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Consumers Motives for Conecting with Famous Brands through Social Networks, Case Study of Croatia

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Abstract

Online social networks were in the beginning used for private purposes, and over time were adopted by academic and business users. Thus, they have become an irreplaceable part of life in the modern 21st, 2.0 societies, particularly for the modern consumers. Their comprehensiveness has also been noticed by marketing experts who has led them to an extensive usage of online social networks as a very popular and widely used effective marketing tool. Following those trends, the main research question is: whether users of social networks look for information about the product with the intention of buying it or them some other motives. Every contact with the brand via social networks does not necessarily mean that the user is also an actual buyer or a potential buyer of the product or services. Therefore, traders, marketers, and community managers should focus on better understanding the motives of different groups of social networks users for standing along with their brands in virtual cosmos. In this paper, we present the results of research aimed at determining the primary motives driving the users of social networks to be connected with the brand. According to the research results, the respondents most frequently connected to the brand in order to have real time information about products and events related to the product. In addition, some study observations showed that the respondents were highly motivated to be connected with the brand to obtain certain benefits, while some respondents used social networks for self-presentation. This research has also confirmed that the respondents' engagement in social networks positively affects self-esteem. However, some respondents are associated with brands because they want to participate in designing and improving products. The survey was undertaken in Croatia 2014 as a part of a research for a bachelor's degree thesis.

Keywords: Social networks; Facebook users; Motivation; Brand management

Introduction

A Social Network Site (in further text the abbreviation SNS) is as a web-based service that allows individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and use their own and others' lists of links within the system [1]. Advertising on social networks is mostly directed by the user's exclusive confirmation, depending on users' willingness to receive information (notification about page updates) related to a particular Facebook page. If a user decides to accept information about a product, he/she can become more involved in page activities, with either a positive or negative involvement, and finally could end in recommending or buying a that product/services or it could only result in having more information without having made any particular action or shopping decision. As information about users of social networks is rather accessible, marketers have found a tool which directs their messages to potential customers. By companies advertising on the Facebook through SNSs, users can companies direct reviews and personal opinions and in this way interactively participate in improving existing products/services as well as designing new ones. One of the corporate goals is to connect with customers through social networks and it can be achieved by attracting those using good promotional tools or positive reputation, i.e., recommendation from other buyers. Connecting businesses with customers through SNS is crucial at the moment when customers like their profile, because then the customers' shows initiative associated with a particular brand. Like on Facebook is used as a statement of support or preferences for receiving multimedia releases. Facebook communication in modern society is in line with growing and more active consumers' interest in a two-way symmetric communication, known as the best form of communication between an organization and their stakeholders [1]. Consumers have become dissatisfied with just listening to marketing messages and they want to participate in meaningful discussions about products. Such customers are the so-called "prosumers" [2], persons in the post-industrial society that combine the economic role of the manufacturer and the customer, who are targeted by the companies whose brands they prefer and who try to keep them as customers.

Social networks have empowered the customers, have given them the right to share their opinions about the product/services and companies with other Facebook users on fan or group page, and because of those changes consumers have become more powerful in creating and sharing "web word-of-mouth". It has become easier, faster and cheaper for companies to promote their product/services and reach target customers (by using Facebook advertising tools) more easily, faster and cheaper because of the development of SNSs. Therefore, in this paper the two-way symmetric communication between customers and companies is expected as a determined, necessary prerequisite for the survey. In this paper that relationship will be empirically examined with the aim to reveal the pillars of the consumers' motivation to be connected with a famous brand via social networks and users' desire to easily communicate with the company, and participate in developing new or improving existing products. SNS will be observed from the perspective of consumers who use social networks to access information more easily about products, and information which may not be available elsewhere [3].We assume that the increase in the use of social networks also depends on the information which consumers receive through the SSN and that the dialogue between consumers and company is based on mutual trust [4]. However, considering that the

