Reputation management: Misuse of social media by customers and consequences on the marketing strategies of firms

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ABSTRACT

The misuse of customer power by means of posting in social media platforms (SMP) is a reality that a company is confronted with. Literature suggests that organizations have to rethink their marketing strategies with regards to SMPs. SMPs enable consumers to share their thoughts and opinions about a company and their products with millions of others within seconds. Since customers do not only share good experiences, corporations are faced with different types of misuses such as negative comments or unfavorable rankings. Consciously or unconsciously the abuse of SMPs by customers can lead to problems for companies, for instance it can cause a bad reputation. This research aims to identify various types of misuse of SMPs by customers and the consequences on marketing strategies. The research is based on a critical literature review. Additionally, case studies with different companies from various industries were conducted. First the threats were diagnosed, followed by the classification of the types of abuse. Apart from that, opportunities to prevent bad reputation and actions that are possible after forfeiting reputation were identified. Lastly, the literature and the practice were compared in order to show similarities and differences between them both. Literature and case studies indicate that the misuse of SMPs by customers can lead to reputational problems. Furthermore, companies claim that there is still no strong motive to change their marketing strategies since the customer abuses faced so far were manageable.

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Keywords
Social media, Misuse, Threats, Consequences, Marketing strategies, reputation management

1. INTRODUCTION

Social interaction between human beings, the media, `(…) advertising and the communication of ideas or information through publication/channels (Neti, 2011) on Facebook, Twitter, blogs or other social media platforms takes an enormous part in our daily life and has a tremendous impact on us in terms of information seeking or decision making, for instance in purchasing a product (Fisher, 2009).

Hence, nowadays the usage of social media websites is among the most common activity of people in the 21st century. Any website which allows social interaction is considered as a social media platform which includes 'social networking' on sites such as Facebook, Twitter or Myspace (O'Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson, 2011).

This breath-taking increase in the usage of social media involves nearly every face of everyone's personal and business live (Qualman, 2010). Therefore, social media is also a big issue for companies in the daily business. As a result, social media do not contemporary only belong to the marketing and public relations department anymore, it is or at least should be also an important part of the company's overall strategy (Qualman, 2010 and Zhou et al., 2007)

Additionally, the online buying possibility, the Internet and specifically the social media platforms (SMP) 'have given consumers much more control, information and power over the market process, which in turn confronts retailers with a number of important dilemmas and challenges.' (Constantinides et al., 2008, p.1).

This technology represents a great opportunity for relationship building between the companies and their customers (Miller and Lammas, 2010). However, the interface between customers is in the present-day possible with the connection and interaction through social media platforms. The sharing and exchange of information can enhance the process of democratization of the given knowledge and provide the customers with the opportunity to actively participate by sharing their own experiences and opinions (Constantinides et al., 2008). 'The result is a unique form of customer empowerment allowing customers to affect as never before the market power structures and (…) the shapes of future marketing.' (Constantinides et al., 2008, p.8).

With these opportunities, threats arise as well. One of the biggest dangers, according to Chu and Kim (2011), is the misuse of the customer power through social media by considering only their own benefits and advantages. The abuse of their power can lead to several complications, such as online price wars between competitive firms or calumny of firms that did not fulfill the essential requirements in terms of price, quality or delivery service (Chu and Kim, 2011).

These developments of the Internet and its progression regarding social media have provoked that the importance and the power of the Internet is substantially discussed from an academic and theoretical perspective (Constantinides et al., 2008).

In this academic paper, the focus is especially set on the misuse of power by end-customers via the diverse social media platforms (SMP) and its influence on companies and the consequences of these misuses on the organization's marketing strategy.

1.1 Management problem
On the basis of the wave of SMPs the importance for companies being proactive in the World Wide Web has become crucial in excess of before. Through SMPs the end-consumers obtain the ability to express their opinions on a product or service. Similarly a certain company can hear and reach out to plenty of people within a short period of time. As a result, the threat of misuse of those SMPs by dint of the end-consumer increases steadly. Therefrom the major challenge for the management of firms is how to govern social media and its interactions in their marketing as well as their overall firm strategy. For a successful integration of social media into the daily work routine, an organization first has to be aware of the importance and the value of SMPs. Thus, the employment of specific and well-trained staff is crucial, such as IT and communication experts. In order to avoid negative effects of SMPs on a company´s reputation, the management has to get an understanding of what kind of misuses exist, how these misuses can influence the company and how to work against them. Accordingly, the research question that arises is:

`To what extend does the misuse of social media by customers influence the marketing strategies of firms?´

After stating the main research question, three further research questions will be listed to support the main question in order to sufficiently prove and analyse the research- and sub-questions.

Question 1: Does the abuse of social media platforms by customers' influence a company's reputation?

Question 2: Does social media, in general, change the marketing strategy of a company?

Question 3: Does social media change a company's overall strategy?

In the following, the described research questions will be tested and answered in the discussion chapter of this paper.

1.2 Pertinence of the paper
The study will be of academic relevance, since it presents a holistic overview about the current literature on the misuse of the customer's power over social platforms, as well as literature about factors influencing the marketing strategy of companies. Additionally, the research paper will determine in how far the power of the customer impacts the marketing as well as overall strategy of the firms.

Thus, a bridge will be placed between the two fields of research and a new research might open up. By combining the literature on social media and their determinants and literature about increasing power of customers over firms, the paper aims at presenting a first overview about the current literature, which possibly makes assumptions or statements about the influence of customers on the strategy of companies. Furthermore, future research directions will be pointed out with the aim of deepening the knowledge on the matter.

Next to the academic relevance, this paper could also serve as a guideline for managers to recognize the importance of social media in their strategy and in general for the daily business activities. Moreover, it shows the different types of misuses that exist and how one can deal with them in order to avoid a bad reputation through the customers' power via social platforms. It is crucial to understand the buying behaviour of the customers as well as the advantages of online purchase to develop strategies, which are beneficial for both sides. Win-win situations lead to satisfied customers who in turn are more loyal and less price sensitive. According to Matzler and Hinterhuber (1998) it costs five or six times more to acquire new customers than to keep one.

1.3 Linkage of the sub-questions
In chapter three of this paper, a literature review will be given which is based on a well-matched and ordered series of sub-

questions. These sub-questions aim to simplify the tremendous research question into smaller pieces and lead to the solution step-by-step. The questions are based on a sequential structure: at first the basic understanding and definition of social media is illustrated, this is followed by the detailed description of what the misuse of social media is and how companies can protect themselves from its menace. In the end, methods and procedures before and after reputational losses will be described and analyzed and to what extent those aid the organizations to stay in business.

