

An Analysis of the Social Media Presence of the Brands

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Abstract

Brands need to be close to consumers. The pursuing of this objective convinced an increasing number of companies to start using social media tools, such as social networks or blogs, in order to communicate with a great number of consumers. Hence, social media is rapidly turning into an important part of the brand communication strategy. The power of social media marketing can help the companies to create brand awareness and also to enhance the consumers' engagement with a brand. Nowadays people seem to enjoy being part of an online brand community. Building a strong social media presence is an efficient way to generate high visibility for the brand. But the companies looking to reach greater exposure for their brand have to vie with dozens of other brands that seek to gain the same consumers' attention. This is why the authenticity and the credibility are essential aspects that increase the chances of success. Based on the investigation of secondary data sources, this paper aims to analyze the social media presence of some of the most successful brands in Romania. Looking at some examples of social media marketing campaigns, this paper will outline the importance and the impact of such practices for the long-lasting customer relationship and the brand image.

Keywords: *social media, online marketing communication, brands, brand awareness, brand image, online customer relationship.*

JEL Classification: *M31.*

1. Introduction

“As the business and branding environment is changing, brand management has to respond with adequate tools and frameworks” (Fisher-Buttinger & Vallaster, 2008, p. 13). As a result many marketing specialists have studied the advantages of using social media for managing and strengthening the brand, showing that online platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter or YouTube, have the capacity to engage consumers with the brands in an interactive way.

“Standard marketing strategies and tactics are inadequate in this changing time” (Macy & Thompson, 2011, p. 18) therefore it is necessary “a reinvention of integrated marketing that leverages traditional, online, and real-time social media marketing” (Macy & Thompson, 2011, p. 32).

In general it is considered that a brand needs to be where conversations are taking place. Social media provides the opportunity of real-time conversations between brands and consumers, but the most important aspect is knowing how to build and manage a relevant dialogue because a company “can either speak at people or it can speak with people” (Brogan, 2010, p. 1).

The marketers are also trying to fulfill the objective of creating a relationship between brands and consumers, which can be realized through online communities developed on social media platforms. In this case, the greatest advantage is that the consumers decide for themselves to become members of such brand communities, proving their interest in the brand.

By closely communicating with the consumers on a social media level, the company or the brand becomes “a trusted source of information, which makes it a great asset when creating company awareness and brand credibility. Social media has become an imperative for all brands looking to be a part of the digital market and create buzz around their business. Social media leads to massive exposure due to its worldwide access, sharing capabilities, and huge amount of daily users.” (Angelova, 2013). For example, according to a Mediascope study, the Romanians hold the second place in Europe regarding the time spent online, with an average of 18.6 hours per week (Ziare.com, 2013). Also, according to a Gemius study, the number of Romanian Internet users is around 9 million and the most popular social networks are Facebook, with more than 7 million user accounts, LinkedIn, with over 1,2 million accounts and Twitter, with 79,000 accounts (DailyBusiness.ro, 2014).

Although social media tools aren't something new anymore, it is considered that marketers are still not making the most of their full potential. Only some companies have successfully integrated them in the marketing communication strategy. Hence, it is important to analyze and to identify the main aspects that characterizes the social media campaigns.

2. Social media and brand communication strategy

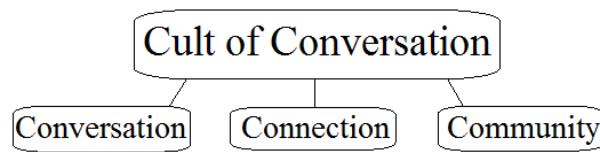
According to Stephen Rappaport “a brand is a conversation” (Macy & Thompson, 2011, p. 66). Starting from this assumption a brand should be managed so that it is constantly engaged in a dialogue with its consumers. Also, branding is about “how customers experience your brand, and the way you interact with your customers” (Stuart, 2014). As it was mentioned before, social media platforms allow the brands to interact with their fans through online communities and to directly communicate with them in various ways.

The companies that decide to integrate social media in their brand communication strategy “will discover that conversations are one of the most powerful brand accelerators and business development tools to appear in years. Conversations in real-time are shoring up customer retention and brand loyalty” (Macy & Thompson, 2011, p. 4).

