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THE FACTORS WHICH LEAD BRANDS TO USE SOCIAL MEDIA IN EXTERNAL CORPORATE COMMUNICATION

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Abstract:

Social media is the new form of today's communication. People spend a lot of time on social media to be informed about and to interact with the happenings in their social environments, and in the meantime they want to reach their favorite brands. Therefore, many brands have started to open brand fan pages in different social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to get in touch with their consumers. There are many factors which have led brands to use social media in external corporate communication; however, these are not pointed out in detail in the literature. This paper aims to cover the factors which have motivated brands to use social media in external corporate communication. The paper first explores the reasons behind the decline of trust towards traditional advertisements and the advertisements on the Internet. Afterwards, it discusses why websites have recently lost their popularity against social media platforms. Lastly, it looks at why consumers want a presence of brands in social media. The results show that today's consumers tend to trust electronic word of mouth in social media platforms more than traditional advertisements since they can learn online the experiences of people who have tried the products and services of brands. Furthermore, many consumers feel bothered from the advertisements which drop into their e-mail boxes and the Internet banners which pop up. Interactivity in social media is the main factor which has caused social media to get one step more forward than the websites. Today's consumers want to engage in dialogues with their favorite brands and have in touch with them on social media. This paper will contribute to the literature of corporate communication from the aspect of social media.

Keywords:

brands, corporate communication, external, factors, social media

JEL Classification: M30, M31, M37

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1 Introduction

Social media has become an indispensable tool for today's communication. Many people from different ages, genders, occupations and countries have been using social media increasingly. By using social media, today many people can connect with their friends or acquaintances with whom they haven't seen for a long time, they can develop their ties, they can start new relationships and create a network, they can follow their favorite brands or they can debate the current issues and they can express themselves. Social media allows conversations, it permits making comments, it enables creating a community, and it is about collaboration and making a contribution (Eraslan and Eser, 2015, p.10).

Thanks to the Web 2.0 feature of social media, everyone has the chance to enhance relationships with their friends and form an online community by creating digital content (Benammar, 2015, p. 2). In order to create a social network at least the presence of three people are needed, however, due to the increase in the usage of social media worldwide, people create networks which are comparatively large (Sander, Teh and Sloka, 2015, p. 101). The statistics of Hootsuite demonstrates that 42 % of the world's whole population has been using social media in the year 2018 and in Turkey people spend 2 hours 48 minutes on social media every day (We are social, 2018). Social media has penetrated into the most parts of the world recently and people have been spending a lot of time on social media lately. Facebook is still the most popular social media platform; however the landscape of social media is so dynamic that new platforms have also appeared lately (Voorveld, 2019, p.15 cited Phillips, Miller, and McQuarrie 2014).

Aside from its usage for interpersonal communication, social media has been used for corporate communication as well. With the widespread usage of social media, brands have also started to benefit from this tool for their corporate communication activities. Especially, brands have started to use social media for creating brand awareness by promoting their products and services and for expressing their brand identity to their target audience. Also, the consumers are more willing to engage with brands on social media because they can make their voices heard for the first time. According to Firat (2017, p. 90), the common characteristics of social media users are that they reach to the recent information about brands via social media, they express their likes or dislikes to the brands through social media, and they follow the products of brands on social media and purchase them.

Most of the consumers search for the brands that they have an interest towards on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and like their brand pages by becoming fans. For instance, while nearly 40% of the consumers follow their favorite brands on different social media platforms, 1 consumer in every 4 consumer follow the brands on social media that they think about buying a product (McCue, 2018). Therefore, opening a brand fan page on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, in other words, having an owned media has become essential for brands.

While brands have started to put more emphasis to social media tools for reaching their target audience conveniently, in the meantime, they have slightly drifted away from traditional media tools which they used to prefer to use considerably. There are some major factors which have led

brands to become distanced from traditional media tools to some extent and tend towards social media tools for new experiments. This paper aims to cover these factors by presenting a literature review.

2 The disadvantages of using traditional media compared to social media

In the past, brands used to give more emphasis to traditional advertisements taking place in newspapers, magazines, TVs, radios, they used tele-marketing for their promotion activities or they went to fairs by opening a stand for their products or services (Perrigot et al., 2012, p. 540). In other words, brands used to benefit from paid media which includes traditional advertisements. Even though brands managed to reach masses this way, using traditional communication tools have brought some disadvantages to brands along the way.

