

An Alternative Event Management Tool for Public Relations: The Case of Eventbrite

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ABSTRACT *Event management in public relations could be described as planing, organization and evaluation process of the events with different purposes –publicity, creating awareness, celebration etc.- for the aims of a person, instution or organization. In this direction purpose of this study is presenting digital agora as an alternative event management tool for public relations. In this direction related literature and the case study for digital agora will be examined in terms of event management feature of public relations. Digital agoras take an important role in spreading events rapidly, growing the attention and sustain the effects systematically for the event management process. The importance of this study is the alternative and accessible event management tool revealed especially for independent organizations.*

Keywords: Public Relations, Event Management, Digital Agora

Halkla İlişkilerde Alternatif Bir Etkinlik Yönetimi Aracı: Eventbrite Örneği

ÖZ *Halkla ilişkilerde etkinlik yönetimi; kişi, kurum ya da kuruluşun amaçları doğrultusunda farklı hedefleri bulunan –tanıtım, farkındalık oluşturma, kutlama vd.- etkinliklerin planlama, organizasyon ve ölçümleme süreçlerinin tümünü içeren bir uygulama alanıdır. Bu doğrultuda çalışmanın amacı iletişim teknolojilerindeki gelişimlerle birlikte sanal ortamlarda kendisine yer bulan dijital agoraların, halkla ilişkilerde etkinlik yönetimi süreci içerisinde kurumların kullanabileceği alternatif bir araç olarak önerilmesidir. Bu doğrultuda ilgili literatür taranmış ve seçilen bir dijital agora örneği üzerinden halkla ilişkilerin uygulama alanlarından biri olan etkinlik yönetimi incelenmiştir. Araştırma sonucunda dijital agoraların; etkinliklerin hızlı bir şekilde yayılması, ilginin büyümesi ve etkilerin sürdürülmesinin sistematik bir hale getirilmesinde yolunda önemli bir rol oynadığı görülmüştür. Bu çalışma özellikle bağımsız organizasyonların kullanabileceği ulaşılabilir ve alternatif bir etkinlik yönetim aracı sunması açısından da önemlidir.*

Anahtar Kelimeler: Halkla İlişkiler, Etkinlik Yönetimi, Dijital Agora

INTRODUCTION

Agora basically described as a gathering place such as; squares, open spaces, conversation areas, public squares, meeting places, marketplaces or forums. The term commonly used for public opinion, establishing grounds for social movements and commercial activities. Such as ancient times, with the digitization of the communication, Agora has become the basic element of the public spheres on the digital world. For example, agora used for uniting

people as social movements like Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street or leading social changes via online petition systems like Change.org or Avaaz.org.

Briefly, with “democratization” of the internet, digital platforms created a new and digital “space” for; expressing opinions, participating and contributing to society. So, Agora still a “place” for integrating individuals and contributing to collective soul.

In this sense, purpose of this study is presenting digital agora as an alternative event management tool for public relations. The paper summarizes the literature related to agora and the result of the rapid advances in communication technologies. While literature focusing on the transformation process of Agora, case study –Eventbrite.com- showed the structure of “new” agora and its function as an event management tool for public relations.

Agora and It’s Functions

Agora contains economic and cultural assets and shapes social life with its own dynamics. In the traditional sense, places where people come together and have developed social relations in addition to various commercial objectives, referred as Agora. The first agora appeared in Ancient Greek in the 7th century BC (Davidson, 1999: 22). Also, as the Habermas said first public spheres also are appeared in The Ancient Greek city-states as Agoras. Demos –the common people of the ancient Greek states- settled in plains –unlike acropolis- and the first agora formed in the middle of these cities (Anık, 2015).

This area was the center of social life and people were spending almost all their time there except home and business life. Rome had the same structure too. It grew with conquests and has become one of the largest state recorded in history. Rome is actually a confederation which divided based citizenship status. Urban-political assets generate this confederation, and these assets with the surrounding countryside formed an economic, political and social whole. The forum is the most remarkable icon of this wholeness. Just like Greek Agora, Roman Forums appeared as a place generates the social, economic and political movement for the city (Tekinalp, 2013: 8-9). So, Greek and Roman Agoras weren’t just for political debates, also they were the centers for sports, education and economy (Keskin ve Büyükçağlar, 2012: 59).

