BRAND COMMUNICATION ON SOCIAL NETWORKS

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Abstract

The communication represents a basic element for the marketing activity that helps companies to achieve their objectives. Building long-term relationships between brands and consumers is one of the most important objectives pursued by marketers. This involves brand communication and creating multiple connections with consumers, even in the online environment. From this point of view, social networks proved to be an effective way of linking brands and consumers online. This paper aims to present some aspects involved by the usage of social networks in brand communication by analyzing several examples of online marketing campaigns implemented on Facebook on the occasion of Valentine's Day by six different brands.

Keywords: *online marketing, brand communication, online marketing communication, social networks, Facebook.*

1. Introduction

Many points of view reveal that social networks have improved the way brands are relating with their consumers, offering new means of communicating and interacting with them.

For the marketing communication, the development of social networks coincided with the emergence of a new way of transmitting messages between companies and consumers. This new media has provided an alternative of communication and has managed to create innovative ways of making known the activity of the brands. The online marketing communication represents a successful method that helps companies to create complex and varied connections between brands and their audience.

Starting from this assumption, this paper approaches the issue of online marketing communications through social networks and its importance in building the relationship between brands and consumers.

Marketing communications comprise a set of elements designed to act together in order to support the brand. Primarily, this paper will present the most important theoretical aspects regarding brand communication on social networks. Secondly, the paper will present some specific case studies reflecting this concept. The case studies present six different online marketing campaigns implemented on Facebook on the occasion of Valentine's Day.

The research presented in this paper is based on a secondary data analysis which aims to demonstrate that the usage of social networks in brand communication can provide advantages for the online marketing activity.

With the help of this exploratory study will be identified some examples of online marketing communication tactics that can be used by marketers in order to relate more actively with their consumers.

2. Social networks and brand communication

2.1. Theoretical aspects

The communication is considered a key component of the marketing activity, "a way of affirming and supporting the competitive advantage"[1] of a company. Marketing communication plays an important role for managing the relationships between companies and consumers on short, medium or long term.

The scientific literature doesn't provide a single point of view regarding the definition of this concept. One way of understanding marketing communication is by regarding it as "the means by which companies are trying to inform, persuade and remind consumers - directly or indirectly - about their selling products or brands"[2].

In the attempt to clarify the meaning of this concept, it should be noted that there are some opinions according to which marketing communication and promotion are two synonymously terms[3]. This approach is incorrect because the ratio between promotion and marketing communications is from part to whole[4].

Promotion can be regarded as a set of discontinuous organized activities that aim to inform and influence the consumer buying behavior, also supporting the process of selling a company's products or services[5]. On the other hand, marketing communication is a more complex concept, which features a diverse set of operational methods, among

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[1] Ioana Cecilia Popescu, *Comunicarea în marketing (second edition)* (Bucharest: Uranus, 2003), 27.
[2] Philip Kotler and Kevin Lane Keller, *Managementul marketingului* (Bucharest: Teora, 2008), 788.
[3] Olujimi Kayode, *Marketing communications* (Bookboon.com, 2014), 9.
[4] Gabriela Grosseck, *Marketing si comunicare pe Internet* (Iasi: Lumen, 2006), 189.
[5] Popescu, *Comunicarea în marketing,* 18-19.

which the promotion is just one of the several specific methods used for communication between a company and its audience[6].

Marketing communication can be classified in two categories, depending on the content or the nature of the methods and techniques used [7], namely:

- *promotional communication*: is using temporary promotional tools such as advertising, public relations, sales promotion, direct marketing, sales force etc.

- *continuous communication*: is using permanent tools such as the brand, the packaging, the price etc.

These forms of communication are complementary and are mutually reinforcing, acting coherently in meeting the company's overall marketing objectives.

Within the continuous communication tools, the brand plays a significant role, which is why marketing communications can be seen as the brand's voice[8], representing an important tool that can be used for starting a dialog and building a relationship between a brand and its consumers. Marketing communication represents "the ensemble of all the elements included in the marketing mix of a brand"[9], each of those elements serving to support the overall message of the brand. Marketing communication may prove to be a source of competitive advantage for brands.

Therefore the brand is a key component of the marketing communication[10]. The valorisation of the brand's communicational equity must be realized carefully due to the brand's capacity to transmit messages and influence the consumers.

The Internet is a communication medium that can be used independently or integrated for marketing communication purposes. The use of the Internet is associated with the improvement of the communication process in terms of addressing the consumers. On the Internet, the marketing communication process must adapt and it should be conducted at both an informational and a relational level[11].

