

Contemporary Business Communication in Social Media: An Analysis of the Objectives of Business Communication Messages

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Abstract: *Today the Internet and the tools of interactive social media have become an integral part of many people's daily lives; as a result in order to attract the maximum number of customers business must include the social media tools in the list of its used communication channels as well. This paper analyzes the possibilities of the present day business communication within social media, highlighting the specific business communication objectives and their characteristics applicable within the interactive space. This article also presents the research of the communication objectives of the Lithuanian mobile communication companies within social media, which reveals the practical application of the interactive communication features, including both the expression of the specific communication objectives, and the feedback of the social media users.*

Keywords: *Objectives of Business Communication, Contemporary Business Communication, Social media, Business Communication in Lithuania.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Internet is frequently called the technology that has changed communication the most since Gutenberg invented the printing press. Today the global network of networks and social media include the whole spectrum of human communication: from political or business topics to personal interaction.

As the number of the Internet users is constantly growing all over the world, with more and more time being spent in a virtual environment, computer literacy and openness to technologies are increasing. Over the past five years, the proportion of people using the Internet in Lithuania has grown from 42% at the beginning of 2006 to 63.6% as of the beginning of 2011,⁵² which is nearly the European Union average – as of the beginning of 2011, on average 67.3% of all Community population were Internet users.⁵³

Furthermore, people are buying more and more latest technology devices such as laptops and tablet personal computers, smart phones, e-readers etc. enabling continuous access to the Internet. These devices often have an integrated social media access so more and more people can use social media at any time and at any place.

In this way, due to the formation and constant increase of the numbers of active social media users, these groups have become an attractive message audience for business players. As well as performing the function of a resource of consumer information, the Internet and social media are changing substantially the ways and forms in which business players communicate with the customers. Due to different social media, business players have wide opportunities for easily accessing large audiences and for communicating with customers directly, without the mass media acting as an intermediary. In addition, new opportunities arise for including potential customers into the communication processes, with social media helping to combine the mass outreach and the personal impact opportunities.

2. THE OBJECTIVES OF BUSINESS COMMUNICATION IN SOCIAL MEDIA

While performing communication in social media, business aims at drawing the attention of the existing and potential customers to itself, at increasing the brand awareness and appreciation, at forming the positive associations and attitudes, and finally, at encouraging the individuals to perform the actual actions of purchase.

Taking into regards the key features of social media, such as interactivity, immediate feedback, mass and personal access to an audience, the following four main business objectives of business communication in the interactive space can be distinguished:

1. Information;
2. (Self)-relation;
3. Involvement;
4. Sale.

⁵² Department of Statistics under the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, 2011.

⁵³ Internet World Stats, 2011.

Information objective. The essence of the information objective is the business efforts to present diverse, informative and relevant information within the interactive media space, which could capture the interest of the social media audiences and would benefit the business organization carrying out the useful communication. It should be borne in mind that the activity of information is only limited to the transmission of different information to the users of social media, and does not attempt to include the receivers of the information or to implement the actions of sale.

The main and primary purpose of the information is to draw the attention to business and to increase its visibility. It is very important to each business that as many potential customers as possible would recognize and know that particular business, because individuals simply do not buy the products and services offered by the unknown brands.

In order to attract the audience attention, business needs to develop an appropriate informational content and to present it at the best and the most convenient time to the audience. While implementing the information objective business organizations should focus on the quality of the sent communication messages rather than on their quantity, because the users of social media can easily sort out the messages that are interesting for them, and completely ignore the unattractive information.

Business must provide relevant and timely information for both the long-term contacts of social media and newly set contacts. For example, although the presentation of the core business values is necessary for the newly set contacts, too intrusive and repeated presentation of the same information may begin to irritate the long-term contacts of social media.

