

# Key Issues of Elaborating Branding Strategies by Using Social Media Marketing Platforms

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## ABSTRACT

Building a brand requires in-depth planning and scrupulous execution at every stage of its life cycle. In this continuous process, social media is one of the most powerful communication channels. It allows marketers to achieve a wide variety of branding objectives. However, managing a brand-building process is often affected by external factors, reputational threats and possible PR crises. Therefore, social media can be regarded both as a challenge and an opportunity for brands. It is extremely important to analyze social media in the context of branding. The paper provides in-depth revision of the role of social media in the branding process. Some of the most influential authors are cited for the literature review. The issues reviewed are as follows: opportunities of social media in branding, communication peculiarities of social media, positioning, reputation management and challenges. Statistical data from various sources is provided for emphasizing some aspects of branding through social media. The paper is summarized by an analysis of the issues reviewed and conclusive remarks.

**Keywords:** Branding, Social media marketing, SMM.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Consumer markets are overloaded by a high number of products and services. Hence, companies face an increasing need to create their unique brand identity in order to maintain competitiveness and market share. Elaborating a branding strategy envisages having a kind of promise that must be fulfilled while interacting with target audiences. If consumers trust the brand to deliver on these promises, this eases their decision making, reduces costs of information gathering and processing information, reduces their purchase risk, and increases expected utility (Rajavi, 2019: 651). Therefore, having a unique brand identity is the most valuable asset that can enable a company to develop.

In its nature, a brand can be regarded as a “living being” that constantly evolves and has its own life cycle. Consumers’ perceptions, attitudes and behaviours towards a brand are significantly affected by the type of branding strategy a company chooses and executes. In this regard, social media plays one of the key roles as it is the main communication channel in today’s digitized world. It provides marketers with a number of tools for gaining marketing benefits. The effect of social media on consumers’ behavior includes a wide spectrum of activities ranging from informing, sharing ideas and attitudes to acquiring awareness and understanding, and visualizing post-purchase behavior (Biligin, 2018: 129).

Branding process may contain risks and threats that can occur throughout the social media environment. Crises may influence the financial structure and fame of organizations negatively (Civelek, 2016: 112). However, in line with a cause of a crisis, due to its diverse marketing opportunities, we can regard social media platforms also as a tool for crisis

management. Nevertheless, despite its important role and efficiency, social media is one of the marketing channels among others not only in crisis management but also in carrying out branding strategies and other marketing activities. For example, customer service, customer relationship management, sales promotion, lead generation, paid advertising (Al-Zyoud, 2018: 106). Social media platforms allow companies to raise brand awareness and, most importantly, brand value. Therefore, social media is an extremely important tool in the general marketing and branding policies of companies. Especially in conditions of Web 2.0 environment where unpredictability and user-generated content greatly affect brands.

The issue of competitiveness among brands in social media is of special importance. Consumers are able to make decisions based on information obtained from social media and other online platforms. They consider product reviews and opinions of other consumers before purchasing, thereby creating conditions for brands where competitiveness is extremely tough. Competition focuses on the prosperity of one brand at the expense of the rival brands (Ilhan...2018: 36). They need to spend big amounts of resources to keep loyal consumers and maintain competitiveness. Social media is one of the main tools in this process.

Besides a tool for competitive advantage, social media marketing strategy must be an important part of general marketing policy. Since markets constantly change, brands face the need to make their decisions and actions as flexible as possible in accordance with current developments in markets.

Social media is not the only but important channel to maintain favourable communication in branding with target

audiences. Similar to other types of online marketing, it provides brand managers with precise, measurable information, both qualitative and quantitative. As analytical data is a crucial factor for making efficient marketing decisions, social media can be used as a valuable source of information.

Taking into consideration above mentioned factors, building brand identity by using social media marketing platforms is one of most important issues in marketing.

**The aim of the research** is to identify the main issues and review methodology of elaborating branding strategies throughout various platforms of social media, its specific aspects, opportunities, challenges, analyze the discussed topics and suggest respective recommendations.