The use of the online marketing communication may prove successful in terms of supporting the brand's message. Online marketing communication provides an opportunity for companies to develop the brand's relationship with its consumers.

The emergence of social media was occasioned by the evolution of the Internet from a repository of information and static communication technologies into a multidirectional communication space[12]. This evolution was fulfilled by the transition from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0. Based on the specific features of Web 2.0, social media managed to improve the interaction and communication between individuals by means of a wide range of tools, applications and specific services.

Among all of the social media tools, social networks are those that meet the highest growth today and enjoy the greatest popularity among Internet users.

The pace with which social networks have increased globally is impressive. At the end of 2014, the total number of social networks users reached 1.8 billion persons[13]. The largest number of users was registered by Facebook, which totaled about 1.39 billion members. Used in a coordinated manner, this network can prove to be very successful for brand communication. By using some specific tehniques, like contests and incentives, the promotional communication can support the brand coomunication and can stimulate the consumers to interact with the brand.

2.2. Case studies

This paper analyses six different Facebook campaigns organized on the occasion of Valentine's Day by brands such as: Paralela 45 (tourism agency), Garnier BB Cream (cosmetic products), Huawei Romania (telecommunications equipment), Durex (personal care products), Sensiblu (pharmaceuticals) and Garanti Bank (banking services). These case studies were chosen because they reflect a variety of brands that are using social networks for marketing communication purposes. All of the campaigns were analysed using Facebrands Pro, a social media tool providing analytics for Facebook pages.

2.2.1. Paralela 45 – Surprise your loved one with a special gift for Valentine's Day

The campaign developed by Paralela 45 took place between January, 23 and February 13, 2015. To enter the contest, each user had to post a photo in which he/she appeared next to their loved one and to add a description regarding how much they love each other and how much they deserve to earn the prize. The prize consisted of a two-night vacation in Sinaia.

At the end of the campaign, on February 13, 2015, the total number of the page fans was 45,733, with 13.02% (5,268 fans) more than at the beginning of the campaign. The average growth speed was of +251 fans per day. The total number of engaged fans during the campaign was 3,193 (21.17% of overall engaged users of the page) and the engagement rate reached the average value of 6.98% of all page fans.

The contest generated a rapid increase in the number of page fans, and also a high level of engagement among the fans. The increase of the total fans number was registered especially at the beginning

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[6] Popescu, *Comunicarea în marketing,* 20.

[7] Grosseck, *Marketing si comunicare pe Internet*, 188-189.

[8] Kotler and Keller, *Managementul marketingului*, 788.

[9] Shimp, 1997 *apud* Popescu, *Comunicarea în marketing,* 20.

[10] Popescu, *Comunicarea în marketing,* 58.

[11] Vasile Tran and Irina Stănciugelu, *Teoria comunicării (second edition)* (Bucharest: Comunicare.ro, 2003), 57.

[12] Horea Mihai Bădău, *Tehnici de comunicare în social media* (Iasi: Polirom, 2011), 26.

[13] "Statistics and facts about Social Networks", Statista, accessed January 20, 2015, www.statista.com/topics/1164/social-networks.

of the campaign, while a high level of engagement was achieved only in the second part of the campaign, as shown below:
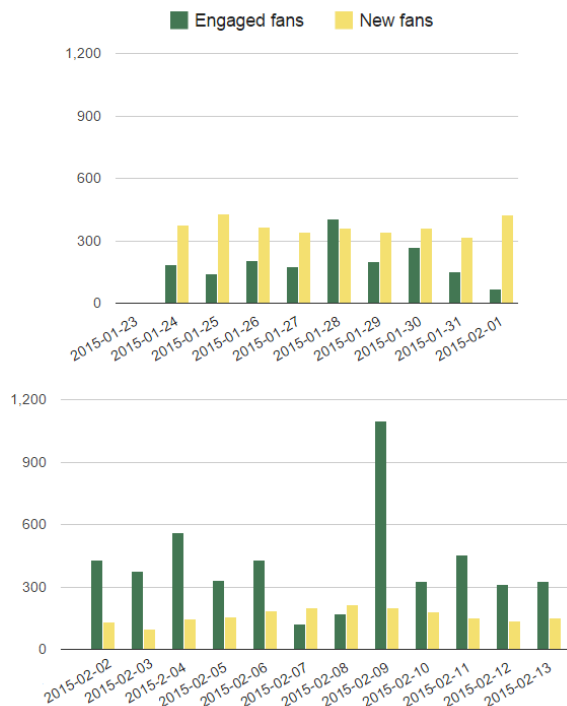
Source: Facebrands Pro, 2015.