This new communication channel comes with a specific set of attributes, among which the most important is that the consumers are in control and they select the messages that they want to see. Another important aspect is the differentiation. The consumers are experiencing today a huge number of brand messaging which bear the risk of not being noticed or being immediately forgotten. This is why “social media require companies to establish a different culture of communication to be effective” (Macy & Thompson, 2011, p. 69). According to Kyra Reed & Marjorie Kase, this new culture of communication is referred to as “the cult of conversation” (Macy & Thompson, 2011, p. 42). This concept involves access and openness and it is based on the idea “that the most effective social media campaigns, and the most memorable, are social” (Macy & Thompson, 2011, p. 43).

The cult of conversation is represented as the peak of a pyramid whose base is composed of three interrelated and equally important elements: conversation, connection and community (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1: The cult of conversation



Source: Macy, B. & Thompson, T., 2011, p. 43.

“The entry point to social media is Conversation” which refers to what and how is going to be said and whether the voice in social media will be that of the brand or that of a semi-social or social personality (Macy & Thompson, 2011, p. 70).

The second element of the pyramid refers to the Connections established in social media which are determined by the style of conversation.

The third element is Community which “arises out of meaningful conversation and connection” and which should become “an engaging environment for participants” (Macy & Thompson, 2011, p. 70).

Hence, in social media, a brand must become a voice, perfectly adapted to consumers and the messages must be characterized by transparency, authenticity and should be strong enough to influence the consumers and to capture their attention. A brand is often evaluated through the share of voice which can be defined “as the activity and volume of conversations by people taking place in social media about one’s service, product, or brand” (Macy & Thompson, 2011, p. 27).

3. Brands on social media

The study “2013 Social media marketing industry report” surveyed 3025 marketers revealing some insights into how marketers are currently using social media to grow and promote their businesses (Stelzner, 2013). The main results of this study showed that 86% of marketers consider that social media is important for their business. Regarding the benefits of social media marketing, 89% of all marketers indicated that their social media efforts have generated more exposure for their businesses and brands. The top five platforms used by marketers in 2013 were Facebook (92%), Twitter (80%), LinkedIn (70%), blogging (58%) and YouTube (56%).

According to a Starcount study, the top 10 list of the most popular social media brands worldwide in 2013 includes brands such as Samsung, Coca-Cola or Nike (Daleda, 2013). The study compiled data across Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other social media websites in order to create the top 10 list.

The most popular social media brand in 2013 was Samsung Mobile. “Although Samsung wasn’t the most popular brand on any particular social network, it gained over 14 million fans on Facebook, 4 million followers on Twitter and over 86 million views on YouTube” (Daleda, 2013). Walt Disney achieved the second place and it earned nearly 1 million new fans on the Chinese microblogging site Sina Weibo and over 2 million new fans on Facebook. The third place is owned by National Geographic which was “the most popular brand on YouTube in 2013 with 160 million views” (Daleda, 2013). The following places are owned by Nike, which had over 50 million views on YouTube, and Google which “earned almost 3 million new fans on Facebook, its total number of fans exceeding 15 million” (Daleda, 2013). Coca-Cola comes in the sixth place with over 15 million new

Facebook page fans and over 58 million views on YouTube. MTV had a combined 10 million new fans across Facebook, Twitter and Google+. Facebook was the most followed brand on its own page, gaining 16 million fans in 2013, the same as Instagram which gained also 16 million new followers on its own official Instagram profile. The last place is owned by YouTube which had over 3 million new fans on Google+ in 2013.

In Romania, Biz created a list of the most visible 50 social media brands during the year 2012 and the first two months of 2013. The study called Top Social Brands 2013 took into account the brands degree of popularity and the impact of the campaigns carried on in social media (Biz, 2013). The top 50 most popular brands was led by Vodafone, followed by Samsung, Danone, Avon, Pepsi, Heineken, Cosmote, Coca-Cola, Ford, Orange, F64, Nivea, Nokia, Romtelecom, Dacia, KFC, Staropramen, Microsoft, Timișoreana, Renault, ING, Lay's, Farmec, Ursus, BMW, Banca Transilvania, Petrom, Rom, Doncafe, L'Oreal, BCR, HTC, Lenor, Grolsch, UPC, Prigat, Citroën, Bitdefender, LG, HP, Piraeus Bank, OMW, Jack Daniel's, Oriflame, Matache Măcelaru, KLM, Canon, Heidi, Skoda and Siemens (Manafu, 2013a).

