such as poverty reduction and environmental sustainability. Up until 2017, no significant improvements regarding the implementation of the Agenda 2030 were visible (Network for Development; AUB Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy; International Affairs 2018). At that point, Lebanon launched a project titled "SDGs in Lebanon: Analyzing Gaps and Reporting Progress" signed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Council for Development and Reconstruction (which

operates under the supervision of the Council of Ministers). The Council oversees funding and implementation of reconstruction, rehabilitation and development of public institutions projects (CDR.gov). Lebanon today faces the same challenges it did at the creation of the SDG initiative plan. In fact,now (2023), these challenges have escalated.

Lebanon, as a host country for millions of Syrian and Palestinian refugees, is bearing a burden of tremendous infrastructure and demographic drawbacks, especially when taking into consideration the latest uprising/revolution (October 17, 2019) and citizens' demands, along with the current (2023) situation – the unprecedented economic and financial crisis, a 19.2% decrease in GDP, inflation, and an increase in poverty rates up to 45% and extreme poverty up to 22% (World Bank 2021).

Due to these various hardships, Lebanon was given grants for improving infrastructure and implementing reforms to remain committed to the Agenda 2030 in order to enhance its global standing and to redirect its governance towards transparency and accountability. Also, the World Bank approved a US $246 million budget for the Emergency Crisis and COVID-19 Response Social Safety Net Project (ESSN) in Lebanon (World Bank 2021).

Stakeholders and the SDGs

The implementation of the SDGs relies on the involvement and engagement of stakeholders, who are key players in the success of the GCNL campaigns to endorse the SDGs. The UN and the governments as well as individuals who are interested can be considered stakeholders. However, for the purpose of this research, stakeholders are defined as entities (corporations, organizations, NGOs) who signed up to join GCNL and adopted at least one of the 17 goals. This adoption entails continuous support and plans of action to promote the SDG of interest which are in line with their organization's mission. This research examines the social media advocacy strategies that GCNL has put in place on Instagram to reach its target persons, to build a community around the SDGs, to reinforce and enlarge its network of stakeholders, and to identify the strength of the impact that the SDGs had on their teams.

Some ways that stakeholders interact with GCNL and introduce the goals to their own followers is by sharing GCNL posts, taking part in their events or sponsoring campaigns, in all of which communication is at the forefront. Hence, communication is a pillar to sustainable development.

Studies on SDG Media Campaigns

SDG communication strategies cater to the specific culture they are being promoted in; however, their reach tends to be global as far as connecting networks and encouraging participation through the use of social media.

UNDP has emphasized the importance of multipronged media initiatives to promote the media's role in aid of sustainable improvement and peace. This entails working in the media ecosystem through capacity-development initiatives for key actors, such as journalists, citizens, or governments to pave the way for independent media. This strategy which includes the use of social media has helped ascertain that UNDP's media engagement caters to the complexity of presenting local development obstacles to adjust to emergent possibilities within the national media landscape. This fast-paced evolution of communication technology often leads to a free flow of information that triggers a broader spectrum of opportunities and further developments due to the interconnectedness of groups, and therefore can come together to contribute to building/developing their own communities (Servaes 2017). Likewise, through the GCNL networks and adoption of the SDGs by the various stakeholders, different networks are formed that can expand the local geographic barriers and involve various parties on a shared social media portal such as Instagram.

GCNL Instagram Outreach Potential

GCNL is mostly active on Instagram, with 4,397 followers to date (February 6, 2023). The lead researcher carried out a descriptive analysis of GCNL's Instagram page. The following information can be viewed by any user/follower. They post on an almost daily basis. Some of their posts, especially nation-wide campaigns and international programs (e.g., Regional Youth Dialogue Leaders' Summit) go viral, others have limited interactions. Most of the posts are consistent in terms of branding (the logos and colors) and hashtags. The posts mainly vary between still images, infographics, and videos. The stories feature is also a space for active reach.

