Abstract

This article seeks to answer to the following question: what are peculiarities of the social media integration into marketing communication? Technological changes impact social changes in society. Communication between majority of society members moves to virtual environment, people use social media more actively. It was social media that enabled creation of new, attractive and innovative ways for people to communicate in virtual environment, to flock into communities, to share important and timely information, etc. The main goal of the article is to ground theoretically the peculiarities of social media integration into marketing communication.

Keywords: Communication; integrated marketing communications; social media.

1. Introduction

Contemporary communication is greatly affected by constantly increasing informational literacy of the society, internet technologies developing apace and information communication means, which are relatively inexpensive and easily affordable to majority of the society. Technological changes impact social changes in society. Communication between majority of society members moves to virtual environment, people use social media more actively. It was social media that enabled creation of new, attractive and innovative ways for people to communicate in virtual

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environment, to flock into communities, to share important and timely information, etc. Increasing audiences of social media determined the changes in communication between business and customers too. Recent scientific literature emphasises that marketing communication in social media helps companies get to know their current and potential clients, create products and services adopted specifically to meet their needs, communicate directly with larger groups of clients in more effective and efficient way, form positive image of organisation and increase sales.

In connection to the opinions voiced in scientific literature regarding the importance of integrated marketing communications and need to use social media, it is possible to claim that business organisations which have goals usual for such organisations and seek to meet increasing needs of customers should first of all actively adopt integrated marketing communications and adapt it in social media. Research problem follows: what are peculiarities of the social media integration into marketing communication?

Research goal: ground theoretically the peculiarities of social media integration into marketing communication.

Timeliness of the article is defined by the lack of scientific research about it. Though integrated marketing communications and social media are researched in scientific literature as separate processes, there is a lack of scientific works or research which would analyse social media in integrated marketing communications.


Scientific literature emphasises that qualitative and effective communication of business organisations with target groups is one of key factors helping business organisations to compete in the market successfully. However, in order for company to achieve strong competitive advantage, all marketing communication forms and messages it applies has to be concerted interdependently, i.e. business organisations have to apply integrated marketing communications in their activities.

Method. The research methods applied in the article are systemic, comparative and logical analysis of scientific literature.

Importance of integrated marketing communications. Every modern organisation seeking to work in its market successfully marketing communications are needed which would allow organisations to communicate with their current and potential customers of its products or services effectively. Communication is one of main means to form public opinion, which is necessary in society nowadays in order to ensure efficient connections between buyer and seller. For companies it is not enough anymore just to create a product wished by target market in order to compete successfully in modern market. According to Bakanauskas (2012) even best product will be worth nothing in modern market if users will know nothing about it existence. Contemporary marketing points out that quality communication with current and future clients is as important as production of the product, pricing or distribution.

Scientists’ list different numbers of marketing communication means. It is caused by the fact that communication channels are constantly widened, more possibilities to communicate with target groups are discovered. Keller (2012) argues that marketing communications mix consists of eight major modes of communication: advertising, sales promotion, events and experiences, public relations and publicity, direct marketing, interactive marketing, word-of-mouth marketing, personal selling. Meanwhile Boone, Kurtz (2007), Belch, Belch (2011) and Bakanauskas (2012) summarise elements of modern marketing communications mix and indicate that there are six key means of marketing communication.

Scientific literature emphasises synergy effect of all marketing communication means. Pickton, Broderick (2001) stress that marketing communications have greatest effect then all elements of it are integrated into one whole. According to these authors when integrated marketing communication elements are united by joint idea of communication, they complement, strengthen each other and create an effect of synergy, i.e. sum effect of all communication elements to audience is bigger than sum of effect of separate elements. This opinion is supported by
Kotler et al. (2003) who argue that every organisation wishing for best result of communication process has to concert all marketing elements interdependently. Similar opinion is voiced by Lauer (2007), who claims that all marketing communication means will work to its maximum capacity only if they will be part of integrated marketing communications plan, i.e. in case selected communication means will be concerted and unified and constant information about an organisation and its products and services is disseminated.

Model of integrated marketing communications looks very simple because it is intended to purposefully merge and utilise all forms and messages of communication. As Kitchen (2005) stresses, integrated marketing communications are used in order to concert, integrate and synergise different elements of communication.