For instance, a radio advertisement is far away from visuality, thus the product of a brand always needs to be narrated to the audience with an effective voice and with a good music in the background by inspiring the event (Sarıyer, 2018, p. 117). Since the listeners don't see the product which is advertised on the radio, they need to visualize the product by thinking how it may be like. However, the hardest thing is to convey the message directly to the listener since it is hard to create the desired effect inside their heads. Therefore, the radio advertisements need to catch the attention of the listener quickly otherwise the radio advertisements won't fulfil their purpose, and thus radio advertisements are mostly used to contribute to the TV advertisements (Elden, 2000, p.47). Thus, it is much harder to create an influence with radio advertisements compared to other traditional media tools.

Furthermore, it is very expensive to give an advertisement on a newspaper or a magazine, and these advertisements only have a limited influence span because people usually tend to throw the newspapers or magazines after they read (Onat, 2014, p.30). Generally, most of the people don't read every detail on the newspapers or magazines, people usually prefer to use the techniques of scanning or skimming while reading the newspapers or magazines. Whatever catches their eye at that moment is the thing that the readers give their attention on the newspapers or magazines. Also, the print quality of advertisements on newspapers are usually low compared to the vivid and colorful advertisements taking place on the social media (Sarıyer, 2018, p.99). Since it is overcosting to publish in high quality papers, the print quality of newspapers don't always meet the expectations of the readers. On the other hand, social media advertisements have the elements of multimedia which are composed of audio, image, video and animation, which make it easier for the audience to remember the advertisements (Mavnacıoğlu, 2015, p.110).

In addition, the newspapers won't publish a news of a brand as long as it doesn't carry a news value; therefore, the brand needs to create a well-designed content in the press release that they prepare (Odabaşı and Odabaşı, 2007, p. 77). Therefore, the press release should reflect what makes the product or the event different and it should be written with a good language. Moreover, the press release of a brand needs to surpass other corporate news arriving to the newspaper that day and needs to be picked by the editor (Onat, 2014, p.30).

In other words, brands need important news to convey to the newspapers, magazines, TVs and radios. Something significant or interesting will excite the media professionals who will agree to

make a news about the press release in the end. Ordinary things do not become news in the media, the media don't present the conventional things because something extraordinary will always draw the attention of the reader, the viewer or the listener (Erdoğan, 2015, p. 178).

Therefore, it is hard to broadcast a news in the media for a brand if something new isn't created or a new occurring doesn't happen. Since editors working in the media receive the press releases of brands it is up to their decision to broadcast a news, and these editors decide in which way a press release sent by a brand becomes a news, as well (Scott, 2007, p.35). Therefore, a press release should be prepared by the brand by paying attention to a few elements.

According to Bayçu (2017, p.90), the brand should prepare a one page summary explaining why this event, product or service is interesting by putting recent examples and practical information within it and should portray the expertise of its brand in the press release. Showing the expertise of the brand and emphasizing what makes this brand difference from others will make an impression on the media professionals and they will be willing to create a news about the brand. Also, Onat (2014, p.37) underlines that the press release shouldn't include generalizations, it should abstain from exaggerations, and simple sentences and short paragraphs should be preferred while writing the press release. If brands use very long narratives in press releases, this will lead the editor to being fed up from reading the press release until its end.

After writing a well-written press release, the thing that the brand should pay attention that it should decide in which media company it wants to publish it news and needs to take into consideration how the media will approach to the press release (Bayçu, 2017, p. 90). The brand should choose the media company according to the target audience that they want to address. Furthermore, in order to make the press release to be published by the media, public relations representatives of the brands always need to build good relationships with the editors of the newspapers and magazines. (Taşdemir and Aslan, 2017, p.35). Therefore, the public relations representatives of the brands should be in touch with the media professionals during the year. In other words, the content is finally created by the professional people who are the editors working in the traditional media. Also, every content has a standard and it is conveyed to the viewer or reader in return of a price (Mavnacioğlu, 2015, p.27).