Briefly, in ancient Greek and Rome, agoras were in the middle of the city and they functioned as shopping and meeting places. In agora people with citizen status, could participate discussions about public issues (Atabek and Dağtaş, 1998: 144). Therefore, social needs and collective goals of a society or a group were determined in this area interaction.

Transformation Process to New Agoras

Modern society accepted public opinion as a key point to impress or convince hesitant citizen. In this sense, public opinion became general idea of the society. Fundamentally, public opinion is open to any kind of foreign intervention and guidance to formation of general idea (Imhof, 1996).

From my point of view the most important goal of social movements – either social, environmental or ecological- is to gain support of citizens and providing positive opinions as much as possible. So in order to reach this goal, Agora is the most ideal place to be.

As with the transformation era, public opinion has become extremely important. Today, expression of various opinions and ideals depends on the spread power. And the internet and social media is the strongest tool for this spread power for now.

We came across the first examples of the strong link between these concepts -public opinion and Agora- in Ancient Greek. Truly, the first known definition of the public opinion described with the meetings in the Agora to discuss everything apart from their private sphere (Fuchs, 2000). But, today with the social media, private sphere has lost this privilege and willingly become a part of the public sphere.

In agora, people express their thoughts about social problems. However, the public opinion, since Ancient Greece, is accepted as a form of the modern societies' participation to governance. Therefore, the public opinion is seen as one of the concepts that are directly related to the social system.

Today, It is inevitable to increase the problems in social, economic and cultural fields. In fragmented structure of our age, people can only express themselves through the public opinion. Social movements are reflect positive effects to the system. Because public opinion allows being aware of and finding solutions to the problems for various groups which unable to attend to social system for different reasons (Schaffhauser, 1997).

In this surveillance society as a form of “democracy”, inhibition of personal freedom within certain rules and monitoring has created the feeling of restriction (Melen, 1997: 21). According to the thought, the debate in the Agoras in the Ancient Greece and forums in the republican Rome was the most independent areas which brought together all segments of the society for public problems for that time. But with the urbanization and increasing working hours Agora lost this function and became a simple marketplace.

But the elements those make Agora essential and the revolutions of web technologies lead to creating “new” Agora. In the 2000's, along with the new information technologies; “sharing” concept, web 2.0, social networks, wiki's, forums, podcasts, and other online environments are began to used. This process has also revealed two-way communication flow on the internet (Solis, 2009: 34; Işık, 2012). Also relating disciplines -Public Relations, Advertising, Marketing etc.- kept pace with this flow and radically changed.

In this new environment, the meetings started by taking advantage of web 2.0 technologies with the opportunity of interact simultaneously. In addition, social communities started to came together in the “new” Agora. These platforms became the focal point of open interaction on various social, regional or national levels. Groups with a specific purpose are trying to reformat the existing relations. As part of the socialization process, social communities call for the participation of wider followers –audience- by facilitating the group meetings in real life.

These meetings give a perfect public relations opportunity to small and independent organizations for event management. Intense competition environment, high advertising budgets, rough publicity conditions and difficulty of taking part in main-stream media are the most disadvantaged points of these organizations/groups for event management. Even these organizations/groups have enough money for the event; occasionally they couldn't find the money or assets for gathering people, taking part in the media or send their messages.

Event Management via Digital Agoras: Case of Eventbrite

New opportunities of the internet and online technologies have led public relations to passing through to online (digital) environments. This transition allowed sharing the events and organizing events over the internet (Alikılıç, 2011: 6). In this way, as a result of the social changes - information society, post-modern democratic society, post-industrial society etc.- (Bennett and Maton, 2010: 321) the new public relations tool for event management appeared.

Special events defined as "That phenomenon arising from those non-routine occasions which have leisure, cultural, personal or organizational objectives set apart from the normal activity of daily life, whose purpose is to enlighten, celebrate, entertain or challenge the experience of a group of people." (Shone and Parry, 2010:3). As the above definition our case - eventbrite.com-; allows the groups to organize meetings and special events.

Event management is capability and control of the process of purpose, people and place. Event management process is shown below. As said before various changes over time influenced today's social and cultural structure. This structure has created a social space – Eventbrite, interrail groups, üniaktivite etc.- that responds to the need to meet in a place of to the individuals representing different groups. Consequently, the function and importance of the digital agora has increasing in every field.