Scientific literature does not provide unanimous definition of integrated marketing communications. Nearly every author researching integrated marketing communications tends to give his own definition of this phenomena, therefore one can find a lot of different definitions of integrated marketing communications in academic literature. Besides, as Radzevičiūtė, Šliburytė (2007) emphasize, definition of integrated marketing communications is dynamic, constantly changing, supplemented often with new theoretical assumptions and therefore there is no unanimous definition and grounding of this concept.

Concept of social media and its impact on communication. Social media is relatively new phenomena therefore different theoretic provide various definitions. According to Angelo (2007), social media is very broad term which often defines something which is not attributed to traditional media. Author argues that content of social media is made of individual and personal attitudes, opinions and reviews of users. As emphasised by Scott (2010), social media enables all people using information technologies to share ideas, content, thoughts, to create interpersonal relations, etc. According to latter author, social media is different from traditional media because only in social media all members can create, comment and upload their information. Garnytė and Perez (2009) argue that social media is a world-wide-web tool which enables users to become active creators of the content, to communicate with each other actively, create and exchange various information. Besides, as emphasized by Cross (2011), social media helps users to expand their social interactions with people, which they would not get to know in any other way because people get familiar with wider world, various people, opinions and cultures on social media.

Social media acquired its name because of its social origin of internet as communication channel. Key aspect of social media is that internet enabled all individuals to become not only passive users of content but content creators as well. Meanwhile traditional one way communication means as newspapers, television, radio or magazines did not give receivers of information to discuss with author of the information provided or to get involved in creation of media content in other ways. Cobb (2007) claims that traditional media was perceived as key intermediary between business institution and society before social media was formed. However, then social media formed, it started to compete or even overtake traditional media because of wide variety of offered means, huge numbers and volumes of users.

Social media is different from traditional media because only in social media all members can create, comment and upload their information. Social media is a world-wide-web tool which enables users to become active creators of the content, to communicate with each other actively, create and exchange various information. Besides, social media helps users to expand their social interactions with people, which they would not get to know in any other way because people get familiar with wider world, various people, opinions and cultures on social media. The main principle of social media is the democratization of content when the same users create and share information. User-generated content is open to comments and criticism, easily accessible to other users. Traditional forms of media works on the principle of “one provider of information for many”, social media is in accordance with the model “many to many”, so they change the ways in which people discover, read and share information (Solis, Breakenridge, 2009).

The essential differences distinguishing social media from the traditional media (newspapers, magazines, television, radio, etc.) are characterized by the increased involvement of the consumer: stimulating consumer activity, openness to participation, involvement (voting, commenting and sharing information), two-sided communication between information sender and recipient, the possibility of quick formation of various communities with distinctive interests.

O’Reilly, Musser (2006) argue that social media is most often used by business organisations for creating a positive or improving current reputation of brand, increasing trust of society in organisation and its products or
services. Besides, organisations can make their organisation more attractive to society, maintain relation to clients by utilising social media. Important to note that organisations have possibilities to monitor its customers insights and improve their performance based on it. According to Dailey (2009) there are a number of benefits for companies to experience if they successfully apply social media in their activities. According to the authors, this lead to increased brand awareness, also creates a strong relationship with the organization's customers and supporters, encourages the use of new communication channels, facilitates the management of company's reputation and enhances the competitive position. Furthermore the organization will be able to secure the certain expert role in the particular field, consequently leading to the boosting sales, increasing number of people that are aware about the activities of the organization, also the events held by organization will be promoted more effectively thus creating the preconditions for competitive distinctiveness.

It is possible to find attempts to classify social media forms in scientific literature. Jurkevičienė (2012), with reference to Dalsgaard, Sorensen (2008), Mayfield (2008), Masterson, Tribby (2008) and others, classify social media into clear functional categories, which entail social media forms: forums, social networking sites (social websites) blogs, microblogs, instant messaging software, podcasts, wikis, content communities, virtual worlds.

Impact of social media on integrated marketing communications. Integrated marketing communications nowadays are composed of many traditional and non-traditional communication means and methods. Information accessibility enabled by information communication technologies is becoming as easy as never before, therefore integrated marketing communications with customers should be performed by exploiting possibilities provided by social media. According to Scott (2007) marketing environment changed significantly and irreversibly in last 20 years. Main cause of this change, in authors’ opinion, is the rise of the internet which transformed communication between people business communication with current and potential clients essentially. Besides, audience was divided into micro layers which became expensive and ineffective to reach by using traditional media forms.

Social media is rapidly changing business communication. Primary idea of internet development was related to communication process, i.e. for sharing information, without emphasis on commercial priorities, but its huge importance to business is stressed (Haig, 2000).