Theoretical Framework

This study attempts to assess the impact of media campaigns that are designed and implemented under the supervision of GCNL in cooperation with stakeholders (e.g., academia, companies, NGOs) on the reinforcement of SDGs awareness. Klapper (1960) considered that campaigns do not influence people but play a role in reinforcing existing attitudes. This should be taken into consideration. GCNL campaigns go together mainly with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) missions and action plans.

Framing theory is used in this study to further investigate how GCNL, as a brand, frames SDGs on its Instagram page, to gain a greater understanding of how the goals are communicated to the stakeholders and others who are interested. While framing theory is a prominent theory in examining how

communication messages are portrayed, it lacks in its ability to guide the researchers in investigating the stakeholder's perspectives and whether certain bonds are formed through social media interactions that would allow for the strengthening of relationships and enhancing the stakeholder's corporate identity and/or reputation. For that reason, the social capital theory is used in guiding the research when testing the stakeholders' engagement, trust, and ties with GCNL.

Framing: Instagram

Framing can be defined as a mechanism by which some aspects of reality are selected and emphasized to define a problem, discuss its causes, and render a moral judgment that leads to suggesting solutions (Entman 1993). Thus, the content creator who frames a message is doing it intentionally to fulfill certain outcomes and the audience may be influenced by the frames (McMahon 2009). Russmann et al. (2016) found that a mix of one-way and two-way communication can help form and expand an organization's relationship with its public (e.g., understanding concerns/expectations), hence building its reputation. Posting, image management, integration, and interactivity assist in promoting SDGs through GCNL's Instagram page as they are integrated together (e.g., hashtags of social events) and have key publics (stakeholders).

Framing of SDGs

Lehmann (2017) differentiated between planned high-level/political SDG campaigns and citizen-level campaigns. The planned high-level/political SDG campaign engages high caliber public figures and personalities who become SDG ambassadors. These public figures support the GCNL as a brand image and launch a call for action; they disseminate the SDGs through their respective networks, their concerts, interviews, and their social media platforms. At the citizens' level, GCNL strives to portray "action-oriented engagement activities and training for key groups such as parliamentarians, municipal leaders, and civil society" (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) 2008).

Dauda (2018) examined how Malaysian online newspapers framed the SDGs and concluded that stakeholders are untapped resources for SDGs funding, aligning SDGs to corporate social responsibility, and developing better mechanisms for collaboration and partnerships.

Are these types of interactions/communication devices associated with greater levels of bonding of stakeholders to GCNL through trust, image, and reputation? These concepts will be investigated through the framework of the social capital theory.

Social Capital Theory

Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) defined social capital as "the sum of the resources, actual and virtual, compiled by an individual or a collective through belonging to a strong network or institutionalized relationships of reciprocity, companionship, and gratitude" (p. 119).

In other words, social capital is a network of social relationships that enable a person to advance in his/her environment. Likewise, in this study, the researchers examine how the networking bonds and opportunities GCNL has created for its stakeholders help them improve at the corporate and community levels. When a mix of networks and norms are tangled, then the focus shifts between bridging and bonding social capital (Putnman 2000). Bridging social capital is visible when social networks are connected via individuals with various backgrounds. Consequently, this may expand the social horizons or worldviews of the members, thus help users get access to resources and reach out to others on social media networks who share common interests (Quan-Hasse and Wellman 2004), strengthening existing social relations while bridging the formation of new ties (e.g., GCNL to stakeholders and followers). However, the Internet may decrease social capital if the relationships do not transfer to physical face-to-face communication (Quan-Hasse and Wellman 2004), and many scholars have shown that the Internet enhances communication but does not replace traditional forms (Horrigan and Rainee 2002; Howard, Rainie, and Jones 2001; Wellman, Boase, and Chen 2002).

In relation to GCNL, stakeholders can be considered bonding agents that attempt to bridge social capital with their followers back to GCNL. This type of bonding and bridging is developed through a system of interaction with the individuals involved that is based on trust; because without trust, and even perhaps arguably loyalty to one another, these networks (stakeholders of SDGs) cannot successfully implement the SDGs. There are then two types of networks: the first are the networks of stakeholders who have adopted GCNL's mission and goals; and the second are the social media networks formed via Instagram that incorporates the interactivity of GCNL, stakeholders, and followers all together. A certain degree of sociality and civic participation can be promoted at low levels of interactivity, such as those provided by new media, leading to reciprocity norms and potentially the establishment of social capital (Bucy and Gregson 2001; Putnam 2000).