In terms of interactivity and loyalty, most of the fans interacted only once with the brand during this campaign, as shown below:

Interactivity levels	
1 activities	2483 fans
2 activities	531 fans
3-4 activities	332 fans
5-7 activities	199 fans
8-10 activities	101 fans
11+ activities	256 fans

Loyalty levels		
1 active days	2604 fans	66.72%
2 active days	538 fans	13.78%
3-4 active days	343 fans	8.79%
5-7 active days	194 fans	4.97%
8-10 active days	82 fans	2.10%
11+ active days	142 fans	3.64 %
Total	3903 fans	100%

Source: Facebrands Pro, 2015.

The administrators of Paralela 45 page posted a total number of 204 different activities during the analysed period. The structure of the posts by type of content and the average number of triggered interactions per post for this period were:

Posts by type of content		Interaction trigger rate by type	Commens	Likes	Shares
Photo	183	87,72	1,1	76,92	9,69
Link	17	58,94	0,12	51,94	6,88
Video	4	25,25	0,25	20,75	4,25
Total	204	-	-	-	-

Source: Facebrands Pro, 2015.

The fans posted 18 different activities during the same period, namely 13 link posts, 3 status posts, 1 photo post and 1 video post.

2.2.2. Garnier BB Cream – Poetry of love

The campaign developed by Garnier Romania for Garnier BB Cream took place during the period February 1-28, 2015 and was implemented by means of a dedicated Facebook application. In order to participate to the campaign, the consumers had to use the application named "Poetry of Love", available on the official Garnier Romania Facebook page, write a stanza and share it with a friend. To enter the draw for one of the prizes, the consumers had to purchase at least one Garnier BB Cream product and write the product code in the application. The list of prizes contained 28 personalised t-shirts and two romantic weekends at a tree house.

At the end of the campaign, on February 28, 2015, the total number of page fans was 256,766, with 0.74% (1,877 fans) more than at the beginning of the campaign. The average growth speed was of +70 fans per day. The total number of engaged fans during the campaign was 3,553 (4.95% of overall engaged users of the page) and the engagement rate reached the average value of 1.38% of all page fans. At the end of the campaign the poetry of love had 810 different stanzas.

During the analysed period, the fanbase evolution was positive and the fans activity showed a significant increase.

Regarding the interactivity and loyalty of the fans, most of them interacted only once with the brand during this period, as shown below:

Interactivity levels	
1 activities	3116 fans
2 activities	246 fans
3-4 activities	108 fans
5-7 activities	42 fans
8-10 activities	12 fans
11+ activities	28 fans

Loyalty levels		
1 active days	3277 fans	92.23%
2 active days	166 fans	4.67%
3-4 active days	62 fans	1.75%
5-7 active days	21 fans	0.59%
8-10 active days	15 fans	0.42%
11+ active days	12 fans	0.34 %
Total	3553 fans	100%

Source: Facebrands Pro, 2015.

The peaks of engagement were reached right before and after Valentine's Day.

Source: Facebrands Pro, 2015.

The administrators of Garnier Romania page posted a total number of 25 different activities during the analysed period. The structure of the posts by type of content and the average number of triggered interactions per post for this period were:

Posts by type of content	Interaction trigger rate by	Commens	Likes	Shares
Photo	20	223,75	10,3	203,3	10,15
Link	3	58,67	8,67	50	-
Video	2	31,50	-	30	1,5
Total	25	-	-	-	-

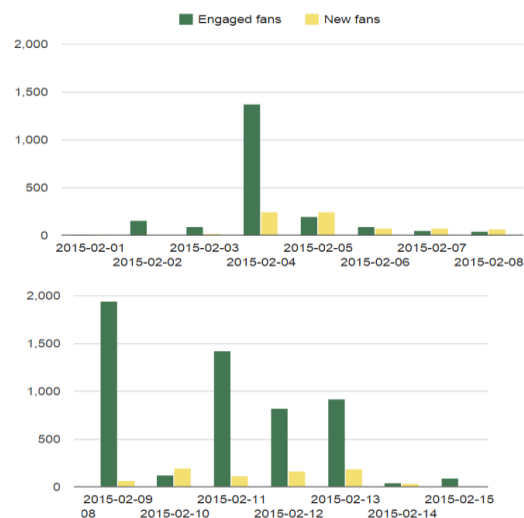**Source: Facebrands Pro, 2015.**

On the other hand, the fans posted 16 different activities during the same period, namely 10 status posts, 3 link posts and 3 photo posts.