Moreover, in traditional media, the people who in fact decide in which way the content will be conveyed to the reader or viewer are indeed the owners of the media companies because they are the ones who set the broadcast policies of newspapers, magazines, TVs and radios. (Erdoğan, 2015, p. 177). Most of the times, monopolization is seen in the media and the owners of media companies have many media products one at a time and they control the market this way (Dağtaş, 2015, p. 37). Also, the professionals working in the traditional media are under the influence of the regulations of the media company that they are working in. Therefore, editors working in the media do not always objectively broadcast the press release which has been sent by a brand; instead, these professionals put their own perspectives and act according to the general policies of the media company that they are working in while creating a news for a brand (Erdoğan, 2015, p.178).

However, thanks to the emergence of social media, brands don't need the help of threshold guards who are the media professionals working in the traditional media any more. Brands can broadcast any information about their companies in social media for free. All they need to do is to create a business blog or to open a brand fan page in Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. This is simple, fast and inexpensive compared to the traditional media because the expense of broadcasting an advertisement is really high in traditional media and certain agreements need to be made with the media companies before by planning ahead (Onat, 2014, p.30). Thanks to social media, brands can convey their press releases to their target audience directly without any alteration in the text any time they want (Aktan, 2017, p.49). Therefore, social media has given the freedom to the brands to create and broadcast their own stories and this is called owned media.

The disadvantages of traditional media isn't only limited with the newspapers and magazines. According to Bozkurt (2013, p.24) the increase of television channels every day, people's tendency to change the TV channels during advertisements, the less ratings of TV channels are other dimensions which show that traditional advertisements have been losing their effect. On the other hand, people who use mobile phones and the Internet has been gradually increasing day by day. According to the statistics of Hootsuite 53% of the world population has been using the Internet and 68% has been using mobile phones (We are social, 2018). As the target audience of brands don't pay high attention to traditional advertisements any more, brands started to search for a new way to promote their products and services and thus they are directed to social media (Akyazı and Aslan, 2013, p.178).

Also, with TVs no feedback can be taken from the target audience since it allows one way communication; on the other hand, it is possible to measure advertisements with the clicks on social media which is an advantage (Bulut, 2014, p.198). In addition, TVs generally address to people whose literate level is low, magazines often address to people with high education and high income, whereas social media addresses to specific people that a brand chooses (Sarıyer, 2019, p.104). Therefore, another significant reason why social media is preferred compared to television and newspapers is that it can reach people with certain special characteristics. Advertisements on TVs are broadcasted with high amounts of prices and it addresses to masses; on the other hand, with social media brands can reach to certain groups of people with special characteristics (Bozkurt, 2013, p. 24). On Facebook brands can target their audience according to age, gender, language, relationship status, location, hobbies, and friends (Gökşin, 2017, p.83).

In traditional media, brands want their advertisements to be watched by millions of people; however, every advertisement on the TVs cannot match with the taste of every person (Sevinç, 2012, p.28). Also, the brands most of the time cannot choose the sequence in which their advertisement will be shown during the broadcasting period on TVs (Sarıyer, 2018, p.123). Therefore, TVs aren't efficient in reaching groups with certain characteristics, and they don't give the opportunity to decide in the order of broadcasting an advertisement. Scott (2007, p.32) points out that the traditional advertisements are one-way from the brand to the customers, they are all about selling the product and their life span is only limited with the campaign.

On the other hand, brands who use social media create their particular audiences by creating content that attracts their attention and they distribute their messages thanks to the likes they gain (Thorson and Rodgers, 2019, p.4). Also, brands who use social media in external corporate communication get many advantages from its usage. Brands can easily promote their products and services by choosing the specific target audience that they want to address in social media. Thanks to social media, getting feedback from customers helps to build stronger relationships with the customers and to learn their actual needs. This way, brands can increase their customer satisfaction by giving a better customer service and by enhancing the qualities of their products and services. In other words, opening brand fan pages in social networking sites bring many advantages to brands such as promoting their products and services, giving fast customer service and learning the opinions of their customers which helps to product development in return. Also Moriuchi (2016, p.13) mentions that since traditional media allows one way communication, consumers are in the position of passive bystanders; however, with social media consumers have become hunters since they engage with the brands' content and have control over it.