Merging framing and social capital theories, this study seeks to develop a benchmark of the best media practices that would help increase SDG visibility, strengthen brand image and trust for the GCNL, boost implementation, monitor electronic word-of-mouth, and evaluate the impact of these messages in the Lebanese context where the media landscape is very unique and where the media, political, and public agendas often overlap. Hence, the below research questions are posed.

Research Questions

RQ1: Does the greater engagement triggered by GCNL increase the chance of bridging social capital among the stakeholders and followers?

RQ2: What are the frames that GCNL uses to strengthen their social media presence, specifically on Instagram, and advance their public agenda?

RQ3: Do the stakeholders' access to and satisfaction with GCNL resources and programs increase their loyalty to the brand?

RQ4: Does the active involvement of the stakeholders in GNCL network increase the stakeholders' companies' reputations and their collaboration with GCNL?

Methodology

This study combined qualitative and quantitative methods, since the reach of social media campaigns highly depends on the selected social media platform and the context of the posts (Kapoor et al. 2018). A questionnaire was sent out to stakeholders of GCNL to understand the impact of GCNL campaigns on their awareness of the SDGs and their action plan. Two focus groups were held to collect clear inputs around the various concepts. Everything was complemented with an in-depth interview with GCNL Former Strategic Advisor Dr. Hassan Youness.

The two focus group sessions included nine stakeholder participants. Focus group A was composed of five representatives; focus group B included four participants; and the representative from the non-profit Stand for Women opted for answering the questionnaire.

Questionnaire participants were recruited using a simple random sampling technique allowing every member of the GCNL network to have an equal chance of being selected (Wimmer & Dominick 2014). However, results cannot be generalized back to the population of interest given that out of the 160 registered GCNL networked members committed to the SDGs within their corporate agenda, only 17% participated. From the respondents who filled out the Google Forms questionnaire, 46.2% hold positions that involve decision-making at a managerial level from various fields (e.g., corporate, non-profits, higher education institutions, social enterprises). Their terms of affiliation to GCNL network varied between less than six months (3.8%) up to five years (15.4 %).

Variables

Trust occurs when one party believes in the honesty and dignity of another (Morgan et al. 1994). Social media accelerates building brand loyalty via networking, conversation, and community building (McKee 2010) which gears stakeholders' outreach (Khurram et al. 2018). Engagement is the extent to which a stakeholder or target audience is committed to a certain

brand. Satisfaction is the level of approval and appraisal of GCNL online services and products. Attitude towards GCNL refers to the stakeholders' attitude about GCNL as a key determinant that could either hinder or fuel adoption of SDGs and lead to stronger bonding. Adopting and bonding are in reference to the social capital theory, where communities and institutions create a bond around common causes. GCNL reputation is the image and credibility that GCNL conveys to its stakeholders and general audience. Corporate reputation of stakeholders refers to the examination at the internal and external levels by the company's performance and the employees and clients' satisfaction (Chun 2005). All of these variables were measured using Likert-type scales from strongly disagree to strongly agree, or semantic scale of 1 = very active to 5 = not at all active.

In addition, participation or taking part in specific tailor-made programs and activities was measured by asking participants about their participation in GCNL programs, as well as how active they were on SNSs associated with the programs. Lastly, electronic word of mouth is known as e-opinion where media consumers share their experiences about a certain brand, its services, and its products with their network creating a snowball effect, becoming informal ambassadors of the brand. It was measured by asking participants if they engage in reposting or sharing SDGs related posts on their social media networks and their frequency of doing so.

Data Analysis

That data was analyzed quantitatively through descriptive statistics (percentages and frequencies). Qualitatively, the data was assessed through a thematic approach by first depicting the emerging themes and categorizing responses according to intensity, specificity, co-occurrence, dis/agreement.

