IDENTIFICATION OF VARIABLES THAT INFLUENCE SATISFACTION WITH COMMUNICATION OF COMPANIES VIA SOCIAL MEDIA

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Abstract

This paper interprets the results of primary research, conducted by members of the Department of Marketing, Faculty of Economics, Technical University of Liberec. The research concerned new forms of communication through social media. The investigation was focused on the users of this communication intermediate. The qualitative method of data collection was used, followed by analysis of the obtained data.

The research results are useful for companies that are trying to communicate with consumers via social media. Based on the research, variables that most affect communication are identified. The result of the project provides guidance to companies on how to reach potential customers.

Introduction

Communication of companies on social networks is very engaging, and so far an unexplored progressively growing area of marketing with ever increasing number of users. Given the increasing number of different social media, there is much uncertainty about how companies should handle communication with the customer. This communication channel is used by millions of potential customers who spend hours on social networks. Many companies feel that social networks are an innovative communication channel with great potential. Majority of companies often give social networks a try, but leave them after a while because of the lack of special information. [1]

The original reason for the research is the current lack of information about how to use social media in communication with customers. The asset of the research was to fill information gaps in communication through social media.

The aim of the whole project was to determine the most important variables that most affect the current satisfaction or dissatisfaction with corporate communications. This goal was determined by mapping the current situation in communication between consumers and companies. A quantitative method of data collection "dual group interview" was chosen and applied to several homogeneous groups of social media users.

1   Conceptual Framework of Research

The basis of the work consists of conceptual framework which is shown in Figure 1. The conceptual framework is composed in order to identify the attributes that affect communication of companies with consumers.
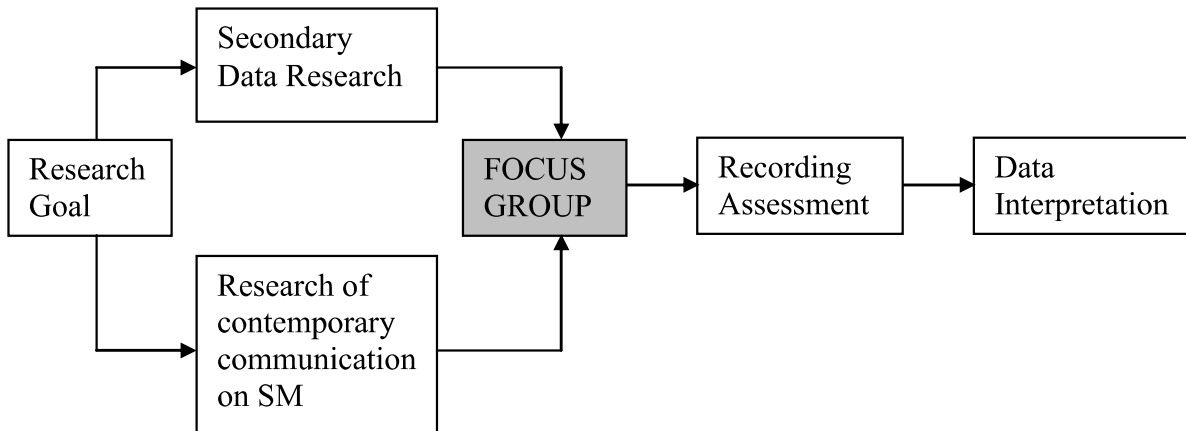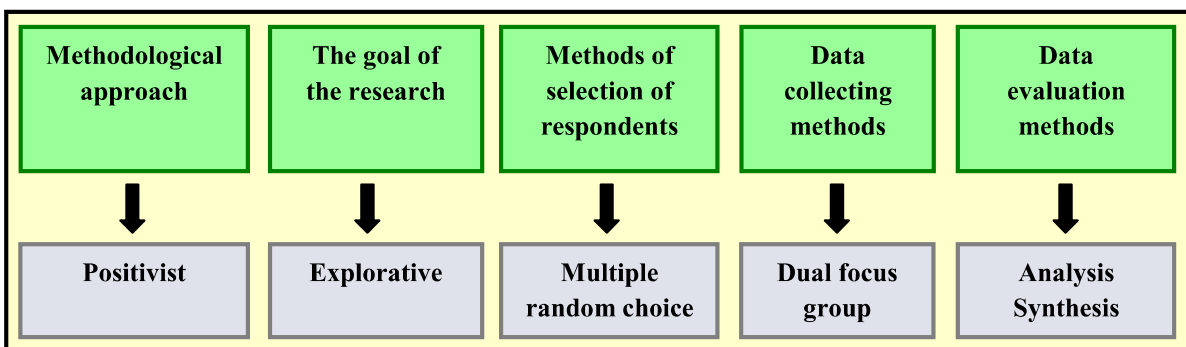