Todor (2016, p.52) further mentions the advantages of social media in a few steps: First of all, when it is compared with traditional media tools the expenses of social media are low and brands can reach anybody globally or locally via social media. Secondly, social media enables to have an interaction with the fans since it allows two-way communication, in other words, it helps to create dialogues. Traditional media tools permit only one-way communication which is a handicap. Thirdly, the content shared on social media can be updated and it can be measured easily. It isn't possible to change a news once it is broadcasted in the traditional media too. For instance, the changes on newspapers or magazines can be made only the day after or in the next issue. On the contrary, news can be updated easily in social media which is another advantage.

3 The reasons why traditional advertisements have been losing their effect on consumers

Nowadays, there are many reasons why brands prefer to use social media tools while introducing their corporate communication activities to their external stakeholders. One of them is the fact that traditional advertisements have been losing their effect on consumers noticeably. The report of Zenith (2018) shows that in the year 2017 the money spent globally on Internet advertisements (both desktop internet and mobile internet 38%) has surpassed TV advertisements (34%), newspapers (10%), magazines (5%), radio (6%), cinema (1%) and outdoor (7%) advertisements. This data indicates that brands have started to invest more on Internet advertisements rather than traditional advertisements, which points out that the influence of traditional advertisements have been diminishing globally.

In addition, the 2015 research of Nielsen called *Global Trust in Advertising* demonstrated that 83% of consumers trust to the advices of their friends and families rather than the traditional advertisements as they trust to the advertisements on TV 63%, on newspapers 60% and on magazines 58% (Nielsen, 2015, p. 4). In other words, instead of relying on traditional advertisements people have started to depend on word of mouth recently. However, it is not that easy for a brand to start word of mouth effectively. The elements which are needed for a word of mouth speech to start are that the product needs to be exciting, extraordinary, interesting or

surprising as people usually don't prefer to talk about boring things with each other as those things do not draw their attention (Silverman, 2001, p. 133).

The reasons why people tend to trust word of mouth more than advertisements can be explained with a few elements from different angles. First of all, word of mouth is a successful communication technique because it enables people to reach to the information they search for from first hand rapidly. Word of mouth occurs when a person, who doesn't have an economic expectation while conveying an information, communicates with another person related with a product and service (Lang and Lawson, 2013, p.375). Word of mouth is an unofficial process during which an information transfer is made in order to create an influence on the behaviors of the receiver with whom one communicates (Baytekin, 2014, p.103).

Since people doesn't have an experience about a brand, product or service with which they come across with for the first time, question marks appear in their head regarding that brand's, product's or service's quality or image. They would like to know from which respects that brand creates a difference from other brands? They ask to themselves from which sides that product is more useful than the other products? They want to know do that product have a good quality or whether will it meet expectations? These questions are confusing from the side of consumers.

Before purchasing a product or service getting an advice from a friend is more useful and helpful than relying on the traditional advertisements because that person can directly learn the qualities of a product or service which he or she thinks about buying from the person who have actually tried it before. Sernovitz (2012, p.15) underlines that when people think about purchasing something, they first ask the opinion of their family members, friends and colleagues. Furthermore, since these people who convey the information does not get an economical gain from this act, the reality about the information can be learned easily.

People who participate to the electronic word of mouth conversations are categorized in two categories. People who change the ideas of other people by sharing their opinions are idea givers or idea leaders, on the other hand, the people who consult to the ideas of other people by searching for information are idea searches (Halaszovich and Nel, 2017, p. 122).

Also, the researches show that while talking with each other people prefer positive word of mouth marketing than negative word of mouth marketing and the ratio between these two marketing technique is 3 to 1 (Bozkurt, 2013, p. 124). Another study conducted in the U.S.A by TalkTrack demonstrates that 66% of word of mouth conversations about brands are positive, 11% is neutral and 15% are both positive and negative (Rand, 2014, p. 58). Thus, people tend to spread positive word of mouth more than negative word of mouth. Therefore, in order for brands to actualize positive word of mouth among their fans, they need to present more useful information which will reflect their brand's good sides because people usually decide to buy a product by relying on word of mouth conversations. Berger (2013, p. 7) mentions that word of mouth influences half of the buying decisions of individuals twenty percent.