Results and Discussion

RQ 1: Engagement and Bridging Networks

As a starting point, it is vital to understand the rationale behind international agencies recruitment and networking processes. According to Dr. Youness, in fulfilling the mission and vision of GCNL, they work with the private sector to have a more socially responsible community. This converges with the argument of Bourdieu and Wacqant (1992) modeling the nature of networking relationships' importance in the path taken and its institutionalization. Adding to this, Mrs. Ghanem (Holdal Group) believes that the diverse ecosystem created by GCNL has opened their company's outlooks to the multiple actors of change and integrated them within the bigger national call for action.

Although these privileges exist, 42.9% of the respondents are barely involved in the GCNL SNSs, while 23.1% of the respondents strongly agreed that GCNL SNSs allow users to reach out to others who share

common interests. This unveils some flaws in the digital communication process. Social media networking site posts might have a double-edged sword effect (Wagner et. al., 2017) because some brands, like GCNL, do not reap their full capacity.

Bridging and Bonding

Dr. El Hage (USJ representative) described SNSs as "a great visibility platform, and it challenges us to go beyond our expectations, to stress on the importance of collaboration and to investigate the interdisciplinary approach while opening up to new outlooks." A step confirmed by 41.7% of the respondents who agreed on its efficiency in paving the way for long-term collaborations among GCNL and the participating members/followers. These types of long-term collaborations are indicative of bonding social capital initiatives.

In terms of bonding and outreach, GCNL acted as a fertilizer to new ecosystems bridging the gap among local and international key players. For example, Injaz had the chance to team up with UNDP and integrate the SDGs further in their programs as well as coordinating with other foundations[1]. The program allows for valuable collaborations across industries according to 66.6% of the participants, thus generating meaningful connections from various backgrounds. As for those who did not agree, perhaps were not active in the communication process or have not reaped the benefits of a long-term partnership.

In addition, in Lebanon collaborations are not easy to build with the relevant parties (NGOs, Ministries) "due to bureaucracy and lack of communication", said Dr. El Hage. Thus, GCNL's role is imperative as it has established internal committees with many ministries that help overcome the bureaucratic obstacles. This step initiated an involvement at the core of cohesion and active citizenship, potentially seeding mutual norms as well as implementing social capital among the members (Bucy & Gregson 2001; Putnam 2000).

Moreover, many barriers/challenges arose throughout the in-depth assessment of GCNL communication strategies towards the stakeholders. First, the lack of access to information and absence of a database. Second, the national culture and financial obstacles. Third, the lack of grants and funds as well as the limited resources due to the ongoing socio-economic issues. Fourth, there is a gap in the SDGs' presence in the media discourse, as they remain not relatable to the mass public. Besides, there is no direct correlation between the SDGs and our daily life. "Just 10 out of 100 people will know about it. Youth will not feel concerned unless they have

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[1] e.g: Chair in Education for Eco-citizenship and Sustainable Development (CEEDD), created by the "Diane Foundation" in October 2015.

experienced it" (Injaz).This points to the flaws in the communication of SDGs and the relativity of the efficiency of the framing techniques in relation to the segmented audiences. This is important because if the SDGs are not well communicated, the chances of expanding their reach will decrease and GCNL would fail at meeting its international commitments.

RQ 2: Framing of SDGs

Overall, focus groups participants found that SDG communications are rich and integrative, creating room for involvement to all. All in all, comprehensiveness, followed by the universality of the causes, coherence, engaging posts, catchy visuals, well drafted captions, and style's variations are the focus of social impact while serving the 17 SDGs. Seven out of nine focus group participants revealed the power of email marketing mentioning that they usually receive specific calls to action to join certain initiatives. In addition, some ranked videos, stories, and graphics as the top three post genres that help promote the SDGs in the optimum way. A point that is comparable to differential framing that looks at the linkages and messages filters that incongruously affect the audiences based on their personal and corporate cultures (McMahon 2009).