As noted by Scott (2007) in his new rules of marketing communications, organisations have to special pay attention to utilisation of social media. Rise of social media determined that it is not enough anymore for organisations to just create ad copy and disseminate it. This way of communication is not appropriate for social media as new users are seeking interactivity if they want to be involved in forming activities of organisation. One of main tasks of organisations is to communicate in a way making users engage in discussion about services and products of organisation. Besides, it is important for organisations to not only communicate with their current and potential users but to form positive image of organisation on internet environment as well.

Palmer, Koenig-Lewis (2009) proposes that marketing communication of business organisations in social media can be defined by combination of three elements (producers, consumers and community).

Divol et al. (2012) argue that not all organisations use benefits of social media for several reasons. First of all, not many company leaders are familiar with and appreciate benefits of social media. Besides, return of investment is not clear, therefore some organisation leaders do not see the point to invest in communications in social media.

Various authors point out different problems faced by organisations which communicate with their customers in social media. According to Scott (2010) marketing social media can be especially difficult in some cases as virtual community and its individual members cannot stand open commercial messages in social media channels. Though individuals are interested to receive information about a company, its products or services, demonstrative advertising or straightforward commercial message will annoy most users. This opinion is seconded by Wilcox et al. (2007) who stress that modern society needs not many informational messages but rather sensitive and subtle communication which would explain users aims of the organisation in socially responsible way.

It is possible to claim that modern business organisations are facing new challenges as in order to utilise social media for achieving marketing goals it is becoming important to create such a message that would make people want to talks and discuss about on their own.

In addition, as is noted by Weber (2007), the mass media principles on the internet does not work anymore, as social media has its own rules and apparently differs from traditional marketing. Traditional market segmentation principles (by age, sex, geographic location, etc.) are hard to implement in social media because people on the
internet tend to cluster according to interests and attitudes, rather than by the other traditional market segmentation criteria.

2. Results

Review of the literature suggests that the principles of traditional market segmentation are difficult to implement in social media because people tend to cluster according to interests and attitudes on the internet, rather than according to other criteria of traditional market segmentation.

It is very important for organisations to have possibilities to monitor its customers insights and improve their performance based on it: to increase brand awareness, create a strong relationship with customers and supporters of the organization, to encourage the use of new communication channels, etc.

The theoretical basis of the analysis suggests that the interaction between producers and consumers creates the preconditions for the development of traditional marketing, while in social media marketing there is one more important element – the community. Theoretical study allows distinguishing the essential differences separating social media from traditional media, which is characterized by consumer engagement, mutual communication between the sender and recipient, the possibility for various communities with distinctive interests to form rapidly.

In summary of theoretical studies it can be said that due to a variety of social media channels users themselves choose the most acceptable and attractive media channel (forums, social networking sites (social websites) blogs, microblogs, instant messaging software, podcasts, wikis, content communities, virtual worlds) and engage actively on it.

Review of the literature on social media integration into marketing communication revealed that social media is a world-wide-web tool which enables users to become active creators of the content, to communicate with each other actively, create and exchange various information. The key aspect of social media is that internet enabled all individuals to become not only passive users of content but content creators as well.

3. Conclusions

Theoretical research has revealed that business sector should judge increasing importance of social media and envisage its potential benefits. Despite that all traditional marketing communications have to become seamless integrated discipline, because only then they will award organisation with full benefits. Interdependently concerted marketing communication means and messages create integrated marketing communication.

Business organisations should be interested not only in creation of relations with customers but in their strengthening and development as well, and to look for new ways to increase customer loyalty. Most important aim of organisations for participation in social media is to achieve ability for organisation to make impact in customer decision making.

Social media is rapidly transforming interactions and ways of communication in society, therefore business sector has to judge importance of social media appropriately and utilise it for communication with users. Application of social media gives organisation a possibility to communicate with large target groups, form and improve its image, maintain relations with customers and increase sales very effectively and with little costs.

Business organisations have to adapt to changing conditions of the environment and use integrated marketing communications through all possible channels by utilising possibilities enabled by social media. It is preferred to do this in innovative manner, while paying lots of attention to meeting the needs of customers and without disclosure of personal goals. Before applying social media integration into marketing communications, first of all organisations have to consider all possible means and channels of communication with target groups, to create communication message attractive and acceptable to the specific consumer and only then disseminate it through appropriate channels.

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