A different study, realized by Gemius (2013), presents the Romanian brands most present on the Internet in 2013. The study called Online Leading Brands in Romania 2013 was based on „2359 questionnaires completed by Romanian Internet users aged 18-45” (Gemius, 2013). The results of the study showed that in 2013 Dacia was the most popular brand on the Internet, followed by Borsec, eMag, Ursus, Dorna, Gerovital, BCR, Farmec and Rom.

All these results show that social media became a marketing tool widely integrated in the brand communication strategy by companies activating in fields such as FMCG, telecommunications, retail, banking, automotive, software or electronic products.

3.1. Examples of social media marketing campaigns

The following four case studies belong to top brands and illustrate best practices and examples of innovative and well-built social media marketing strategies. The analyzed examples are: the Coca-Cola campaign “Let's eat together”, the Pepsi campaign “Ia-ți vara în cap”, the Heineken campaign “Share the sofa” and the Danone campaign “The milk's road”.

3.1.1 The Coca-Cola campaign “Let's eat together”

Knowing that nowadays the moments when we eat together are more and more scarce, The Coca-Cola Company launched the campaign named “Let's eat together” in order to give people the chance to reunite with their families, friends or colleagues and to take part in a unique ambience at a meal prepared especially for them by Coca-Cola and a famous chef.

The promotional campaign, created by The Coca-Cola Company and MRM Romania, successfully combined the online environment and the social media tools with the offline promotional activities which included several TV commercials, public relations, outdoor billboards and special events.

The company used the microblogging site Twitter for the first time in order to promote its brand. The company's representatives declared that “in our communication with the customers, we want to use all the tools that motivates them to stay connected. Twitter is a social platform little used in Romania, but which has great potential for future development” (Borcea, 2013).

Hence, the most important part of the integrated communication platform used a live tweeting campaign that took place between March 1, 2013 and April 11, 2013. During this period, the users had to post on their personal accounts a message containing the hashtag #letseattogether through which they invited their friends to eat together. The “#” symbol is called hashtag and it is used in order to mark a tweet’s keywords and to help the users to discover more easily subjects of common interest. Every day 6 original tweets were chosen and were then included in the TV commercials. At the end of the campaign a jury selected from all the tweets the winner of the big prize, represented by a meal organized for 6 persons by Coca-Cola.

The fans could use as well Facebook to invite their friends or families to eat together following three easy steps: they should choose an invitation theme, select their invitees and send the invitation through Facebook. The users were constantly invited to “send the virtual happiness truck on tour” by sharing the eating together moments on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter (Coca-Cola.ro, 2013).

During this campaign, the brand’s activity on Twitter increased well above the average level registered in 2012. At the end of the campaign the Twitter user base grew by 15% and the campaign entered the top 10 Twitter trending topics. Also the brand’s association with food increased by 15%. The campaign, strongly characterized by interactivity, had over 1 million social media impressions (Manafu, 2013b).

3.1.2 The Pepsi campaign “Ia-ți vara în cap”

Pepsi is “a brand that has moved from the cult of personality to a fully social cult of conversation” (Macy & Thompson, 2011, p. 44).

The campaign entitled “Ia-ți vara în cap – Get on the road only with Pepsi!” was designed by GolinHarris for promoting the brand using an interactive contest. The campaign took place between July 15 and September 12, 2013 and integrated both online and offline tools such as TV commercials, outdoor advertising, public relations, the website Pepsi Pulse and the social network Facebook, including also partnerships with the most popular singers from Romania.

The social media part of the campaign included a dedicated blog named varaincap.ro and a Facebook application. Before the official campaign was launched, it was supported by an experimental weekend during which teams of bloggers went on a road trip trying to obtain everything in exchange of Pepsi cans.

The senior manager of GolinHarris declared that “Pepsi is a brave brand, lively, adventurous, with a distinct and strong personality. We wanted to capture these features in the campaign. We started from the idea that the brand is so strong and beloved that you could get anything in return to some Pepsi cans” (IAA, 2013).