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vast amount of information is present on social networks, this paper will examine whether the information about products and events related to this product are timely and true, whether consumers put some efforts into Facebook engagement in communication with a company and whether they receive information related to the product from other sources (i.e., their Facebook friends). Moreover, consumer might be a member of a Facebook group or a fan of a Facebook page because he/she expects a benefit. One of the reasons [1] for visiting a product's page on social networks is to participate in competitions. Customers may be also be motivated to visit a page on a SSN by the opportunities to participate in creating the page and communicating directly with the company by posting comments, sending direct messages or expressing their positive or negative experience in communication with a particular brand. This empowers the consumer to control the product pages, more consumers are engaged in advertising when they want to be engaged, and under their own conditions, and thus they expect a feedback from the company (brand) in the form of a reward for the effort. However, in order to involve users of social networks in this type of advertising, the reward itself must be valuable to the consumer, whether it is recognition, information or stimulus.

Connecting with a product or company on social networks, provides the consumer with a variety of benefits, such as participation in competitions, privilege information about current special offers, new products/services or offering additional benefits because of the consumers' efforts to recommend this product to other users. Therefore, in this article we research whether various benefits encourage users to connect to a certain brand. Positive comments that are sent to the users of social networks positively affects their self-confidence. Previous research has delivered some interesting results such as those users who have low self-esteem will connect more with brands because that way there is the possibility of raising their self-esteem. The results obtained in this research showed that the information displayed in the user's profile boosts self-confidence, particularly when users care about the appearance of their profile. Those users, who do not care about the impressions that they leave with their profile, are those that are more likely to have problems with confidence. This paper will demonstrate empirically whether the relationship with the brand positively or negatively affects the confidence each time they connect to the brand, inform their friends on social networks and show that information on the personal profile. People who have a social network profile build their public image by publishing a Facebook status, sharing public information and so on [5]. The results of a previous research [6] leads us to the conclusion that the members of a SNS profile can convey the desired impression to their audience through the activities conducted on social networks, and can furthermore create fake impressions even to themselves, which can finally result in changing users' attitudes about themselves. The members of social networks can also decide when and to whom they will allow seeing their personal information, displayed on their profile. Editing profiles on social networks can also be motivated by personal self-presentation goals and the presentation of the user and his/her habits that may or may not be true as will be elaborated in the following paragraphs. According to the above presented theoretical background and previous researches we defined our research goal. The main goal of this study is to investigate the motives for consumers' engagement in corporate brands via SNSs, with deep appreciation of personal motives for that particular relationship.

Methods

For the purpose of the empirical part of the paper, primary and secondary researches have been conducted. The theoretical part of the work is based on the extensive desk research of related academic papers and books, accessed in the library of the University of Split, Faculty of Economics. Scientific and professional papers have been accessed from the database (ScientDirect, EBSCOhost, Emerald, etc.), and on the web site related to the dynamic social networks knowledge and habits of their users. While collecting secondary data and developing the theoretical background for this thesis, regular scientific methods have been used such as compilation, description, analysis and synthesis. With the aim to collect primary data, a questionnaire, designed for the purpose of this research was used. The survey was conducted between February 5, 2014 and March 31, 2014. The questionnaire was distributed via Facebook and direct mail with the primary aim of reaching Facebook users and also with the aim of reaching other Facebook users, i.e., those outside the researchers' primary social networks. Facebook was used in this research for two reasons: firstly the most visited social network in Croatia is Facebook, which in February 2013 reached 1.6 million users while the second most visited social network was Twitter, which had 51,839 users in February 2013 [7]. Secondly, Facebook was our choice because of the purpose of this study in which we investigated connection with the brands through Facebook Survey. In the first section of the questionnaire, the participants were asked about some general information about their engagement in SNSs. The participants were asked to answer questions about how familiar they were with various, most popular global SNSs, that are also very popular in Croatia such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+ etc., about the ways they access the SNSs (through web or mobile), and about the average amount of time spent daily on social media. The second section of the questionnaire addressed Facebook activities in the terms of their community engagement with ten most famous brands in Croatia at the moment of survey, as presented on Facebook. The third section of the questionnaire aimed to collect data on participants' subjective answers regarding their personal perceptions of themselves. The fourth part of the questionnaire was aimed to find out participants motivation to be connected with some brands, and the last, i.e., the fifth section of the questionnaire aimed to gather some personal details about our participants such as: age, gender, educational status and employment status. Previous studies suggested that the most important motives for hosting a personal home page, as Facebook profile is impression management and self-presentation. Seven key elements of motivation were observed in this survey: entertainment, information, social-interaction, self-presentation, previously researched [8], passing time, professional advancement [9], and searching for the new products. In this paper, each element of motivation was correlated with the supposed motives. The respondents were a total of 207 Croatian Facebook users who have an active Facebook profile (33% male and 67% female), who were asked to participate in an online survey on voluntary basis, and they were dominantly located in the greater Split (Croatia) area. The participants were intentionally recruited via social media and direct e-mails with the aim to cover the most active population on SNSs in Croatia. The majority of them have an economic background (57%). More than a half of our respondents, precisely 51.2% (out of 3.9% are entrepreneurs) are employed, 28.5% are students, 16.9 % unemployed and 1.4% are retired. Sample structure by age groups is as follows: there were 4.8% of respondents in the 18 and younger age group; 29% in the 18-24 age group; 38.6% in the 25-34 age group (making the largest group in the sample); 23.2% in the 35-44 age group, and 4.45 % in the 45 and over. Furthermore, most of the participants, i.e., 87%, have mobile internet access, what is in line with the global level of 80% [10]. This could be considered a proof that our respondents were a good choice for this type of survey. Previous researches have shown that