2. METHODOLOGY

The methodology in this research paper comprises a qualitative data collection as basis of the literature review and interviews among ten companies in Germany and the Netherlands. Moreover the interviewed companies are acting in different industries and are independent from each other. This has been done in order to get a holistic overview of how companies operate within these diverse branches. The applied type of research in this academic paper is based on an explorative research owing to the investigation of the differences and similarities between the practice and / with the theory.

2.1 Literature Review

According to Webster and Watson (2002) a review of pre-existing relevant literature is a fundamental feature of any academic work. An adequate review is able to create a strong foundation for advancing knowledge. Moreover, a literature review is a type of data collection from preliminary researches (Kajornboon, 2004). However, it could simplify theory development, close areas where the opulence of research exists and divulge areas where research is needed. A well-chosen sample of current literature from different well-deemed professional journals, such as International Journal of Market Research, International Journal of Advertising or Business Horizons, gives the reader a first impression about the issue and leads to the comparison between theory and practice. The used search engines and websites were Google Scholar, Scopus and Ebscohost.

The focus is on specifically chosen keywords while probing competent journals helps to filter irrelevant publications and to concentrate on adequate findings. The following keywords were used: misuse of social media, threats of social media, change in strategy caused by social media, consumer empowerment, shift in power from organisation to consumers, definition of social media, characteristics of social media, general hazards of companies, protection against social media, reputational loss, avoiding reputational loss, forfeiting reputational loss, etc.

2.2 Data collection

As mentioned above, the collected data will be of qualitative nature and therefore contains interviews with numerous companies from different industry sectors. Interviews are an appropriate and often used method especially for case studies. It should be taken in account that a qualitative interview is a fundamental element of a qualitative research project (Myers and Newman, 2007). As defined by Lyn Richards (2015) 'qualitative methods are ways of studying people and their social worlds by going there, observe them closely, in their natural setting, and learning how they understand their situations and account for their behaviour.' (p.1). Rather than testing existing theories in quantitative methods, qualitative research methods pursue to recognize individuals or a narrow amount of instances. The rich and immense detailed data helps to analyse specific situations. In this paper using qualitative methods assist to learn something new that is until now unknown (Richards, 2015).

2.3 Interview / Procedure

According to Myers and Newman (2007) there are three types of qualitative interviews, (1) 'structured interview' (p.4), (2) 'unstructured' or 'semi-structured interview' (p.4) and (3) 'non-structured interview' (p.4). The type of interview that has been applied for this research paper is a structured interview where '[...] a complete script is prepared in beforehand' (p.4) and all participants are asked the same questions. In other words, a standardized interview was carried out in order to gain the ability to make a comparison between the different companies and the literature findings.

The questionnaire was divided into three sections, firstly general questions about the SMP presence of the company, followed by questions about the misuse of SMPs and lastly the consequences on their strategies. The questionnaire is attached in the appendix as Appendix 1. List of participants. A mixture of closed and open questions were asked in the interview, whereas the possible answers for the closed questions were yes and no, the answers of the open questions were completely free to the participants without any specifications from us. In order to avoid a bias of the participating companies, the questions were asked suggestively and the confidential treatment of the answers was promised to the organizations.

Considering that the companies are not all located close to us, a face-to-face interview with all of the interviewed organizations was not possible; thus the prepared questionnaires were sent to the majority of the companies via email.

2.4 Participants

The participants of the interviews are listed in a table (1. List of participants) that can be found in the appendix. Detailed information of the interviewed companies is contained in the appendix as well (2. Interview questionnaire). In order to get an adequate sample regarding the topic of this research paper the selected companies are mainly focussing on business-to-customer (B2C) marketing but at the same time some of the interviewed organisations also apply business-to-business marketing (B2B). Furthermore the attending companies are located in the Netherlands and Germany besides operating in different industries, for instance in the hotel and gastronomy sector, automotive sector or outdoor toys sector, which gives a broader insight in the diverse branches.

After collecting all interview records, the further procedure will be an in-depth analysis of the results between the different sectors followed by a comparison between the critical findings of the literature and the outcome of the case studies. This enables us to examine possible similarities and differences and hence suggest appropriate solutions and recommendations.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Before starting with answering the sub-questions on the basis of collected literature, the term `organizations reputation´ will briefly defined in order to give the reader a full understanding of the term and guarantee that the reader has the same understanding of this keyword.

According to Gibson (2006) the reputation of an organization is one of the most valuable assets. On the strength of the importance of reputation companies are anxious to have a good reputation. Nevertheless reputation is an intangible asset and therefore not measurable.

Above all, the reputation of an organization reflects the success or inefficacy of the performance. As a result, reputation management is a crucial aspect in business that has to be taken in account (Heinonen, 2011).

3.1 How can social media be defined?

In the following section a general definition of the term 'social media' will be given according to the academia.

In practice, social media employ web-based technologies to develop interactive platforms with which individuals as well as communities share, co-create, discuss and modify user-generated content (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Generally speaking, social media contains four main categories: there are (1) blogs - online journals, the most known and fastest-growing category, (2) social networks - application allowing users to build personal websites, (3) communities - websites organizing and sharing particular types of content, and (4) forums - sites for exchanging ideas and information (Constantinides and Fountain, 2008). The most current and popular examples are Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, Cyworld and YouTube (Boyd and Ellison, 2007), The term social media is the abbreviation for social network sites (SNS) and contains hundreds with different technological affordances, supporting a wide range of interests and practices (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). According to Boyd and Ellison (2007) a web-based social media service 'allows individuals to (1) construct a public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection and (3) a view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others.' (p. 218). However, social network sites can vary to the extent to which they are able to incorporate new information and communication tools such as mobile applications, blogging, photo- and video sharing (Berthon et al., 2012).

A few journals state that the term social media is the synonym of the current term of 'Web 2.0' and is used interchangeably (Constantinides and Fountain, 2008) which is the ultimate evolution of Web 1.0 and an intense increase in the usage of the World Wide Web. The Web 2.0 is incredibly altering the way people are doing their daily lifestyle: it changes the way of communication, the decision-making process, how people socialize themselves, learn and even entertain themselves through the interaction with other 'online' people (Constantinides and Fountain, 2008).

With regards to the definition of social media from the technological perspective, Berthon et al. (2012) assert that the Web 2.0 transforms 'Broadcast media monologues (one to many) into social media dialogues (many to many)'; additionally Constantinides and Fountain state that Web 2.0 is an assortment of 'open-source, interactive and user controlled online applications [...]' (p. 232).