**Research methodology:** Observation is used as the primary method of the research. Quantitative (statistical) and qualitative data, obtained from various resources, are used to analyze the issues reviewed in the paper.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The definition of brand and branding in marketing literature may have numerous variations. All of them reveal its nature, purpose, and opportunities. Textbook definitions offer its explanation in a formal and scientific manner. However, brand and branding are a notion that can be explained also in an informal manner where the gist may be expressed as well as in textbooks. Such an explanation is provided by Marty Neumeier in his book “The brand gap”: “A brand is a person's gut feeling about a product, service, or company. It's a gut feeling because we're all emotional, intuitive beings, despite our best efforts to be rational. It's a person's gut feeling because in the end the brand is defined by individuals, not by companies, markets, or the so-called general public. Each person creates his or her own version of it” (Neumeier, 2000: 2). Such a vision of a brand is extremely relevant in the era of social media. Each individual perceives a brand and forms their attitudes, opinions and behaviours towards it under influence of social media platforms, alongside other circumstances. Special emphasis must be placed on the emotional side of the definition as human behaviour is determined significantly by emotional and irrational factors. Social media strengthens this aspect of human behaviour and their interaction with brands.

Another important aspect of contemporary approaches in brand building is recognizing that consumers play one of the key roles in this process. Marty Neumeier stresses this in his book “The brand flip”: “They no longer buy brands. They join brands. They want a vote in what gets produced and how it gets delivered. They're willing to roll up their sleeves and help out, not only by promoting the brand to their friends but by contributing content, volunteering ideas, and even selling products or services” (Neumeier, 2015). Consumers achieve it by using social media platforms. They want to be treated as unique individuals. Therefore, the importance of personalization in product, service and communication reaches the highest levels as “customers buy products to build their identities” (Neumeier, 2015). Hence, marketers should consider social media as one of the main tools for establishing personalized communication between brands and consumers.

“Power has shifted from companies to customers” (Neumeier, 2015) and social media is the main determinant of this reality.

The same topic is analyzed by Philip Kotler in his book “Marketing 4.0 – moving from traditional to digital”. He considers “netizens” as individuals who have a significant impact on brands: “Netizens – or citizens of the internet – are highly influential. As digital natives, they are very savvy in connecting with others online while sharing information. They are clearly the epitome of smarter customers. They freely express their opinions and feelings about brands, often anonymously. They create ratings, post comments, and even create content that other citizens pay attention to” (Kotler, 2017: 32). Respectively, brands need to adapt their marketing policies to this reality in order to keep loyal consumers and attract new audiences.

Kotler also emphasizes the emotional side of consumer behaviour and its potential to influence other consumers: “People who can connect emotionally with others to drive their actions are very powerful influencers. Brands that evoke emotions can drive favorable customer actions. They connect with customers on an emotional level with inspirational messages” (Kotler, 2017: 116). Leveraging conformist inclinations in human behaviour may turn into a very powerful tool for raising brand awareness, its value and for becoming competitive in markets. Social media is one of the main channels to achieve these goals.

Positioning is also one of the key aspects of branding. It greatly determines how a brand is perceived by consumers, what values are associated with a brand and what expectations consumers have from a brand. Though positioning is determined by the nature of a product or brand itself, from a marketing point of view, it's a more personal vision of consumers both as individuals and as audiences. This issue is discussed by Al Ries and Jack Trout in their book “Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind”: “Positioning is not what you do to a product. Positioning is what you do to the mind of the prospect. That is, you position the product in the mind of the prospect. So, it's incorrect to call the concept “product positioning.” You're not really doing something to the product itself” (Ries, 2001).

Since social media is an environment with huge potential of spreading information rapidly to large audiences, it must be used as a platform for disseminating ideas about a brand. Seth Godin points out the importance of this issue in his book “Purple Cow – transform your business by being remarkable”: “A brand (or a new product offering) is nothing more than an idea. Ideas that spread are more likely to succeed than those that don't. I call ideas that spread, ideaviruses” (Godin, 2002: 31).

Alina Wheeler reviews social media as an efficient tool in brand building in her book “Designing brand identity”: “Social media has become the fastest-growing budget in the marketing arsenal. Consumers have become active participants in the brand-building process. Retweets work at speeds much faster than the rollout of a global marketing campaign” (Wheeler, 2013: 70). This clearly demonstrates how impactful consumer-generated content can be in brand-building process. Therefore, marketers should take into account the fact that building a brand identity is not only a

matter of elaborating marketing plans, it is also influenced by external factors throughout the social media environment.