the average time spent on Facebook is important [11] and the global average is 21 minutes. Therefore, our respondents were asked on the average daily time spent on Facebook and the results are as follows: less than 10 minutes - 8.7%; 10-30 minutes 21.3%; 31-60 minutes 14.5%; 1-2 hours 27.1%; 2-3 hours 16.4%; and finally more than 3 hours 12.1%. The first assumption is that the users connect to a particular brand in order to participate in improving existing products and developing new products (H1). Then, we have observed the respondents' interests in acquiring privilege information about the brand (H2) as a motive for engagement. Our third hypothesis was related to the benefits (H3) which can accompany that relationship. Furthermore, we have researched the correlation between motives and consumers self-presentation (image) on Facebook (H4). Our last hypothesis was aimed at researching the correlation between consumers' motives and their self-image (H5). Self-image was researched by using the well-known Rosenberg's Self-Esteem scale [12]. Each question was rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1- strongly disagree to 5- strongly agree. These items, with closed choice questions required our participants to express their attitudes about themselves, and in this way we could examine how the relationship with brands on social networks affects their self-esteem.

Results

The purpose of this study was to research the users of social networks and the motives that encourage them to be connected with the most popular brands in Croatia, i.e., the top 10 brands (Njuškalo; dm-Drogerie Markt; Samsung; H&M; Nutella; Ferrero Rocher; Lidl; Red Bull; Kolektiva, and Ožujsko) as of in October 2013 [13]. The data showed in Table 1 can lead us to some interesting, but still fragile conclusions about consumers' motives to be connected with brands with the purpose of getting privilege information about the brand. A higher, but still weak correlation and a very significant (level of confidence 1%) our results showed there is a connection between products and consumers' motives such as: entertainment (r=0.265); information (r=0.180); social interaction (r=0.159); and passing time (r=0.210). The correlation between self-presentation and opinion in creating new products showed there is a highly significant but still weak correlation (r=0.257). Consumer behavior on social networks, has pointed to the fact that consumers are increasingly important and that a new form of communication between companies and consumers is developing. Consumers have also become more dissatisfied having only passively listened/watched advertising and, they want to participate more. The respondents in the study have stated that they like to join groups or be connected with a brand because that way they have more control

Motive	1	2	3	4	5
Entertainment	.164*	.155*	.265**	.196**	.141*
Information	.062	.094	.180**	.038	.111
Social interaction	.230**	.204**	.159**	.265**	.160*
Self-presentation	.257**	.157*	.111	.221**	.045
Passing time	.130*	.080	.210**	.159*	.225**
Professional advancement	.167*	.112	.155*	.203**	.111
Searching for new products	.099	.139*	.149*	.087	.144*

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

Note: 1-Opinion in creating new products; 2-Opinion in improving of the existing products; 3-Connecting with products; 4-Feedback; 5-Recommending the products to friends.