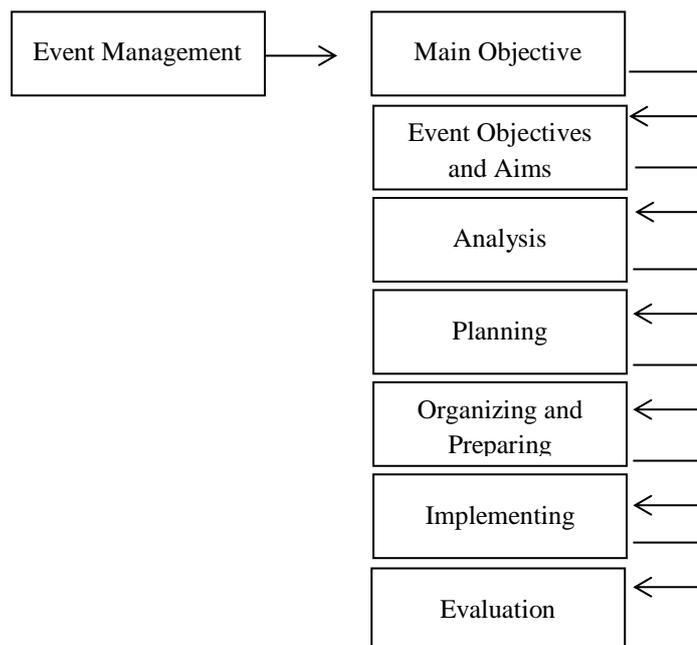


Figure 1. Event Management Process

Source: Shone and Parry, 2010: 92.

http://www.ajit-e.org/?menu=pages&p=details_of_article&id=364

Figure 1 demonstrates event management process nearly all of the digital agoras –and our case study Eventbrite- could be used for these process with several tools; Event objectives and aims identified in accord with the main objective of the company, institution or person. Following this process, research, planning and organizing and preparing stages, which can be called preparatory process steps in. Lastly, the event carry out in accordance with preparations and finally the team evaluates the results.

Digital Agora; constitute interaction environments with the public and make it easy to share the information and ideas with others. Also, these Agora are not dominated by a single person or a group despite of the old city-states, they are shaping by the information society. And this society giving importance to highly-qualified human capital along with the signs, images and dynamics of the era.

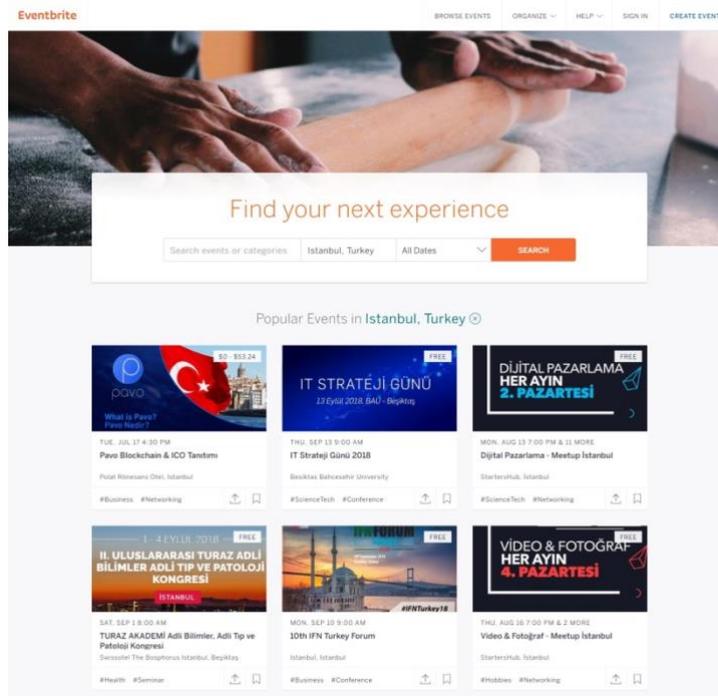


Image 1: Eventbrite, Homepage

Events on the platform divided to different categories –music, art, sports, travel etc.- and shown for different cities. So users may easily find the events they interested and get contact with the group easily. This function gets things easier for organizers to access target groups and send strategic messages to them.