On the other hand, with the fast spread of Internet and social media people can now read the comments about tons of products and services easily online. While traditional word of mouth

takes place in familiar surroundings, with electronic word of mouth opinions can be learned from people who live in other parts of the world and from people with whom one has never met. Brito et al (2015, p.55) mention that via the Internet people who have tried the products or who are potential customers convey their positive or negative opinions to the other people all around the world. There are so many information about brands on social media. Social media carries the experiences of people into the mobile phone and computer screens through the Internet and it enables people to have an idea about brands quickly. Also, the word of mouth conversations taking place on social media about the brands enable the brands to have an earned media.

People are in the position of face to face communication while word of mouth happens, but they can be in different locations when electronic word of mouth occurs. According to Karahasan (2012, p.26) consumers have started to influence each other's preferences with electronic word of mouth and they have started to ask for more information from brands, criticize the brands and demand their rights. The 2015 research of Nielsen called *Global Trust in Advertising* showed that people trust to the online comments about products 66% (Nielsen, 2015, p. 4). On the other hand, the ratio of electronic word of mouth compared to traditional word of mouth is still low. While most of the word of mouth conversations occur face to face (90%) only (10%) happen electronically (Rand, 2014, p.56).

Aydin (2014, p.75) summarizes the difference between word of mouth and electronic word of mouth: Accordingly, while traditional WOM occurs face to face, one by one, verbally, with limited geography and randomly; electronic WOM happens online, with many people, written, with unlimited geography and in a planned way.

As it is seen, both types of the word of mouth provide more tangible benefits compared to traditional advertisements. Furthermore, Brito (2014, p.188) emphasizes that most of the time traditional advertisements are ignored by consumers because every day consumers come across with numerous advertisement messages sent by companies which have a big budget for marketing. In other words, consumers who have been encountering with push marketing messages have become insensitive towards them lately (Açikel and Çelikel, 2014, p.48). In other words, people come across with many messages that they cannot fully realize every day and they are aware that these messages are the advertisements of products that they don't think about purchasing or the advertisements about unrelated products and services (Bozkurt, 2013, p. 24).

Traditional advertisements are around people every day. When people walk in shopping centres, when they watch television or when they look at billboards on the streets they come across with traditional advertisements, and after a while these messages become ordinary for them. Also, while being exposed to traditional advertisements consumers are in the middle of doing something else; therefore they cannot give an immediate response to the traditional advertisements (Açikel ve Çelikel, 2012, p.24). People might be eating in a restaurant while seeing the billboards on the street, they might be gathered in the living room of their houses while watching the TV or they might be going to work while listening to the radio. Therefore, they cannot buy the product advertised on the traditional media instantly.

According to a social media expert Sevinç (2012, p.24) the common point of traditional advertisements is that they all say that their products are better than the others and therefore consumers should prefer their own products; however, consumers do not like to be forced to buy something anymore. Consumers would like to act according to their own preferences. Therefore, they prefer relying on word of mouth conversations more than the traditional advertisements.

4 The reasons why people have started to trust less to the Internet advertisements

Another form of traditional advertisements are the advertisements on the Internet. However, it is found out that social media advertisements are preferred more than the advertisements on the Internet because people do not totally trust in the advertisements on the Internet. According to some researches, the advertisements that appear on the Internet and the advertisements which are sent to the e-mail boxes are insufficient in giving trust to the people. At the end of a survey conducted in Hong Kong it is seen that most people don't pay high attention to the advertisements on the Internet and the advertisements which drop into their e-mail boxes.

Prendergast, Liu and Poon (2009, p.325) mentions that some of the Internet advertisements don't give a contact address, they don't give the guarantee of return of money, some of the e-mail advertisements come as junk mail and since they pop up in multiple windows, people's trust towards them have been decreased. In other words, people have been bothered from the e-mails which constantly come to their e-mail boxes and from the advertisements which pop up in many windows by spreading viruses. The advertisements which pop up on the Internet when somebody visits a website appear even if that person doesn't click any button (Mestçi, 2017, p. 68). The pop-up advertisements first created in the year 1994; however, they haven't been favored by the users by then since they appear suddenly (Güçdemir, 2017, p.80).