In order to compete, the fans had to log into the Pepsi official Facebook page and to register along with two of their friends, trying to gain supporters and gather as many votes as possible. The first 10 teams that gathered the majority of the votes went into the finals. Only three selected teams went on a 7 days road trip through the country having to obtain everything, from accommodation to meals, by offering instead only Pepsi cans. During the campaign over 265 teams signed up for the contest on the brand’s official Facebook page (Maxim, 2013a).

The PepsiCo Romania representatives said that “summer is the vacation season, a season of intense experiences and adventurous discoveries on the musical rhythms of the moment. We know that

the Pepsi fans want such experiences, so this summer we challenged the young Romanians to take part in a unique experience: to go on a road trip only with Pepsi” (Revista Piața, 2013).

This campaign generated the most appearances in the online media for the brand, namely 639 appearances, with 172 more than in the same period of the previous year (Maxim, 2013b).

The campaign was supported by more than 45 bloggers, through Facebook and Twitter posts, likes, shares and comments, quickly becoming one of the most visible and followed campaigns. More than 300 messages with the #varaincap hashtag were posted on Facebook and Twitter and more than 51,000 unique visitors were exposed to the campaign on the dedicated blog and other blogs (MarkMedia, 2013).

3.1.3 The Heineken campaign “Share the sofa”

The campaign entitled “Share the Sofa” was created by DDB and Tribal Worldwide Amsterdam for Heineken. This Heineken campaign can be considered “the biggest Twitter campaign of all times, since #ShareTheSofa is a communication platform that “transcends all markets and engages fans across the territories” (Reynolds, 2013).

This fun and different initiative was meant to offer to the consumers a unique experience associated with the brand. The fans were invited to join UEFA Champions League players on Twitter for a chat during select games. The fans could pose questions to former footballers who would then answer the questions in real-time. This way it was created the feeling that the football legends were sitting next to the fans on the sofa watching the game.

While the campaign was not particularly innovative, Heineken managed well to integrate its #ShareTheSofa activity into its overall Champions League sponsorship. Heineken’s involvement in Europe’s top football competition dates back to 1994, currently the company paying £ 43 million a year to sponsor the competition (Reynolds, 2013).

According to Paul Smailes, Global Head of Digital at Heineken, the idea of this campaign was “the result of combining a couple of key insights. 70% of UEFA Champions League viewers watch the game at home and over two-thirds of our consumers are also online while watching TV. Twitter is also the number one social media platform being used during live TV shows and also provides us a great opportunity to directly connect passionate UEFA Champions League viewers with legendary players” (Reynolds, 2013). Besides that “the UEFA Champions League is one of the top three most-tweeted events of the year, according to the company” (Wasserman, 2013).

The success of this campaign was defined based on scale and share of voice. For example, the match with Hernan Crespo resulted in 46.8 million earned impressions and 78% share of voice among UEFA Champions League sponsors. The match with Owen Hargreaves generated 2,600 tweets and 55,6 million social impressions, while the match with Fernando Morientes managed to gain 1,200 questions directed to him (Oster, 2014). The number of people who engaged and followed the campaign and also the number of countries that supported the idea increased significantly with each match.

3.1.4 The Danone campaign “The milk’s road”

The campaign entitled „The milk’s road - How the Danone yoghurt is made” was developed by Danone and Blogal Initiative and was carried over 15 days, between May 7 and May 21, 2013. This campaign was dedicated exclusively to bloggers.

In order to compete, the bloggers had to write a cover letter motivating why they want to see how the Danone yoghurt is made and to include the hashtag #cumsefaceiaurtulDanone. At the end of the campaign 9 bloggers were selected and divided by draw in 3 teams, each team including a farmer, a carrier and a quality controller. These teams had the chance to observe how the Danone yoghurt is made and to actively participate in the process. The farmers went to the farm to see how milk is harvested, the carriers traveled with the tanks that bring the milk to the factory, and the quality controllers went to the factory to assist in the manufacture of yoghurt. After that, they had to write a blog post describing their experience.