The contradictory fact about the definition of social media is that, on the one hand, it is often just a maintenance of already existing relationships and social networks but, on the other hand, it allows individuals to meet strangers and to communicate with them, based on same character attributes and shared interests, which would otherwise not be possible (Agichtein et al. 2008).

The current interest in social media from an organizational point of view lays on the way in which these applications are challenging the strategists and marketers. According to Hanna, Rohm and Crittenden (2011) SMPs have taken an important role for organizations, where the size and industry of a firm does not matter with regards to their marketing strategies. Therefore, organizations have to take care of the immense evolution of social media platforms and their great empowerment of the end-consumer. According to Constantinides and Fountain (2008) social media transform the consumers' group and individual behavior.

Berthon et al. (2012) visualize the different aspects of Web 2.0, social media and the so-called creative consumers and their similarities:
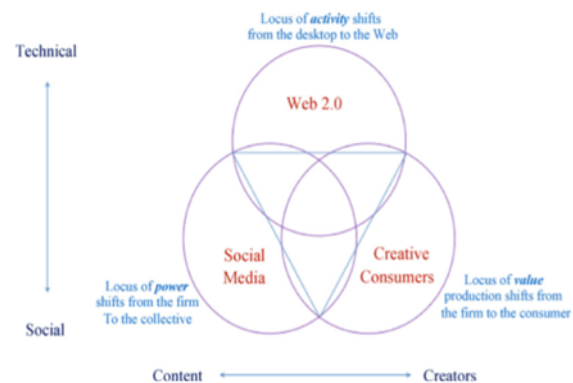

Figure 1. Visualization of Social Media and its different aspects

The graph shows the different positions between social to technical and content to creators. As one can see there is a locus in social media from shift in power, from firm to the collective; a locus of activity shifts from desktop to web at Web 2.0; and locus of value production shifts from the firm to the customer in terms of creative consumers. This emphasizes the connectivity between the three terms and how they change the relationship between firms and consumers.

3.2 Threats of social media platforms for organizations

Social media as such brings, as aforementioned, a lot of advantages into the globalized world, for instance better connection through the Web 2.0, faster communication between people or higher information dissemination (Berthon et al., 2012). Although companies benefit from social media in terms of being closer to the customer and getting a better understanding of customer needs, they are also faced with a lot of threats, which arise through SMPs. In this chapter the threats of social media platforms for companies will be examined.

In order to identify the threats that can occur through social media for companies, one has first to be aware by cause of social media or so called Web 2.0 the threats from the customers side increased since the world has become faster in terms of information flow (Bellmann et al., 1999). Berthon et al. (2012) underlines that the speed of spreading information to millions of others within a couple of seconds is a threat for companies, as the spread of information about a product or service of a certain company has become easier and faster, regardless of whether the information is positive or negative; or so-called `good buzz´ and `bad buzz´ (Dellarocas, 2003). In other words, the power of `telling others´ expanded.

Generally, the majorities of end-consumers do not post or write a comment or a blog in order to inflict conscious damage to the companies. Nevertheless, there are also people who share their views and thoughts about a company consciously for a particular purpose, for example harming a company knowingly. Bad comments or rumors make immediately their round at SMPs and get reported via social media channels and after some time make its way to traditional media, such as television or radio (Smith, 2009). Rumors are not anymore only harmful for companies on a short-term perspective but they may be harmful for a company on the long-term perspective.

Consequently, this can lead to a bad reputation and further to a decrease of a company's prestige (Coombs and Holladay, 2002).

Moreover, a survey shows that the majority of the consumers gains information about a product via social media as much as they gather information by observing the specific company's website in order to obtain knowledge of a product or brand (Miller and Lammas, 2010). According to the survey of Miller and Lammas (2010), it is reported that approximately half of those who are influenced by gathering their information through means such as blogs, build up their purchasing behavior on the knowledge they gain through the use of social media.

Another threat for companies that is caused by social media is the evolution of customer power (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). The last couple of years show the trend that more and more people make use of SMPs and that the usage of these platforms for the upcoming years will increase continuously (Asur and Huberman, 2010). As result, the number of `connected´ people will increase, too. Consequently, this means a continuous shift in power (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Social media enables the consumer to communicate to hundreds, thousands or millions in an easy way. Thereby, Web 2.0 empowers the customer and weakens the firms or brands. As Berthon et al., (2012) states that there is a 'shift in power away from the firm toward individuals and communities'. Due to the fact that the customers increase their power via SMPs the companies are faced with the problem of losing control to the consumers (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Thus the influence of consumers on companies increases and the content will become more bottom up and customer driven (Smith, 2009).

To sum up, social media offers the companies not only positive aspects; it also threatens companies' reputations or even worse the existence of a company. As Hanna et al. (2011) state `we are all connected in other words the dissemination of information became faster through social media therefore the responding and reaction time of companies to, for instance a tweet or post before it reaches too much people became very short. As a result, it became also easier for consumers to misuse social media in order to damage a company's reputation and mostly companies are not able to prevent these negative impacts of consumers before everybody in the social media platforms notices it (Bellmann et al., 1999).

3.3 Manner of existing misuses on social media platforms

The next important question to mention here is what kind of misuses actually exists on social media platforms and how one can identify them. The following section will give an overview of the different misuses:

Obviously the whole evolution from using the World Wide Web until the misuse starts very early as consumers start utilizing the social media platforms (Kietzmann et al., 2011). There are content-sharing sites, blogs, social networking and wikis and all of them enable to create, modify, share and discuss specific content (Komiak and Benbasat, 2004). The aforementioned platforms lead to the so-called 'social media phenomenon' which can nowadays with their power significantly impact the organization's reputation and even survival (Kietzmann et al., 2011). One of the main reasons why people prefer the usage of SMPs in order to give their opinions, thoughts and comments is that, according to Komiak and Benbasat (2004), social media is a more impersonal, anonymous and automated way to communicate with the external world. In the same way, consumers find it easier to write their real opinions such as advising against products that they made bad experience with (Wright and Hinson, 2008). The

additional advantage of using social websites from the consumer point of view is that one is able to reach by far more people than in 'real-life' (Mayfield, 2011).

Since social media have nowadays become a normal routine during the daily activities of the end-consumer, it became a very powerful tool that empowers the consumers quite contrary to firms and organizations (Shirky, 2008). The empowerment of consumers is angst inducing for many organizations since they are losing their power to influence people in their buying-behavior (Shirky, 2008). Misusing SMP´s can have different faces: there is calumny if a consumer is very dissatisfied with a firm or a product; different assessment and rating portals in which consumers can tell the world their experiences and broadcast misuse with videos that are made by consumers in which they put products to the acid test and afterwards articulate a recommendation or not (Abrahamsa, 2012).