Participation remains a key indicator of stakeholders' serious commitment to the Agenda 2030 since 66.7% agreed that they are more interested in GCNL than its international counterparts thanks to accessing and participating in its programs and activities. For Shamaa (Arab Educational Information Network), it is a ground for visibility and a potential to build partnerships while ShareQ, a Lebanese non-profit organization that supports people with physical and financial challenges, perceives it as a good hub for avant-gardists inclusion. Both insights refer to the social capital theory suggesting that individuals and groups bond with a cause that meets their aspirations and needs and in return bridge together the company, cause, and greater community.

Strategic Framing and Advocacy

Highlighting the framing of GCNL programs and activities to prime them on the stakeholders' agenda, Dr. Youness stressed that "every program has its own particularity…interacting with the companies weekly or monthly via email, and mass marketing via digital media platforms." The findings indicate that GCNL is aware of the goals relevant to the Lebanese Network priorities and is strategically planning the campaigns to meet them. The high level of credibility emanates from the international reference of the GCNL, where most of the members of GCNL have access to this academy webinars series from UNGC New York.

According to the findings and despite all the efforts deployed by GCNL and its network members, there are still many missing factors that strengthen bridging and bonding among all Agenda 2030 actors such as a well-

grounded database sorted by scope of interests and interventions, a dynamic platform that updates GCNL programs and activities, a space for follow up on already implemented projects and benchmarking the evaluation procedures. It has been clear that with the COVID-19 restrictions, GCNL has moved its activities online. Hence, relying merely on SNS which did not fully play in its favor. Hereby, it is important to understand that effective communication is definitely about alternation between online and in-person approaches.

RQ3: Stakeholders' Satisfaction and Loyalty to the brand

The majority (54.2%) of the questionnaire respondents were satisfied with the richness of GCNL programs content; the methodology used in various programs was satisfactory, efficient, and user-friendly, as well as providing high-profile qualified mentors/trainers; 16.7% were dissatisfied.

Respondents (35.7%) also emphasized that they usually resort to the electronic word-of-mouth by sharing GCNL call to action as long as they are directly contributing to it and satisfied with its approach, and while it is relevant to their scope of interest "and relatability", said BMF Architects representative. All focus group participants agreed on the need for stronger focus on testimonies and partnerships, "they give a human face to every story and make it noteworthy" (Ms. Dani, Injaz representative).

Mrs. Ghanem (Holdal Abou Adal Group) saw that the greater involvement in SNSs bore fruit by bridging among followers and maintaining ongoing communication. The sites then have the potential to transform online networking to hybrid collaborations. Similarly, Mrs. Maalouf (Shamaa representative) pointed out that their niche is selective, and that they were thriving for bonding, but it doesn't happen through GCNL yet. Niche segments within such programs could be a potential area for future research, especially that they might require greater efforts or specialized ways of engagement for bonding to occur within and across the networks. An angle that Quan-Hasse and Wellman (2004) addressed about social capital and social networking since the internet has changed the traditional flow of information by granting the audience more autonomy, threatening the frequency of offline engagement.

Mr. Sfeir (shareQ) also stated that "within GCNL we need to see more engagement that leads to productivity" although they have met Holdal and INDEVCO through GCNL and other channels which due to the nature of the work strengthened their bonds.

Mrs. Gacia Apikian (INDEVCO Group) argued that the programs are an added value because they bring in local and international experts to guide stakeholders and beneficiaries through many steps "which is helpful to strategize better." An observation that demonstrates that bridging expands from the local networks to the global networks of partnerships, and that

involvement could potentially lead to bonding. It also points to the trust and loyalty factors that encourage participation through the use of social media communication.

ShareQ team was involved in this process as explained by Mr. Sfeir: "We had the opportunity to put our expertise at the service of training HR managers from GCNL network of companies on inclusive recruitment. As an outcome, they employed more people with disabilities." This grounded network triggered a fast-paced evolution of communication technology and had expanded the spectrum of opportunities due to the interconnectedness of groups (GCNL) regardless of their status and therefore drove them together to form alternative communities (Servaes 2017).