(Self)-relation objective. The (self)-relation objective includes the activities implemented within the social media by business organizations, which attempt to show the direct links between business and other business/social players or themes (e.g. other brands, a variety of communities, social groups, the positively assessed organizations of interests, the issues of environment or health care, etc.). The (self)-relation objective, similar to the information objective, can be implemented via the positive links between business organizations and the objects of associations which are favourable to them or via the negative links between business competitors and the objects which are unfavorable to them (e.g. poor quality products or services, health risks, etc.).

The (self)-relation objective aims at the favorably shaping of business identity, at increasing the reliability of business organizations, at assigning the favorable evaluations of other players or brands or even at taking over their existing strengths and characteristics. By using the (self)-relation technique with the specific topics that attract a large public interest and a number of positive assessments, business seeks to make that the specific reference of a topic would immediately bring certain associations to that particular business or brand.

Involvement objective. The involvement objective includes business efforts to include the users of social media in the communication process, to get the feedback or to encourage them to perform a particular action. The activities of campaign involvement include the exclusively virtual involvement and activism, i.e. any action in the electronic space, but not the actual actions of purchase.

There are three process types of involvement and interaction of the social media users with business content within the virtual space: 1) the involvement of the button click when the interaction of the social media users and the content published by the candidates is limited to the click of the “like” or “share” buttons; 2) the involvement of discussions when the interaction of the social media users and business messages manifests itself via text records, comments, replies to messages, and so on; 3) the involvement of the content generation, when the social media users themselves create and disseminate the communicative content favorable to the business environment within the interactive space.

In order to incorporate the social media users within the interaction process business can use many techniques, such as: asking the questions (which may be favourable not only seeking to involve the users, but also for the assembly of the necessary business information), interactive questionnaires, tagging of the content placed in social media, interactive games, contests, etc.

Sale objective. The ultimate goal of each business is to sell their manufactured products and services. Equally, the involvement of people in the communicative processes in the interactive space within social media is not enough for business as the actions of the real social media users, and most importantly – the real action of the sale of the manufactured goods or provided services, are also necessary.

It is the sale objective that defines the efforts of business to perform the actual actions of sale of goods or services. With regards to the fruitful implementation of this objective, business communication reaches the goal of the social media users purchasing a specific business product or service.

The sale objective is directly dependent on the previously discussed objectives: information, (self)-relation and involvement. If the operators of business communication fail to implement all of these objectives, it is virtually impossible to implement the sale objective as the social media users do not have enough information about business entities, do not possess positive associations or the experience of interaction.

The sale objective is implemented within social media by business offering the discount coupons, providing the outstanding proposals of actions for the interactive media users, etc.

While summarizing all the objectives of business communication is important to note that the information objective forms the base for all the business communications within social media because without the information practices all the other objectives basically may not be implemented. Meanwhile, the sale objective is the aim of all the business communication within social media, purposefully determined by the complex implementation of all the communication objectives.

Complexity is understood here as the use of the combinations of different objectives within the course of communicative process. Different objectives of the electoral communication need not to be implemented simultaneously, and various combinations of objectives can be used for communication. For example, business can implement only one combination of the information and involvement objectives at one time, the combination of the information, involvement and mobilization objectives, or any other combination of objectives – at other times.

The logic of success in the interactive electoral business communication is based on the fact that the implementation of the lower-level objectives facilitates and increases the likelihood of the successful implementation of the higher-level objectives. For example, the successful implementation of the information objective increases the likelihood of the success in the (self)-relation objective, which in its turn increases the opportunities for the fulfillment of the involvement objective – this ultimately increases the opportunities for the successful sale actions. Each implementation of the higher level objective determines the increase in not only the involvement of the existing and potential business customers, but also their level of engagement.

3. THE RESEARCH OF THE OBJECTIVES OF MOBILE COMMUNICATION COMPANIES WITHIN SOCIAL MEDIA

The use of social media for the purposes of business communication is still a relatively new and little researched practice in Lithuania. The Lithuanian business companies started to use the tools of social media, especially the social networking site *Facebook*, for the communication with the existing and potential customers more in 2008-2009.

