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Social media and brand management (literature review)

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Abstract

Social media use has expanded greatly in the last years in Albania. The development of different networks that offer online service all over the country has contributed a lot to it. Many people, particularly young ones, are very fond of it, are using heavily and social media networks are now part of their lives. Social media have changed the way people communicate and interact with each-other and the marketing done on social media has enriched their marketing mix and has transformed the way companies communicate to their customers. Companies and brand managers have the opportunity to benefit from the use of these new communication channels and boost their profits. The purpose of this study is to offer a review of the existing literature about social media use by companies. It focuses on the marketing generated through social media channels and the specific elements related to it. Extant research evidence the significant effect that social media marketing has on the overall communications between companies and customers and the benefits and challenges associated to it.

Key words: *social media marketing, brand, consumer*

1. Introduction

Technological developments in the last decades have offered new ways of communication between people and organizations. Internet is an innovative way for individuals and companies to communicate. Internet use has become a normal phenomenon during the last decade and an essential element of everyday life (Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010) as it influences many human and business aspects from the way in which organizations operate to the way people

communicate, shop and spend their leisure time. People can socialize, search and spread information online and this is a big transformation. The development of Web and especially Web 2.0, where there is a high level of interaction and users can gain and generate information has contributed to these changes. At the beginning of internet and social media use, the interaction between people through these media was unidirectional; one-to-many media content. While technology continually evolves, social media used today enables two-side interaction and peer-to-peer messages and communication between specific individuals and/or organizations in an online environment, so users and customers can generate the information. Internet is a powerful media that offers the opportunity for having public and private social interaction. There are huge amounts of information that can be distributed in a small amount of time. This element is very important in business and especially in marketing where communication is very important and key to create and maintain positive relationships between companies and customers. Hughes et al. (2011) stated that Internet is a strong mean of communication and it may reshape the way people and companies communicate by contributing to the reduction of the barriers to face-to-face interaction. Internet and social media marketing has greatly impacted the communication and marketing activity of companies and individuals by also multiplying their effects. Researchers state that there is an increasing need to update the understanding of social media and to develop knowledge which suits the imperatives of marketing in social media environments (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2013).

Social media are websites and softwares that serve a primary function of allowing users to "connect, communicate and interact with each other" (Correa, Hinsley & Gil de Zúñiga, 2010, p. 248). Saffo and Brake (2009) stated that social media has to do with the activities, practices and behaviors that are created among people who gather online to share information, knowledge and opinions. The use of social media is continually growing rapidly and data from different researches (ex. Pew Internet, 2016; Smartinsights, 2017) show that among the different social media, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Pinterest, Instagram and LinkedIn are among the most used.

These media offer a direct way to communicate and socialize with others and get their feedback, by influencing so on individuals' choices and self-esteem (Pempek et al., 2008). People communicate with each-other through these media and share elements of their personal, social and economic life. Social network sites are an important tool that satisfies communication needs and wants, a key element in the marketing of every business. This kind of communication allows their users to interact over social media not only with friends but also with unknown institutions as organizations and brands. Social network sites have received considerable attention from researchers, organizations and the general public because of the increasingly large user-base of their sites. They are thought

to help on creating and maintaining more extensive social networks and business relationships between people and organizations due to the reduction of costs (e.g., time, effort) for developing and maintaining relationships (Donath & Boyd, 2004) and their significant impact on exchanging valued information. Blogs and consumer generated information on social media are used as valuable resources of managing and evolving customer relationships with brands (Gensler et al., 2013). Social media marketing is relatively a new but rapidly growing platform for companies for creating and maintaining relationships with customers and forming customer positive image about the brand (Erdogmus & Cicek, 2012) and it is eagerly explored by academics and practitioners.

Users differ in their characteristics, their level of activity in the social media and their intentions to continue to use it. As new kinds of social media increase rapidly, it becomes significant for businesses to develop proper strategies to be in these media, engage actual users and acquire new ones. New social media can easily proliferate by imitating the functionality of existing ones as these media are characterized of information transparency, low barriers to entry in the social media industry as well as low customer switching costs (Pentina et al., 2013). Social media networks are a significant source of electronic word of mouth and this kind of communication is even more important than traditional one because the number of relationships created and customers reached is much greater. It is also more challenging than traditional communication as it is not a one-way company communication but customers can actively communicate impact and interact with each-other (Li & Bernoff, 2011).

In this challenging new environment, it becomes important for businesses to explore these communication channels and use them in their marketing and managing activities. Few studies have been conducted to assess the way social media affects communication and purchase behavior (Baker & Oswald, 2010) and other ones are needed to better understand this relationship. This study tries to offer a literature review on the use of social media in marketing, creating and managing customer relationship and brand management.

