

THE POWER OF INFLUENCER IN ROMANIAN'S BUYER DECISION

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Abstract

In the past, the process of communication within business organizations and especially outside of them was a laborious process in which information grew harder for those to whom it was addressed. Nowadays, due to the emergence of social media, this process cannot be controlled just as easily. Even if the organization's management is the one who decides the general communication policies within the business organization, anyone, that is employee, consumer or just influencer, can now participate in the communication process of the organization and promote its activities, products or services. A company should analyze such an opportunity, infinitely superior to other means of communication, as this is directly responsible for the influence of the customer's opinion and their economic education.

One aspect that can influence how an organization reacts to market requirements and what kind of products and services it maintains or develops in the future is how consumers perceive, evaluate and relate to existing products and services, and express their needs for new ones, and the social media allows a better analysis of these issues and at the same time allows consumers to organize and defend their rights more easily against suppliers of products and services. Meanwhile, the organizations, pressured by their customers and other factors of influence that activate in the online or offline world, have become more responsible for the social values they promote in the society. Social media is one of the tools that serve the organizations advertise such values and actions.

To identify whether the use of social media vs traditional media in business organizations is perceived we conduct a research on the students from the bachelor's and master's programs within the Academy of Studies.

Keywords

Influencer, social media, communication process, consumer behavior

JEL Classification

D91, M10, M37

Introduction

Consumers use products and services for a reason. Some satisfy very basic physiological needs, such as thirst or hunger, while others satisfy more complex psychological needs such as self-fulfillment. At the most basic level, the forces that drive people to buy and consume products are usually easy to identify. However, even the choice of staple foods can still be tied to deep-rooted beliefs as appropriate or desirable. Consider the consumers who choose

to buy only organic food. They are often driven by beliefs about health, the environment and food safety. In some instances, these beliefs emotionally trigger responses that lead to a deep commitment to certain relevant products. The theories of motivation, perception and attitude help us understand why consumers like these are doing the things they do. Motivation refers to the state of inner arousal that causes people to behave the way they do. It occurs when there is a need within the consumers that they need to meet. (Noel, H., 2009) Needs may be the direct consequence of the environment in which an individual lives, of his social class, but his preferences are more of an inner self or the influence of external factors such as family, friends, or even publicity. Instead, preferences can only be determined by direct observation and research based on self-declared behavior. Many factors can influence motivation, including personal relevance, perceived risks, and personal values of the consumer. (Aamir) The results of high motivation are goal-relevant behavior, elaborate information processing and high participation

After a consumer has an item to buy, then he uses it in several ways. This could mean that the offer is consumed in one use, or it could be consumed over time. The use could also influence the behavior of others. If a product works well, then consumers can encourage others to accept it through positive reviews. On the other hand, dissatisfied consumers can complain and encourage the behavior of not buying a product to boycott the entire product line of a business. Lastly, consumer behavior involves what happens after a product has been used.

1. Identification of potential influencers

The most valuable consumers for the success of a social media campaign are those who are part of the "hard core," those people who manage to influence the buying behavior of others. These are those people who through their opinions can easily convince others that their opinion is the right one. Such people are very valuable to organizations, they can become promoters of the organization.

The duty of those responsible for studying and evaluating user behavior and building their profile is to identify these people and bring them closer to the organization and engage them in promotional activities.

A starting point in the process of identifying these people is that they belong to certain associations, non-governmental organizations, non-profit organizations, knowing that membership of such groups can demonstrate communication skills and good organizers. Another category of people who can be promoters and people of influence for organizations is those who are active on blogs, produce and post audio and video.

2. Communication strategies in the social media

2.1 Determining the audience

In general, strategy involves all levels of an organization, while tactics are specific actions needed to implement a strategy. (Sweeney, S., Randall, C., 2011)

Lon Safco and David Brake (2009) believe that the four pillars on which a successful communication strategy is based in the social media are consumer communication, consumer collaboration, consumer education, and consumer entertainment. On the basis of these, organizations can build a strategy to successfully promote their products and services, to better know their target audience to determine their needs and expectations and to identify new product development directions and services offered.

A first step in developing a successful strategy is for organizations to determine what they want to communicate to the public and which audience they want to address, and once they are established, the message must be as direct and attractive as possible to reach better target. At the same time, the transmitted message must not give the impression of a protocol

message, but it must be friendly and perhaps even friendly, so that the recipient of the message feels that he is talking to someone who listens to his wishes and takes his opinion. When the message and the audience are addressed, it should be noted that there are five types of behavior in relation to the message.

These are (Laine, M. O.J.,Frahwirth, C., 2010):

- Active
- Commentator
- Viral
- Passive
- Regardless

As we said for the strategy chosen to be successful, organizations need to define clearly what they want to communicate, how it is in the relationship with the consumer and the competition. It is also necessary to form a "hard core" of clients and potential customers around which to form a strong consumer community with which to promote themselves, on the basis of which they can determine the needs of consumers, to be able to evaluate products and services offered, and thus on the basis of all the information obtained, to set their models for development strategies. This group of clients could be the most valuable assets in the future promotion campaign, they are the influencer for all the other type of costumer.

