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THE IMPACT OF ONLINE MARKETING CAMPAIGNS
CONDUCTED THROUGH BLOGS

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Abstract

A blog is a communication canal for people with same interests as the author. For corporations a blog is a more efficient way to collect feedback from customers than the offline obtaining procedure. A blog is also an interaction canal through which the company communicates and attracts potential customers and also can inform existing clients of promotional offers, and about launching new products.

The authors of this study will explain why and in what circumstances businesses, no matter of their size or targeted market should use blogs as a communication channel with their customers. In order for advertising agencies and companies to use the blogs in an efficient way, in one of the chapters there will be presented the pros and cons of blogging and also some situations that must be avoided.

In this article is presented the impact of blogs on a world wide scale and in particular on Romania. So far the traditional mass-media was considered to be the most reliable source of information but in the last decade the traditional mass-media is being overtaken and replaced by blogs. The power of blogging was a surprise for a lot of individuals because of the influence over the behavior and mentality of the readers.

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1. Introduction

Analysis blogs and research the impact that it has on people worldwide is of international relevance because the blog offers the possibility to communicate with people around the globe who share the same interests as the blog author. For corporations blog offers a feedback much faster than that achieved in the offline environment and also an interaction with potential clients and for the customers, blog provides information about promotions, special offers or information about possible new products.

“The blog is a web page with some steady, regular and chronological scrapbooks about a subject or a variety of topics, allowing readers to comment on every note” (Guțu, 2008, p. 34). Whoever manages and / or publishes posts using Blogware, a software application, is called "blogger".

The community comprising all blogs, bloggers and blog posts it is called blogosphere. Visitor's traffic of a blog influences the blog, which is monitored by specialized sites. After monitoring the blogosphere, websites set rankings of blogs with the highest number of visitors.

Unlike hosting platform, the private domain has several advantages, these include the ability to customize the blog, the possibility of a detailed monitoring of blog's visitors, but also the possibility to receive money after displaying a banner on the blog. Two disadvantages of the private domain are the costs that have to be borne by the blogger on one hand and the risk of hosting services on the other, which interfere with the smooth functionality of the blog.

Blogs can be classified according to several criteria:

- These can be classified by the number of authors, so we may have blogs written by a single author or collective blogs Please replace this text with context of your paper.
- Another classification can be made depending on author's status and we may have personal blogs or corporate ones. Bloggers who write on a corporate blog were classified by “Niall Cook” by motivation and how they approach a subject in the following categories:
 - a) The Blog Star - it is the motivated blogger who approaches the topic in a professional manner;
 - b) The Budding Blogger - is the blogger who is motivated, but who does not want to share knowledge with others;
 - c) „ Why Bother ” - is the blogger who is not motivated and doesn't know to approach a topic in a professional manner;
 - d) Blogger beware - it is the blogger who wants to write on the company blog, but is not focused on the subject.
- Personal blogs are managed by the following categories of bloggers:
 - a) Aggregators - are the bloggers who gather information from multiple sources when publishing a particular post;
 - b) Storytellers - are those who relate facts from personal experiences;
 - c) Mavens – it is the blogger specialized in a particular subject.
- Depending on their purpose, blogs may be generalist, political, journalistic, artistic, cultural, sports, war, photography or video ones

- Blogs can be addressed to either to the general public, external blogs, or to the staff of a company, internal blogs. Internal blogs can be classified into several categories as followings:
 - a) Marketing blogs - are those ones used to promote company's mission and ideas;
 - b) Personal blogs – are the blogs of the company's employees;
 - c) CEO blogs – these are the blogs for company leaders.

“Inside organizations blogs can be used to document the progress of research projects, production etc., their chronological nature being helpful in this regard. They enable the employees to be all the time aware of not only decisions but also of the decision-making processes, with all the motivations that led to the adoption of certain decisions. For public relations specialists who have a blog, when it comes about external communication, accuracy is a burden” (Horton, 2002). It is important that in an online journal, PR bloggers to introduce as many links to sources of information as possible to support information's entrance in that respective blog.