Considering the above mentioned aspects, marketers realize that using social media in building a brand is inevitable. The myriad platforms that make up our social landscape now play a central role in all of our lives, be that at a personal or commercial level. Brands are increasingly taking to these platforms as a means of engaging directly with their audience (Nahai, 2017: 110). This and other issues of branding in social media is comprehensively discussed by Nathalie Nahai in her book “Webs of influence – the psychology of online persuasion”.

Social media can serve multiple purposes in branding. It allows marketers to use social media platforms as a holistic approach in building a brand identity. Marketers identify social media platforms as a branding channel that companies can use in order to create brand attention and awareness, promote customer loyalty and engagement, increase brand popularity, encourage word-of-mouth connections with consumers regarding a brand and drive the attention towards a specific brand (Al-Zyoued, 2018: 106). Various stages of development of social media demonstrate that it is a powerful tool for building and supporting a brand identity. Technological development of social media platforms provides marketers with a wide spectrum of opportunities.

### III. DISCUSSION

#### A. Branding Opportunities in Social Media

One of the fundamental premises for building a brand is raising awareness among target audiences. In order to achieve this goal, companies need to reach as many potential consumers as possible. Social media is a channel that provides companies with such an opportunity. It allows firms to access millions of people. Since a huge number of people are already visiting social media, a brand's name presence all over those networks can help inform people about it and become familiar with the firm, creating brand awareness (Tsimonis, 2013: 332). Gradually raising awareness may not instantly convert into financial profit. Nevertheless, it is a necessary basis for maintaining sustainable development for a brand in the long-term prospect. Gaining high brand value is impossible without having a high level of awareness. It enables a company to attract valuable customers who benefit not only by being loyal to a particular brand, but also by having the potential to influence other consumers' behaviour. Therefore, loyal customers play an extremely important role in the life cycle of a brand. They increase the company's turnover; the increase of company's awareness is a great tool to increase customer's loyalty (Išoraitė, 2016: 322).

There are various types of social media platforms and marketers have an opportunity to choose a platform that fits a brand's identity and its communication peculiarities. Often a combination of platforms is preferable in order to maintain efficient communication with consumers and support brand-building process. Presenting a brand consistently across all platforms can increase revenue (Vojinovic, 2021). There are personal profile based and content based social media networks. The primary purpose of some platforms is social networking (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn), some of them are

based on video content (Youtube, Vimeo, TikTok) and some of them are focused on sharing photo content (Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat). Since each of them can serve different purposes, marketers need to make a choice based on a brand's specific characteristics, its positioning strategy and general marketing policy. Social networking sites are used as a marketing tool by marketers in creating brand relationships (Vukasović, 2013: 58).

Eventual objective of branding and marketing, in general, is financial revenue. It is important to know how branding throughout social media results in conversions. Various research data indicate that proper management of social media in branding increases the likelihood of purchasing. For example, according to research by Sproutsocial, there is a 57% probability of buying from a brand people follow on social media (Sproutsocial, 2017).

Since social media enables brands to be present in consumers' “attention area”, they have an opportunity to increase financial revenue, along with raising brand awareness and brand value. It also facilitates creating active and loyal consumers who can turn into a valuable tangible asset for a brand. After following a brand on social media, consumers continue to engage in various ways. 91% visit the brand's website or app, 89% will buy from the brand and 85% will recommend the brand to a family or friend (Chen, 2021). These data show how powerful social media platforms can be in converting brand value into tangible assets.

Different stages of a brand's life cycle require specific approaches of managing social media. When a brand is on its introduction stage, social media strategy must be focused on informing and attracting audiences. When a brand reaches a particular level of awareness, social media platforms must serve persuasive purposes in order to keep loyal consumers and attract new audiences. As for the maturity stage, it is necessary to maintain communication with consumers in order to remind them about the existence of a brand on a regular basis and keep them. Otherwise, tough competition may result in the decline of a brand's awareness and value. Social media platforms offer marketers a wide spectrum of opportunities to manage branding processes at all stages of the lifecycle.

Another important opportunity of social media in branding is segmentation and targeting audiences. Social media platforms allow to precisely choose audiences composed of individuals that fit brand segmentation goals. There are options to target an audience based on numerous criteria: age, sex, interests, geography, device usage features, behaviour traits, etc. Leveraging these opportunities result in generating rich analytical data which is another benefit of branding in a social media environment.

