

SOCIAL MEDIA - A NEW WAY OF COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: *The Internet has a major impact when it comes to marketing tools, providing new opportunities that were not previously available in the traditional marketing environment. Each traditional communication channel has its obvious advantages and organizations must continue to use it, but the Internet is a channel in constant development, enjoying high attention and being currently used by more than a third of the global population. Knowing the different advantages and disadvantages of both traditional and online marketing, a good marketer may be able to make the right decision when developing integrated marketing strategies.*

Key words: *social media, online marketing, communication methods, integrated marketing, internet.*

1. Introduction

The marketing concept is vast and there are a large number of studies on this topic. These studies discuss various marketing tools and strategies that are looking to guide companies to success. Currently, online marketing has taken over more and more of the marketing budgets and efforts, diminishing the traditional marketing activities. The success gained by the organization in the offline environment is radically different from that obtained in the online environment. Out of the online communication channels, this paper will present the particularities of the component that is currently known to be the *star* of the online environment: social media.

It is often said that people learn how social media works only by using it actively - for example, people learn to use social media through networking,

communication, exchange of information and use of various applications in the online environment. This creates a distinction between those who are already actively using social media and those who still view social media as something unfamiliar.

In 2005, Internet guru Tim O'Reilly proposed the first definition of what he called, Web 2.0 [6]. This umbrella term was referring to the new generation of Web services and business models on the Internet. Since then, many definitions have been proposed. Web 2.0 focuses on all forms of networks, the various applications available and how users interact and communicate online. As more data and more Web Services appear on the web, the platform or service gets better [11].

Social media puts the person, the information and the message in the center because the individual is given the

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opportunity to communicate freely in the online public open space, which is what actually leads to the rapid development of these networks. Platforms and their functionality are continuously improved as more people get to use them and socialize in different ways [2]. It was pointed out that this area is in constant development due to freedom of expression and free access to these platforms.

2. Communication in Social Media

The power lies in the hands of the user, because the individual can, through a simple click, spread their ideas and opinions through social media to the whole world. The message can be directed explicitly to someone while at the same time, it is hard to know exactly who the author is [1]. Almost everyone can share their opinion and can express themselves freely through social media. Once a message has been posted, it is difficult for anyone to control how it will spread. Moreover, the information can be quickly shared and/or distributed without having any control. Public space has changed due to social media, as it has created new ways that allowed unlimited freedom of speech. However, companies that control social networks have a certain power to create rules and policies for their use. In the same time, users can take decide at any given moment not to use a particular social network if they do not agree with these rules.

Moving forward, it is important to make reference to the different types of traditional marketing, focusing on differentiating the *push* and *pull* marketing methods. A growing trend was noted for the *pull* marketing, in this case customers seeking themselves the companies and the brands to which they are interested and

willing to establish a relationship. Nowadays, companies use the *pull* marketing practices in social media because customers are those who seek and choose, showing an interest.

In the traditional marketing communication the focus was on promoting and messaging. This has encouraged a *push* marketing approach using media channels such as television, radio, newspapers and even direct marketing phone [9]. The use of such media channels made the communication as a one-to-many message, the message being transmitted from a single source to multiple receivers (Rowley, 2004). When communication is *push* (one-to-many), the receiver encounters difficulties in avoiding commercial messages because these are "pushed" to the target market. The receiver can evaluate the message, but cannot decide whether or not to accept the message.

On the other hand, the web provides a dynamic communication because it represents a free flow that allows the exchange of information. The information is always available on the Web, the customer being able to access it whenever he/she wants in the most convenient way for him/her. This is called *pull* marketing, according to Rowley. The receiver can choose to browse through search engines or social networks and may publicly become the fan of a company which he/she believes it has the information he/she seeks. Rowley stresses that though *pull* marketing the customer spreads information, observations, opinions, commenting on and making recommendations to other acquaintances. Another important aspect is that the communication encourages immediate feedback due to the bi-directional communication which takes place between the organization and customers in the online environment.

3. "Word of Mouth": Recommendations from friends and acquaintances

Recommendations from friends and acquaintances, known as "word of mouth" represent an important part of marketing nowadays. The information people receive from friends who talk about a product or service are often more effective than information coming through the media. People have more confidence in what they are recommended by acquaintances than in the information coming from media promotion channels. Sernovitz [10] states that there is no better way to promote a product or service than through recommendations from friends and acquaintances. Nowadays people exchange information between them via the Internet, a very good example being the social networks.

According to Grönroos [4] "word of mouth" recommendations are a "tool" that can be used when the message of the organization, credibility, actions, habits, its services and so on, are transmitted from one person to another.

"Word of mouth" recommendations represent the way in which people transfer messages to one another about products and services that they have heard or tried. This is not a new way of marketing, it has existed for a long time in the market but expanded even more with the development of the online environment. This type of marketing often has a greater impact than planned marketing.