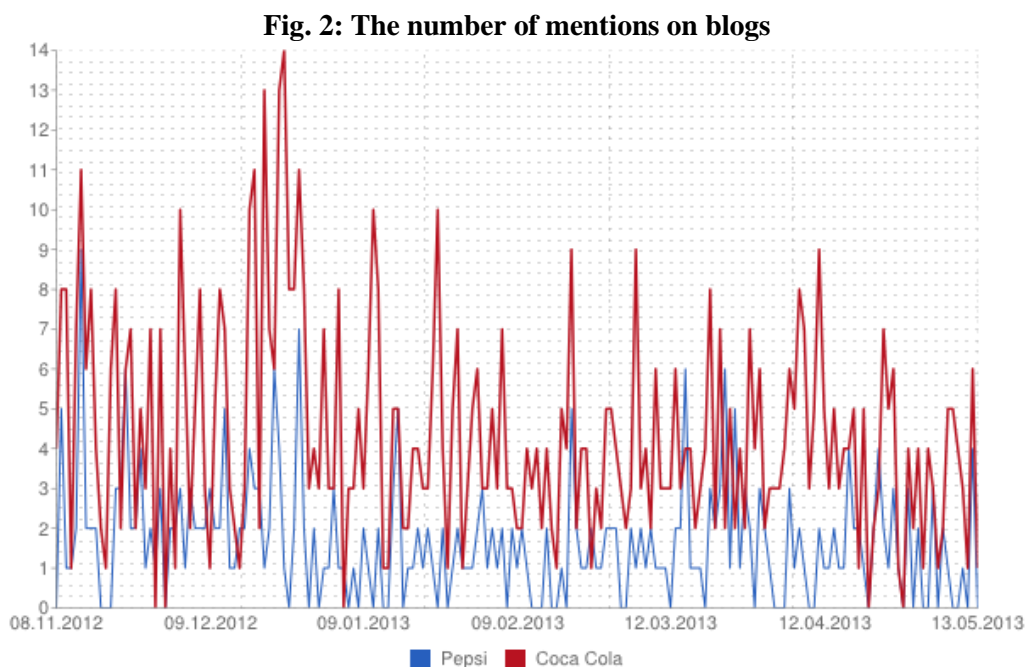
According to Zelist, the campaign had a total viewership estimated around 270,000 impressions, 140,000 unique visitors, 200,000 duplicate visitors and overall 44 bloggers wrote about this campaign in 59 posts (Blogal Initiative, 2013).

3.2. A comparative analysis of the brands activity on social media

Using the monitoring service Media IQ, which provides instant access to over 120,000 online sources such as websites, social networks, forums, blogs and comments, a comparative analysis between Coca-Cola and Pepsi was realized regarding the brand activity in social media in Romania (Vlad, 2013).

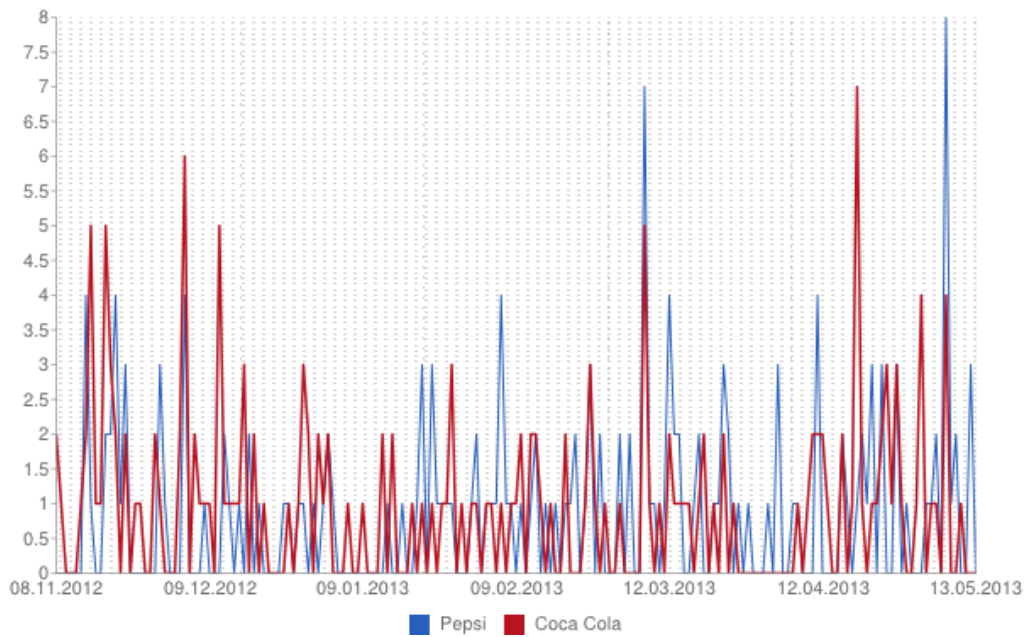
The analysis, concentrated over a period of 6 months (between November 2012 and May 2013), shows that Coca-Cola has a significantly more pronounced presence on the social media platforms in Romania, with a total share of voice of 72.42% against the value of 27.58% for Pepsi.