2.2.3. Huawei Romania – Find a pair to your phone!

The campaign developed by Huawei Romania took place during the period February 1-15, 2015 and was implemented through a dedicated Facebook application. In order to participate, the consumers had to buy a Huawei Ascend P7 smartphone from Vodafone Romania and to enter the product code in the application. The list of prizes consisted of two Huawei Ascend P7 smartphones and 300 sets containing a phone pouch and a 4GB USB stick.

On February 15, 2015, the total number of page fans was 120,252, with 1.26% (1,494 fans) more than at the beginning of the campaign. The average growth speed was of +107 fans per day. The total number of engaged fans during the campaign was 5,118 (12.94% of overall engaged users of the page) and the engagement rate reached the average value of 4.26% of all page fans.

The fans engagement was more pronounced on the second week of the campaign, when it was also registered an increase of the fan number.

Source: Facebrands Pro, 2015.

Most of the fans interacted only once with the brand during this period, as shown below:

Interactivity levels	
1 activities	3823 fans
2 activities	798 fans
3-4 activities	336 fans
5-7 activities	77 fans
8-10 activities	31 fans
11+ activities	52 fans

Loyalty levels		
1 active days	3903 fans	76.26%
2 active days	775 fans	15.14%
3-4 active days	317 fans	6.19%
5-7 active days	74 fans	1.45%
8-10 active days	30 fans	0.59%
11+ active days	19 fans	0.37 %
Total	5118 fans	100%

Source: Facebrands Pro, 2015.

The administrators of Huawei Romania page posted a total number of 29 different activities during the analysed period, consisting of 28 photo posts and 1 video post. The structure of the posts by type of content and the average number of triggered interactions per post for this period were:

Posts by type of content	Interaction trigger rate by type	Commens	Likes	Shares
Photo	28	287,75	7,68	278,14	1,93
Video	1	22	1	21	-
Total	29	-	-	-	-

Source: Facebrands Pro, 2015.

The total number of fan posts was 19, represented by 17 status posts, 1 photo post and 1 link post.

2.2.4. Durex – Why not offer something different?

The campaign developed by Durex Romania took place between 1st of February and 31st of March, 2015 and was implemented through a dedicated Facebook application, called "Give him/her something different!". To enter the contest, the consumers had to first purchase one of the Durex products and then enter the application. After playing a 30 seconds game and introducing the product code, they could enter the draw for winning one of the 10 prizes consisting of a hot-air balloon ride near Bucharest.

After one and a half month of campaign, the total number of page fans was 362,482, with 2.44% (8,649 fans) more than at the beginning of the campaign. The average growth speed was of +222 fans per day. The total number of engaged fans during the campaign was 18,697 (16.08% of overall engaged users of the page) and the engagement rate reached the average value of 5.16% among all page fans.

The engagement peaks were reached right on Valentine's Day and at the beginning of the second month of the campaign.
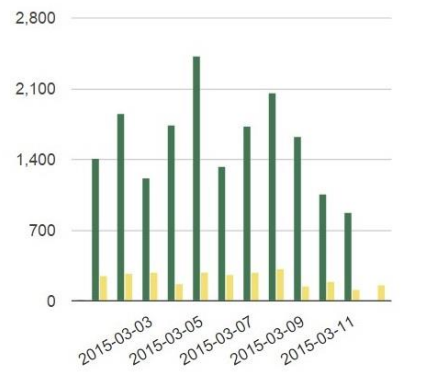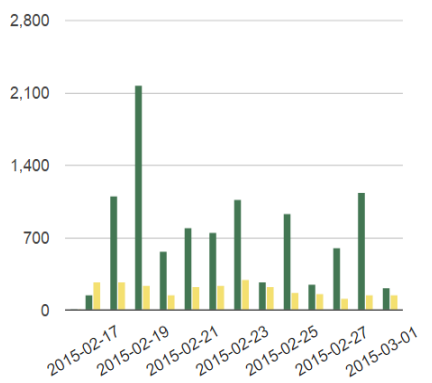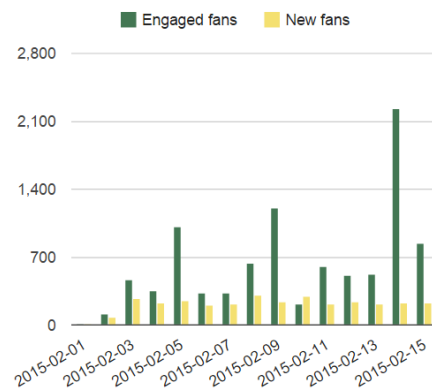
Source: Facebrands Pro, 2015.

