



## WORKING PAPER

In what extent the Covid19 crisis changed the organization of *Square* brand image ?

**Maëva Maidou**

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10 Rue Sextius Michel, 75015 Paris

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## **Introduction**

Brand image can be interpreted in different ways. It can be seen as the brand identity or as the brand values themselves. In fact, there is a lot of research in information and communication sciences about the definition of what is an image but not too much about brand image. Indeed, an organization's identity is a more dynamic concept than previously thought, and organizations often change as they try to maintain their identity. For them, image is an important strategic issue and also a proprietary technology.

In this working paper we are going to look at the definition of a brand image and how brands can manage to work on it efficiently. After, we are going to look at how brand image changed during the different events throughout time. Therefore, why the Covid19 crisis enrolled in those events which changed consequently the organisation of brand communication, whether it is internal or external. In the second part, we are going to look specifically on one brand, which is a consulting company : Square, based in Neuilly-sur-Seine, France. With the help of a few interviews from Square managers and employees, we will discuss in the second part, in what extent the Covid19 crisis changed the organization of Square brand image ?

### **First Part : The construction of a brand image through time until the COVID-19 crisis.**

- A. The evolution of brands image through time.
  - a. What is a brand image ?

Building strong brands has become a major challenge in today's heightened global competition. Indeed, it is difficult for companies to stand out from the competition, especially in the current health context. Creating a brand image or a brand identity is a long and tedious process. It requires a lot of patience and a lot of organization, in order to reach a brand image that is as real as possible. For this, companies must be able to define the DNA that represents them in order to achieve the connection between identity and image consistency.

Despite the relational display, marketers remain imbued with Shannon and Weaver's communication paradigm. Indeed, it is a question of « conveying information » and of « coding messages ».

Therefore, the difference between the identity the company needs and the image perceived by the target is emphasized. The brand image is the image of a company voluntarily showing itself to the market, and the image is a set of associations maintained by the public. The image is considered to be the concept of receiving and transmitting identity. In the sense of image production and its transaction, image is the core of doubt.

As a matter of fact, the image can be determined from the company's history. For companies, the generation of images must be based on the continuity between the constructed identity and the image refinement, and the image refinement will illustrate this point, according to the article « L'image à l'épreuve : du reflet à l'imagerie » (Caroline De Montety p.84-96), « coherence has been evoked to designate several aspects:

- The link between the internal, the place where identity is constituted, and the external, so that the image becomes an « analog » of the identity, its faithful translation.
- The harmony between the different external manifestations of the brand at the different points of contact ».

In other words, the identity of the organization must be understood as a socially constructed concept of what the organization is. Therefore, this identity can be a social construction, but people within the organization consider it to be well-founded and true (Bauman, 1996). However, if identity represents what the organization is, then it must be considered « real » and « deep », as an expression of the true « nature » of a given organization. This tradition can be seen as part of Durkheim's vision, in which individual behavior is aggregated into an overall, institutionalized organizational entity. In this way, he links the concept of organizational identity with more traditional meanings of organizational culture based on values, rules and behaviors.

In addition to « content », the point of contact is formed through tone, style and all the signs understood by the public, which in effect establishes a link between the brand and the actual or potential consumers. This relationship includes representations that merge with experience and therefore transform. Images evolve with life and perceived reality : « fragmentation, expansion or dilution of the image ». The brand identity has changed at the same time: whether it is controlled or

not, the perception and experience of consumers will enrich it, because consumers can prove it, complain about it or praise it, especially when it comes to the language spoken today on online forum or evaluation. This argument is based on the assumption that the identity of the organization is reflected in the labels we use to discuss, describe, and analyze, and these labels are generally institutionalized and disseminated globally. For neo-institutionalism, then, the identity of the organization is subordinated to the dominant external perceptions of what the organization should look like. Instead of a conception of its identity emerging from the core of the organization, identity is located in the formal structure and becomes a « shifting imitation of images predominant in the postmodern marketplace » (Gioia et al., 2000, p. 72).

b. The impact of a brand image for the company ?