Source: own processing

Fig. 1: *Concept of research*

The top of the conceptual framework consists of defining the problem. The issue is elaborated in the main objective, which is to identify variables affecting communication in social media. The definition of objectives is followed by the second, preparatory stage, which is composed of two parallel parts. The preparatory phase aims at getting familiar, and in detail, with the problems of communication carried out on social media. The first part can be characterized as a secondary data survey, which means searching for existing research dealing with similar issues. The second preparatory part consists of analysis of the current communication via social media. This is made by practical analysis of successful and unsuccessful companies that use this communication. The third stage is the primary research, which is the crucial part of the project, preceded by the moderator's thorough preparation and proper recording equipment. An integral part of it is securing an adequate sample of social media users. The fourth step is to evaluate the records taken from the group interview, in which experienced professionals are involved. The last stage is the interpretation of the data in the form of the final report.

2   Research Methodology

The core group of the research were 13 - 70-year old respondents, citizens of the Czech Republic, who are users of social media. Boundary of the age of 13 was derived from legal access to the largest social network Facebook. Research methodology is reported in Figure 2.

Source: own processing

Fig. 2: *The research process*

- **The methodological approach** – in terms of methodological approach, positivist approach using quantitative methods of data collection has been applied in the research.

- **The purpose of the research** – with regard to the objective, the purpose of the project can be determined as an exploratory one, looking for variables that affect consumers´ satisfaction with communication on social media.

- **Methods of selection of respondents** – respondents' selection was made by random multiplier, and they were further divided into five groups based on a demographic character - age.

- **The method of data collection** – in the project the method of "dual group interview" was used. It implies more moderators to ensure continuity. This method was carried out five times, always with a different structure from 6 to 10 participants. The number of the group interview respondents was 45. Age groups were internally homogeneous and intergroup heterogeneous due to possible inter-group differences in perceptions of communication examined. Respondents in the introductory part of the interview had not been given a choice of predefined variables, to secure their unbiased view. In the end, however, there was an offer of possible variables assembled by secondary research and experience of experts.

- **The method of data evaluation** – dual group interview was the major part of the project, which led to the identification of variables that mostly influence communication through social media. The outputs of group discussions were subjected to special analysis with the participation of a psychologist. After the complete analysis of the course of study the final synthesis was performed, which led to the fulfillment of our goal. [2]

The process of evaluating the obtained data was the following:

1. Selection of records of particular age groups.

2. Slow re-playing and analyzing records.

3. Comparison of written records, which were acquired parallelly.

4. Assembling five independent groups of variables which are recorded in the table.

5. Synthesis of the variables in the final model of the most important factors that affect communication in social media.

3 The process of identifying variables affecting communication

Identification of variables in social media communication is – because of its topic – a unique marketing research. According to available information it has no equivalent in the Czech Republic. Yet in terms of setting the research process it is necessary to follow certain procedures. At the beginning the whole procedure was divided into two parts. The first, preparatory stage, which consisted of defining the problems, the approximate analysis and planning of the research project, was more important than the data collection itself. This was due to pressure on the organization of the research, time and financial planning. The second stage is the actual data collection, processing and evaluation.

3.1 Defining problems and objectives

Social media are now becoming an important communication channel in all countries with free Internet access. In the Czech Republic there are currently over 3.6 million people[1] only

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[1] http://www.socialbakers.com, Total Facebook Users:3,611,000, (31.5.2012)

on the largest social network Facebook. Worldwide, there are about 850 million people[2] on Facebook. However, social networks are not only represented by Facebook, but there are many international and local networks, which are constantly coming into existence and disappearing after a while. For example, the largest Asian network of "QQ" has over 600 million users. These huge numbers are a good reason for companies to consider the use of these channels to reach consumers and to establish or maintain contacts. Social media[3] (social networks) are among the fastest growing forms of Internet marketing, and each day more and more Internet users join them. Given the increasing number of different social media, there is much uncertainty about how vendors should be approaching them to create competitive advantage and increase sales.

The aim of this work is based on primary research to identify the unknown variables that affect satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the behavior of companies on social media.

3.2   Approximate analysis of the situation

On the one hand, there are generally many publications dealing with the issue of marketing communications. For the connection between consumers and companies there are created communication models that analyze this relationship very closely. On the other hand, there are no detailed models of communication that would use social media communication.