Table 1: Correlation between motives and participation in the process of creating new products or improving the existing ones (H1).

Motive	1	2	3	4	5	6
Entertainment	.230**	.290**	.326**	.362**	.097	.250**
Information	.276**	.351**	.303**	.248**	.049	.246**
Social interaction	.239**	.245**	.334**	.263**	.069	.254**
Self-presentation	.172**	.203**	.303**	.229**	.100	.270**
Passing time	.218**	.293**	.240**	.220**	.075	.249**
Professional advancement	.122*	.193**	.228**	.163*	.124*	.192**
Searching for new products	.308**	.411**	.358**	.225**	.178**	.236**

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

Note: 1-Acquiring information about the product/services; 2-Acquiring information about the events; 3-Acquiring new knowledge about the products/services; 4-Keeping posted about the product news; 5-Feeling disturbed because of large amount of information; 6-Exchanging knowledge with the community members (page or group).

Table 2: Correlation between motives and obtaining privilege information about the brand (H2).

when and what kind of information about the particular brand they will be provided with. According to the results showed in Table 2, it is obvious that the highest and statistically relevant correlation at the level of 1% is found between acquiring information about the events and searching for new products (r=0.411). Other important relationships regarding the level of information and motives are: searching for new products and acquiring information about new products (r=0.308); acquiring new knowledge regarding products and searching for products (r=0.358). We can also confirm significantly and rather fragile that entertainment and keeping posted about the product news showed a statistically significant and interesting correlation of r=0.362. Given that both consumers and companies want to create and establish good communication, we researched, using the 10 most popular brands in Croatia, on the possibility for customers to comment either the company or the products both positively or negatively. All surveyed companies have shown very little the two-way symmetric communication, precisely only a few companies have allowed the two-way symmetric communication [14].

Of these 10 brands mostly only, DM (Drogerie Markt) allows commenting, although this percentage is low and negative comments on products are not allowed according to the opinion of 32.9% of respondents, while 34.3% of brands permits (from very little to very much). So in great proportion of 67.2% of observed brands, negative comments are not welcomed as a customers' feedback. Positive comment of products according to the survey are not allowed on 34.3% of observed brands, and 42.5% of permits (from very little to very much. The results shown in Table 3 aimed to explore the correlation between motives and benefits of being a fan of a Facebook brand page. Some of the results are quite interesting, such as the highest correlation between benefits of being informed of competition and social interactions (r=0.309); information about special offers and information as a motive (r=0.344); direct benefits and information (= 0.298) and finally recommending the special offers to friends and social interaction (r=0.372). The fourth observed hypothesis was addressed to reveal the correlation between motives and consumers self-confidence. Results presented in Table 4 show very week, even negative connections, and most of them are statistically significant. When we explored the correlation between self-image and respondents motives to be a part of brands Facebook community, we have found three interesting relations regarding the observed self-image statements as in Table 5. Our respondents who care about information presented on SNSs showed

Motive	1	2	3	4
Entertainment	.189**	.119	.204**	.187**
Information	.141*	.344**	.298**	.254**
Social interaction	.309**	.246**	.286**	.372**
Self-presentation	.238**	.110	.223**	.337**
Passing time	.256**	.213**	.296**	.278**
Professional advancement	.222**	.108	.233**	.249**
Searching for new products	.257**	.370**	.344**	.333**

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

Note: 1-Competition; 2-Information about special offers; 3-Direct benefits; 4-Recommending special offers to friends.

Table 3: Correlation between motives and benefits (H3).