Central to organizations, and in particular companies with a commercial purpose that manage brands, image is a major strategic issue as well as a know-how. The intensification of media processes, especially with the Internet, makes image management even more delicate, subject to numerous risks and variations. This complexity has reinforced the professionalization of image work and the need for communication agencies to convince on this point. As masters of the semiotization of a company's attributes into a brand image, these agencies must convince their clients of their ability to enrich the capital of brands and. To do this, they build methodologies designed to make visible their ability to build meaning with added value, to enrich and disseminate an image. In order to explain how enterprises can define an efficient brand image, I found out about the V.R.A.I. method which works in two steps:

1. A definition with the client of the DNA of the company or its brand to determine its positioning on the market,
2. A confrontation of these determinants with the reality of its public manifestations (essentially media).

The challenge for companies is to display a natural expression of their identity in their communications.

In companies where brands are not perceived as fundamental to the business, often SMEs, communication is a tool for publicizing the company's identity: the message conveyed must be transparent, or at least reflect as well as possible what constitutes it, i.e. its « DNA ». This approach

goes back to the representation of communication as a simple information practice. But it also means that these companies had little or no knowledge of marketing and communication issues.

On the other hand, when the company invests in the notion of brand, the development of the DNA is recognized as an ideal elaboration and construction. In this case, companies consider communication as the expression of a specific positioning. It is the expression of a bias, resulting from a strategic reflection intended to favor the affirmation and the differentiation of the company, whatever it is, in relation to its environment and to arouse the support of its customers.

The image sought must take advantage of the characteristics of the organization that employees consider important, the characteristics they are willing to show to the outside world. « If they don't feel like they're part of the process, even the most creative image strategy won't be reliable». Thus, we can talk about employer brand.

The term employer brand was coined by Simon Barrow in 1990. Since then, two terms have been used to refer to employer branding, the concept being generally represented by « employer brand » while the process of managing the employer brand is referred to as « employer branding ». « Researchers seem to agree that employer brand represents the potential benefits an employee sees in working for an organization » (Berthon et al., 2005; Roy, 2008).

The goal is to become an "employer of choice" by communicating to applicants and employees the message that it is an attractive place to work and different from its competitors. According to Ambler and Barrow (1996), there are three constituent dimensions of the employer brand : functional benefits, which correspond to the usefulness/interest of the work and development activities for the employee; economic, financial and material benefits; and psychological benefits, which refer to feelings of belonging and control. Individuals would develop an employer brand image through brand associations, which are the result of the employer brand created by the company and its marketing and communication actions that create strong, favorable and unique associations to the brand in the memory of individuals according to Keller.

Employer branding addresses both the company's current employees and those it would like to attract, i.e. prospects. In the research I've done, we don't necessarily differentiate between internal employer branding towards employees and external employer branding towards candidates, it is important to ensure their unity and consistency. The impact of the employer brand is nevertheless different on these two targets.

According to several researchers, an organization with a unique and favorable employer brand will be preferred to a company with a weak or negative employer brand. The employer brand thus



contributes to the formation of a sort of psychological contract even before recruitment. It would also result in a greater involvement of employees, improve their satisfaction and motivation.

Indeed, some researchers warn organizations about the importance of developing an external employer brand that is aligned with the actual attributes of the job and the organization, otherwise « the employer brand can become « toxic » (Charbonnier-Voirin et al., 2014; Mark and Toelken, 2009; Soulez and Guillot-Soulez, 2011) in the event that the promises it conveys are not respected (breach, violation or rupture of the psychological contract) », leading to significant and rapid departures of newcomers or even to disengagement or demotivation. This raises the question of the impact of major world events on a company's brand image.

## B. Covid-19 : Why brands shall changed their communication strategies ?

Due to the current health context, some companies have seen their communication strategy change 360° in a positive or negative way. Some have prospered, others have seen their reputation go down the drain. But the Covid-19 is not the first crisis that companies have gone through.

