

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN BUILDING AWARENESS OF RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION

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Abstract:

Responsible consumption in times of changes in both- economic and ecological phenomenon is very important, but complex. It can be manifested in many ways. It could be described at slogans: reduce, reuse, recycle, rethink. This philosophy is therefore designed to educate consumers about the rational use of products and services, and thus reduce resource consumption, and to proclaim the ideas of recycling and reuse of products. Lending is gaining in importance, processing, exchange and sharing with others - instead of buying.

The paper shows that shaping responsible consumption in offline world could be ineffective, and using social media can be beneficial.

The authors attempted to determine whether there are present and how can be developed responsible consumption behavior on social networking sites like: Facebook, Pinterest and Youtube.

Keywords: responsible consumption, reduce, reuse, recycle

1. INTRODUCTION

Shaping the attitudes of responsible consumption becomes more and more important nowadays (Pereira Heath, Chatzidakis 2011). In the face of worsening environmental conditions of the world, and thus climate change, the problem of waste disposal, increasing pollution, etc., but also the economic crisis is an important issue. Development of environmental awareness, or more broadly - promotion of the idea of sustainable development has become a goal, or a policy of not only governments and NGOs. It is also more often reflected in the activities of companies as corporate social responsibility, as well as among themselves-consumer activists.

The authors adopted an approach that attitude of responsible consumption is manifested in rational consumer purchases (meaning reasonable satisfaction of consumption needs), reducing the amount of waste, reuse of waste products, such as packaging (eg. by giving them a new function) and choosing fair trade products. It is also important to promote sharing and exchanging products between consumers. In short words, these activities can be described as slogan: rethink, reuse, reduce, recycle (compare with Kozłowska 2008).

Nevertheless, the communication of responsible consumption attitudes to the public encounters certain specific problems (Schöll 2010). On one hand, it is still a significant lack of awareness, as well as on environmental conviction proceedings, which is regarded as too time-consuming and labor-intensive (to reach the eco products), or expensive. Authors on the basis of available resources will try to extract and present the spectrum of the problem.

In forming the above-mentioned behavior various tools can be used. Until recently main roles played typical actions through the mass media. Now we can see a trend, in which such communication uses more and more non-standard forms of advertising, thus trying to draw attention to this problem. The organizations used for example: an ambient marketing, buzz marketing, and viral marketing concepts and tools. The authors propose to use activities in social media for reaching mentioned goal. Such media in the last few years has become very popular and permanently inscribed in the daily reality of the consumer.

The authors assume that the actions in social media in shaping responsible consumption are more effective than those run offline. However, these actions (through subtle character) act more on the sub consciousness, resulting with consumer behavior typical of the attitude of responsible consumption while not identifying with it and without being aware of it.

This paper present the results of qualitative research based on virtual ethnography. The analysis will include such portals as: Facebook.com, Pinterest.com and Youtube.com. These are the three main aggregators considered by users to be interesting in terms of: content, photos and video.

2. ONLINE AND OFFLINE TOOLS TO PROMOTE RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION

Promoting the idea of responsible consumption can be made using all available marketing channels (including print, TV and internet). However, each one has its own limitations. The most important limitations include the costs and coverage, and the size of the population, which can be reached this way. The authors present differences in the functioning of the campaign in the world of offline and online (focusing on social media channels). Preliminary analysis shows that the greater effectiveness of the social media may be the result of several factors. They are presented in Table 1.

There are examples from the market, when were used traditional elements, such as billboards, with the possibilities of new technologies together, such as involving smartphones usage. An example would be a campaign carried out in Singapore at buses (PETA, 2011). There were posters placed with photos of fashionable leather shoes and belts, photographed the way which for the majority of women it would be hard to resist. Slogans on posters encouraged to check the prices as for instance "Branded shoes at unbelievable prices". To know the price it was needed to scan with a smartphone barcode posted under each photo. Code contained link to short video shown immediately the phone screen with shocking content depicting how animals are killed to get their skin used to produce clothing or accessories. The drastic the videos ended with an appeal to consumers: "Know the real price. Shop

responsibly." Already during the first week of the campaign - the code has been scanned 12 thousand times. Despite the shocking content of the message - it is difficult to estimate how much the campaign increased consumer awareness of market practices, and reduced the size of generated sales of leather products that are not fair trade products.

Table 1: The differences between offline and online campaign

	Offline	Online (social media)
Strategy	push	pull
Duration	limited	unlimited (so-called long tail by Anderson (2004))
Nature	informational, aimed at shocking	interesting, news, entertainment
Form	campaign dedicated to a particular, often one specific problem	open-ended, often unrelated to each other (in the vicinity of the time) materials
Promotion	based on typical media	based on the involvement of users
Communication	direct	indirect
Organizer	institution, organization	ordinary people, the prosumers
The ability to interact	the ability to interact negligible	opportunity to comment on the content, insert its contribution
Time to start the campaign	longer	shorter

Source: authors own elaboration

So what actions can affect attitude changes? According to the authors - the simplest possible, if they are effective. The internet and social media come to mind – used actions have not be big, spectacular and expensive.