The introduction and use of internet and social media in Albania has happened after the year 2007, when the market was liberalized and the prices for internet services were reduced. Although it has been used late in time compared to other countries, it has experienced a significant growth in the last decade and has reached 60.10% coverage in June 2014 (Albanian Media Institute, 2015; IBNA 2014). These figures represent a huge opportunity for any company that operates in the Albanian market to engage in social media marketing and gain the advantages and positive results associated to it.

Social media use is changing the traditional marketing communication of companies. These networks offer customers the opportunity to interact not only

with the company but also with other customers, so the company is no longer the sole source of brand communication (Li & Bernoff, 2011). By doing so, marketing managers need to manage not only the communication of the company toward its customers but also the customers' communication about the company as they increasingly impact on company brand and product management. So, customer-generated communication and customers' online word of mouth should be carefully understood and managed by companies in order to continue to control their marketing communication and the way they want to be perceived by customers. Different studies have evidenced the need to analyze and understand the effect of company and customer communication on social media with a special focus to brand communication and management (Taylor, 2013; Smith, Fischer & Yongjian, 2012).

While there is evidence of the increase in the use of social media, there is also a higher attention of researchers about different aspects related to it. Despite the increase in empirical research in social media, there is still little understanding of how this company and user-generated communication influences consumer perceptions of brands and their behavior in the marketplace and other researches can enrich the literature about them (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016).

2. Literature review: Company generated social media communication

The domination of new technologies and social media offer the possibility to many people to be connected to each other. Many Internet users have the possibility to have a large amount of online exposure and to be part of different networks. One of the most important networks of engaging with many other customers is social networking. Social networking through online media is composed of a variety of different digital sources of information. Referring to Chauhan and Pillai (2013), these networks are created and used by Internet users as a way to educate one another about products and brands. Companies do not only try to offer significant information for their brands on these networks, they have also become aware now of the necessary need to monitor these flow of information and to foster the interactions of the company with the customers leading so to the development of personal relationships with consumers (Li & Bernoff, 2011). Social media offer to companies new ways of engaging with customers and the entire audience. As a result, the use of social media for marketing purpose and the social media communication delivered by the company is also considered to be a new and essential element of its promotion mix (Mangold & Faulds 2009). Marketing managers have established objectives to their social media use and they

expect their social media communication to engage with customers, to foster the interaction between the company and the customer, to create loyal consumers and to influence their perceptions of products, disseminate information and learn from and about their audience (Brodie et al. 2013). It is a powerful tool on attracting different kinds of audiences and orienting them toward company and audience interests of products and brands. Brand social media marketing is able to catch a vast audience with extensive demographic appeal (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) and that's another reason why many companies are increasingly using it. The ability to reach more people than traditional media and the popularity of social media and Internet use among people throughout the world is at the core of social media use by many companies (Li & Bernoff 2011) and different studies sustain the increase use of brand social media marketing by many companies. Internet users are turning away from traditional media and are increasingly using social media platforms to search for information regarding brands and companies (Mangold & Faulds 2009; Bambauer-Sachse & Mangold 2011). Consumers require instant access to information, information on demand, interaction with the brand management and all of this at their own convenience (Mangold & Faulds 2009) making it imperative for companies and brands not only to be found but to be very active on social media marketing.

2.1 Customer generated social media communication

The user generated content of brand social media marketing has attracted much attention among researchers. The inclusive of customers on offering information on brand social media marketing has been a significant development that has shaped the marketing of companies and also the consumer behavior toward brands. This is a consequence of the so called Web 2.0 era (consumer generated content) and of the continuous increase of the customers and companies which use these media. While trying to define the user-generated content, OECD (2007) defined it as the "i) content that is made publicly available over the Internet, ii) content that reflects a certain amount of creative effort, and iii) content created outside professional routines and practices". User-generated content is a significant element for consumer insights. They can engage with the brands and with other customers and have an environment where can share their thoughts and where can freely communicate and share their opinions. They exchange information about the brand and can create powerful communities where people with same interests can easily interact with each-other (Christodoulides, Jevons & Bonhomme 2012; Winer 2009). While studying on the issue, some researchers have highlighted that there is a difference between content creation and content dissemination, and that the user-generated content creation is conceptualized as similar to e-word

of mouth (Kozinets et al. 2010). Other researchers (Smith, Fischer & Yongjian 2012) go further by offering the differences between the two concepts; whether the content is generated by consumers or it is just conveyed and shared by them through social media.