Social media are online media where the content is created and shared by users. The media are constantly changing along with their changing (increasing) contents, as well as adding many functions. On social media marketers can find directly what customers want, what their opinion on a brand or a company is and what they are complaining about. Social media are a place with "collective wisdom", where the view created on a particular product is mostly true. Therefore, they are more popular and trustworthy than traditional media. People have almost ceased to believe advertising campaigns, and companies cannot help getting engaged in social media. Extensive problems in social media marketing can discourage many people. It is ideal to start with one activity such as blogs, and later, after finding sufficient amount of information, broaden and intensify the activities. The reason for presentinting on social media is often spreading awareness about the company and its offer at minimal cost. [3]

For many people the term social media is represented by Facebook, which is clearly dominant in the CR. However, under this name can be included many other resources:

- Blogs, video blogs, microblogs (Twitter)
- Social networks (Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, Google +)
- Wikis (Wikipedia, Google Knol)
- Social bookmark systems (Digg, Delicious, Jaggi)
- Shared Multimedia (YouTube, Flickr)
- Virtual worlds (Second Life, The Sims)
- Discussion forums, QaA portals (Yahoo! Answers)

3.3   Plan for data collection

The plan was modified according to research objectives and methods of data collection to adequately secure the required information. The plan determined the whole course of practical investigation, staffing and time distribution. The data collection plan gave the answer to the questions of when, where, who and whom the research concerned.

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[2] http://www.socialbakers.com, Worldwide Facebook User 847, 573, 840, (31.5.2012)
[3] *Social network*, is an interconnected group of people, a community communicating most often via the Internet.

Group interviews were carried out in two days, the first day with two groups and the next day with three groups. The number of participants was in accordance with the principles set from 7 to 11 people. The approximate length of the interview was based on the number of queries per hour. The place for collecting information was provided with regard to the presentation and especially the possibility of recording conversations. For the purpose of the research a research team was set up, which consisted of five people. The debates were led by a moderator, asking questions that properly developed the issue. The other two team members encouraged debates expressing their opinions and suggestions for possible solutions. They supported the other two members by recording of the interviews and operating suitable equipment. Each of the five groups in Table 1 represented 20% of users of social networks.

Tab. 1: *Division of the group interview into groups by age*

Focus group	Group A (20%)	Group B (20%)	Group C (20%)	Group D (20%)	Group E (20%)
Age	13 – 19	20 – 24	25 – 29	30 – 39	40 plus

Source: own processing

3.4 Data Collection

Before the start of the dual group interview there had been a thorough preparation. It consisted of staging problems of communication in social media. Another important part of the preparation was creating scenarios for group discussion and materials for screen projection presentation. A serious problem, however, was to ensure appropriate respondents. Participants were divided into groups by age and also had to be active users of social media. Active user is a person who participates on creating the content of a social media.

The scenario for a group interview was composed of five parts:

1. **Presentation of the team and respondents** – mutual acquaintance for "breaking the ice".

2. **Introduction** – in this part the respondents were informed about the rules of the group interview. At the same time the issue of communication through social media was presented. The moderator asked the first question (*What do you think social media are? What do you think of the term "social media"?*). Respondents were acquainted with the main characteristics of social media. To clarify any discrepancies, audiences were encouraged to ask questions.

3. **Discussion supported by questions** – this longest part of the group interview was also the most important one. Answers to the objectives should have arisen from this discussion. The consequence of questions was designed to draw as many respondents as possible to the problem. The sequence from the important to utmost important questions was as follows:

   - *What is your main reason for using social media?*
   - *Will your opinion on products, services or companies influence other users of social media?*
   - *Which activities do you most often use in social media in relation with the firms and companies for?*
   - *What products, services or companies do you recall as successful in communicating with you on social media? How did they attract you?*
   - *What are you influenced by when communicating with companies?*
   - *How do you want companies to provide you with information?*
   - *What should the content of enterprise information provided on social media be?*

In each group the sequence of questions had a slightly different course. Some groups' conversations needed to be encouraged by thought-provoking stimuli. Sometimes, on the other hand, it was necessary to inhibit some participants and let those shy ones speak.

4. **Written responses** – following the assumption that in certain age groups the group interview might not be sufficiently informative, written questions were included at the end. These questions offered a range of possible answers. The respondents should have indicated the importance of each proposed variables according to their own experiences with social media communication. These variables were derived from secondary research by the members of the research team.

5. **A final thank you** – at the end the moderator thanked the participants on behalf of the whole team and invited them for refreshments, where he also conducted an informal discussion about the topic.

3.5 Evaluation of the data

The correct processing of qualitative research was emphasized. The results of so conducted interviews can be evaluated by different methods and thus with different results. The research team, which participated in the evaluation of the project, consisted of experts in social media, marketing, and a psychologist.

Records of respondents' answers were compared and put into homogenous groups. Bases on synthesis, these variables, influencing communication on social nets, were formed. The final variables affecting communication on social media are shown in Table 2.