The analysis also shows that regarding the number of mentions on blogs, Coca-Cola had a significantly better position than Pepsi, with a peak of 14 mentions compared with a maximum of 9 mentions for Pepsi (Fig. 2).



Regarding the number of mentions on forums, Coca-Cola was ranked the second since Pepsi managed to obtain a higher value for this indicator (Fig. 3).

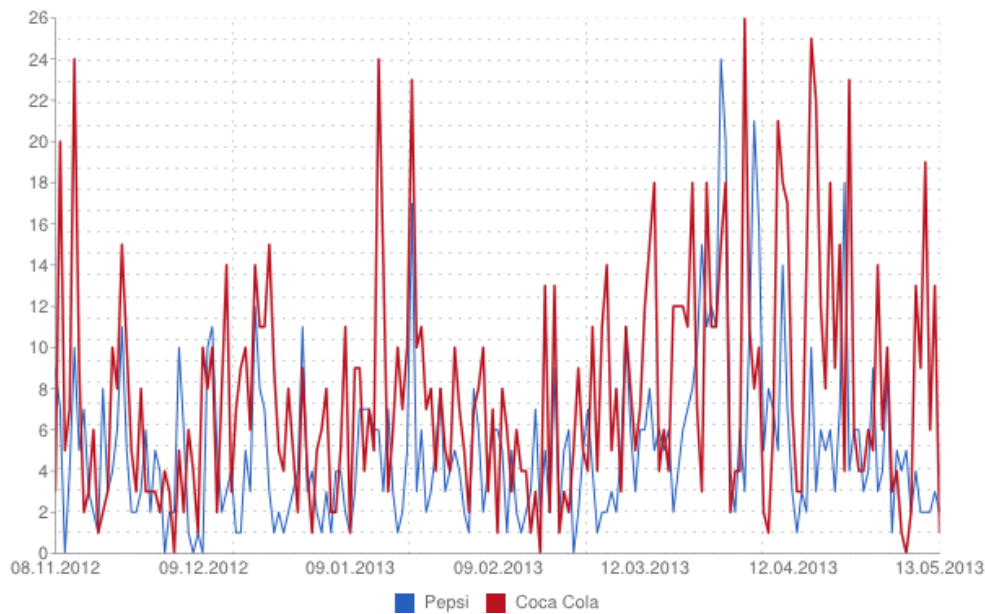
Fig. 3: The number of mentions on forums



Source: Vlad, A., 2013.

The total number of mentions on Facebook and Twitter shows a better activity for Coca-Cola compared with Pepsi during each of the six analyzed months (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4: The number of mentions on Facebook and Twitter



Source: Vlad, A., 2013.

4. Conclusions

The main aspect to be highlighted is that the most successful campaigns integrate multiple communication channels, both online and offline.

Even if social media tools have increased in popularity, they are still not sufficient to ensure the visibility required by a strong branding campaign. But with the help of social media, the branding

campaigns can benefit from other important and unique advantages such as an increased interactivity and creativity, a large audience and rapid feedback.

The companies need to understand that attracting consumers and engaging them in online brand communities can expand the brand's audience and therefore increase the brand awareness and also improve the brand credibility depending on the type of submitted messages and conversations. Also it is important to remember that in social media "authenticity and transparency are even more important than consistency of the brand message" (Macy & Thompson, 2011, p. 40).

The effect of social media on brands should be seen as a positive one, and creating an online presence for the brand should become a part of the communication strategy in order to sustain the long-lasting customer relationship.

More than ever, social media marketing must be viewed as "a business management function that contributes to the bottom line" because the companies using it can "generate sustainable, profitable growth and will end up winners in the globally connected world" (Macy & Thompson, 2011).

A further research work should include a more detailed analysis of more branding campaigns and should also concentrate over the impact of each specific social media platform on the consumers' level of engagement with the brand.

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