

ISCKMC 2020**International Scientific Congress «KNOWLEDGE, MAN AND CIVILIZATION»****EMPLOYEE IMAGE IN SOCIAL MEDIA AS A PROMOTION
TOOL**

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Abstract

The paper examines the phenomenon of a brand ambassador as a means of promoting a company. Modern users of social networks are primarily young people leading an active lifestyle. The researchers of modern communication drives note that among trends that form and have the greatest impact on the development of the communications industry, there is a trend called “Brands that look like people”. Expanding their influence on business, representatives of the younger generation have placed on company’s agenda a question as to whether brands developed have social significance, thus setting an altruistic direction for marketing strategies. The younger generation began to take brands subject to their attitude towards people. To maintain loyalty for many years, a modern brand must have and demonstrate empathy, the ability to empathize and provide support. Thus, a new generation of consumers and employees is growing, which requires a different treatment, and the business needs to develop new models of behavior in order to interact with this audience. A solution to keeping up with this communication drive may be to use a pool of company’s ambassadors in the communication strategy. It is a young employee who has her/his own accounts on social networks and can convey the image of their company to potential users of services in the best possible way, demonstrating such qualities as empathy and compassion.

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Keywords: Social media, brand ambassador, image, SMM promotion, communication drives



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1. Introduction

Currently, there is a quantitative growth of brands in the modern market, and therefore companies need to look for new, original and at the same time effective ways to promote them (Kozlov, 2018). Many of them open up the possibilities of social networks, but it is getting more and more expensive to promote and provide community management. Besides this, browsing algorithms are constantly changing in favor of personal accounts, and corporate site traffic is decreasing, hence making it necessary to promote each post for a fee so that even subscribers can view it. Company employees have personal pages on social networks and this can bring additional benefits to the company (Sycheva, 2019). Subsequent upon new forms of communication, an employee becomes an advertising medium and a brand conductor for consumers, otherwise known as a brand ambassador or a corporate ambassador. Company employees become the best brand ambassadors. Research shows that making employees brand ambassadors is cheaper and more efficient. They can attract an average of 5 % of visitors to company's resources and 25 % more leads. But for this, the company has to do a lot of work. Firstly, an employee must be completely loyal to the company, secondly, he must be a charismatic person, and thirdly, he must be aware of his role as an ambassador.

A brand ambassador is a person who is committed to a brand's product and is hired by an organization or company to communicate the values and policies of a brand. This ambassador presents products only in positive aspects, helping to raise brand awareness, thereby ensuring its sales growth. The ambassador is called upon to relay the corporate identity, the visual image of the company reflected in the eyes of the target audience. It is important that the brand ambassador must fully correspond to the promoted brand. To successfully use such a marketing strategy, it is necessary to assess all possible risks and factors that contribute to the formation of an impact on the public (Zotova et al., 2019).

2. Problem Statement

The job of a brand ambassador requires a careful approach to the entire system of brand promotion and positioning. A brand ambassador should primarily bring the idea of a brand to the masses as convincingly as possible, believe in it, and live for it. The ambassador tries to match the brand in everything, as if trying on the brand shell on his personality, and convincing the audience of this. Thanks to such visualization of the brand, a certain level of trust in the advertised product is formed among the audience. The emotional component takes on a new meaning here – the ambassador is perceived as a person who personifies the brand, being its “live advertisement” (Artamonova, 2016).

Despite the fact that promotion through brand ambassadors is one of the most striking trends in external and internal corporate communications, which is gaining popularity in Russian companies as well, many companies want, but do not dare to form a pool of ambassadors because of possible unforeseen risks causing concern. Most of them have well-founded fears that employees will post something wrong and improper on social networks.

3. Research Questions

The mission of a brand ambassador is to convey brand values through his personality. Any successful company has its own corporate mission, philosophy, history, values. With a view to conveying this information to the mass audience, there is brand identification with some figure that will be a “brand with a human face”.

Brand ambassadors should be tasked to increase consumer flow to a specific brand promoted. An ambassador attracts attention and interests of leads. In addition to broadcasting values, a brand ambassador should identify the needs of the audience in order to fine-tune his communication skills in the desired direction of promotion.