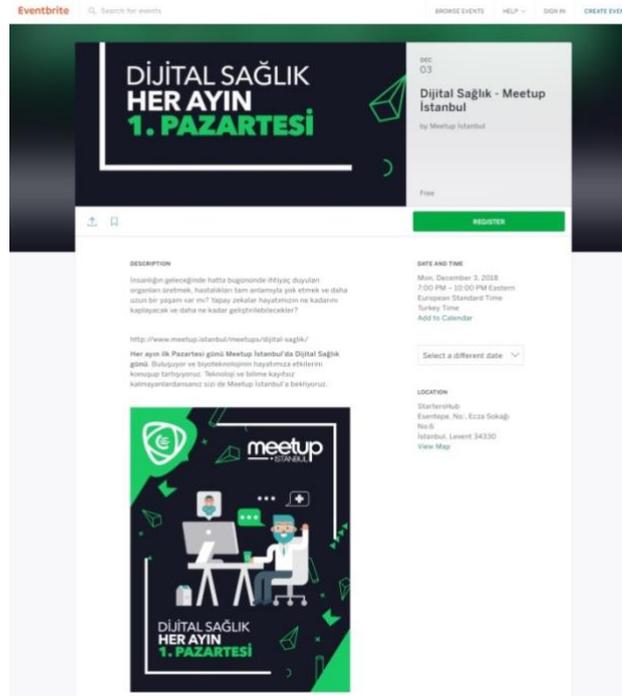


Image 2: Eventbrite, An Event Page

As our case study, Eventbrite allows the users to contacting to other users who have common interests with them. As a part of a group, users could follow the events that they are interested. In Eventbrite, users could participate and easily access in the communities that meet with their interests (sports, music, informatics, environment, politics etc.) or create their own community. In this direction, the purpose of the Eventbrite is making announcements of events to the members of the community or to the other people, who may be interested in it. In Eventbrite users may:

- Create an event & Browse events
- Manage and analyze their events
- Reach new audiences
- And get communicate with them

In public relations perspective all of these are seen as perfect opportunity for event management. For Wolf et al. (2005: 1-2) a successful event is depends on “ the five Ws and how” these questions are: Who are your guests? What is your event? Where is your event? Why is this event happening? How much money is in the budget?

Eventbrite.com or any similar platform – meetimer.com, meetup.com etc- help with these questions and event management process (See Figure 1) as determining and knowing the guests and potential target groups, estimating the budget according to the number of participants, promoting the event, its place and the organization’s cause for the event.

With these features of digital agoras gives the chance public relations departments to; Gathering information and data for research, access to target groups and with social media

functions communicate with them easily, managing in systematic processes and evaluation tools after the event.

CONCLUSION

Public life shaped by individuals in constant communication and established relationships between them through social networks. In fact, this social system is the product of freedom of thought and discussion.

Benefits of collective action have an important role in the producing, receiving and processing knowledge. This role provides an important tool for public opinion. Naturally, for the formation of public opinion, the tool –within this study our tool selected as digital agora- should be used in the most effective way. First of all, in today's society, well-functioning social action depends on the level of collective organization of society. In conjunction with it, collective action also requires that people be brought together for similar purposes. So, Eventbrite -just like an ancient agora- creates a social platform that could bring people together.

In the another hand, digital agora also takes the image management role too. Independent organizations could use Eventbrite –or many other digital agora- for creating events, getting attention, delivering their messages or simply expressing themselves. These platforms offer these advantages with great ease and affordable –even free- prices.

Agora should be considered as a social mechanism that fulfills informing and criticizing function. But Eventbrite shows lack of sense of politics and critical thought and focusing mainly “entertainment”.

An important point to be also noted here is the social groups which gathering for the same purpose in the Agora; attempt to gather other resources and participation to community, these groups also are in dialog with the other groups for potential conversion and take action for collective the events (Diani, 2001: 2). However, except entertaining function Eventbrite is also an environment where any idea and thought can be discussed freely and courageously.

With digitalization, this meetings has become an ideal event managers in terms of create a mechanisms that facilitate group meetings and opportunity to reach everywhere (Bumin, 2010:3). Despite of the usual functions of agora not fulfilling properly, in a digital agora: Organizations/Groups could take a part in the media, individuals could enjoy the new type of “gathering” and could organize meetings for coming together in "new" agoras for discussing and sharing their thought about their daily lives.

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