It is important to mention that especially the hotel and restaurant sectors are affected by the misuse of the end-consumer; there are thousands of rating websites in which consumers express their bad or good experiences (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Besides the sharing experience of the consumers, rating websites are usually the deal breaker for many consumers, as they only look at the ratings of other past users/consumers and whether they recommend the specific hotel or restaurant (Nair, 2011). According to Kietzmann et al. (2011) negative ratings from consumer to consumer is more influence able during the decision-making process than positive ratings. Therefore organizations try to avoid negative word of mouth as much as possible since it can lead a company into unfavorable troubles, such as reputational losses and the low performance of a firm.

3.4 How can companies protect themselves against the misuse of power of the end-consumer?

As identified in the chapter above, there are several sorts of existing misuse on social media. This chapter will provide thoughts of how companies can protect themselves against these types of misuses.

First of all Berthon et al. (2012) state that there are five barriers a company has to overcome. The first barrier (1) a company is faced with is the approach and language in other words the way a company communicates with their customers. Followed by the barrier (2) of knowledge about the handling of social media. Thirdly, (3) the slow and inflexible behavior that an organization shows in terms of responding to customers' complaints and accomplishment on social media platforms. The fourth barrier is (4) the problem of inadequate and the lack of skilled employees in information technology (IT) and communication. Lastly the barriers caused by (5) senior managers who are rather older and therefore consider social media as a time waster and are skeptical towards the usefulness of SMPs.

The literature displays several possibilities of how a company can avoid or react to these barriers, such as employing skilled labors, especially in IT and communications. Offering employees workshops about the importance and its use and handling of social media on a routinely manner could serve as a protection (Berthon et al., 2012).

A survey that has been conducted pointed out that 74% of employees surveyed declare that it is uncomplicated to wound a company's reputation through social media (Berthon et al., 2012). Therefore a company should integrate the employees more into business activities in order to monitor their thoughts

about the company and adapt their ideas and opinions into business activities (Baird and Parasnis, 1996). Another way to protect oneself as a company against the misuse of customers via social media, firms can implement programs in order to control, oversee and allay potential reputational risks (Abrahamsa et al. 2012). These programs are able to discern potential risks in beforehand, means the program is always checking the different social media platforms. Once there are some keywords found which are connected to the company it sparks an alarm and the responsible person can easily respond to the potential risk. As Abrahamsa et al. (2012) show in their article, applying such a program as the text mining is with the purpose of customer complaint management is a way to protect the company from such a threat as the misuse of power of customers is. The text-mining program distinguishes mails between complaints and non-complaints, therefore the IT or communication department is able to react faster and it saves a huge amount of time for the responsible departments that in turn can be used for other issues, such as communication with the customer. Creating a social media plan can also serve as a protection against the misuse of social media by customers (Berthon et al., 2012).

Kaplan and Haeinlein (2010) suggest building a good relationship with the customers in order to prevent bad influence from the customer side. They add that a company should be honest and respectful towards their customers (Kaplan and Heinlein, 2010). Further, as a company one should be aware of the environment in terms of what is happening in the consumer's world and therefore gain a good understanding of the environment which leads to a better situational awareness of companies (Mayfield, 2011). In order to gain information about a company's environment the use of blogs or other social networking sites conducts an insight into the society and can give information of what is important to the customer. As Kaplan and Haeinlein (2010) state in their paper, being active in SMPs can prevent attacks. Listening to customers is another way of protecting oneself from the misuse of power, that is companies should rather listen to the consumers than exhorting them and consequently the importance of using an adequate tone towards the customers has to be underlined (Nair, 2010). Due to the fact that a lot of companies made huge mistakes by reacting in an unprofessional and inadequate manner to customers' complaints via social media platforms, the significance of learning from past mistakes is crucial. In other words, not only the usage of the correct tone, such as an interpersonal tone, is relevant, also companies are warmly recommended to take the right actions instead of bullying the customer who misuses the power of social media (Berthon et al., 2012).

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the senior managers forgo one barrier since they are not aware of the relevance and significance of social media in today's marketing strategies. In order to protect a company being attacked by customers through the misuse, those who have a close relationship to the older senior managers should make them aware of the importance to be active in the Web 2.0 since companies benefit in today's business life through a good planned and structured presence in the social media world. A team that is responsible for monitoring social media in other words a team that `acts as the eyes and ears` is necessary (Mayfield, 2011).

Although there are a lot of barriers for companies in preventing the misuse of social media by customers, there are different ways for a company to protect themselves from the misuse of customers through social media. For instance teaching the employees about the importance of social media or mounting an extra team which is responsible for social media since the usage of social media platforms is steadily increasing (Abrahamsa et al., 2012). Nevertheless a company cannot completely protect itself from these kinds of attacks due to the fact that the social media world is too fast to being able to react on everything within a short period of time (Heinonen, 2012).

3.5 How can companies avoid bad reputation through the misuse of customers' power via social media?

First of all it is important to mention that the fundamental step of being able to handle the power of social media is especially for international marketing strategists to understand the technology that reinforce the social media and the development of creative consumers (Berthon et al., 2012). Moreover, the strategists must understand the consumers and their position. This is crucial since technology has transformed the prior traditionally passive consumer into a dominant source of creative talent (O'Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson, 2011). The shift in the power has to be necessarily recognized by the organizations in order to adapt them to the new and unknown situation and to be able to survive in the business (Nair, 2011).

As reported by Chibuike Iwu-Egwuonwu (2010) 'corporate reputation positively impacts on firm performance' (p. 1) and this has been widely confirmed. Several journals are firmly convinced that reputation can cause an immense amount of wealth for any organization. Besides that, reputation has become an intangible asset that ultimately increases the sustainable competitive advantage and is therefore indispensable (Chibuike Iwu-Egwuonwu, 2010).

In contrast to positive reputation, negative reputation can cause an extreme tough situation for companies as it threatens the overall performance (Heinonen, 2011). Nevertheless, negative reputation on social media platforms can trigger a big rush for the companies, which is connected with stress, pressure and enormous time exposure (Kietzmann et al., 2011) and should be avoided by actively participating on social media and being representative (Berthon et al., 2012).