### a. Organization within businesses evolved since the beginning.

Economic activity is constantly challenged and renewed by innovation. Moreover, J. Schumpeter qualified, about a century after Marx's principle of « creative destruction », « the process of the destruction of old capital by new productive combinations which create, by their introduction into the market, new opportunities for investment and profit » (Schumpeter, 1979).

This process of « creative destruction » explains the cyclical evolution of the economy. The crisis is therefore inseparable from growth; it is even salutary, because it allows for the rebirth of the economy and the raising of the standard of general well-being.

« If we follow Schumpeter's thinking and extend it with the help of the mathematician economist N. Kondratieff (1984), we can see that the crisis is not only a crisis for the economy, but also a crisis of the economy. We can identify five economic cycles since 1780 or, rather, five long movements of accumulation associated with five waves of radical innovations: textiles, iron and steel, steam at the

end of the 18th century; railroads in the middle of the 19th century; electricity, automobiles, chemistry at the beginning of the 20th century; oil, plastics, electric motors in the middle of the 20th century; microelectronics, biotechnologies, ecotechnologies towards the end of the 20th century. »

This mother technology, combining with others, causes innovations to appear in successive clusters, causing imbalances wherever they appear : capital leaves inert and saturated sectors to move to sectors with high growth potential and high profit.

b. Nowadays, companies have to adapt to keep their customers.

In 2020, the world faced a new economic crisis due to the health crisis of the global Covid-19 pandemic. Month after month, the world has seen the number of cases and deaths increase exponentially. This unprecedented situation for our generation and our economy has triggered drastic changes more or less consequent.

Indeed, the priority of consumers has changed since the first containment was established in France. The industries were more or less affected and I think in particular of the cinema industry, the restaurant industry or culture in general. The virus arrived in our lives during a pivotal period, especially for the organization of cultural events such as festivals or concerts bringing together a very large number of people. I am also thinking of the hotel market which, following the restrictions of the French state, had to restrict or close its establishments. Other businesses that are not considered necessary for the survival of the population have seen their doors close for an indefinite time, even forever for some.

We can then ask ourselves what techniques companies have used to manage to survive during this global pandemic. Indeed, even if this sanitary situation has caused the collapse of hundreds of businesses, it has also been an opportunity for some. For example, in the textile industry, the market for fabric masks, which had not existed before, reached a record level in 2020. In addition, the health crisis has made some brands realize that consumers are never 100% acquired, on the contrary, they have to adopt techniques to keep their consumers and acquire new ones. Thus, companies must adapt to the needs of consumers and develop techniques that will allow them to gain market share.

The techniques are diverse but all have a common purpose depending on the specificity of the company. A company that sells services will have different marketing needs than a company that sells

goods. To adapt to the crisis, companies have not only had to change their editorial line but also adapt the techniques that allow them to be seen by the largest number of people.

First, companies have adapted their message to their customers. « Some, by the nature of their products, were able to respond to specific consumer needs related to the crisis and thus easily adjust their communication, » Sihem Dekhili, professor of sciences' management. Indeed, in the period of health insecurity that we are going through, brands have focused their message on emotion. For example, the brand *Free* with its advertising campaign totally linked to the period of the first confinement in France, has been able to have a strong impact on its consumers. The brand had first chosen to publish on social networks using the hashtag #RestezChezVous the French for #StayAtHome. This had generated a lot of positive reaction and had marked the minds. They totally succeeded in their bet because their campaign had a big success. It was, as a matter of fact, mentioned in articles and also visible during prime time television viewing. Another brand had known how to rebound on this opportunity to be seen despite the health context. It is the LVMH group which decided to produce hydroalcoholic gel for hospitals and EHPAD, greatly in need. Indeed, the brand had shared the fact that it had adapted its production units of perfumes and cosmetics to manufacture hydroalcoholic gel. This act of generosity of a group such as LVMH was relayed in the written and televised media, which generated commitment and interest towards it.