The study aims at analyzing how and what objectives are used by the Lithuanian mobile communication companies in an interactive space for the communication with the existing and potential customers. The Lithuanian mobile market is essentially shared by the three major service providers: *Omnitel*, *Bitė* and *Tele2*.

During the study period – from January 1, 2012, to March 31, 2012 – the communication of the three largest Lithuanian mobile providers in the most used tool of social media – the social networking site *Facebook* – has been analyzed. In March 2012, this interactive networking channel had over one million registered users from Lithuania, who account for about one third of the country's population.

In March 2012, the *Facebook* page of the company *Omnitel* had 63,868 fans, the page of *Bitė* – 4,638 fans, and the page of *Tele2* – 45,614 fans. In total, during the three-month period the company *Omnitel* published 92 messages in the social networking site *Facebook*, *Tele2* – 105 messages, while *Bitė* – only 5 messages.

The study has found that mobile communication companies mostly use the involvement objective for the communication with their contacts on the social networking site *Facebook*, as this has accounted for 45.3% of all the messages. Also, the messages on the information objective form a significant proportion – 35% – of the communication of the companies. Meanwhile, the (self)-relation and sale objectives have been used at lower volumes, forming respectively 8.4% and 11.3%

The comparison of the expression of the communication objectives of the individual companies clearly reveals that the communication objectives of the actively communicating companies *Omnitel* and *Tele2* have been quite similar. Meanwhile, the expression of the objectives of the company *Bitė* which had been passively communicating in the social networking site, differed from the first two companies, but due to a very small number of messages no deeper insights could be made here.

The feedback analysis of the users of the social networking site *Facebook* revealed the types of objectives that are the most attractive for the audience. The analysis of the messages of all the companies disclosed that the messages of the involvement objective received the highest interaction, each of which received an average of 83.3 clicks of the “like” button and 24 comments. The messages on the sale objective received an average of 39.3 clicks of the “like” button and 8.2 comment, while the messages on the information objective received an average of 33 clicks of the “like” button and 6.6 comment. The users of social networking sites used to respond least to the messages on the (self)-relation objective, which attracted an average of 19.2 clicks of the “like” button and 3.4 comment.

While communicating with the existing and potential clients within the social networking site *Facebook*, the Lithuanian mobile communication companies use all types of the objectives of business communication. An integrated use of the objectives of business communications allows companies to successfully implement the key objectives: to attract the attention of the existing and potential customers to themselves, to increase the brand awareness and appreciation, to form the positive associations and attitudes, to involve the users of social media in the process of interaction within the virtual space, and finally, to make real actions of sale.

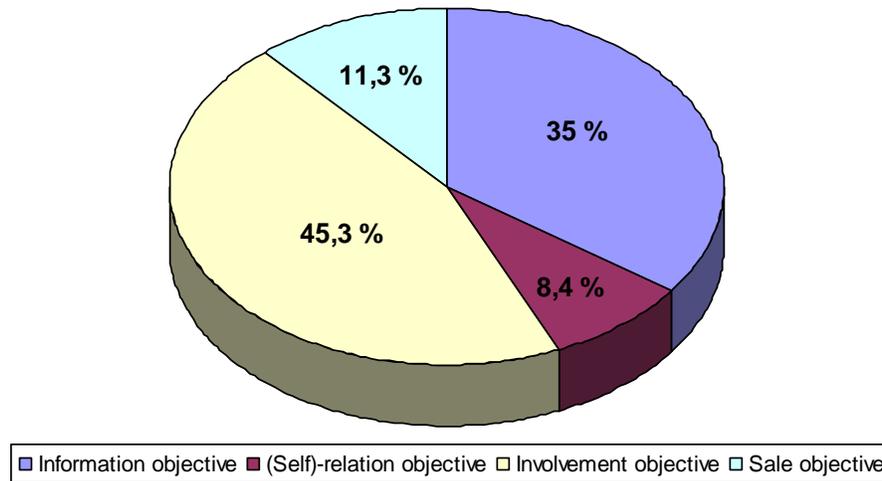


Figure 1: The overall distribution of the communication objectives within the flow of communication