Stakeholders' loyalty to GCNL as a brand increased thanks to their access to GCNL resources, programs, and activities. This implies that SNSs widened the relationships (e.g., bridging) that were first developed offline. These offline spaces can be duplicated online (Price & Cappella, 2002) where businesses can congregate to promote topics of interest and perhaps drive the online back to offline interactions.

Stakeholders' Loyalty to GCNL Brand

The stakeholders' assessment of the access to GCNL programs and activities and their loyalty affiliation towards the brand was somehow relative. Injaz confirmed that they are involved with GCNL because they believe in the mission, and they didn't necessarily seek benefits or get access to privileges organically. USJ believed that the networking, collaboration,reporting process, and the tools and instruments provided by GCNL were really beneficial for their Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis.

All these elements played a role in accelerating the stakeholders' loyalty to the GCNL brand; 62.5% of the overall questionnaire respondents strongly agreed that they will be collaborating with GCNL in the future after accessing and experimenting with their resources and programs. Moreover, due to GCNL resources and their programs' benefits and impact, 50.0% of the total respondents will renew the engagement in GCNL activities. Most importantly, as the loyalty to the brand has been sealed, 50.0% strongly agreed and 29.2% agreed on recommending GCNL initiatives to others in their networks, and 50.0% would prioritize it over other similar international agencies. These relatively high figures give us an understanding of the importance of reciprocity in the rapport between GCNL and its stakeholders which was reflected by the win-win situation.

This step lays the groundwork for a solid well-crafted company reputation thanks to the know-how transmitted by GCNL activities and the strategic implementation of the Agenda 2030 at the leadership and operational levels within the stakeholders' respective workplaces.

RQ 4: Involvement in the Action Plan and Corporate Reputation

When it comes to the engagement with the SDGS action plan and involvement with GCNL, each company adopts a pool of SDGs that they usually rotate on a yearly basis. Thus, they set corporate strategies accordingly, and develop projects that tackle each goal.

Seven out of nine participants were neutral when it came to the statement: "the 17 SDGs are given the same space and interest on GCNL platforms," an issue that was also reflected within the companies and institutions. For instance, BMF architects mainly focus on concrete base and up-cycling designs. They advocate for responsible construction sites, relying on solar energy, and clean water. They have also been pushing towards gender equality and good health and well-being. This example illustrates that even though BMF is scientifically oriented, it bridges the gap to engage and invest in leadership and humanitarian goals. This wouldn't have been possible without the framing of the goals on GCNL platforms. When GCNL introduced each goal with relevant facts and figures about them, the stakeholders got acquainted to them and were curious to discover the outcomes of adopting them which is defined as the second-level agenda setting managing the salience of a topic (McCombs, Shaw, and Weaver 1997).

For Holdal, joining GCNL was a great opportunity to put pressure on the company to make the process more disciplined and transparent, and from a change management point of view, to become more holistic in everything they do. Further proof that Lebanon, as a signatory country and GCNL as an implementation body, has succeeded in mobilizing the private sector.

The majority of the stakeholders appreciated the fact that their corporate social responsibility (CSR) has improved and has been institutionalized by joining GCNL. It allows them to gain more access to local, regional, and international resources, and references to tailor them to their company's needs. Mrs. Ghanem (Holdal group) emphasized that they were able to open-up to the diverse ecosystems and to be part of multiple actors of change. Thus, improving their corporate image and disseminating a credible portfolio to their respective shareholders/stakeholders. This signifies that the social capital theory is value-based and a motivation to show integrity in incorporating Corporate Social Responsibility within an institution's philosophy.

Adoption and Trust

The organizations have adopted one or more SDG for various reasons. For example, SDG 17, Partnerships for the Goals, brings coalitions together around the main values (Holdal). Shamaa on the other hand have combined goals 10 (Reduce Inequalities), 4 (Quality Education), 5 (Gender Equality), and 17 into their framework allowing them to prioritize creating

opportunities, developing equal gender representation, and establishing Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs).