Secondly, brands have had to adapt their communication techniques. Indeed, before the pandemic, it was common to organize large events to announce the release of a new product, a highlight of the company concerned or simply to create excitement around the brand. However, with the health restrictions, this has become almost impossible. At the beginning of the pandemic, brands took time to adapt. Event planning was too vague at the time, and brands focused on delivering strong messages that represented their values and principles. But as time went by, companies were able to adapt their events to the digital format, especially through social networks such as Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and others. Indeed, brands or companies have equipped themselves with these social networks in order to reach their consumers as efficiently as possible. Being confined, the population has strongly increased the time spent on screens, whether it is phone, tablet, computer or television. A concrete example would be the organization of the Paris Fashion week 2021. High fashion houses such as Louis Vuitton or Balmain have innovated their way of presenting their fashion show. Instead of having a classic fashion show on a catwalk surrounded by spectators, these houses decided to rent new spaces such as the Louvre Museum for Louis Vuitton or the maintenance hangars of the airline

AirFrance. A successful marketing cost since the results of these videos are breathtaking and convey another form of art through a fashion show.

To conclude, building a brand identity is a rough road for companies. In today's world of global pandemics, companies' marketing methods have been turned upside down and they have to innovate to promote their product and keep their customers. Companies that sell services, such as the Square group, which I will talk about in the second part of this working paper, must find new strategies to promote their employer brand. Why should prospects choose Square over BCG or KPMG? That's what we're going to see right now.

## **Second Part : In what extent the Covid19 crisis changed the organization of Square brand image ?**

### **A. The evolution of communication at Square.**

#### **a. What is Square ?**

Founded in 2008, Square is a strategy and organization consulting group with 7 firms in France, Belgium and Luxembourg. Circle, Tallis, Viatys, Vertuo, Adway, Initio Belgium, Initio Luxembourg and Flow&Co are consulting firms specialized by business, sector or level of intervention. This unique and specific organization favors proximity, commitment, agility and expertise within each firm. The complementary nature of the firms allows Square to address, with more than 700 consultants, the most complex projects of its clients. Square advises its clients by providing expertise in 9 key areas. These expertise are *Data, Digital, Innovation, Marketing, People & Change, Risk & Finance, Regulatory & Compliance, CSR & Sustainable Finance* and *Supply-Chain*. These expertise allow them to intervene with their clients in specific areas in order to meet a need.

#### **b. The implementation of a communication plan.**

To answer this question I conducted two interviews with people in charge of communication at Square. These people are Manon Brisse, Communication and CSR Manager of the Square group and Emeline Dicham, head of communication for the Viatys firm of the Square group.

Manon joined the group in 2018 as a marketing consultant and then moved on to become Square's Group Communications Manager. She is the one who is behind the whole redesign of the group's communication strategy, both internally and externally. It is already clear that the establishment of this strategy is something quite recent within the group and that this strategy is evolving as it goes along in order to achieve a brand image that is as accurate as possible.

*« Before I arrived, the communications department did not exist. My first missions were to take over and develop communications on social networks, relations with the press agency and the CSR part of the group. After that, I worked on the new identity and the new positioning of the group. I developed new media and a very precise graphic charter. It's a work in perpetual renewal, there are always new things to do, to develop. We can't afford to rest on our laurels. »* Manon Brisse, Communications and CSR Manager.

Indeed, a new graphic charter has been reworked to reflect a premium image of the group through the various internal and external media. Manon worked with graphic designers, communication and production agencies to obtain the results we have now. The logos of the different firms were also reworked so that the whole Square universe would be coherent. The goal is that this image be interpreted as well as possible by the clients and prospects of the group. In fact, Manon's job was to put all the content distributed by Square in order. Manon is the link between the group and all the external entities that gravitate around it. Thus, she also worked with a communication agency named Wellcom, for all the press part of the group. When a consultant's article is published in the press, the agency informs Manon so that she can in turn communicate on this subject through social networks but also on the group's blog. This blog allows the group to broadcast Square's own content, i.e. articles published in the press but also feedback from employees that Square calls Case Study. This blog is attached to their website where you can see all the expertise and commitments of the group through writings such as *Focus*, *Books* or reports. In addition, on the website but also on Square's YouTube channel, we can access videos representing Square's « talents » as the tag line is « Giving future to talent ». These videos were made with the production agency KOTAO and allowed the viewers to put faces on the Square consultants.