Motive	1	2	3	4	5
Entertainment	.134*	.063	-.010	.118	.021
Information	.194**	.151*	-.117	.134*	-.001
Social interaction	.157*	.161*	-.015	.111	-.004
Self-presentation	.082	.080	.052	.156*	.109
Passing time	.060	.177**	-.011	.178**	.084
Professional advancement	.053	.055	-.018	.156*	.115
Searching for new products	.141*	.142*	-.123*	.277**	-.057

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

Note: 1-I believe that I am equal as other people on SNSs; 2-I believe that I have many good characteristics; 3-Generally, I do not think that I am a worthy person; 4-I am capable to do on SNSs everything what others do; 5-I do not think that I possess something to be proud of.

Table 4: Correlation between motives and consumers self-confidence (H4).

Motive	1	2	3
Entertainment	.165*	.221**	.201**
Information	.196**	.209**	.138*
Social interaction	.178**	.274**	.242**
Self-presentation	.212**	.325**	.317**
Passing time	.213**	.364**	.264**
Professional advancement	.243**	.302**	.281**
Searching for new products	.276**	.237**	.223**

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

Note: 1-Caring about information presented on SNSs; 2-Caring about others'/ friends' opinion on liking /connecting to brands/products; 3-Caring about the fact that their friends see what they like, comment on, etc.

Table 5: Correlation between motives and consumers self-image (H5).

the highest correlation with searching for new products as a motive for being engaged (r=0.276); the second statement, i.e., caring about others/friends' opinion on liking/connecting to brands/products and FB being a nice as a motive showed the highest correlation (r=0.364) [15,16]. The last observed self-image indicator, i.e., caring about the fact that their friends see what they like, comment on, showed the highest correlation with self-presentation as a motive (r=0.317).

Conclusion

The development of social networks and the growing number of users have a strong impact on companies' communication in the attempt to improve the communication between companies and consumers, and thus the communication within SNS users. Social networks allowed any user to be equal for each company and enabled each user the access to the information he/she wants to have in a short period of time, with the respect of working hours of SNSs which are 24/7/365. The aim of this paper is to explore the motives that lead the users to be connected with particular brands, what connections represent to them and how the brand affects them. A large number of users of social networks and those who are associated with certain brands do that because of some, previously surveyed motives such as: entertainment, information, social-interaction, self-presentation, passing time, professional advancement, and searching for new products. On the other hand, companies searched for customers and followed them to the SNSs, which enabled them to make closer connections, but even made companies' brands them more vulnerable. When social networks were first started, companies avoid being present on SNSs, as they did not understand the potential of SNSs, and, moreover, they did not accept the development of information-communication technologies. However, that is also the history of many successful companies. In those days, most of them had community managers who cooperated tightly with all the companies' departments, and the top management with the purpose of better presenting on SNSs. The second motives of the companies were economical in its nature, as advertising on social networks was and is still much cheaper than any other type of advertising, and in addition to lower costs, there are some other benefits of SNSs, particularly of Facebook advertising such as targeting interested audience which is also very appreciated by community and brand managers. Our survey results should be the starting point for everybody interested in promoting a brand or company on Facebook, and will at least help them to understand their market and motives for joining brands'/companies' communities. In the research, we also noticed that people who want to express themselves and who enjoy social interaction are also users who wish to participate in the designing and improving products, will recommend the product to their friends, and in their free time will take advantage of the possibility to send feedback to the companies. In this way, users feel that their opinions are important and that they are not just passive observers. Moreover, they have the power to express their opinions publicly. When consumers express their opinion on SNSs, companies need to react quickly, meaning they should have that they have 24/7 community management service, taking into consideration any comments, whether they express satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the brand.

Limitations and Directions

Limitation of this study is the fact that the survey was conducted only in Croatia, and was directed to monitor user activity only on currently the most popular social network, i.e., Facebook. In further research it would be useful to conduct a similar research in other countries. The results of a comparative research across industries and countries would be interesting for practitioners and the academic in the field of marketing and community management. It is also recommended to repeat this study in the future because this study represents only the first effect of the two-way communication with users in virtual networks.

Nevertheless, given the limited nature of the research in this particular field, these results should not be viewed as conclusive, but as providing valuable insights in understanding the real motives of consumers' relationship with popular brands. It would be fruitful to

have future research designed in this field in order to get more precious directions for future researchers and corporate community managers.

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