The brand ambassador is meant to embody the corporate identity in appearance, demeanor, values and ethics. Brand ambassadors should feature an ability to use promotional strategies that will strengthen the customer-product-service relationship and encourage the audience to buy and consume more.

The brand ambassador is often known as a positive spokesperson, an opinion leader, or a community influencer, appointed as an internal or external spokesperson to boost service or product sales and build brand awareness. There is also a second option for implementing a brand ambassador program, when the best employees become brand ambassadors, aimed to spread information about the benefits of their employer and assist their company in “hunting” for new talented personnel.

4. Purpose of the Study

The paper aims to identify the best ways to create brand ambassadors on social media who will present the brand to the consumer for the benefit of storytellers. Based on the survey feedback, company employees can act as brand ambassadors.

However, prior to the selection of employees suitable for the role of brand ambassadors, it is necessary to define the purpose of such branding:

- to raise brand awareness,
- to increase promotional content,
- to change brand image,
- to push up sales or achieve something else.

Once the purpose is defined, a platform is needed. It should be borne in mind that building a presence on different social media platforms takes time.

It is also necessary to examine potential ambassadors to see if anything in their public or private life could harm the brand.

5. Research Methods

The research methodology was built on the assumption that personal positioning is becoming one of the simplest and most effective ways to promote. This is true because imitation of our ideals is part of our psychological state – to become like the one we admire (Zotova et al., 2019). Thanks to this phenomenon, in the end we get a massive promotional platform with a high degree of efficiency in

providing a communicative and stimulating effect. Therefore, the authors treat company employees as a potential channel of influence on wider audience (Rabadanova, 2020).

A company employee, being present in social networks, forms a certain opinion in his audience, which, through imitation, spreads to an ever larger target group. Big brand owners have noticed a growing impact of successful figures and have decided to use this trend to their advantage.

The study was based on the analysis of the activities by Aeroflot airline, a pilot survey.

6. Findings

The study was geared towards Aeroflot activities.

In the Soviet period Aeroflot embraced the entire civil aviation of the USSR, which was made up of many state aviation organizations and enterprises. Outside the Soviet Union, Aeroflot acted as a single airline. The name originated as an abbreviation of General Directorate of Civil Air Fleet. Since 1992 it is Russian public-private airline (full name – PJSC Aeroflot – Russian Airlines; abbreviated name – PAO Aeroflot), which was derived from one of the divisions of the Soviet Aeroflot and began to own the rights to this trademark. The company operates a domestic and international flight network from Moscow Sheremetyevo Airport and Krasnoyarsk Airport. Since April 2006, Aeroflot has been a full-fledged member of the SkyTeam aviation alliance. Together with its subsidiary airlines Rossiya, Aurora and Pobeda, Aeroflot forms an aviation holding Aeroflot Group, which is one of the TOP-20 air carriers in the world in terms of passenger traffic.

Aeroflot Airlines is present on the Internet in social networks Vkontakte, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and on YouTube video hosting. Analyzing the presence of the airline in social networks, it can be noted that the majority of the audience is on the social networks VKontakte and Instagram (the distribution of resources among Aeroflot followers is presented in Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of Aeroflot followers in social networks

No.	Resource	Followers
1.	Vkontakte	576 K people
2.	Instagram	656 K people
3.	Facebook	251 K people
4.	Twitter	193 K people
5.	YouTube	27 K people

The frequency of publications in almost all networks is one publication per day, except for the YouTube channel (1–3 publications per month). The topics of publications in all social networks are the same: company news, amusing facts about tourist destinations and promotional activities.

In December 2019, a pilot survey was conducted among airline users to identify attitudes towards PJSC Aeroflot and likelihood to attract employees as brand ambassadors. It involved 200 respondents. All of them were employees of this or that organization, most of them had two to five years' work experience, 11 people – less than a year and 3 – less than half a year. Women predominated among the respondents (75 %), the age of respondents was from 18 to 55 years (44.5 % – 26–35 years old). 76 % of respondents completed higher education, including 7 % of respondents who completed their master's degree.