2. Problem Statement

Blog can be an effective method of communication that may impact its visitors.

This is the problem statement on which we orient our attention.

Starting from this hypothesis we make a research to see how much increased communication through the blog and most importantly, what is the impact notices posted on the blog readers.

Since its appearance in the online environment, there is a transformation of blogging from a nonconformist exercise of online self-expression in a corporate responsibility, a small but already a growing number of companies employing staff for writing blogs (Grosseck, 2006, p. 421).

Philip Kotler (2005) defines sales promotions as a "whole different specific instruments, most of them on short-term, designed to drive purchase faster or in a larger volume of products or services by consumers or by industrial customers" (Kotler, 2005, p.845). The blog is one of these tools

A company website offers fewer opportunities to communicate its information products and services they offer, but also about the campaigns they carry. To remedy this situation through the easiest and cheapest way, the company can open a blog. It allows information to people interested in the company's activity in real time. Moreover, customers can communicate to the company their opinion about certain products much easier by simply posting a comment on the blog.

Paul Chaney has compiled a list of the main reasons for a company to open a blog and follow developments in the blogosphere:

- The blog offers the opportunity to communicate directly and honestly with customers;
- Major search engines offer the ability to search for information exclusively in the world blogosphere;
- Blogs use alternative channels for presenting the brand to the company's customers;
- Through blog niche segments of the market where the company operates can be covered;
- The blog is an excellent tool for public relations;
- The ease with which a blog can be used facilitates internal communication of the company;
- Through blog company can build long-term relationships;

- The blog provides a glimpse of what a client wants and therefore the company can customize the product or service.

“Communication is effective if it follows five key steps: listening, understanding, appreciation, interpretation and contribution” (Wright, 2006).

Blogs allow companies to assume a natural tone rather than a public relations typical speech of some static web pages, and readers are often invited to post comments. Any marketer should consider blogs as a powerful communication tool because they allow rapid customer feedback.

3. Research Questions

Who are the readers of blogs?

Blog readers are influenced by various articles posted by bloggers?

Is the blog associated with freedom of expression?

How many people access the information provided by a blog and what type of people?

When the blog has grown worldwide, but also in Romania?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to identify the role of a blog and what impact it has on society, both globally and at the level of Romania.

5. Research Methods

As a research method we used a questionnaire that could analyze what respondents think about the importance of the blog and also if they use the information they find on the blog pages. This method is a quantitative research.

The questionnaire was filled in online, posted on various blogs famous and on Facebook. The sample for this was composed of readers of blogs and in this study responded to about 160 people.

The questions used in the questionnaire and variants of answers were:

1. How long have you user of the Internet (e-mail, search engines, rss feed, etc.)?
 - Less than 6 months
 - Between 6 months -1 year
 - Between 1 and 3 years
 - Between 3 and 7 years
 - Over 7 years
2. What kind of web pages read most often to inform you? (Tick all answers that apply to you)
 - blogs
 - sites
 - websites specialized social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Pinterest, LinkedIn, etc.)
 - websites media (online editions or exclusively online publications)
 - portals, forums
 - I do not have a preference for one of the types of sites listed
3. On what channel of social media are active? (Check all responses that apply to you)
 - I have a blog
 - on Facebook

- on Twitter
 - on Pinterest
 - on Youtube channel
 - I have a Google account
4. How long have you read blogs?
- Less than 1 year
 - Between 1 and 3 years
 - Between 3 and 5 years
 - Over 5 years
5. How many blogs read on average?
- 1 blog
 - Between 2 and 5
 - Between 6 and 10
 - Over 10
6. How often happens to bring up for discussion in your circles of friends topics and subject that you have read on the blogs?
- very often
 - quite often
 - sometimes
 - quite rarely
 - never
7. What do you consider that blogs offers to the classical media? (Check all responses that apply)
- fresh informations
 - independent opinions
 - different perspectives on current events
 - an approach more personal of reality
 - a community discussion
 - it helps me to better understand the events around my
8. Why you read the articles on various blogs??
- it keeps me up to date with the news in a domain
 - for fun
 - it gives me the feeling of belonging to a community
 - it gives me new perspectives to the current events
 - it gives me subjects for discussion for appointments with friends
 - other reason (please specify which is this)
9. You changed or you may have reinforced a point of view on the problem/ product or service after reading some opinions of bloggers? Show off your opinion on a scale from 1 to 5 where 5 means "very much".
- 1 2 3 4 5
10. In which profile socio-demographic you fall?
- field of activity
 - hierarchical position
 - education and training
 - environment: urban/rural areas
 - your age
 - monthly income