Social media channels when used as brand marketing ones facilitate consumers' communication about the brand and accelerate communication among consumers about it (Duan, Gu & Whinston, 2008). Researchers (ex. Burmann & Arnhold 2008) think that the Internet and Web 2.0 have empowered consumer behavior, by significantly impacting not only on the information but also on all the phases of the purchasing process. They can undertake all the phases of the purchase process by using online mediums. They can search for the brand online, compare brands' qualities and prices, take more information about the brand and generate information to the company and to other customers by commenting, liking or disliking the brand. In the Web 2.0 era, when customers have needs and wants they go first online, gather information, compare alternatives, make their choices and buy online. Nowadays, customers use extensively social media networks in order to access the desired product, brand and company and all the necessary information about them (Li & Bernoff 2011; Christodoulides, Michaelidou & Siamagka 2013). Research (ex. Daugherty, Eastin & Bright 2008) shows that customers engaged in user-generated content actively share opinions about brands with other customers and can be brand advocates while the company is keeping marketing and communication costs lower than traditional one.

3. Role of social media in marketing

Social media offers to every business a new mean and marketing opportunity to compete in the market. It is one of the best ways for a company or brand to connect to its customers. Despite the positive results of using traditional media and traditional customer communication and promotional techniques, companies are continually reinforcing their engagement in the online word of social media marketing. The size of the company or business is not a condition in this case; whether it is a small familiar business or a big corporate the use of online communication has positive impact and can improve their performance. Despite other reasons, particularly small businesses use this kind of marketing communication to their audience as they may lack the necessary resources for using traditional forms of advertising. Practitioners and advertisers are increasingly using it and researchers are trying to explore its processes, elements and effects. Social media marketing is marketing using online communities and social networks and it is one of the latest trends in marketing and the marketing experienced in this way offer several benefits to both

the company and the customer (Kotler & Armstrong, 2013). Among other means of traditional marketing, marketers have used social media marketing in order to maintain brand loyalty from their customers. It contributes to the reduction of business costs, offers the possibility to interact with the customers and enables the company to gain more brand awareness and profits through a different marketing tool that can generate more sales. Customers who like the brand and follow it on social networks tend to visit the store more frequently, generate more positive word of mouth and are more emotionally attached to the brand (Dholakia & Durham, 2010). The attribute of user-generated social media in brand communication positively impacts every company. But at the other hand, because of this element, social media marketing should be managed carefully by companies. There may be dissatisfied consumers which may use social media sites to make public complaints to the company by generating in this way negative word of mouth. But managers have the opportunity to strategically manage this negative information and transform it to a possibility for brand building and reinforcement. Because of the extended use of these new communication channels and the significant impact of word of mouth communication on customers, it has a greater effect on consumers' overall perception of brands than using only company-generated social media communication. By using social media, organizations can effectively promote their products, offer immediate support to their customers, customers are more able to share information between each other about the company and its products, increase brand awareness and recognition through networking, conversation and online community by building so brand loyalty (Gunelius, 2011; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009; Mangold & Foulds, 2009). Customers who use social media are more likely to talk about, recommend or purchase a company's products after they have been engaged with the company online. Small businesses use social media marketing for different purposes among which are to have a company page on a social networking site, to post status updates or elements of interest on social media sites, to build networks through different sites and to monitor customer feedback about the business. Social media marketing not only presents the company and its products to customers but it also helps to listen and understand customers, offer the possibility to identify opinion leaders and brand evangelists and all these can be done to zero costs. Social media marketing, as an effective mean of using time and resources, offer to companies a better way of communicating to its customers by representing in this way a new alternative method, despite the traditional ones, to build brand loyalty. As it is different from traditional marketing methods, it requires special attention and appropriate strategies to achieve positive results. Social media offers also the company the possibility to actively interact with its customers and it is strongly related and contributes to relationship marketing. Morgan and Hunt (1994, p. 22) defined relationship marketing as marketing

activities directed towards establishing, developing and maintaining successful relational exchanges. Social media marketing, being at the hand of customers is an important tool that positively impacts the creation and reinforcement of company-customer relationship. It offers more insights and feedback to the company about what customers want, think and say about the brand.

Social media are seen as service channels which can actively engage customers in every moment in real time offering so many benefits to customers. In this way customers are exposed to many different brands and they can evaluate and choose the right one that can be of their interest. By doing so, social media marketing poses new challenges for companies and marketers to continuously manage and update their sites in order to grasp customer attention and to be their first choice.