Once the message, the main information to be transmitted, and the target audience, the consumer group around which the communication strategy will develop, the organization will launch a series of ideas based on and around which it will develop its communication strategy. These ideas will form the basis for the formation of the future community around which the organization will develop its communication strategy.

In order to achieve the desired results, we need to take into account some basic rules needed to create and manage an online community. As I said above, the success of a communication strategy in the online environment is about the existence and size of the community formed around the campaign initiated by the business organization. Within each community, those who will become key elements in the further development of the communication process need to be identified.

3. Influencing the target audience

Social media can be used in all moments of the existence of a brand or product. The applications and tools provided enable an organization to use social media platforms both at the moment of awareness, i.e. the launch of a product, service or organization, as well as in the sales and after-sales process. All information and messages are launched in order to reach the widest possible audience and also to attract as many people as possible to the group of potential loyal customers.

Any organization has some accumulated experience that it can pass on to potential customers. This experience can come both from the product or service process and from the time the product or service is already on the market. Based on this experience, the organization can build a consumer education strategy and can consist, for example, in building blogs or forums, or by broadcasting video or photo material to showcase their accumulated experience and thus to make potential customers aware of their existence and the qualities of the products and services offered, or to teach them how to use them more effectively.

Some studies show that many communication strategies built on social media platforms fail because they are built and focus on the needs of the organization rather than on the consumers, so there must be a balance when building the message to be transmitted between the values of the organization and consumer expectations, but the emphasis should be placed on what the recipients of the message are waiting for.

The social media offers a multitude of platforms, and millions of communities, each generating huge amounts of information. In such a world, where information can come from any environment and is subsequently taken over and multiplied in the social media, it is extremely difficult to become visible and then impose. Thus, as I have already said, the information that an organization transmits must be in the same relevant but also attractive type. It should also be noted that the size of the community it constitutes is not important, but the link formed within that community. A small group, but well-established relationships can be a stronger promoter of the values of an organization than a large group but that is not as well welded and as active. Even if there are a large number of people in the community around the organization, it is likely that many of its members have not been active for a long time.

Another disadvantage of large groups is that within the group there may be factions that may be disputes, which at some point may be a problem, can generate conflicts that harm the organization. That is why we need to know how we maintain a balance between having control over the community and an influence in our favor.

4. Efficiency and benefits of using the social media in relation to the traditional media

We wanted to identify whether the use of social media in business organizations is perceived as a more effective promotion tool than other types of instruments used by the traditional media.

In order to achieve all the research objectives and to verify all the established assumptions, we used an exploratory research conducted online through a structured questionnaire posted on a free platform and its main purpose was to clarify and better understand the coordinates of the issues involved. The researched collectivity was predominantly that of the students from the bachelor's and master's programs within the Academy of Studies.

In order to achieve a major impact, and for the success of campaigns conducted through social media channels of communication, it would be necessary to take into account the benefits of using the social media in relation to the traditional media. The same benefits must be borne in mind by other actors in the economic environment.

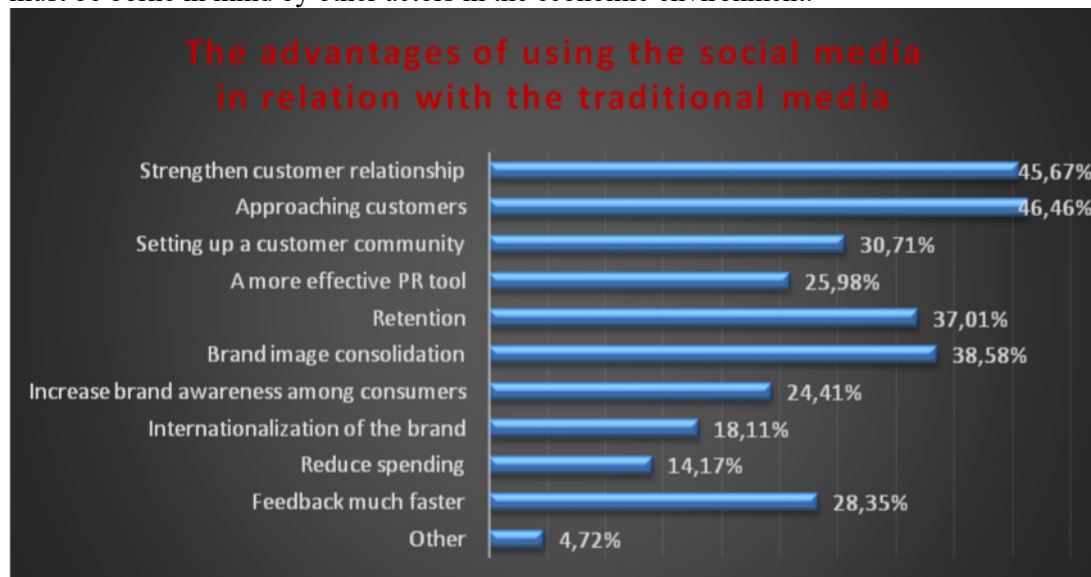


Fig. no. 1. The advantages of using the social media in relation with the traditional media

For this I wanted to find out what is the perception of those who work in business organizations over these advantages, the results being presented in Figure 1.