Generally speaking, there is no 'perfect' or 'appropriate' strategy which companies can always make use of to avoid bad reputation (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

Additional actions that can be taken are for example to start listening to the customers and their requests, instead of advertising the product or service one is offering, to have a sympathetic ear for customer feedback (e.g. on rating websites), to understand the environment they are acting in and to behave like a 'sponge' by absorbing outside influences (Schiele, 2010) and put the criticism into practice. Although social media is a way of communication, organizations should avoid to communicate with customers in an impersonal and anonymous way and instead try to talk to them like a 'friend' who is trustworthy, this makes the customers feel relevant and like very important 'human beings' who have the right to complain, talk or request (Williams and Chinn, 2010). Roughly said, the crucial point is to never lose the personal contact to the customers, therefore the following points describe how to be social: 'being active, being interesting, being humble, being unprofessional and being honest' (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p. 63).

3.6 What kinds of possibilities exist for companies after forfeiting reputation?

The previous part shows a couple of alternatives to how a company can avoid a bad reputation. However, as mentioned in an earlier chapter it is not possible to avoid the risk of reputational damage to one hundred per cent. Thus companies

have to be aware that they will be confronted with experiencing reputational losses. Therefore, in this section of the research paper there will be given various opportunities to how a company can react after a reputational forfeiture.

In 1998, Coombs established a holistic strategy for organizations, the seven crisis communication strategies (CCS) that can be applied after a company is faced with a reputational damage. The seven CCS are responding tools and namely:

1. Attack the causer – the person that asserts the existence of a crisis will be confronted by the management
2. Denial – repudiation of a crisis
3. Excuse – management strives to curtail the guilt of the organization
4. Justification – trying to minimize the discerned damage
5. Ingratiation – actions are made for the stakeholders goodwill
6. Corrective action – managers try to recover the contamination
7. Full apology – managers accept the accountability for the crisis

CCS is an approach that can serve as basis for the management to repair reputational losses. Admittedly Coombs extended this strategy and subjoined the importance of the given situation which has to be taken into account by facing with a crisis, for this reason the new theory is called the situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) (Coombs, 2007).

Although, the CCS and its updated version the SCCT are not established for the purpose of crisis management caused via SMPs by customers, it is an appropriate tool for organizations since it gives a general overview of possibilities to treat and solve crises.

Notwithstanding, there are a lot of other possibilities that exist for a company after forfeiting its reputation.

According to Wright & Hinson (2008), companies tend to forget to realize that the end-consumers are human beings, subsequently companies do not talk to the customers like human beings. However customers are seen as a beneficial source of product intelligence through their gripes (Abrahamsa et al., 2012). Therefore, the first step in interest of a company is to create a consciousness about treating customers correctly and not to ravish to muckraking after forfeiting the reputation.

It is equally important to provide direct channels of communication for the end-consumer in order to show them the importance of each customer (Wright and Hinson, 2008).

Nevertheless, it is significant for each reputational damage to be evaluated for the given situation since there is no sample solution where each problem can combat through a specific pattern (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

Another possibility is to assess worse case scenarios in order to be able to act and react fast when experiencing reputational losses. Not to forget is that learning from previous happenings or mistakes is crucial (Hanna et al., 2011).

Moreover, a well grasp of the environment while establishing a strategy is one of different possibilities to overcome during a company is faced with reputational forfeiture (Mayfield, 2011). Another possibility is that if a firm cannot cope with the `challenges´ of social media, there are several firms that offer a service in order to monitor and analyze the social media activities of an organization. Further, the aim of those external vendors is to maintain all social media platforms (Hannaa et al., 2011).

Coupled to the mentioned possibilities, there are several other opportunities after forfeiting the reputation, for instance `giving an ear´ to the customer combined with observing their impressions. Involving end-consumers into new product designs as co-creator is, according to Nair (2011), a favorable opportunity in order to build a positive relationship between organizations and their customers. It is identically crucial to integrate all vendors and partners into the value chain due to the fact that all participants benefit from such connections.

3.7 Summary of the Literature Review – Critical findings

In the previous sub-chapters, a detailed literature review was given in order to answer the research questions. In the upcoming chapter, the main critical findings of this review are expressed to get a holistic overview of the literature.

Critical findings
1. How can social media be defined: - Social media employ web-based technologies to develop interactive platforms with which individuals as well as communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content   - Social networks are developed to allow individuals to meet strangers and communicate with them, based on same character attributes and shared interests
2. Threats of social media platforms for organisations: - Speed of spreading information to millions within seconds   - Bad reputation and decrease of prestige through end-consumer misuse of SMPs   - Shift in power from firms to the customer   - SMP-users build up their purchasing behavior on knowledge they gain by the use of social media   - Price wars between companies   - Evolution of customer power therefore companies lose control of the customer   `Bad buzz´
3. Manner of existing misuses on social media platforms: - Consumers make use of their power and influence other people's buying-behaviour and decision-making   - End-consumers damage corporations with calumny or 'shitstorms'   - Rating portals can serve as a tool to damage a company   - Misuse via broadcasts with videos, typical nowadays telling about a product or service one purchased
4. How can companies protect themselves against the misuse of power of the end-consumer: - Employing skilled labors, especially in IT and communications   - Giving employees workshops about the use and handling of social media   - Integrate employees more in business activities   - Implement programs in order to control, oversee and allay potential reputational risks (text-mining)   - Creating a social media plan and worse case scenarios   - Create a good understanding of the environment which leads to a better situational awareness of

companies
- Listening to customers
- Having responsible persons or teams for the maintenance of SMPs

5. How can companies avoid bad reputation through the misuse of customers´ power via social media:

- Awareness of technology
- Giving the customer an `ear´ and interact with them, gaining an understanding of the environment
- 'Being active, being interesting, being humble, being unprofessional and being honest' (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p. 63)
- Being open for customer feedback
- Management has to be aware of customer position and their importance as a beneficial resource

6. What kind of possibilities exist for companies after forfeiting reputation:

- 7 crisis communication strategies (CCS)
- Treating customers in a correct manner and not to ravish to muckraking after forfeiting reputation
- Provide direct channels of communication
- Assess worse case scenarios
- Involving end-consumers into new product design as a co-creator

4. EMPIRICAL STUDY

After presenting a detailed description of the current literature about the misuse of social media in theory, the theory will be now used to the research questions. The facts will be tested based on ten companies from different branches as a case study. The organisations are from four different sectors, including: the restaurant-, hotel-, automobile-, outdoor toys-sector. Consequently, this allows a rather complete overview about the impact of SMPs on the current situation of these companies.