To prove that hypothesis is true (blog can be an effective method of communication that may impact its visitors), we also conducted a qualitative research:

- It studied the documents that refer to the evolution of blogs in Romania
- It was studied literature in the field of online communication
- There were analyzed several online articles that refer to blog evolution in various countries around the world
- They were analyzed and interpreted statistical data regarding the type and profile of people who use blogs
- They were visualized interviews with some of the world's leading bloggers

6. Findings

6.1. The results of quantitative research

As a result of the quantitative research in which I have used as well as the method the questionnaire, results are centralized below.

The Audience blogs is composed mainly of young people, most commonly between the ages of 20-45 years (73.7%), with an income and studies over the average of users of the internet:

- studies: 49,5 % have higher education completed, of which over one third were and comprehensive studies masters degree or Phd)
- revenue (17% have income over 3000 RON, while 34 % have income between 1000 and 3000 RON)
- most have a function of middle management (18, 3%), 15.6% are freelancers or partners in a business, 7.3% have a function of upper management and 9% of the readers of blogs are students
- are Internet users with accounts on social networks (Facebook 87.7%, 41.1% on Google+, YouTube, 28.45%, 20.46% for Twitter) who discussed topics in their groups of friends (97,4% and 37,3% of them often and very often).

As regards the age, the segment of the age of the most important in among the readers of blogs is 20-25 years (36,7%), followed by the 25-31 years (27,1%), 18.6 % of the readers of the blogs are older, having between 31 and 45 years, and only 13,2 % between 15 and 19 years.

Blog readers are users with extensive experience in the Internet and interacting in a significant proportion of the blogs they read. Over half of respondents use the Internet for over 7 years (50.3%) while 34.9% use the Internet for 4-7 years. The proportion of those who use it for 1-3 years is low (12.4%), while Internet users that are at the beginning are almost nonexistent on blogs (6luni - 1 year 1.3%, <6 months 1.2%).

The readers are loyal to those blogs which they read, 52.5% of them accessing daily or several times a day favorite blogs, 24.3% several times a week, while only 10.6% go on blogs weekly, and 12, 5% once a month or less.

The vast majority of our readers (51,2%) aim at the daily between 2 and 5 blogs, while only 2.9% of the respondents read more than 10 blogs. Between these extremes are to be found as the proportion who declares that accesses a single blog, 8.4% of the respondents. RSS is used for reading blogs in low percentage (17.7%), the main method of accessing blogs being by the method of writing directly to the address in the browser (41.5%) or through bookmarks/favorites 31.2 %).

A proportion of 68,9 % of the readers appreciate that they changed or strengthened their review at least once about a product, a service, or a company after the reading of opinions of bloggers about these, and 59.9% of respondents even they admitted that they have changed or strengthened their opinion several times after the influence exerted by the blogs that they read.

Almost three quarters of the readers of the blogs bought products and services at the recommendation of the blogs that they read (67,19%) and 77.64% of readers blogs, and have changed or have strengthened at least once a opinion about a product, a service, or a company after the reading of opinions of bloggers about them:

- 65.00% read the blog because they are interested in the opinion of the author, 56.25% in order to find out the news in the field
- 35.00% bought or used services on the recommendations of the blog.
- there are 36% of readers who have never commented on blogs and 41.25% rarely comment on blogs
- 71.21% percent of readers considers that the blog provides independent views and opinions in comparison with the classical media, and 57.58% an approach more personal touch of reality

6.2. The results of qualitative research

As a result of the qualitative research through which we studied the various items with reference to the evolution and the blog influence on the readers, we centralized with the information on the environmental impact of the postings from the blog at the world level and at the level of Romania.