## B. The impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the group communication strategy.

### a. The consequences of the crisis on Square's visibility.

The Covid-19 health crisis had more of a positive than negative impact on the group's communication. In fact, according to Manon and Emeline, it allowed the group and the firms to develop and to accelerate the content dissemination process.

*« As you will have understood, the impact was positive for the Communication Department. We were able to demonstrate our real contribution and the partners understood that we were a real lever on which to rely to ensure cohesion within the firm. We feel a real confidence on their part, they now rely on us, release the necessary funds and call on us as soon as a subject is to be dealt with in order to properly embark on the internal and external communication side. »* - Emeline Dicham, in charge of communications at Viatys, Square Group.

*« This crisis has required us to be very adaptable. We were able to develop certain topics more quickly and others took longer than expected. But overall, I will say that it forced us to make ourselves visible more quickly. »* - Manon Brisse.

Since the company's communication was mainly online, it was not negatively affected much. In fact, it allowed the group to develop its social networks more quickly because employees were telecommuting and had more time to spend on social networks to get social.

*« On external communication, the containment allowed employees to develop more content (Book, Focus and articles). We have therefore greatly increased the pace and quantity of publications. The content has always been of high quality, which has enabled us to establish our position as an expert on certain subjects. We have also developed new partnerships (such as with OpinionWay) to improve our understanding of the situation. »* - Manon Brisse.

The lockdown allowed employees to work on new content and to reflect on new management methods, which resulted in the publication of Books and Focus as well as many articles. The situation was in real correlation with the communication strategy that Manon wanted to bring to the group. There were some changes and adaptations, but overall, Square was able to make itself seen and known in the media.

b. What are the strategy adjustments that the group made ?

The adjustments were numerous and organized by period. First of all, the objective was to maintain the social link between employees. *« On internal communication, the confinement also required an increase in posts on our internal social networks. The objective was to maintain the social link, despite the distance, and to allow employees to feel supported and surrounded. »*, Manon Brisse. Thus, challenges were organized to create cohesion between employees. They were sports, culinary or entertaining challenges (blind tests), organized with external organizations such as *Gymlib* or *PlaySquad*. Following these events, screenshots were shared on the internal social network to generate commitment among employees.

*« The containment almost coincided with the launch of a new internal communication tool. So it was the perfect time to get people to go there and interact with their colleagues. We created a lot of content in this sense (Square Home Challenge with experience sharing, games, animations, etc.) and we developed new content to best accompany them in this period (telework tools guide, telework best practices guide, etc.) »*, Manon Brisse. This employer branding strategy is working and helps maintain a welcoming and fun image of the group among employees. For Emeline, *« the employer brand corresponds to the actions and marketing levers implemented by the company in order to make it attractive to future employees and to build employee loyalty »*.

Secondly, *« the adaptation was mainly carried out during the second half of 2020. We developed a new format : Square webinars linked to our Focus and Books. We realized that this was a good way to highlight the work of our employees in a format that was more adapted to the content consumption patterns of our targets »*, Manon Brisse. Indeed, the group has taken advantage of the development of digital platforms to participate in or produce video content such as lives, webinars or *« Square events »*. Since employees cannot travel or meet in the same space, it was wise to turn to this type of content. These live events were then rebroadcast on social networks, notably Instagram with the IGTV function.