Since all firms strive for the same purpose, namely, being successful and making profit, good reputation is inevitable and is nowadays endangered by SMPs and the empowered customers. Especially the B2C sector is very sensitive since it is directly connected to the end-consumers and therefore needs adequate presence and appropriate recommendations in order to stay in business (Neti, 2011). Primarily affected are firms such as hotels and restaurants in the B2C sector.

4.1 Interviews with organisations

The interviews with the companies have been realised online via e-mail exchanges. The questionnaire has been sent as an online PDF. The answers were immediately analysed and compared with the facts that have been already elaborated in the literature review. Since the given data from the organisations have to be treated confidentially, the author is not allowed to publish the answers of the participating firms. Therefore the facts will be generalized without mentioning specific information about the firms.

In the following subsection the answers of the interviews will be summarized. The survey form was used in two languages, German and English. The questionnaire can be found in the appendix (2. Interview questionnaire).

4.2 Interview results

All participating companies (10 companies) are present on SMPs. 40% are active on a daily basis (min. 4-5x/week), 30% at least once a week, 10% at least once a month and 20% at least once in a half year. 80% of the participants say that they have a responsible person or a team for SMP issues. These responsible teams or persons are part of the management and collocate from the public relations, human resources, marketing and sales departments. 70% states that they have more contact to their customers because of SMPs, in contrast 30% have not increased their contact to customers. 10 out of 10 drum up potential customers via SMPs (e.g. advertising, voucher campaigns or presenting new products/services).

70% of the participating companies experienced an abuse of customers in terms of a bad comment, negative messages or unreasonable negative ratings on platforms. In most instances hotels and restaurants are affected by the misuse of customers. None of these 70% states that such a misuse lead to reputational losses or a decrease to the customer base but they recognised that customers were more sceptical.

The reactions of companies towards the negative experiences were to rather contact the customer and try to find a solution in a `personal´ way instead of reacting to customer comments publicly. Thus customers were given more attention. Additionally, the organisations offer customers indemnifications, such as endowing customers' vouchers or discounts for their next purchase.

All companies see SMPs as an opportunity for marketing activities and furthermore rate it as cost-efficient. However 8/10 states that they do not change their strategies especially for SMPs, whereas 2/10 give SMPs a higher grade of importance in their strategy and imply it in their daily activities.

The majority of the participants recognised a shift in power from the firms to the customer. Additionally 70% realise a tendency of independence of customer and fear to lose control. The participating companies have stated that they realise the importance of customer voice and on that account give more patience to them. It should not be forgotten to mention that the organisations see SMPs as a source of innovation and trends for new product or service design. Moreover, companies added that the end-consumers could serve as a beneficial source in terms of innovation, idea generating and co-creators. The participants use also SMPs for recruiting new employees or introducing new projects. Lastly, all companies agree that a good reputation on SMPs has an impact on the organisation's performance in terms of good reputation can lead to better word of mouth or increase sales and the prestige of a company.

5. ANALYSIS

In the previous chapter the case study and the results were presented and generalized in an adequate scheme.

Henceforth, the given facts will be now compared with the theory of the literature. Moreover, in the end of this chapter the critical findings of the literature will be confronted with the results of the case study.

5.1 Analogy among theory (literature) and practice (case studies)

In this sub-section of the analysis the literature will be compared with the case studies in order to examine similarities and differences between them.

After listing and displaying the results of the conducted interviews with several organizations one can now identify how close or far the theory is to the `reality´.

According to the theory social media platforms are nowadays crucial for corporations and their businesses (Fisher, 2009). Thus, all interviewed companies approve Fisher´s description of the importance of social media platforms. In addition, the organizations of the case study recognized the relevance of social media and agree that SMPs are an elementary component

of today's business world. As a result, all of them are present on social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter or YouTube. Firms and the literature assent with each other in the aspect that SMPs enables new communication channels (Constantinides and Fountain, 2008, Berthon et al., 2012) between companies and their actual and potential customer; thus the communication between the two parties has become faster and improved. Also the companies are able to respond quicker on customer complaints.

Consequently, the literature states that an organization should build up teams responsible for the maintenance and monitoring of SMPs (Mayfield, 2011). Again the practice accredited it and 80% of the asked companies have a responsible person or team for SMPs. Besides that these aforementioned teams or persons consist of different departments for instance human resource, public relations, marketing and sales department, the literature also suggests to instruct communication and IT employees for SMP issues (Abrahamsa et al., 2012, Berthon et al., 2012).

Surprisingly 80% of the participating organizations contradict the literature regarding the relevance applying SMPs in their strategies; hence they do not agree that it is significant at this moment to change their marketing strategies for SMPs.

As Shirky (2008) and Miller and Lammas (2010) state social media has a huge impact on the buying-behavior of customers, which is approved by the firms.

The shift in power between organizations and customers is recognized by companies as well as the force of end consumers towards organizations. In other words, corporations recognized the empowerment of customers through SMPs (Constantinides et al., 2008).

Corollary, the companies noted the tendency of losing control to customers. Similarly, this was pointed out in the literature as Kaplan and Haeinlein (2010) state that companies are confronted with the problem of losing control to the consumers.

As a result, Smith (2009) claims that the influence of consumers on companies increases and therefore the market will become more bottom up and customer driven. Certainly this thought is not shared by the practice according to the interview that was conducted for this research paper. However, they are aware of such an inclination.

Unfavorable comments on a product or service via Facebook, negative feedback at a blog or at the `fan-page´ of a current company or bad ratings and rankings at rating websites are types of misuses that the interviewed companies claim.

The interviewed companies state that they are confronted with unreal and unreasonable comments. In the same manner these types of misuses are mentioned in the literature. Thus, customers generate through their frustration calumny, which is very hard to deal with for an organization. This is coupled with broadcast misuse in terms of publishing unfavorable videos about a product of a specific company (Abrahamsa et al., 2012).

According to Komiak and Benbasat (2004) end-consumers produce these kinds of misuses since SMPs ensure them anonymity. In comparison to the customer companies tend to solve the problem in a more `diplomatic´ way. In other words, as recommended by the theory (Hanna et al., 2011), they contact the customers personally and don't offend them in public.

In agreement with Kietzmann et al., 2011, companies state that SMPs can effect the reputation of an organization. With this in mind Coombs and Holladay (2002) claim that a bad reputation leads to a decrease in a company´s prestige, which is to somewhat agreed and disagreed by the companies. Furthermore,

and even worse than a decrease in the organization's prestige, the power of SMPs can cause tremendous trouble for companies that can end up in bankruptcy (Kietzman et al., 2011).