Özdem (2010, p.169) points out that banners are another advertisement type which are commonly used on websites and banners which move or stand still are located on the sides of websites either vertically or horizontally. The common characteristic of banners is that they tell the consumers that there is an emergent need to click here by using triggering words such as buy now, try now, last chance (Doğan, 2015, p.78). Karahasan (2012, p.60) points out that today's Internet users which are qualified as prosumers don't click the banners, don't pay attention to the messages which drop into their e-mail boxes as spam.

Most of the people who are disturbed from the e-mails constantly dropping to their e-mail boxes don't even open the promotional e-mails including offers, they have a tendency to delete them and they even block them (Brondmo, 2000, p.20) The 2015 research of Nielsen called *Global Trust in Advertising* portrayed that people trust to the e-mails (56%), advertisements on search engines (47%) and banners (42%) (Nielsen, 2015, p.6). As Logan, Bright and Gangadharbatla (2012, p.165) underlines people don't entirely trust to the Internet advertisements and banners, therefore the content shared in social media is a new field for marketers where they can experiment.

5 Why websites have lost their popularity against social networking sites

Additionally, websites have lost their popularity compared to social media tools. Websites are often designed no different than brochures, they convey one-way information to the stakeholders and they are static (Alikılıç, 2011, p.63). Since websites don't give the opportunity of two way communication and since they don't support instant talk, brands have started to use social media while communicating with their fans (Özel and Sert, 2015, p.17). Nowadays, every consumer who search for information want their favorite brands to have a presence on social media because it is easier to get in touch with brands on social media rather than websites.

In other words, one of the main reason why social networking sites are preferred more than websites is that websites don't allow dialogues. Brands which use websites in corporate communication are insufficient in giving answers to the questions of their stakeholders. Therefore, the usage of social networking sites is preferred more for brand to consumer communication nowadays. Griffiths and Mclean (2015, p.148) who resembled the websites of brands into "store windows" said that the only way to communicate with consumers via websites is the e-mail address taking place in the "contact with us section" and the e-mails which are answered usually stay in simple scenarios and they are far from giving real answers to the questions of consumers.

Briefly, websites only permit one way communication from the brand to the consumers. On the other hand, social media allows two way communication and this way brands not only learn the views of their stakeholders but also can answer their comments. Thanks to social media brands can answer the requests and suggestions of their consumers and create a dialogue with them. This way interaction occurs. Therefore, today many brands create a connection from their websites to their Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn pages (Abacıoğlu, 2014, p. 236). Businesses don't forget to put the slogan of "follow us on Facebook" on their websites (Çağıl, 2017, p.17).

6 Conclusion

The factors which have an effect on brands' using social media in external corporate communication are that the influence area of newspaper, magazine and television advertisements have been decreased, Internet advertisements and e-mail advertisements don't give enough trust to consumers, websites only allow one-way communication and people tend to trust more to word of mouth conversations. Therefore, brands have searched for another way that they can communicate with their target audience. Meanwhile, the usage of social media tools have become common among people and this directed brands to the usage of social media. Thus, brands have commenced to open brand fan pages on various social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Also, consumers have started to look at the social media pages of brands before their websites while searching for current information. Consumers start to think that getting information about brands from social media is much easier since they can ask their questions or convey their requests to the brands.

Furthermore, in order to broadcast a news on social media, brands don't need to the help of traditional media professionals any more. They can convey any information about their brands to

the specific target audience that they choose easily through opening brand fan pages and using social media advertisements. Also, by creating meaningful conversations with their target audience on social media, and by engaging their customers to their social media pages with current, informative and entertaining content which shows their expertise, brands can enable the spread of positive electronic word of mouth among their followers. This will help to increase their sales, in the end. On the other hand, brands' usage of social media does not mean that they should totally give up their usage of traditional communication tools. Brands should use each traditional media tool effectively for reaching their target audience. Brands should convey their corporate identities in the same way in each traditional and social media tool that they use. This way, it will be easier for brands to create a sound brand image and reach their goals.

7 Reference

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