Social media platforms can be used in managing various elements of integrated marketing communications. Advertising, public relations, sales promotion activities can be carried out within social networks. However, these activities must correspond to unified branding standards. Social media is an important tool, but it is just one of many touchpoints with consumers in branding and it must strictly fit into general marketing policy.

Organic and paid reach are opportunities of social media that can be widely used in branding. On some social media platforms, algorithm updates make it difficult to achieve high

results in organic reach. For example, on Facebook. However, it does not necessarily mean that reaching a high number of consumers is an unattainable goal. Qualified and experienced social media managers are the most valued resources for investment. If done properly, social media is a medium for communicating with target audiences through organic reach. As for paid reach, there are immense opportunities for advertising. Return on investment (ROI) in social media is higher than in other media channels. In some situations – especially where the brand was struggling financially – social media could substitute for media spend (Fulgoni, 2015: 233). Therefore, spending financial resources on advertising in social media can be much more efficient. Besides, precise targeting and the ability of retargeting consumers is one of the most prolific opportunities, along with diverse ad formats, tools for creating ads and various campaign objectives.

Managing a brand requires constant communication with consumers and monitoring their discussions. Social media is a channel both for creating word-of-mouth campaigns and observing what people say about a brand. These opportunities make social media one of the main mediums between brands and consumers in all aspects of communication. Therefore, it requires special revision.

### B. Communication Peculiarities

More and more consumers choose to use social media platforms as a way to connect to brands whenever they need it. Brands that manage personal communication through social media on high standards are able to keep their loyal consumers. On the other hand, loyal consumers can be regarded as a valuable source for new consumers. Therefore, communication is a vitally important aspect of branding in social media. At the same time, brand managers, marketers and even every employee of a company should bear in mind that each consumer is a unique individual who needs a personalized approach. Personalization could be based on the information consumers openly provide about themselves, for example, in their public profiles or based on the hashtags they use (Voorveld, 2019: 8). Of course, the style and language of the communication must correspond to the brand book and reflect brand values.

One of the prerequisites for maintaining positive communication with audiences is that brands need to create expectations among consumers and, most importantly, justify them. The level of satisfaction of a consumer depends on the level of justified expectation. Higher compliance results in more satisfied consumers who have the potential to become “sneezers” – individuals who spread positive words about brands. However, it takes a while to reach the sneezers, who take a while to reach the rest of the population (Godin, 2002: 57). Therefore, building productive communication with consumers takes time, professional approaches, and patience.

Maintaining communication, to a great extent, means having a dialogue with consumers. The environment for this dialogue may vary from personal messaging or comments on social media posts. This dialogue is multilateral, rather than bilateral as post comments are visible for everyone and each social media user is able to engage in the discussion in the comment section. On the other hand, some consumers, motivated by various reasons, may share personal messages

between brands and them with their close friends or even with a large audience of people on social media. Being responsive is one of the key factors for success in this process. It brings a number of benefits for brands. In 48% of cases, responsiveness may result purchase (Sproutsocial, 2017).

Perceptions, attitudes and behaviours towards a brand may be influenced by comments on posts in social media. As it is a multilateral dialogue, social media managers need to be flexible and react to comments properly, both positive and negative ones. Positive feedback makes a consumer feel that their opinion is valuable and deserves attention from the brand. As for the negative comments, it is necessary to respond to them immediately, with argumentation and, if necessary, with apologies. Consumers trust each other more than brands. Therefore, comments in social media are of great importance. It has a huge potential to impact consumer behaviour as electronic word of mouth (eWom) may occur. Modern day consumers try to get as much information from other consumers as possible. They are interested in reducing risk, securing lower prices, and having easy access to information prior to purchase decisions (Daugherty, 2014: 84). Brands need to consider eWom as one of the main strategies of brand communication.