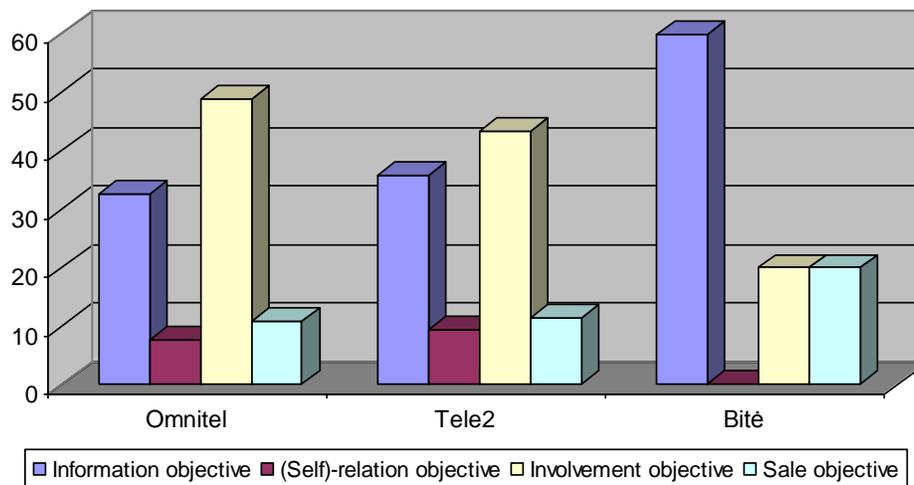


Figure 2: The distribution of the communication objectives of the individual companies within the flow of communication

4. CONCLUSIONS

The constantly growing number of the active social media users and the increasing number of the hours spent in the interactive space cause the expanding importance of these channels in the context of the business communication as well. Due to social media, business can successfully combine the opportunities for mass outreach and personal influence. Using these interactive media, business can access vast audiences of potential customers at minimum cost, present authentic and undistorted communication content, segment and personalise, to maximum extent, their messages, receive direct feedback, and involve people in the communication process.

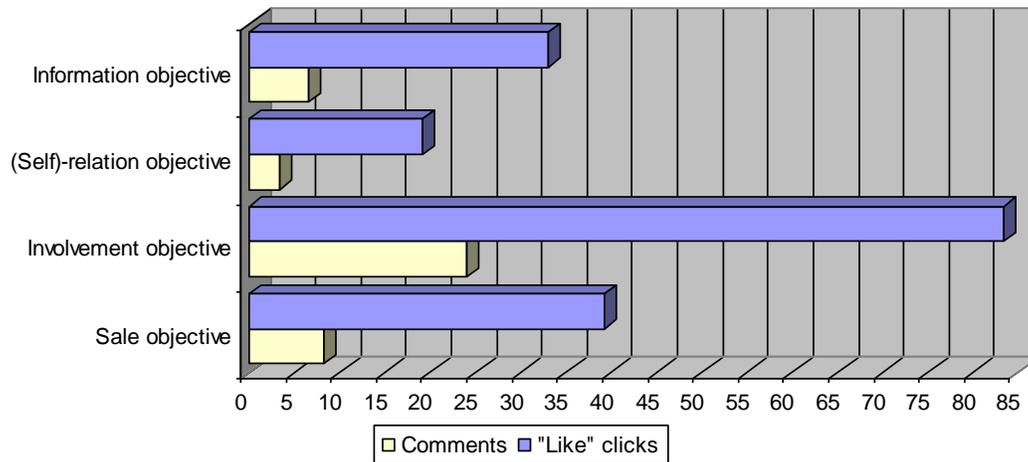


Figure 3: The feedback analysis of the users of the social networking site Facebook

The performed study revealed that the objectives demanding a greater involvement of the audience attract a more active feedback and interaction of the users of social media. The users of the social networking site *Facebook* more often and more actively interact with the messages concerning the involvement and sale objectives.

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