Finally, many projects have started or have been thought at the beginning of this year 2021, especially with my arrival as an intern in communication. Indeed, I joined the group in January 2021 to accompany Manon Brisse on all the communication part of the group and the organization of events. So, since January we had the opportunity to work on a new communication strategy based on all the work Manon had started for two years. As a student in international brand strategy and marketing, I was able to bring a new look to the communication strategy of the group, especially on social networks. For this, I had to do a benchmark to position Square among the competitors. We then

established an action plan that we have already started but which I will share with you in the recommendations part.

### C. Recommendation.

In this part, I will mainly resume what we have been working on with Manon for three months now. As said before, we have established an action plan in order to highlight Square's employer brand. In parallel, a project to redesign the website was already underway before I arrived but we integrated it into the action plan in order to have a global vision of the projects we could develop over the year.

First of all, we will talk about Square's place on social networks. Indeed, even if Square has managed to gain engagement on external social networks, this is not enough to make itself known to prospects. Square is a consulting firm that produces a lot of very interesting content but not enough promoted. So we thought of a strategy to improve the visibility of Square's content. The creation of podcasts linked to articles published in the press was developed and applied. This is a kind of content that is trending at the moment and that works well. We still need to develop the strategy around it by continuing to communicate about it.

In addition, the content that works best on social networks are the video contents. Indeed, people are more likely to click on a short video than on a long written content. That's why I think we should develop video production within the group. This is what we have already started to do with the acquisition of a new video editing software that will allow us to edit quality videos quickly and efficiently. At the same time, we have been able to acquire new filming equipment, especially light and sound equipment.

We are going to communicate on aspects of the group that were little known externally but nevertheless very important internally. It is essential to communicate on all facets of the group to have employer brand content that is effective and as representative as possible. This is why we conducted internal interviews with researchers working on Research and Development (R&D) projects. In order to obtain employer brand content, we asked them why they had joined the group in order to use their verbatims to edit visuals. In terms of content, it is also necessary to regularly take photos and videos of employees in order to share content specific to Square. The goal is to put faces on the people who represent the group. Thus it is important to develop the content published on social



networks and to take advantage of all the features available, especially the highlights stories on Instagram, especially for students, who are more likely to go on Square's page and look.

Then, an equally important point was the relationship with schools. As a student myself, I think we need to anchor Square in the minds of business school students as a reference for a future job. For this, projects are being organized or have already taken place with some schools like IESEG or EM Lyon. Square has participated in 100% online recruitment forums and has been able to meet master students. We need to develop this school relation aspect by organizing competitions based on concrete cases proposed by Square.

This point brings us to recruitment, all these employer brand strategies aim to recruit « talent » but also to retain the employees who are already there. Let's focus on recruitment. We are currently working on the entire redesign of the website and we want to allow candidates to apply directly on the site. The site must reflect the values, projects and expertise of the group so that candidates can apply. The goal is to anchor in the minds of prospects that Square is a group where employees are the pillars that hold the whole entity together. For this, the diversity of the contents is important to stimulate and generate clicks from the candidate. Nevertheless, the website also aims to be clear about the projects that the group carries out so that the clients or future clients can get the best information.

To conclude this working paper and to answer the question, we can say that Square was able to bounce back from the Covid-19 crisis. Despite the difficulties, the group used the Covid health crisis as an opportunity and not as a threat. Thus, as Schumpeter would say, « the process of the destruction of old capital by new productive combinations will create new opportunities for investment and profit ».

#### D. Annexes

(I) Interview with Emeline Dicham, head of communication for the Viatys firm of the Square group.

**Maeva : How long have you been in charge of communication for this firm?**

**Emeline :** I've been in charge of VIATYS communications since the beginning of 2019! But I've been part of it since I joined the firm in 2015!

**M : Did you have a specific communication strategy for your firm? What was your strategy?**

**E :** The communication unit must ensure the internal and external influence of the firm in coordination with the Square communication and the image of the group. As far as the communication strategy is concerned, this year we defined it around the change in working habits in the face of the health situation but also with a view to what is going to be installed in a permanent manner. This strategy is then adapted to our various projects, which are as follows :

**Brand Identity:** Management of the firm's brand image, creation and support in the creation of visuals for the firms and communities.