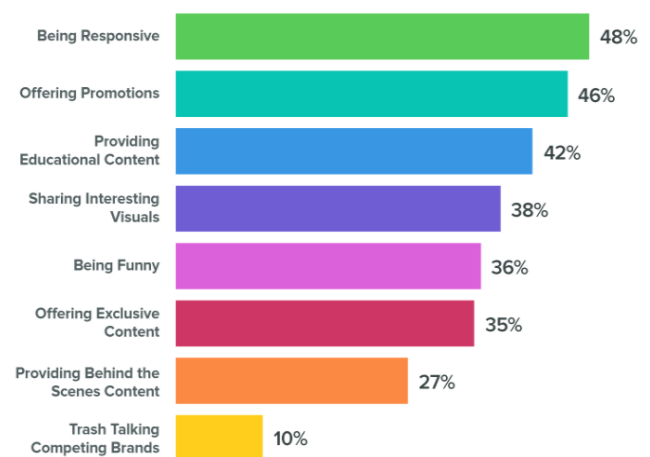


Fig. 1. Brand actions on social media that prompt consumers to purchase (Sproutsocial, 2017).

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 a more effective and efficient way, form positive image of organisation and increase sales (Jucaityto...2014: 491). Direct communication with a customer in social media is one of the cornerstones of contemporary brand communication. It can be regarded as an important part of customer relationship management (CRM) policy. It also is a medium to form opinions and attitudes on brands. Last but not least, direct messaging can be considered as a valuable source for qualitative data on consumers.

Brands with large audiences face a need to implement chatbot in their social media direct messaging. Since customers expect to be responded rapidly, chatbot is a good way to manage the direct messaging process. It offers a new opportunity to provide individualized attention to users at scale and encourage interactions between users and brands, which can not only enhance brand performance but also help



users gain social, information and economic benefits (Xu, 2017). However, often customers require and prefer human interaction over chatbots. Therefore, brands need to make a comprehensive analysis of customer messages and sort them. Such an approach can drastically improve the efficiency of direct communication with customers. One of the most important aspects in this process is that brands need to abide general communication style and voice, both in human and chatbot messaging interactions.

Content management and posting is other important aspect of communication in social media. Quality, relevance and consistency are the main prerequisites of increasing reach and social media algorithms value them. Consequently, it positively affects financial results of a brand. Consistent presentation of a brand has been seen to increase revenue by 33% (Moshin, 2020). However, posting too many promotional messages or posting too frequently can negatively affect brand reputation and the number of customers (Sproutsocial, 2017). Therefore, social media managers should choose the right number of posts in order to ensure positive feedback and high reach. At the same time, posting on social media can be a way to support brand positioning strategy.

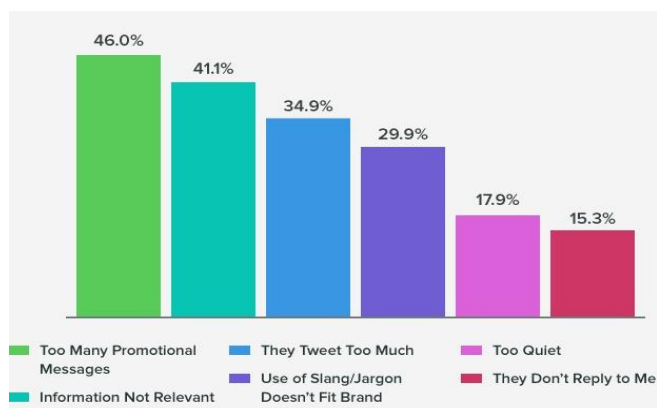


Fig. 2. Actions that make people unfollow a brand on social media (Sproutsocial, 2017).

### C. Positioning Peculiarities

In order to gain loyal customers and competitiveness, it is necessary to make people remember a brand in some context. Positioning is a powerful mechanism to build strong bonds between a brand and consumers. It is especially important in our informationally overloaded environment where it is extremely difficult to attract a person's attention and gain trust. Positioning is the first body of thought that comes to grips with the difficult problem of getting heard in our overcommunicated society (Ries, 2001). Needless to say, positioning is one of the basic prerequisites for building strong brand identity in the social media era. Otherwise, consumers simply will not be able to remember, distinguish and, most importantly, have a "gut feeling" towards a brand.

Perceptions among the target audience is greatly determined by the brand presence in social media. As social media is one of the major channels of communication in today's world, brands have an opportunity to position themselves according to their respective positioning strategy. Social media features and opportunities allow brands to differentiate positioning strategy based on local markets and target audiences, especially in case of global brands with

diverse product portfolios. Creating differentiation should rest squarely with marketers. Of course, if they don't create a focused positioning based on meaningful differentiation, consumers will take over, especially in the age of social media. (Chiranjeev, 2014: 38). However, unified standards of positioning are also necessary.