During the analyzed period, most of the fans have interacted only once with the brand, as following:

Interactivity levels	
1 activities	12127 fans
2 activities	3145 fans
3-4 activities	1891 fans
5-7 activities	795 fans
8-10 activities	322 fans
11+ activities	416 fans

Loyalty levels		
1 active days	12432 fans	66.49%
2 active days	3145 fans	16.82%
3-4 active days	1758 fans	9.40%
5-7 active days	725 fans	3.88%
8-10 active days	297 fans	1.59%
11+ active days	340 fans	1.82 %
Total	18697 fans	100%

Source: Facebrands Pro, 2015.

The administrators of Durex Romania page posted a total number of 52 different activities during the analysed period, consisting of 52 photo posts. The average number of triggered interactions per post during this period was:

Posts by type of content		*Interaction trigger rate by type*	*Commens*	*Likes*	*Shares*
Photo	52	810,73	11,04	759,81	39,88

Source: Facebrands Pro, 2015.

The total number of fan posts was 29, represented by 23 link posts, 3 photo posts, 2 status posts and 1 video post.

2.2.5. Sensiblu – How did you meet your half?

The contest organized by Sensiblu took place between 11th and 12th of February, 2015. In order to participate, the users had to post a comment describing how they met their loved one. Three of the most interesting posts were awarded with a set of cosmetic products.

According to Facebrands data, at the end of the contest, the total number of page fans was 105,926, with a fan variation of 77 persons. According to the Sensiblu Facebook page, the contest post registered 476 likes, 404 comments and 232 shares.

2.2.6. Garanti Bank – The Valentine's Day surprise

The contest organized by Garanti Bank on its Facebook page took place on February 11, 2015. To enter the contest, the users had to leave a comment on the contest post writing three words that define Valentine's Day in his/hers opinion. The list of prizes contained 10 boxes of chocolates.

According to Facebrands data, at the end of the contest the total number of page fans was 212,747, with a fan variation of 94 persons.

3. Conclusions

The case studies presented in this paper make possible the formulation of some recommendations for brand communication on social networks.

The use of social networks, or more specifically the use of Facebook, can generate an increase of the consumers' interest for a brand. All these case studies demonstrate that a large number of consumers can be involved in a brand communication activity, especially if the campaigns are offering significant incentives to the consumers.

Facebook is a powerful online marketing tool for brands. Facebook offers the opportunity to create dedicated applications for marketing campaigns, facilitating the development of promotional activities, like contests. Contests are an attractive way of interacting with a large number of consumers on Facebook, due to the fact that the users can obtain some specific benefits from the interaction with the brand. Contests draw the attention of many users which is why they are a popular method to raise the interest among consumers. Promotional communication on Facebook can be used both on short term, to stimulate the sales, and also on long term, to help the developing of the brand community. As it was shown, in all six cases, the brand's fanbase raised at the end of the campaigns and the brand community was enlarged. But for a brand it is not enough to create large communities around it. The communities must be involved in specific interactions with the brand and the companies should create a close and continuous relationships with their consumers[14]. Social networks are not primarily a place to advertise, but a place to communicate and strengthen relationships[15].

[14] Otilia-Elena Platon, Irina Iosub, and Mihail-Cristian Ditoiu, "An analysis of the AIDAT model based on Facebook promotional contests", Procedia Economics and Finance 15 (2014): 1570, accesed March 5, 2015. http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2212567114006273.

[15] Platon, Iosub and Ditoiu, "An analysis of the AIDAT model", 1571.

All the results presented above can help marketers to develop useful online marketing campaigns meant to attract the consumers' attention and stimulate their interactions with the brand. Social networks offer a new way of interacting and connecting the brands with consumers. The consumers are willing to interact with brands on social networks. These case studies demonstrate that most of the fans prefer to interact with the brands in a simple manner, expressing their interest for a campaign.

Further research direction would imply an analysis of the consumers' perspective regarding the usage of social networks for brand communication purposes.

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