The practice claims that they are not faced with such enormous reputational losses as mentioned before. Indeed they are confronted with reputational problems after customers' misuse of SMPs but they recognized that customers are initially skeptical towards the organization. Although the companies from the case studies state that they do not agree that a misuse compulsorily leads to reputational losses, a skeptical customer is to some degree an indication of a reputational loss since he is prejudiced against the organization.

Social media platforms are seen as a cost-efficient way for marketing from the literature and practice (Aula, 2010). In agreement with the literature the practice states that customers serve as a beneficial source for their organizations and accordingly can be involved into product development or idea generating processes. According to Nair (2011) customers are a favorable opportunity for companies and they can serve as a co-creator for new product designs.

Given these points one can see that the theory and the practice are very close to each other and accord exceedingly, for instance paying higher attention to customer voice and giving an ear to their complaints, or the importance of SMPs in business in the present day and integrating customers into product developments or designs.

The presence of an abuse of SMPs by customers connected with consequences on a company's performance is approved from the practice as well as from the theory.

Nonetheless there are a few differences between the literature and the case studies. Surprisingly one is that the literature addresses that companies have to rethink their marketing strategies and if given that they have to change their strategies based on SMPs, whereas the companies state that such a redeployment of marketing strategies because of social media platforms is not necessary for them yet. Another surprising result is that the interviewed companies do not agree that a misuse leads to reputational losses. They state that a misuse can lead to reputational problems.

5.2 SWOT analysis - Social Media

In order to give the reader a better overview, a SWOT analysis has been generated to visualize the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of SMPs to companies.

In terms of business a SWOT analysis is a tool that is used for strategic purposes where internal and external factors of a company are analyzed. Therefore it is important for the management of a company to understand and identify the internal factors, which are the strengths and weaknesses (Houben, G., Lenie, K. & Vanhoof, K., 1999). Additionally to identifying the external factors in form of opportunities and threats is crucial for a company. Both internal and external factors can on one hand create value for an organization and on the other hand destroy value of an organization (Houben, G., Lenie, K. & Vanhoof, K., 1999).

Figure 2. SWOT analysis of social media

5.3 Summary of similarities and differences of the theory and practice – Critical findings

Similarities:

- SMPs are indispensable in today's businesses, traditional marketing is not enough anymore
- Social media influences customer behaviour
- SMPs can lead to reputational problems
- Shift in power from firms to consumers
- Realise the tendency to lose control to customers
- End-consumers are seen as a beneficial source (as co-creator), new trends can be foreseen through SMPs
- Recognize the importance of customers voice and give an `ear´ to them
- SMPs are a cost-efficient marketing tool
- Significance of a responsible team or person for SMP maintenance
- Hotels and restaurants are rather faced with reputational problems on SMPs because of rating websites
- Companies experienced the misuse types as the literature mentions, bad comments, negative feedbacks, etc.
- Practice agrees not to discuss problems via SMPs instead looking for other ways to solve the problem more 'privately' and try to look for a direct communication way
- Faster and better communication with actual and potential customers (faster responding possibilities)

Differences:

- Companies do not see the importance of changing their marketing strategies because of SMPs
- Practice does not agree that the market is only customer driven
- Organisations are faced with misuse of social media but did not experience an appreciable decrease in their turnover or reputational forfeiture

6. CONCLUSION

One of the most valuable assets and therefore for any organization of paramount significance is the reputation. Thus, companies are interested in protecting their reputation in order to survive. Nonetheless, through the emergence of social media

or the so-called Web 2.0 companies are confronted with different threats that are caused by the end-consumers. This research paper investigated the topic of reputation management with regard to the abuse of social media platforms by customers and its consequences on firms marketing strategies. Additionally, this paper examined the types of misuses, the way in which a company can avoid unfavorable reputation and the possibilities it has after forfeiting reputation. For that reason the research question of this paper was:

`To what extend does the misuse of social media by customers influence the marketing strategies of firms?´

In order to answer the question adequately, first sub-questions were discussed with help of different scientific literatures and then interviews with several corporations from various industries were conducted. Additionally, the literature and practice were compared and similarities and differences were examined.

The main results of this research paper are that social media has nowadays an important role in the business world, for this reason the majority of companies are aware of this issue; hence they apply marketing activities through social media platforms (e.g. advertisement for new products or new projects). SMPs offer the user to share their thoughts and opinions on a certain product or company.

SMPs are not only a cost-effective platform for organizations to advertise their products or to communicate with customers it also brings threats along. Companies are threatened by the power shift from organizations to customers through SMPs and the tendency of losing. The types of misuses of SMPs by customers are for instance bad comments, unfavorable ratings or calumny. Nevertheless, there opportunities to protect oneself as a company against these types of abuses in terms of employing skilled labor forces, understanding the environment, listening to customers and implementing teams for the maintenance of SMPs. Awareness of technology is also significant for companies in order to avoid bad reputation. Moreover, 'being active, being interesting, being humble, being unprofessional and being honest' can lead to avoidance of bad reputation (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p. 63).

This paper has two momentously findings. One is that the practice and the theory are discordant with respect to the marketing strategy. The second one is the consequence of the misuse regarding to reputation forfeiture. (1) The practice states that at this moment there is no relevance given to changing marketing strategies because of SMPs. In accordance to the literature by dint of the importance of SMPs companies have to admit that changes have to be made regarding their marketing strategies (Hanna, Rohm and Crittenden, 2011). (2) On the one hand the literature states, according to Berthon et al. (2012), that the abuse of SMPs by customers leads to reputational losses, on the other hand the companies of the case study claim that the misuse of SMPs by customers indeed can lead to reputational problems, such as a bad reputation. But they do not agree that it could leads to reputational losses based on their experiences.

7. DISCUSSION

In this chapter of the research paper a discussion about the findings and results of the research will be provided. Additionally the support questions of the introduction for the main research questions will be answered with respect to the research outcomes, followed by the sub-sections with the limitations of this paper and recommendations for future researches.

The importance of SMPs in today´s businesses coupled with its threats such as the power shift is definitely given. The existence of various misuse forms (e.g. calumny, unfavorable comments) is also approved. Both literature and practice agree on the presence of preventive arrangements to avoid bad reputation (e.g. listening to customer or awareness of technology).

However there is objection between the practice and literature regarding the changes in marketing strategies and the consequences of reputational forfeiture through an abuse. These objections guide the author to the resolution that none of the supporting research questions can be answered with 100% confidence.

`Does the abuse of social media platforms by customers influence a company's reputation?´ was the first support question. The literature indicates that the abuse of SMPs influences the reputation of a company, whereas the practice does not agree. The companies claim that an abuse `could´ lead to reputational problems.