When it comes to positioning, common values between a brand and a consumer is a key pillar for creating a strong, long-lasting bond. Emotion is an aspect that can be used in this process. 89% of shoppers stay loyal to brands that share their values and 94% of people said they'd be highly likely to recommend a brand they were emotionally engaged with (Vojinovic, 2021). Hence, researching target audiences, studying their motivations, values, attitudes, and behaviour is extremely important while choosing a positioning type.

Consumers value honesty and it can be used as a way for positioning strategy in social media. 86% of consumers prefer an authentic and honest brand personality on social networks (Vojinovic, 2021). It is vitally important in brand building process as consumers make decisions considering values, especially in conditions of the marketing 4.0 era. 77% of consumers buy from brands who share the same values as they do (Moshin, 2020). These statistical data clearly demonstrate how strong an impact can positioning have on consumer decision making processes and behaviour.

Positioning through social media can be conducted in various ways. Hashtags are one of the ways to label a brand with a type of value in a consumer's mind. Hashtags indicate topics or themes, and they represent an important innovation in social media communication. The use of hashtags is powerful because it is participatory (Saxton, 2015: 156). They are widely used by brands. For example, 7 out of 10 hashtags on Instagram are branded (Vojinovic, 2021). However, social media campaigns that envisage using hashtags must be planned thoroughly. It has the potential to generate buzz, go viral and trigger the eWom effect. In its turn, positive word of mouth in social media facilitates brand building and supports positioning.

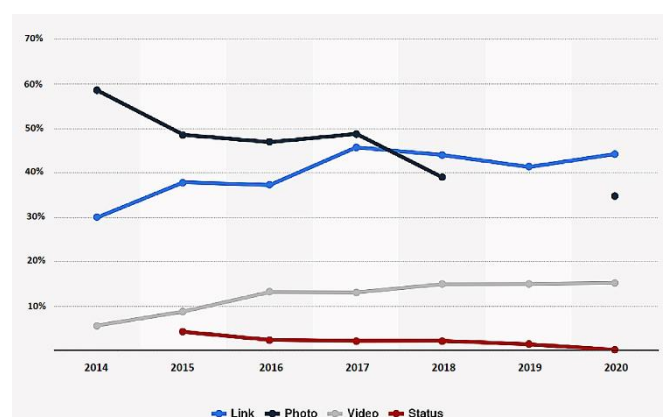


Fig. 3. Leading types of branded posts on Facebook worldwide from 2014 to 2020 (Chen, 2021).

Brand positioning in social media can be revealed in various content formats. They may convey values, messages and express a brand's image. Brand pages allow brands to enlist an unlimited number of followers and publish concise brand messages on a daily basis. This brand-generated content – formally known as brand posts – is the primary mechanism through which brands connect with consumers in

social media (Tafesse, 2016: 424). Since Facebook is one of the leading social media networks, it is noteworthy to observe content format distribution across the platform. As the statistical data below shows, sharing links and videos are on a slight rise from 2014 to 2020.

Marketers, brand managers and social media managers should allocate branded post sharing on social media for best results in positioning context, along with other marketing purposes. In its turn, positioning may influence a brand's reputation.

#### *D. Reputation Management and Dealing with Challenges*

Brand reputation management and protection are one of the primary premises for the development and competitiveness of a company. Social media can be both the cause of a reputational threat and a tool for protecting a brand. A cause due to its unpredictability and a tool due to its powerful communication opportunities. As the popularity of the social online community increases, the need for companies to take ever increasing cautionary measures in protecting reputations and brands becomes essential (Becker, 2019: 232). Hence, brands face a need to create a reputation management and protection policy designated specifically for social media environment. Attitudes, perceptions, and behaviour towards brands are greatly affected by social media. On the other hand, brands have no control over the dissemination of damaging information about them. As a result, brands should regard social media as the most important marketing channel in reputation management.