**Brand Content:** Management of the internal and external communication of the firm through the VIATYS News, the podcasts project (in connection with Square), the creation and animation of events, etc.

**Social Networks:** Ensure the firm's influence on LinkedIn and Twitter. Analyze the behavior of the competition and create a brand image for the firm (outside of Square on these RS).

**Publications :** Accompany the consultants in the writing of publications, propose animation, training and ensure the link with Wellcom and the other sites of the cell in order to make these publications radiate.

**Recruitment:** Accompanying consultants on recruitment issues such as onboarding, life and internal involvement, cooptation, etc.

**Relations with schools:** Work in conjunction with Square. VIATYS works with several universities and organizes events, intervention days, etc.

**M : How was internal communication organized before the Covid19 health crisis?**

**E :** We had our sites in the same way (except for Recruitment and School Relations, which joined the ranks). I had a smaller team and communication was less important for the firm, we felt it.

The difference was that we were supporting the communities and associates on a daily basis in their activity. We didn't have an impact on the relationships between partners and consultants for example (even if we were a force of proposal). As the associates were not communicators, they did not necessarily see the real interest in using us as a lever and in relying on us.

**M : What impact did Covid19 have on your communication strategy?**

**E :** As you will have understood, the impact has been positive for the Communication Unit. We were able to demonstrate our real contribution and the partners understood that we were a real lever on which to rely to ensure cohesion within the firm. We feel a real confidence on their part, they now rely on us, release the necessary funds and call on us as soon as a subject is to be dealt with in order to properly embark on the internal and external communication side.

**M : What actions have you taken to remedy this?**

**E :** We have built a roadmap and a proposal file. We have also set up regular exchanges with our sponsoring partners, which allows us to bring up topics and validate them quickly so that we can move on to action! We have also increased the number of people in the team and we give them free rein to be a force of proposal.

**M : How would you define the concept of "employer brand"?**

**E :** The employer brand corresponds to the actions and marketing levers put in place by the company in order to make it attractive to future employees and to build employee loyalty.

**M : Do you think that employer branding is an issue to be developed in your firm and in the group in general?**

**E :** Yes, I think it is important and it is in line with our actions! We have a recruitment project that deals with this subject, but also brand content and brand identity. These actions combined allow an improvement on this level but I think we can always evolve and do better!

**M : What would be your recommendations to improve Square's employer brand?**

**E :** I think we need to highlight the benefits of our HR policy more! It is more favorable and positive than many other competitors and that is a plus. Employees and candidates should feel the climate of trust and benevolence.

I think it would also be good to work on the transparency of the information relayed by our managers and partners, especially on the organization of the group and its evolution. And that the information is not only top-down! We need to apply what we advise and implement with our clients. We are starting to work on this aspect in the firm by proposing a Live where the partners answer the consultants' questions!

(II) Interview with Manon Brisse, Communication and CSR Manager of the Square group.

**Maeva M : How long have you been working in the communications department at Square?**

**Manon B:** I joined Square as a Marketing Consultant in October 2018 and then was offered the position of Communications Manager in April 2019.

**MM: What are some of the projects you've established to develop Square's communication?**

**MB :** Actually, this is a job creation. Before my arrival, the communication department did not exist. My first missions were to take over and develop communications on social networks, relations with the press agency and the CSR part of the group. After that, I worked on the new identity and the new positioning of the group. I developed new media and a very precise graphic charter. It's a work in perpetual renewal, there are always new things to do, to develop. We can't afford to rest on our laurels.

**MM : Did you have a communication strategy in place, outside the context of Covid19?**

**MB :** Yes, because we were launching the whole new identity of the group a few weeks before the first containment on French soil. So naturally, I had a communication strategy for the year. This crisis required us to have a strong capacity to adapt. We were able to develop certain topics more quickly and others took longer than expected. But overall, I would say that it forced us to become visible more quickly.