Grönroos believes that the organization itself has, in a certain extent, the control to make customers talk about it by doing something unexpected. This can create a viral topic but is not enough. It is important that the right person hears about it in the right time and that he/she spreads the word to the right people through the right communication channel. Whenever a

strong connection is created between the organization and the client, the client often begins to recommend the organization to relatives and friends by sharing their experiences. These customers are called ambassadors, they promote the value provided by an organization. Such different criteria make recommendations from friends and acquaintances to be almost uncontrollable by the organization, but when this method of promotion is properly managed and built major advantages arise.

According to Grönroos, recommendations from friends and acquaintances have a positive influence on the growth of an organization. This may be connected with the fact that ambassadors, satisfied customers, feel enthusiasm for the products and services of the organization, which leads to actively recommending the organization to others. He emphasizes the importance of these recommendations and ambassadors for the development of an organization, stating that if an organization fails to create ambassadors who will spread positive feedback about the organization and its products on their own initiative and without any incentives, then that organization has come a long way - and will be able to get even further.

As already mentioned, "word of mouth" recommendations represent a well-known phenomenon and is not a recent practice, but the audience was limited to a network consisting of family, neighbors and work colleagues you meet in real life day. Today, with the evolution of Web 2.0 and social media, the social network of people has increased noticeably, making it possible to disseminate information and opinions very quickly and on a large scale. In social media, people who are in a relationship with an organization or are interested in the products and services of an organization, are often those who start discussions. If companies provide

customers the right environment, tools and the support needed, then discussions about the organization can be easily established and the organization can receive valuable information and feedback on customer perception about their activity; an example of such a support environment is to create a page on Facebook.

Despite the fact that social media has created a quick and effective way to ambassadors and other customers to act and broaden their positive experiences about products and services, this environment can also work against an organization. Grönroos states that there is one thing that spreads faster than positive “word of mouth” feedback, which is negative feedback. It is therefore important for companies to engage in discussions on the Internet and social networks to prevent any potential negative feedback to spread out the general public. In addition to preventing such a feedback to grow, it is also important for the organization to interact with customers to understand why they were dissatisfied and finally take action to correct these potential problems. It is important to offer customers the opportunity to exchange information and experiences, but it is equally important for the organization to be proactive in these discussions. The organization must create the necessary environment and provide the appropriate tools to allow customers to interact with each other, but also must engage with support from the staff of the company that is able to do that. The information circulating on the Internet will exist for a long time and can be found and accessed by anyone at any time [12]. It is therefore important for organizations to actively respond to questions and engage in conversations to turn negative feedback into a positive one.

"Word of mouth" recommendations can be a very effective marketing tool, and represent an important part of generating

brand exposure for an organization. But what is also important to note is that this kind of feedback comes mainly from very loyal customers who act as ambassadors [7]. This means that organizations must use as many resources to create and maintain customer loyalty, which ensures spreading positive recommendations about the company.

This paper will include different types of communication because it is an important aspect of how an organization communicates and to whom it communicates. All employees must have knowledge of how to communicate with customers both face to face and via the Internet. This is most often carried out by different parts of the organization; therefore it is important that the same information is supplied by all representatives of an organization. The following sections will present different aspects of communication and theories on how this can be done.

4. Principles of communication methods

Grönroos argues that integrated marketing communication requires a strategy that integrates traditional marketing channels, direct marketing, public relations and other marketing communication distinct environments, as well as communication on issues that include supply, delivery and consumption of goods and customer service and other customer related aspects. The integrated marketing communication has a long-term perspective [4].

Today more and more people use the Internet instead of any other written publications, finding all the information they need online. However, this does not mean that everyone has stopped using traditional marketing and reading magazines. Internet and social media complement traditional marketing.

All communication within and outside the organization must be aligned in the same direction. It is important to emphasize that all the information about a company should be aligned in all the marketing channels used.

4.1. Integrated Marketing Communication

Organizations must consider that it is necessary to communicate the same information in all channels used to avoid confusion among customers. If an organization has a business page on Facebook, the information published there should be the same as the information presented on the company's website, on its LinkedIn profile, on its Twitter account and so on. Another aspect that is important to consider is that many people perceive things differently depending on the environment and personality of each [4]. If a user starts interacting with an organization by searching its site first and then starts to engage with it on Facebook, different information will create confusion and might diminish trust.

Integrated Marketing provides the same information about the organization both internally and externally. If the information is different within various communication channels, the customer will get confused, which can damage the company's image.

Whenever a client interacts with an organization, previous interactions will enable in the customers mind. If it is the first interaction, recommendations from other similar experiences will influence them. Recommendations from friends and acquaintances create an impression of the organization, and each client can perceive an organization in different ways, since we are all unique. It is important for a company to keep in mind that new customers have probably heard about the organization before visiting and interacting

with it, so it is recommended that employees try to seek and anticipate customers' expectations from the organization.

They must also consider the fact that most customers are familiar with the various methods of communication, such as: *planned posts*, *products posts*, *support posts* and *unplanned posts/ messages* [3]. Organizations should consider the fact that not only planned communication can send information to customers. Below is a description of the existing types of messages:

- **Planned messages** – these are displayed through advertising channels, such as TV, radio, magazines and other media networks that distribute information to a large amount of customers.
- **Product messages** – messages on an organization's products and features regarding these products.
- **Support messages** – refer to the interaction between customers and employees regarding products and activities.
- **Unplanned messages** – these messages are spread by customers who had contact with the organization. Therefore, such messages are more trustworthy for customers because they represent real recommendations of others. This type of messages is actually "word of mouth" recommendations.