One of the obvious reputation ways that affect a brand is its potential to convert into tangible assets. If it is damaged, brands encounter not only reputational complications but also experience a significant financial loss. Thus, a positive reputation gives a brand opportunities to gain both tangible and intangible assets. Each consumer has unlimited opportunities to disseminate their positive or negative opinion on brands, often among vast audiences. As a result, the internet has created a new wave of intensely engaged 'professional consumers' that they term 'prosumers'. These active prosumers create company news and can rapidly affect a firm's image. Through them, a one-time incidence of bad service can be echoed around social networks reaching thousands of consumers within minutes (Becker, 2013: 296). Social media makes brand reputation management one of the most important marketing priorities.

Web 2.0 is a notion that should be analyzed in the context of reputation management. It creates conditions for brands where they have no control over content distribution. Each internet user is able to reach vast audiences and influence a brand's reputation, positively or negatively. The emergence of web 2.0 was a game changing development that set new standards in creating branding strategies. User-generated content on web 2.0 platforms significantly affects brand reputation and image. Creative consumers are the new locus of value in Web 2.0. It is they – rather than firms – who produce much of the value-added content in social media, and it is their networks of friends and associates that constitute the social. Creative consumers are the dynamos of this new media world (Berthon, 2012: 263). Brands need to facilitate positive feedback to avoid negative content distribution. In order to ensure positive attitudes among content creators and active

users of social media, brands should create special strategies aimed at influencers.

For monitoring content dissemination, online reputation management (ORM) strategies and tools should be used. It is extremely important for monitoring discussions and mentions as brand building process requires constant observation on the circulation of information about a brand. Online reputation management process comprises tracking not only content dissemination but also comments and mentions of individual consumers and general word of mouth (WOM). If managed on high standards, a brand will be able to make timely interventions and ensure positive word of mouth on social media platforms.

Online reputation management process allows brands to collect and analyze diverse qualitative data on consumers. It is an opportunity to assess reach in social media and sentiments of mentioned topics. As a result, a brand will have valuable information for making efficient marketing decisions. One of the main sources of this type of information is feedback posts, comments, and reviews by online users. 81% of buyers do some online research before making a purchase, 88% of consumers read reviews to determine if a business is reliable enough and 85% of consumers treat online reviews as personal recommendations and trust them as much as a tip from a friend (Kalyadina, 2020). Therefore, monitoring and managing online presence of a brand is vitally important. For systematic management of online reputation, it is important to set specific goals. Otherwise, risks of damaged reputation and crises increase significantly. Especially for large brands facing various types of challenges in branding online.

As mentioned above, social media is an unpredictable environment. There are no boundaries for spreading information that can be extremely influential for a brand, negatively or positively. Since brands have no direct control over these processes, it creates risks of PR crises. Therefore, for preventing crises and avoiding damage of reputation, risk management and crisis management policies must be implemented in general marketing policy. Brands need to deal with negative word of mouth in order to prevent, alleviate or manage ongoing PR crises. There are several sources for spreading information on brands: owned media, earned media and paid media.

Owned media is the main tool that a brand has in its disposal. They have full control over sources like branded pages in social media, web sites, blogs, video channels etc. If necessary, these sources of information should be used in crisis management. Immediate response on the initial cause of a crisis is crucially important for further development and management of a crisis, as well as for its final consequences. Qualified human resources and experience is needed for proper PR crisis management.

Earned media is extremely important in supporting a positive reputation and crisis management. These are third-party entities for audiences. Therefore, they are perceived as unbiased and have potential to gain more trust than sources of media owned by brands. Hence, brands need to obtain positive attitudes among mass media, influencers, bloggers or even active users of social media who are able to reach large numbers or social media users.

As for paid media, it includes social media ads, sponsored posts or promotions by influencers. Brands are able to use this approach in order to cover large audiences that may have an impact on a brand's development. Financial resources allocated in these activities can foster positive perceptions and attitudes among potential and existing customers. This may have a strong potential for protection against reputational threats.

When it comes to reputation and risk management, dealing with negative comments and reviews is an extremely important issue. Social media managers and marketers need to have a constant monitoring policy for detecting such activities across social media platforms. Since a brand reputation in today's digitalized world is rather fragile, it is vital to have mechanisms for managing negative feedback that can be caused by competitors, particular consumers or the brand's actions itself. It takes years to build a brand, but only a nanosecond for a poorly managed crisis to ruin it. A crisis is an event – either internal or external – with the potential to negatively affect the brand. The most effective reputation management begins long before a crisis ever occurs (Wheeler, 2013: 88). Thus, brands need to elaborate comprehensive crisis management plans that will be activated in case of a PR crisis.