The biggest advantage of using the tools offered by the social media compared to the traditional media is, in the respondents' opinion, the closeness to the clients (46,46%). Similarly, customer relationships are appreciated (45, 67%).

Approaching customers aims to attract them, awareness of the fact that the organization exists and offers quality products and services comparable to other products and services on the market, leads to a closer relationship with them and their loyalty, and consolidation the relationship with customers is a natural consequence of the first action, leading to a long-lasting relationship with them, and at the same time constituting a group of clients who in turn can attract new clients. By consolidating their relationship and turning them into loyal customers, they can become part of the tough core of consumers of the services and products they offer. Through them, the organization can attract new customers and, at the same time, it can be based on attacks or compromising information from competitors.

Another advantage of the social media in relation to traditional media is the creation of a community of customers, a communicative community that uses the products and services offered by the organization through which it can obtain reactions about the products and services offered. From among such communities, a loyal customer group can be formed, which ultimately forms the group of clients that can strengthen the link within the group, the hard core, and will react promptly if negative reactions to products and services organization. This advantage is perceived as such by 30.71% of the survey respondents, which is a fairly good percentage. Consequently, both responses can be considered as social media benefits compared to traditional media and so have been perceived by respondents to our research.

The percentage of those who have chosen this option as an advantage is the least of the benefits offered by social media tools that are available to any business organization to promote themselves and to be in a continuous relationship with their own clients. Such a result can be explained by the fact that this process may seem to be a consequence of the other two advantages presented above, so it is not perceived as a distinct advantage but as a consequence of other advantages.

As we have shown above, a consequence of the first two advantages is customer loyalty. Loyalty is also perceived by respondents to my research as a fairly important advantage. This is seen as an advantage by 37% of them.

If the right platform is chosen, the results of the action may exceed expectations, and may lead to the expansion of the market on which the organization operates. This is not very well understood by respondents in my research. They consider in a rather small percentage, only 18.11% that the use of social media can lead to the internationalization of the brand.

The much faster feedback of messages sent to consumers is also viewed as an advantage by 28.35% of respondents. A timely and timely feedback can be a strategic asset in terms of more and more fierce competition, and the market has become globalized, allowing anyone to be present on a particular market, with fewer barriers.

Although, at first glance, correct feedback can only come from communities already established around the organization's activity, this is not a mandatory condition. There may be reactions from where we expect less, and perhaps for this reason the number of people who see quick feedback as an asset is lower than those who consider loyalty, customer relationship consolidation, or the establishment of stable customer communities.

The decrease in spending is considered an advantage only by 14.17% of the respondents, which is a rather small percentage. This result can be considered as surprising, especially since it comes from young people who use the social media very much. From our point of view, respondents to my research do not believe that promotion through the social media does not lead to cost savings for business organizations can be corroborated with the answer

to the question of perception of concepts that characterize the social media. Respondents associate social media with entertainment rather than education, so they regard social media as a place where they spend their free time.

A first aspect related to the image of the organization is that of brand image consolidation. 38.58% of respondents believing that social media presence is an asset for organizations. This is a very good percentage, placing this advantage among the most important benefits offered by the social media, just getting closer to customers and strengthening the customer relationship with a higher percentage, which for the business environment shows the image of the company remains an important aspect. This percentage also demonstrates that business representatives are aware that through the social media the image of a company can be improved, and that both positive and negative news are transmitted very quickly through the social media, which can greatly influence the image of companies in the eyes of consumers.

Conclusions

Social media is not only important in terms of promoting the products and services of a business organization, but also from the point of view of the image of the organization in the eyes of consumers. That is why in the list of advantages from which respondents of the questionnaire can be found advantages that refer to this aspect.

The social media, through the tools and applications it provides, offers a wealth of possibilities through which the image and existence of a business organization can reach consumers' minds and thus make them aware that a particular organization exists on the market. It may be that Romanian companies do not perceive the potential offered by the social media for consumer awareness, the fact that a single post about them on social networks or a video on video sharing sites can lead to a reaction on the part of those I'm following that post, talking about it, and finally awareness of the existence of that organization for consumers.

Strengthen brand image and brand awareness among consumers can be done more efficiently with the help of a PR agency or even with the help of the company's dedicated department. However, through the platforms and instruments provided by the social media and through the effective use of influence, these actions can be done even by organizations that cannot have PR personnel, which is why among the social media advantages we can mention the fact that the social media offer effective PR tools.

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