Tab. 2: The final variables affecting communication on social media

1. Speed of response to my question
2. Individual approach of the company
3. On-line company communication all day long
4. Regular updates of information
5. The veracity of the information provided
6. Clarity of information provided
7. Humorous form of information
8. Expertise of provided information
9. Lotteries, contests, coupons from companies to social media
10. Dealing with complaints
11. Obtaining information to social media through advertising
12. Index of corporate information to social media
13. The way of providing information to social media
14. Presentation in Czech
15. Social responsibility of companies (environment, ethics)
16. Supporting non-profit events (cultural, sports)
17. Link to company web site
18. Getting only the information requested
19. Obtaining full and complete information
20. Communication through forums (chat)

Source: own processing

Conclusion

Communication through social media is by its nature a complex concept. On one side of the market there is a company which is trying to reach customers through channels. The market in which they operate, is constantly sharpening, the competition is intense, leading to a stronger effort to communicate with the consumer. On the opposite side there are customers with their expectations, needs and requirements that differ from individual to individual. To obtain information they increasingly use new channels of communication from the comfort of their homes. Most progressively growing of these channels in the last five years are social media. Firms seek profit, while satisfying customers in their wishes and needs. The question is how to find a common solution which is acceptable and suitable for both parties. Finding the solution for the connection of these two subjects has been defined in the above-mentioned variables. [4], [5]

The aim of this research was to identify important factors that affect communication in social media. This relatively difficult target has been met through qualitative research using dual group interview. The obtained variables can be of great help to companies seeking to use social media. With the help of this research companies will get to know the factors that are most important to consumers. Provided only one of the surveyed age groups is the target one, the company can modify the method of communication according to the identified variables.

The research results are a useful source of information for companies looking to reach their potential customers. It is up to them how they can use this opportunity to fight competition. Social media cannot be just a single channel of communication for companies, but they should become a full part of modern business communication mixture of the 21st century.

Literature

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IDENTIFIKACE PROMĚNNÝCH, KTERÉ OVLIVŇUJÍ SPOKOJENOST FIREM, POMOCÍ SOCIÁLNÍCH MÉDIÍ

Tento příspěvek interpretuje výsledky primárního výzkumu, který byl proveden členy katedry marketingu, ekonomické fakulty, Technické univerzity Liberec. Výzkum se týkal nové formy komunikace prostřednictvím sociálních médií. Šetření bylo zaměřeno na uživatele tohoto komunikačního mezičlánku. Použita byla kvalitativní metoda sběru dat, následovala analýza získaných dat.

Výsledky bádání jsou využitelné pro firmy, které se snaží komunikovat se spotřebiteli pomocí sociálních médií. Na základě výzkumu jsou identifikovány proměnné, které komunikaci nejvíce ovlivňují. Výsledek celého projektu poskytuje firmám návod, jakým způsobem potencionální zákazníky oslovit.

DIE IDENTIFIKATION VON VARIABLEN, WELCHE DIE ZUFRIEDENHEIT MIT DER KOMMUNIKATION VON FIRMEN DURCH SOZIALE MEDIEN BEEINFLUSSEN

Dieser Beitrag präsentiert die Ergebnisse einer Untersuchung, welche von Mitgliedern des Lehrstuhls für Marketing an der Fakultät für Ökonomie der TUL durchgeführt wurde. Die Untersuchung betraf neue Formen der Kommunikation durch soziale Medien und konzentrierte sich auf die Nutzer dieser Kommunikationsart. Es wurde eine qualitative Methode der Datensammlung angewendet. Hernach wurden die gewonnenen Daten analysiert.

Die Untersuchungsergebnisse sind brauchbar für Unternehmen, die mit ihren Kunden durch soziale Medien kommunizieren. Ausgehend von dieser Untersuchung werden Variable identifiziert, die die Kommunikation am meisten betreffen. Das Untersuchungsergebnis gibt Firmen Anregungen, wie sie potenzielle Kunden erreichen können.

IDENTYFIKACJA ZMIENNYCH WPŁYWAJĄCYCH NA ZADOWOLENIE FIRM KORZYSTAJĄCYCH Z MEDIÓW SPOŁECZNOŚCIOWYCH

Niniejszy artykuł przedstawia wyniki badań przeprowadzonych przez pracowników Katedry Marketingu Wydziału Ekonomii Uniwersytetu Technicznego w Libercu. Badania dotyczyły nowej formy komunikacji prowadzonej za pośrednictwem mediów społecznościowych. Ukierunkowane były na użytkowników tego kanału komunikacji. Zastosowano jakościową metodę gromadzenia danych a następnie poddano je analizie.

Wyniki przeprowadzonych badań są przydatne dla firm, które komunikują się z konsumentami przy pomocy mediów społecznościowych. Na podstawie badań określono zmienne najbardziej wpływające na komunikację. Wyniki całego projektu stanowią dla firm wskazówkę co do sposobu zwracania się do potencjalnych klientów.