#### IV. ANALYSIS

Branding in general and branding within social media in particular is a ubiquitous issue. For successful branding in social media, it is necessary to analyze opportunities and threats in advance. The results of the analysis should be used in elaborating a branding strategy that includes various platforms of social media. It is upon a brand image, positioning and communication peculiarities what type of platform should be used as the primary channel. However, often the combination of channels is needed for supporting the branding process. Especially when it comes to large-scale brands with broad audiences.

Another important issue is that different audiences and markets require personalized approaches. Needless to say, it is a fundamental rule of marketing in general, but it gained special importance in parallel with the development of web 2.0 platforms. Social media is one of the most important channels in the online presence and brand-building process. It is also important to take into consideration that branding in social media requires a high level of flexibility and readiness to fit into current developments as social media is an environment of constant changes and unpredicted behaviour of audiences.

Practice, trends, and statistics clearly demonstrate that consumers are much more trusted by other consumers than brands themselves. Brands are able to use this in their favour by creating groups of loyal consumers and thereby ensuring positive word of mouth across social media platforms. It is much more efficient to gain and incentivize brand advocacy among consumers than persuading audiences. However, bilateral communication with them must be used to justify requirements, expectations and promises given by a brand. The latter is especially important as brands that keep their promises have much more potential to strengthen their brand identity and image. Competition level is often so high that

even a minor digression from a brand's philosophy can cause disappointment among target audiences. As a result, a brand will lose competitiveness and opportunities for future development.

Social media data analytics is one of the main prerequisites of efficient marketing decisions. This should be a continuous, uninterrupted process through which marketers are able to identify a number of trends and gain valuable information: needs, wants, and demands of audiences, behaviour traits, geographic data, device usage, interests etc. Equipped with diverse data, marketers will be able to plan and execute branding strategies in social media.

As we live in a world overloaded by information and commercial offers, brands face a high level of competition. They need to stand out in the perception of consumers and offer them more than just a product. Consumers need to be valued, appreciated and often it is portrayed in social media. Otherwise, a brand will cease its life cycle at an early stage. One of the main boosters of competition is social media as it is an environment where consumers obtain information and make comparisons between brands unimpededly. They make decisions based on which brand values them as individuals and strictly keeps promises. Perceptions, attitudes, behaviours of consumers determine brand development not less than marketing plans and branding strategies. In these conditions, risks and threats of PR crises are much higher than decades ago when consumers did not have opportunities to spread information among large audiences and communication was unilateral, controlled by brands. Today, the situation is completely different when each and every consumer possesses opportunities to influence brand reputation. Hence, it is vitally important for brands to elaborate and manage online reputation and crisis management strategies.

Last but not least, branding is a complex, long-term process. Social media is one of the powerful but not the only tool for building a brand identity. Therefore, supporting a brand by social media platforms must be an integral part of holistic approaches where every detail, touchpoint, communication channel and interaction must be in compliance with the general philosophy of a brand.

#### V. CONCLUSION

Using social media as a tool in building a brand is inevitable on today's markets. Refusing to include it in a company's marketing strategy leads to conceded positions as competition is often extremely high on consumer markets. Hence, social media is a powerful platform for building a brand identity. However, managing social media platforms often is accompanied by various complications and risks. Marketers, brand managers and social media managers should realize that despite challenges, social media is a communication channel that has strong opportunities to deal with challenges, establish favorable communication with audiences and most importantly, use it in building brand identity. This makes social media one of the most efficient channels in contemporary marketing communications.

Choosing a particular type of social media platform should be based on a brand's needs, communication style,



positioning and target audience. This approach can help a company have a segmented, “warm” audience with the potential to attract new customers which is much more profitable both in terms of tangible and intangible assets. In this case, a brand will be able to gain more competitiveness. This is extremely important in conditions where social media and other platforms of web 2.0 allow consumers to make informed decisions.

Lifecycle of a brand is affected by numerous external factors, both online and offline. Social media is a platform that companies can use efficiently in branding. However, it is important to take into consideration that it is a powerful but not the only tool in building a brand identity. This is a continuous process that requires thorough planning and multilateral approaches.

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