The next support questions were `Does social media, in general, change the marketing strategy of a company?´ and Does social media change a company's overall strategy?. What has been said for the first question, can be stated here: the literature agrees and approves it but the practice shows that companies do not see the relevance of changing their marketing or overall strategies. Although customers confront them with the abuse of SMPs, none of them faced reputational losses.

This paper shows that there might be differences between the theory and practice. Nevertheless, one has to take into account that the amount of the participants for the interview does not give a force of expression in order to generalize the results. Additionally, the participants are all small medium enterprises; in other words the outcome might not be considered for large enterprises or multinational corporations.

Furthermore, the research approved that SMPs play an important role for organisations and that the abuse of it caused by customers can lead to bad reputation. SMPs do also influence the company´s overall performance. Therefore, the management of companies has to be aware of the power of social media platforms. Understanding the environment is crucial to them in order to identify threats faster. On the other side an understanding of the environment can serve as a competitive advantage since trends can be foreseen.

The literature as well as the practice provide no `universal´ solution for the abuse and its consequences. Nevertheless, both show possibilities to prevent these abuses or opportunities of actions after being confronted with it. Conducting worst-case scenarios can be an affective tool; hence management should elaborate various scenarios to provide quicker actions to solve the problems. Another point is that the evaluation of the results of the interviews could have been made separately in order to show differences within these countries.

With this in mind, this research paper might help organisations to get an awareness of the significance of social media platforms, its threats, the types of abuse and the possibilities that an organisation has to avoid or prevent bad reputation and opportunities for actions after forfeiting reputation.

7.1 Limitations
This research is bound to several limitations. Starting with the limitation that reputation as such is not measurable since it is an intangible asset (Chibuike Iwu-Egwuonwu, 2010). Additionally, there is no universal `rule´ which serves as a successful guideline how a company should act against reputational losses. In other words, there is not a so-called `to do list´. Another limitation is that the CCS of Coombs is not developed with regards to social media platforms.

Besides that an exploratory research has been conducted, therefore it is based on qualitative data and does not provide exact numbers as quantitative data does. Consequently, it is not predictable how many or in how far a company is effected by reputational losses.

The amount of interviewed companies for this research is rather small; therefore there is no high force of expression. Since different sectors are confronted with different types of misuses, for instance hotel- and restaurant-sector via rating website, it is a limitation that the interviewed companies are from different sectors hence the misuses differ from industry to industry. Another limitation is that the difference between the organizations located in Germany and the Netherlands has not been mentioned and the research paper does not show the customer perspective for instance an interview with the end-consumer.

7.2 Future research
For future research it is recommended to conduct a research based on a specific industry and increase the amount of participating companies in order to guarantee a higher force of expression. It is equally important to find a measurement for reputation and make it feasible. As Coombs tried with his crisis communication strategies it should be researched if these strategies are applicable to crises caused by the misuse of social media. Also the investigation of possible universal worst-case scenarios for companies after forfeiting reputation could be done. Additionally, executing a research based on quantitative data could be interesting in order to see in how far bad reputation leads to a decrease in the customer base and turnover of an organization. A question can be for example; `In how far does bad reputation lead to a decrease in the turnover of a company?´ or `Does bad reputation in fact lead to a loss of customers?´

8. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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10. APPENDIX

1. List of participants

Company name	Marketing type	Industry sector	Location
Ristorante Trattoria	B2C	Restaurant	Braunschweig, Germany
Wueins GmbH	B2B	Marketing agency	Münster, Germany
Hotel Adria	B2C	Hotel	Munih, Germany
Riverside Hotel	B2C	Hotel and Gastronomy	Nordhorn, Germany
Exit Toys	B2B and	Outdoor	Doetinchem,

	B2C	toys	The Netherlands
Frühlingshotel	B2C	Hotel and Gastronomy	Braunschweig, Germany
Hotel Marco Polo	B2C	Hotel	Münster, Germany
BMW Cyran	B2B and B2C	Automotive	Gronau, Germany
Mercedes Benz Beresa	B2B and B2C	Automotive	Gronau, Germany
Porsche Classic Center	B2B and B2C	Automotive	Apeldoorn, The Netherlands

2. Interview questionnaire

Interview for Bachelor Thesis – University of Twente

Information:

In line with our Bachelor Thesis at the University of Twente with the emphasis in Management and Marketing we, Koray D. Erdogan and Anita Davoudi, question companies from different industries about their presence and usage of social media platforms. The main focus of this paper is the misuse of social media through customers and as result the changes of the marketing strategies of organizations.

Please Note: This questionnaire consists of closed and open questions. All data and information will be embraced confidential and will not forwarded to third.

Part I: Questions about social media presence:

1. Are you participating in social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, blogs, etc.)?

    a. Yes   b. No

2. Are these platforms you are using, up-to-date (e.g. maintenance of Facebook page such as regular posts, reacting to consumer requests, etc.)?

    a. Yes, daily (4-5x / week)

    b. Yes, regularly (1x /week)

    c. Yes, sometime (1-2x /month)

    d. No (at least 1x/half year)

3. Do you nowadays have more contacts with your current customers online?   a. Yes
    b. No

4. Do you drum up potential customers via social media platforms such as Facebook?

    a. Yes   b. No

5. Are there persons or teams who are only responsible for the supervision of social media?

    a. Yes, Person

    b. Yes, team

    c. No, is done randomly

6. If yes, from which department?

    Answer:

Part 2: Experience with misuse of social media:

7. Did you ever experience an unfavorable influence from the end-consumer towards the company on social media?

    a. Yes   b. No

8. What kind of incident (e.g. bad comment on Facebook about the company, shitstorm)?

    Answer:

9. If yes, did it have an impact on the reputation of the company and in how far?

    Answer:

10. How did you react (e.g. ignored, taking legal steps, etc.)?

    Answer:

Part 3: Change in the marketing as well as overall firm strategy:

11. Did your marketing strategies change over the increase use of social media?

    a. Yes   b. No

12. If yes, how?

    Answer:

13. Did you already recognize that there is a shift between the empowerment of end-consumers and companies?

    a. Yes   b. No

14. Do you feel that you are losing the control over consumers and it tends to become more customer-driven?

a. Yes   b. No

Answer:

15. How did you integrate social media into your marketing strategies?

Thank you for your attendance

         Answer:

16. It is said that a firm's reputation positively influences the performance, do you experience that positive or negative reputation via social media impacts your overall firm performance?