Likewise, ShareQ adopted goals 5 (Gender Equality), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 10 (Reduced Inequality), 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and 17 (Partnerships to achieve the Goal) in order to expand awareness around the SDGs and create an action task force catering to the inclusiveness as a mindset. All of these examples indicate that massive partnerships (public and private) make the goals implementation smoother and that bridging is feasible when the common objectives are set and the dialogue is open.

To fully ensure trust, ways to measure the development of the goals should be executed by GCNL so that some of the problematic areas can be addressed and resolved. Five out of nine focus group members questioned the criteria that GCNL uses in treating its stakeholders; "to be realistic the absence of a real measurement of the SDGs could backfire since it will become self-satisfactory and hinders evolution", said Sfeir (ShareQ). He pointed out that some entities join the GCNL just for the image without being faithfully involved in the SDGs implementation. In this context, he explained: "First and foremost, we joined GCNL with the aim of building partnerships with companies, NGOs and institutions that want to make an impact. Thus, the reality does not fulfil these expectations." He urged for putting a benchmark to measure the involvement of a company based on its capacity. Those are the pillars to enhance a network's social capital since it will showcase a model of good governance which is one of the main reforms that the international community is asking the Lebanese government to abide by in order to pave the way for potential investment, and the private sector is the key leader in this framework (World Bank 2021).

Gacia Apikian from INDEVCO pointed out that "the issue with sustainability is that we transitioned from what is now considered change and what was previously labeled as CSR without really thinking about the numbers behind it: impact." Perhaps an introduction of a unified quantitative metrics for the SDGs can assist.

Dr. Youness clarified during his interview thatwhen it came to monitoring the SDGs campaigns implementation and follow up, there isan international and a local component because the different SDGs are being implemented distinctively across countries as the challenges aren't the same. He added that stakeholders can help monitor in their capacities, and that all the programs are evaluated based on the metrics, rubrics, and score cards that were developed to weigh to what extent they achieved their purpose and their own success factors. For the YSIP, the inventions that were developed

inside the corporations to which the cohorts belong helped in assessing whether the SDGs were being implemented properly or not.

For example, for the *Lira Betchabbe3* Campaign, the major success indicator was the reach out on social media, spreading the message, raising awareness on the level of poverty in Lebanon, via TV interviews, influencers' marketing, ads, digital media presence, and most importantly raising donations. A primary goal that Lehmann (2017) investigated in a comparative approach between the political and SDG efforts in parallel to citizen-level campaigns.

Mrs. Ghanem (Holdal**)** demanded the democratization of the process, the need for consistency, daily commitment, and having the courage to go against the status quo and to go back to the environmental and social impact: "if we mobilize a human chain around the right action, it will pay off." The success of the SDGs action plan depends on its ability to engage people at all levels of the pyramid, especially the actors that are in direct contact with the needs of the communities (OHCHR 2008).

Trust

In line with the motives behind the stakeholders' involvement in the GCNL, the respondents (95.8%) expressed their trust towards GCNL vision, mission, services, and reforms. Knowing that the trust is a component of the bridging and bonding trajectory, 54.2 % strongly agreed that GCNL is a reputable international network, which means that trust cannot be established unless there is credibility. For example, some joined the network based on the industry needs, and grounded in partnerships among different sectors meeting entrepreneurial visions. Hence, "strengthening our commitment and contribution towards Agenda 2030" (Ms. Dani, Injaz). This pertains to Lebanon's meeting at least seven Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Dr. El Hage (USJ representative) explained that the faculties work together on achieving multiple goals. Thus, they were seeking a strong linkage among the various SDGs under the umbrella of GCNL which justifies why 45.8% appreciate their involvement in GCNL network for strengthening the corporate image while 41.7 % believed that it has boosted their entity's reputation at the societal level. This is another advantage of forming bonds internally and externally.

Company Reputation

On the involvement and impact on the company's reputation side, many perspectives were brought to table.