The blogs' impact on world society

The blogosphere is the ideal place to find out opinions and recommendations about specific products or services. 10 years ago, 50% of companies were not giving importance to blogs, today companies have special departments in charge of monitoring blogs. A study shows that half of those who have opened a blog publish on the internet at least once a week, information about various companies, products and employees.

Third part of bloggers don't reveal their identity on the site for safety reasons. They fear that their family and friends could be harassed, and in some countries there is also the possibility for those ones to be arrested.

Blogging is associated with freedom of expression, but in some countries there is a possibility that the people behind the blog to answer before the law for this activity.

Another problem bloggers may face is to be fired from their posts because of the notes appeared on the blog. Fred Wilson, Managing Partner at Union Square Ventures in New York, has predicted that we will get to post on the blog thoughts like: "I cannot imagine than this: every human being to post their thoughts and experiences in any way on the Internet." This is where we are heading and blogging has an important role in this.

Unlike the freedom of expression they bloggers have in democratic countries, in China there have been discussions about government plans to force all Chinese Internet users certainly use their personal identity. The Chinese government has been accused on numerous occasions of blocking certain websites or blogs criticizing government activities.

In Japan, a country with a high degree of technology, there are about 8.68 million active blogs. In this country it is being put a great emphasis on the anonymity of the blogger and thus the number of links on blogs is much lower than in other countries.

The country with the most developed IT infrastructure in the world and most active in the Asian blogosphere is South Korea. South Korea's former president admitted that he won the elections due to his promotion in the Korean blogosphere.

In Middle East countries control systems and censorship of information appearing on the Internet have been set up. Another country which has established a system of censorship of information on the

Internet is Saudi Arabia. Here all sites and blogs that are censored are displayed in the list on the website Service Unit. The most famous blog which is censored is "Suadi Eve" where were posted details of the emotional life of an Arab woman.

UAE is among the countries with a system of censorship of blogs with religious or political content. However Emirates encourage public to access the Internet.

In Europe blogosphere is divided into several local blogospheres. They are supported and promoted by the European Union and the European Commission, however European blogosphere is below the American and Asian ones.

Belgium is the country hosting the most important institutions of Europe, but also is the country with the lowest number of blogs. Posts that appear in the Belgium blogosphere do not influence blogs reader's opinion.

France has a dynamic and active blogosphere, 22% of the French population read blogs and 3 million people have a blog. Traditional media has helped with its development by pulling information from blogs.

In Great Britain we encounter a similar situation as in France, traditional media influencing blogosphere's development. The most common English blogosphere articles have as subject politics, followed by topics related to advertising.

In Germany only 15% of people said they read blogs, German population being one of the most difficult to be influenced by the information that appears in the blogosphere. Another country with a small number of bloggers is Italy, but this is because of the low level of technology in this country.

USA have set the tone for most of the times on new forms of media and blogs have had their peak in 2001, being accountable for credible sources of the events on September 11. The most known newspaper, The New York Times, has a team of bloggers who publishes information about ongoing events.

The blogs impact on Romanian society

In Romania blogosphere has seen an ascension starting with late 2006, and those who helped to develop and promote its growing tendency were the organizers of "Communication Olympics". They also introduced in the contest a section dedicated to blogs. A year later other events appeared in the blogosphere which aimed to reward the best blogs.

Companies have begun to see possibilities a blog offers, in the first place it can be a way to promote much closer to the people, and secondly it offers the possibility of a much faster feedback from people who buy the company's products. PR companies have taken advantage of the communication possibilities of the blog and they have opened blogs dedicated to specific campaigns.

Following the international trends as well, in Romania the number of blog sites is increasing, being estimated a number of about 5,000 online journals. We can speak thus about a Romanian blogosphere constantly expanding, comprising weblogs with different themes and using more efficient technology to gain a better visibility. The blogosphere in Romania includes journals written by Romanians living in the country or abroad and are written not only in Romanian but also in English, French, German, Italian etc.