The company needs to find a balance in their marketing strategy to combine and integrate these different types of messages. Social media allows using and integrating in a successful way such types of messages. When the organization succeeds in persuading his clients to generate discussions, then unplanned messages appear, which offer other customers more confidence.

The following section presents the advantages achieved through interactive communication technologies in

comparison with the traditional marketing approach. With interactive communication technologies organizations can disseminate information faster and at a lower cost. Being present on social media, organizations can also reach a wider geographical area.

4.2. Interactive communication technologies

Since 1995, Rogers and Allbritton [8] analyzed how communication technologies changed and evolved. The results of their research have highlighted the benefits of new communication technologies that could be used over the Internet. These technologies are based on both media communication and interpersonal communication. They have shown that interactive communication technologies have facilitated the flow of information both for one-to-one communication and for one-to-many communication. These technologies provide organizations and marketers the ability to communicate with customers in more ways than before.

Interactive communication technologies are different from the traditional communication system in terms of flexibility. A person who communicates interactively decides on their own when to send a message to whom and through which channel. The sender of a message is not restricted geographically, nor is the person receiving the final message. The cost of using the technology is also very low, which also contributes to how flexible interactive communication is.

The flexibility of interactive communication may also have some negative effects. Rogers and Allbritton stress that a receiver can choose not to respond or not to read a message. In addition, the flexibility of interactive communication provides a new way to transmit information to the target

population. This tool allows a more advanced customization of the messages, because messages can be targeted personalized to each individual.

Using the Internet as a marketing channel offers a cost advantage when trying to reach customers within a larger geographical area. Due to the Internet, distance barriers disappeared. As Rogers and Allbritton say: "The cost of communication is no longer proportional to the distance" [8]. The use of interactive communication technologies offer the possibility to eliminate the distance between sender and receiver within the communication process. Both Rogers and Allbritton, as Yang and others highlight that organizations have become closer to customers due to interactive communication technologies.

Rogers and Allbritton mention information overload as a disadvantage of interactive technologies. Due to existing technologies, organizations are now able to send a large amount of information simultaneously to a wide audience named receiver. This receiver can be overwhelmed by the amount of information received. The downside of this is that important information sent by a particular source or organization may be lost due to information overload and therefore never reach their target audience. The authors talk about it and say that organizations must take this into account and identify new creative ways to promote the organization to pull out from the rest of the crowd.

Social media and interactive communication technologies enable organizations to communicate with customers and to be part of their everyday life. Therefore, the organization must develop strategies in online communication channels, and use online marketing communication. Online marketing communication is partially different from the traditional approach of marketing.

4.3. Communication through online marketing

Rowley [8] identifies that communication is focused on three areas on the Internet: creating a presence, creating relationships and creating mutual value.

Creating a presence is the marketing communication phase when the organization creates an exposure of its products and offers in order to create an image in the online environment. The aim is to encourage customers to become familiar with the organization in a similar way as presented in the first two levels of loyalty scale by Zeithaml et al [13].

Creating relationships occurs when the organization and its customers work together, such a relationship between the two parties evolving as the number of interactions increases. In addition, the knowledge of one another grows through each transaction, dialogue, feedback, user registration, and with each visit to the website. This is the third step in the loyalty scale.

Creating mutual value is the most advanced step in a client-organization relationship. Organization and customers work together to create mutual value. When they work together, their relationship becomes a partnership (Zeithaml and others). Rowley also points out that this can be effectively achieved through online communication, but also that such communities cannot exist in the long term without creating a certain value. Members find value, for example, if they are able to share their experiences and to gain access to the opinions and experiences of others.

Facebook has over a billion user accounts while Twitter has over 550 million users [14], generating over 58 million daily posts per day (called tweets). Social Media and the way we use Web 2.0

technology have transformed the way we build, access and disseminate knowledge. Therefore, social networks must become a priority to any successful company.

4. Conclusions

Social media unites billions of people and millions of organizations and individuals across the globe. The success achieved through this medium makes it impossible to be ignored by any company that wants to increase its exposure to customers and potential customers, constantly communicating with its target market and its partners.

Social media puts the person, the information and the message as the central elements of the communication process because the individual is given the opportunity to communicate freely in the online public space, which leads to the rapid development of these networks. This environment is in constant development with freedom of expression and free access to these platforms. In the online environment, the communication type is pull, in this case customers being the ones searching and selecting the organizations and the products they are interested in and willing to establish in a relationship with.

Understanding this environment as a means of communication is vital for the proper conduct of any company in this environment. Social media allows increased exposure through viral messages and recommendations from friends and acquaintances, operating on the principle of building a "snowball", step by step.

Another important aspect concerns the presented methods of communication. Marketing communications must be integrated in the company (both online and in the traditional media) to avoid confusing the target audience and create a uniform image. Interactive communication technologies generate major benefits, but

it's mandatory that these are known and applied properly in the social media environment.

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