First, representative from Stand for Women, Roula Achkouti pointed out that their involvement with GCNL helped them expand their initiatives and get referrals and bond with other members such as Holdal. Likewise, 37.5%

of the total respondents agreed that GCNL has helped build their company's reputation through its interdisciplinary approach and international standing. Through GCNL, their company was able to reach out to the community (29.2% agreed , 45.8% strongly agreed that their own image strengthened while 41.7% agreed that GCNL initiatives have helped them increase their company's reputation within society. Moreover, 31.8% agreed and only 9.1% disagreed when asked if the GCNL network helped them to advance in their domain since GCNL activities and events are not industry-oriented, rather they are sustainability driven across many sectors and industries.

Second, Injaz assessed the outcomes of their involvement in terms of credibility and validation of their work, not only towards their stakeholders but also toward their beneficiaries. Here it is noteworthy to mention that the participating NGOs and social enterprises usually receive grants from UN affiliated entities. Therefore, being an active member of GCNL is an added value to their portfolio. As Mrs. Dani clarified: "We don't just tell the youth about the SDGs but, through our involvement, we are able to show them tangible examples." Since stakeholders have remarked the power of youth in driving change, they called for a reconsideration of the current means of communication of the SDGs and they became more aware of the need to leverage new technologies and all available resources to mobilize the niche audiences as per their internal assessments.

Limitations and Further Suggestions

In some cases, the focus groups dynamics were challenged by opinion leaders who tried to dominate the discussion and influence others' opinions; however, the moderator facilitated the session back into a balance. Although the lead researcher approached stakeholders via one-on-one contact, they were either unresponsive or reluctant and many of them confessed to not being fully aware of the essence of the SDGs, which leads one to speculate that the commitment was just a cover for Social Corporate Responsibility purposes. Therefore, the results of this study are exploratory and cannot be generalized across the population of interest due to the small response rate

In light of the research process and the stakeholders' insights, recommendations for further research and development are as follows: Theoretically, GCNL strategies can be explored from a political communications framework; Practically, the cultural, political, and socio-economic context has totally changed in the last few years which calls for a revamping of some campaigns that are no longer relevant to the status quo which is currently highly unpredictable. On a holistic note, there are suggestions worth studying in relation to the SDGs narrative and media discourse, and taking steps based on studies to meet the stakeholders' needs.

Conclusion

To sum up, the universal communication of the SDGs has marked a milestone but needs more standardization. The combination of online and offline strategies is of greater importance to optimize the stakeholders' equal access to resources. Trust should be strengthened by continuous monitoring and evaluation among the GCNL network and stakeholders. Loyalty to the brand is determined by recurrent participation in the programs and initiatives whereas Corporate Social Responsibility is an integral component that advances corporate reputation.

Based on the results, it is essential to notice that all variables are interconnected and complementary, if one is undermined, the SDGs communication process will be hindered, and the GCNL network components will be affected. The stakeholders have raised many issues pertaining to the access to resources, challenges in the implementation and evaluation. Many insights manifested pitfalls in the digital advocacy realm.

The SDGs have significant implications for countries like Lebanon, which are facing complex political and economic challenges. Since the 4th of August 2020 Beirut Port explosion, Lebanon's political structure and economy have changed dramatically. The explosion brought widespread public anger and frustration to the surface, leading to mass protests and calls for political reform. At the same time, the country is facing its most severe economic crisis since the Civil War, with rising unemployment, declining economic activity, and a sharp devaluation of the currency. In this context, the SDGs can serve as a useful framework for addressing the challenges facing Lebanon.

However, in order to achieve the SDGs in Lebanon, it will be necessary to address the root causes of the country's political and economic challenges, including corruption, mismanagement, and political polarization. This will require the active engagement of all stakeholders, including the government, civil society, and the private sector, working together to promote sustainable development and ensure a better future for all Lebanese citizens.

Meanwhile, it is time to institutionalize a culture of collective power by laying the groundwork for private/public partnerships, and to develop a communication guide for public policies and sustainability based on market research and expert insights. Sustainability is the future, and media's power is exponential as a fourth estate. Digital media advocacy has driven tremendous changes and brought to attention vital conversations as well as global coalitions. It has created a momentum in which every community and media specialists have their share of the responsibility to keep it up!

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