In 2015 there were at national level, the following categories of blogs, written mostly by men (75-80%); and in terms of age, on the whole, half of the authors are between 20 and 29 years.

The structure of blogs in Romania:

- Business – 7%;
- Law – 2%;
- Education – 8%;
- IT – 29%;
- Private – 38%;
- Politics – 8%;
- Culture – 1%;
- Photo – 6%.

The academic environment was also influenced by the new media trend so starting with 2000, blogs were used to improve the quality of education. Universities have opened a blog for each faculty by which they communicate to the students information on admission, examinations or events within that universities.

The first blogosphere includes personal blogs that generate high traffic and generally are written by young people. The second blogosphere includes professional blogs from IT and Media categories.

Another category includes journalists' blogs who post both personal and press releases. The penultimate category includes political blogs, owned either by politicians or journalists. The last blogosphere category is sports-related.

Media expert, Iulian Comanescu said "the most read blogs are freestyle or football related. Politics has grown because we had three election campaigns, sports goes very well as well, the journalists instead did not have much of a success because many of them have figured blog as a tension release from their jobs, and did not think about the public at all".

The major disadvantage is the freedom these corporate bloggers have regarding the topics they pick and tone of their messages, some of them being even able to disclose proprietary information or damage the reputation of the company. Starting from this, companies undertake a delicate challenge, to transform the corporate blog in the newest direct marketing channel, consumer being the one receiving via blogs various tips, ideas to use the products, etc.

Promotional communication through the blog offers significant advantages for increasing brand notoriety, but also to improve products (Scoble, 2006, p.86):

- Creates active customers promoting the company's products;
- Enables the company to become innovative on the market;
- The discovery of new opportunities for the company's development and new market prospects.

The blog is the most used tool for disseminating information in the online environment today. It differs from traditional environment by the amount of information made available to people interested in a particular subject. Both in the traditional as well as in the online environment, communication is made using the model transmitter - message - receiver.

7. Conclusion

The blog is a communication tool that all companies should use. Its main feature, the dialogue, contributes greatly to companies' customer loyalty that have a blog. Comments that readers post on the company blog can help it to create products or services that meet all the needs of a customer. A satisfied customer means the achievement of the main purpose of a company. Posting a comment anonymously gives the reader a guarantee that he or she will not suffer physical or property damage in this action. In most of the cases the readers' answers to what they visualize are sincere answers, which could not have been provided if they had been requested personal data. Companies should take advantage of this, and use the comments received on the blog to perfect their products or services.

Through quantitative and qualitative research accomplished by authors of this study they were centralized important informations on evolution and impact of the blog in the world, and in Romania.

This paper work has tried to emphasize the fact that a company must communicate with its customers through the easiest and cheap communication tool, the blog. Monitoring global or national blogosphere can help the company to find new data about customers or about the competition, because knowledge is power. Finding new market information about competitors and customers in real time, may be an advantage for the company that owns such information.

The campaigns that have been conducted until now in Romania have had a great success. The advertisers have been provided with data about the effectiveness of the campaign even during the campaigns. The blog provides real-time statistics and because of this the advertising agencies in charge with conducting campaigns can observe what the best way to promote the campaign is and what should be improved. Bloggers involved in the campaign have increased company's notoriety and its products. Thus, advertisers began to turn their attention to the most famous bloggers in Romania who can promote a particular product or service. Most of the companies do not see the blog as a positive thing because they also provide negative feedbacks as well. Through this paper work the authors tried to show that negative notes and comments can also improve communication policy of the companies with their audiences.

For an ordinary person, blog stands for an interactive diary. The freedom available to a blogger can provide him or her the possibility to post on the blog's pages any desired topic. Many undemocratic countries deprived bloggers of this kind freedom, and the result was, in the case of China, a campaign for the adoption of blogs on private websites. Today bloggers are given the same trust as journalists. In some unfortunate situations they were the first reporting in depth details of these situations.

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