Among the respondents, the most popular social networks are Instagram and VKontakte. The data obtained from the answers to the question “In what social media do you run your personal page?” made it possible to determine not only the presence, but also the activity in social networks. 199 people had pages on both VKontakte and Instagram, whereas 137 and 167 were already engaged in it, maintained and published information, respectively. 5 % of respondents published information on their pages on a daily basis, while half were engaged in weekly publication. The average frequency of publication activity is characteristic of 65 respondents.

The percentage of the number of respondents’ followers in social networks showed that the respondents had the largest audience on Instagram (500-1000 people – 34 % and 1000-5000 people – 19.5 %).

Half of the respondents occasionally talked about work in their publications. Another quarter talked about work quite often. In total, 65–85 % of respondents published content about their work in one way or another.

109 out of 200 respondents answered that their organizations had a handbook/code of corporate rules, but the vast majority – 179 respondents – did not know if the code included social media manners.

When asked “If you publish on a social network, do you think how this might affect the company’s image?” 129 respondents answered that they tried to control the information published on social networks, and, therefore, think about how this might affect the company’s image. Almost 75 % of employees correlated their image with the company’s image and believed that their behavior on social media could influence the company’s brand. To the question “Does an employee make up company’s image?” 55.5 % of respondents answered unequivocally positively, while 31 % found it difficult to answer.

7. Conclusion

The study addressed the phenomenon of a brand ambassador as a means of promoting a company. Promotion through brand ambassadors is one of the most striking trends in external and internal corporate communications, which is gaining popularity in Russian companies (Kozlov, 2018). However, the fears of many companies involve expecting that employees will post on social media something wrong. This fact prevents them from forming a pool of ambassadors. The authors have identified basic rules to help brands bring up ambassadors from their own employees.

Firstly, you need to understand that a company ambassador is a person who leads an active social life, is listened to and who voluntarily brings the values of a certain brand into the world. With a well-organized HR office, you can instill in the philosophy of the company and figure out the topic of corporate culture, which can make almost any employee become an ambassador in their organization. Large companies often form out a separate group of people and provide them trainings how to properly support the brand in a systematic way and work more effectively in social networks in order to achieve a greater effect both for themselves and for the company (Nosov, 2018). Based on the learning outcomes, such ambassadors not only believe in the company, share its values, personally use its products or services and recommend it to others, but also have well-developed communication skills that help them “infect” others with their ideas.

Thus, companies with a clear mission and a developed outreach program can get good support for their marketing and communication tasks.

Secondly, based on current market development trends (Sycheva, 2019), the authors identified the main patterns in positioning a brand ambassador. The definition of this concept in the information field of social networks allowed the authors to get even closer to a common understanding and orientation in a wide mass media space.

The study confirms the following assumptions:

1. To promote a brand through ambassador branding, a company can attract its own employees, which will result in both a PR effect directly from the promotion, and an increase in brand loyalty among employees.
2. Currently, the boundaries between advertising and everyday life are blurring, which gives rise to the need to develop new forms of brand communication with the consumer.
3. Employees are aware that they are spokespersons, which affects their behavior on social networks. Being an employee of a strong brand, a person falls under the influence of the brand, which causes an opposite effect when it is the brand that orchestrates the employee. By recognizing that they belong to a strong brand, the employee will take much less liberties with social media.

Thus, expanding their influence on business, representatives of the younger generation have placed on company's agenda a question as to whether brands developed have social significance, thus setting an altruistic direction for marketing strategies. The younger generation began to take brands subject to their attitude towards people. To maintain loyalty for years to come, a modern brand must have and demonstrate empathy, the ability to empathize and provide support. Thus, a new generation of consumers and employees is growing, which requires a different treatment, and the business needs to develop new models of behavior in order to interact with this audience (Zotova et al., 2019). A solution to keeping up with this communication drive may be to use a pool of company's ambassadors in the communication strategy. It is a young employee who has her/his own accounts on social networks and can convey the image of their company to potential users of services in the best possible way, demonstrating such qualities as empathy and compassion. Promotion through brand ambassadors is one of the brightest trends in external and internal corporate communications, which is gaining popularity in Russian companies as well. This is particularly evident in the current situation of the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, when all kinds of companies, through their representatives, whether they are top officials or ordinary employees, address their leads from the screens of all kinds of gadgets with relevant messages. A formed trend has every chance not to disappear after the end of the pandemic, but to gain popularity in ordinary, current communication with consumers.

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