4. Brand management on social media

Today, almost every product and company operates by using brands. Brands are intangible assets and are one of the most valuable assets that a company may have (Zehir et al., 2011). Brand management has changed dramatically in the last decades with the use of internet and social media platforms. Social media have supplied the marketing of companies with new channels of brand communication by participating in online brand engagement (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). At the beginning of internet use, managers were just replicating the offline marketing they were already applying on social media and offering one-way informational brochures (Chistodoulides, 2009), but today things have changed a lot. Brand managers were the only to offer and communicate the attributes and characteristics of brands to the customers and the entire audience. Their main aim was to create a powerful and specific image for the brand by using the company one way communication and evidencing the positive elements of brands. Internet has transformed this way of brand management and social media can have a dramatic impact on brand's reputation (Kim & Ko, 2012). Customers have become an important element of online brand management and companies engage in activities that positively involve customer-generated content. A specific strategy that has attracted managers' attention and has been used by them is to stimulate the creation and sharing of customer content which can enhance the relationships between brands and customers and lead to the creation and reinforcement of brand communities (Van den Bulte & Wuyts, 2007). By using social media, brands can communicate to their customers both individually and in groups. Researchers (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) encourage businesses to use social media and to take advantage of it as a significant tool of their marketing integrated communication if they want to survive and reinforce their position in the market. Different studies

(ex. Erdogmus & Cicek, 2012) have shown that brand loyalty is positively affected by different platforms and applications that are offered by the brand on social media. Brand managers should offer attractive online marketing and differentiate their brand and the communication about it.

But they should carefully manage customers' consumption experiences as they are exposed online to everyone and it may be more difficult to manage contemporary interactions with each single customer. Every element of social media should be thoroughly understood by brand managers while they want to or are using it. This will lead to positive results related to brand management in social media.

Brand managers often stress different aspects of social media use to be more important than others in their marketing activity. Some of them are more interested in the number and positive comments about ones brand while others are more interested on the presentation of products or the number of likes their brand receives. De Vries et al. (2012) studied different aspects of brand management using social media marketing and stated that not all the determinants which are beneficial for increasing the number of likes do also have the same effect on enhancing the number of comments about the brand, and vice versa. They also found that brand fans active on brands social media are significantly influenced by each other, enhancing in this way the effect of online word of mouth.

Different studies have tried to explore the impact of different aspects of the brand on brand equity while applying the marketing for their brands on social media. The study of Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016) about the impact of social media on brand perception in three industries found that both brand equity and brand attitude positively influenced the intentions of brand purchase of costumers. The effect of social media marketing on brand and brand loyalty have attracted many attention from researchers and practitioners (McKee, 2010; Kaplan & Haenlein,

2009). Different studies have shown that social media can create and reinforce brand awareness and increase sales (Fanion, 2011). But brand managers and marketers should carefully manage these relationships especially in the case of ineffective handling of online relationships with customers. These situations may lead to negative word of mouth about the company and the brand so online brand managers should develop appropriate response strategies to respond promptly and not let to negatively impact brand image and sales (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010).

5. Conclusion

Social media and its use in business and marketing have received particular attention in the last years. It has been adopted by different kind of companies

from profit to non-profit ones, from small familiar businesses to big companies as an effective instrument of connecting to customers and managing their brands. Prior research has attempted to show the positive effect of social media marketing on brand management. Different studies have tried to assess the effects of social media communication on products and brands and have aimed to measure brand purchase intentions when using social media. Marketing and brand managers should focus on the proficient use of social media brand marketing in order to offer more value and generate more profits. They should also focus on building positive brand associations and on exploring which of the characteristics of their brands mainly influence the consumer's attitude towards the brand in order to reinforce these associations and create brand equity (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). Different studies have indicated that positive attitudes toward a brand can positively influence brand management, customer's purchase intentions and their willingness to pay more for the brand (Folse, Netemeyer & Burton 2012). Despite that, different researchers (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016) suggest that social media marketing and brand management should not be used as a substitute for traditional marketing and advertising, but should be treated as one of the elements of the marketing communication strategy of every company. Companies should continually design their social media content to influence consumer's preferences and positive attitudes towards brands. Brand managers should offer attractive online marketing in order to benefit from positive word of mouth in the online medium.

Companies have to compete with other ones that are present in social media and they should also be careful on choosing among different platforms of social media that already exist. This is done by carefully analyzing each social media platform and its popularity in the market. The existence of many social media platforms poses many difficulties to companies. They should understand which platforms are used by their target market segments and participate in the right and most effective ones in order to create brand awareness and brand loyalty. Companies have to stay competitive on using social media so they need to develop solid and effective social media marketing strategies. Despite the benefits associated with the use of brand social media marketing, marketers and companies that are engaged in social media brand marketing should carefully manage their online customers. They should attract and maintain more and more customers engaged to the brand, control and guide the information they are generating and create loyal customers.

This study aimed to offer an empirical analysis of the existing literature on social media marketing and its use on managing brands. Despite the different studies about the use of social media brand marketing there is still a need to perform empirical studies in different context that explore the influence of this tool of promotion mix on customers' behavior and their purchase intentions toward the brand.

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