**MM : What consequences has Covid19 had on the group's external and internal communication? There were several consequences.**

**MB :** In terms of external communication, the containment allowed the employees to develop more content (book, focus and articles). We have therefore greatly increased the pace and quantity of publications. The content has always been of high quality, which has enabled us to establish our position as an expert on certain subjects. We have also developed new partnerships (such as with OpinionWay) to improve our understanding of the situation.

In terms of internal communication, the containment also required an increase in posts on our internal social networks. The objective was to maintain the social link, despite the distance, and to allow employees to feel supported and surrounded. The objectives were not at all the same for the two types of communication.

**MM : What adaptations did you have to make to keep your audience?**

**MB :** The adaptation was mainly done during the second half of the year. We developed a new format (Square webinars in connection with our focus and our books). We realized that it was a good way to highlight the work of our collaborators in a format that was more adapted to the content consumption patterns of our targets. Apart from the pace of publication, there has not been much change. Initially, Square's communication is mainly digital, so it has remained so.

**MM : Have you noticed a difference in interaction with the content posted?**

**MB :** Yes, there was a lot more interaction during the containment period mainly. There are several reasons for this. First of all, you have to take into account that the lockdown has, in some cases, allowed people to have a little more quiet/free time. And when you have time, you go on social media. People certainly took more time to discover the content that was available to them. Plus, a lot of people were very hungry for content. They wanted to use this special time to enrich their knowledge on this or that topic.

Secondly, consultants are proud of what they produce. And they are absolutely right. The content they produce is of good quality, and it was important to them that it be visible. For internal communication, the lockdown almost coincided with the launch of a new internal communication tool. So it was the perfect time to get people to go there and interact with their colleagues. We created a lot of content for this (Square Home Challenge with experience sharing, games, animations, etc.) and we developed new content to accompany them in this period (telework tools guide, telework best practices guide, etc.).

**MM: Has there been an evolution in the recruitment of new talent?**

**MB :** We have reduced the number of people recruited but that seems normal to me, I am not an expert in these matters.

**MM : What are the points you would like to develop in the next few months?**

**MB :** There are several very important points and projects to come for the company in terms of communication. We will launch our new website during the second half of the year. It's a great project that I'm excited to be a part of. We launched new content in the Podcast format in April. I can't wait to see how consumption of this new format evolves. We will also be developing more video formats with new tools in-house. We're also going to be participating in events again and after almost a year of nothing, that's great news. The last point is that we want to develop communication around recruitment and the employer brand. This is a very important topic for consulting firms.

**MM : How would you define the concept of "employer brand"?**

**MB :** The employer brand is closely linked to the reputation of the company, to the highlighting of its values and its organization. Beyond a communication purely aimed at potential candidates, it is important that it highlights the DNA of the brand and its functioning.

**MM : How should Square develop its employer brand?**

**MB :** There are many ways to develop your employer brand. Not only will the new website allow us to develop this, but all the new content we want to create will also help. In addition to the know-how of our employees, which we highlight in our books, focuses and articles, we will be focusing more on Square's values, partnerships, internal life, commitments, etc. This can also concern internal communication. We have to constantly think about how to reach our employees and enrich them with everything we do, despite the physical distance that has been going on for a year now.

**MM : Should the current health situation be taken into account when establishing this communication strategy? How can we do this?**

**MB :** The health situation has profoundly changed certain mentalities, certain modes of management, certain organizations. It seems to me that it would not be relevant to act as if nothing had happened.

It is important to take into account the values that have developed rapidly during this crisis (awareness of the need to be more eco-responsible, the importance of human relationships, the development of well-being in the workplace, etc.) so that the messages are understood by our targets and that they adhere to them. The idea is not to develop biased communication, but rather to highlight what we do well, often for years. These were actions or organizations that we did not usually communicate about. They appear to be of primary importance today.