Industry studies show that consumer confidence toward advertising dropped significantly (CBOS, 2003), as well as toward sales personnel in stores. With the development of the Internet and increasing its availability, as well as lower prices for the offered access speed – the consumers began to share information on their own using the internet to communicate: they recommend the products or warn others, communicate promotions, price bargains, new products and their capabilities. They also are spreading certain ideas, which is simple using social networks. User recommendations gained much in importance – the are spreading in the online environment on an unprecedented scale. Changes in consumer behavior and technological progress, and hence greater availability of tools of peer-to-peer communication only fueled the spread of certain trends, including consumption. We are talking both about consumptionism, so called euroconsumption, consumer ethnocentrism, e-consumption, or deconsumption, as well as responsible consumption (understood as conscious and sustainable approach to consumption) (Słaby, 2006).

Social networks have several advantages and possibilities allowing ideas to spread faster than in the old-fashioned Internet. For the purposes of promotion of certain slogans, content and ideas are created even separate websites, however, if the consumer is not a strong supporter of the brand - will not be often visiting them. But the main mechanism working in social media is of viral nature, so if one person performs an action - the whole group of people will immediately know about it. Any provision of content, following action on the profile of another person (depending on privacy settings and platform options) is immediately visible to others. The existence of brand profiles creates communities centered around provided brand-oriented content.

3. THE NUMBER AND POPULARITY OF FANPAGES

Fanpage analysis on the Facebook shows that the idea of responsible consumption is promoted in different ways. First, it should be noted that places like Facebook.com contain very large number of such fanpages. These are the profiles created by the brand associations and private persons. Some of them are already in their name contain terms referring to the responsible consumption, others - realize have this goal as hidden (not to mention this outright).

For these reasons, it is extremely difficult to estimate the number of such fanpages and the total number of users following them. In particular, there are multiple fanpages, having number of users counted in the thousands. But those fanpages cannot be perceived as better or more affecting attitudes than those with fewer fans. There is a huge amount of similar fanpages created not long time ago (very young) yet to collecting their fans, but having already high influence of their users. Such fanpages are smaller, but there exist in greater numbers. On Facebook, commitment can be measured by the so-called engagement rate, expressed through the activity of profile subscribers: clicking »like« button, providing comments, or allowing access to own wall or wall of a fanpage. It can be assumed that the highest form of activity is sharing, thanks to which the content is immediately visible to a new audience, and then comment – seen (depending on privacy settings) by friends of the person who comments on the content, and finally – liking, as least valuable form of user engagement.

Table 2: Example of differentiation of Facebook.com fanpages devoted to responsible consumption aspects

The idea	The profile name	About fanpage profil	Follo wers	Used tools on profile
Reduce, reuse, recycle	Handimania	<i>A Perfect place for all creative creatures. Sharing handmade stuff to help you find passion and mania for using your hands. www.handimania.com</i>	387 431	Photos, Pinterest, newsletter
Sustaina ble consumpt ion	Sustainable Man	<i>Sustainable Man - http://sustainableman.org/ - is dedicated to the sharing of experiences, stories, best practices and methods for achieving sustainability in both our personal lives and our communities.</i>	71 973	Photos, vimeo, Pinvolve, notes, You Tube, video channel, smart suggest, events (2)
Ecology	Do The Green Thing	<i>Do The Green Thing is an inspiration feed of creative ideas to turn green living from something you ought to do to something that people want to do. People from 207 countries/territories have tuned into Green Thing >7m times, saving over 1m tonnes of CO2.</i>	14 759	Twitter, surveymonkey, You Tube
Reduce, reuse, recycle	Knock-Off Wood	<i>Hi! I'm Ana, a mother and homemaker from Alaska. I am so glad you found us here! Share your projects, ask questions, help others out as we all try to make our homes better no matter our budgets!</i>	150 507	Photos, videos (2), newsletter, notes (23), events (10), giveaway

Source: authors own elaboration

4. TOPICS

On the Facebook, you can find profiles, which are spreading broadly defined ideas of responsible consumption or some specific aspects of it. For example, some of these are dealing only with environmental issues, the other on sustainable consumption and others - would promote 3R ideas: reduce, reuse, recycle.

Some fanpages are focused on very narrow issues interesting the small groups, others treat things very general way. There are in example profiles that promote the use of used promotional materials to create fashionable bags for men and women that can be used such as shopping bag, while others promote sustainable tourism, responsible purchasing, and the issue of promoting local events devoted to responsible consumption patterns. Many of fanpages are focused around a topic of handmade and DIY (do it yourself). They are promoting deconsumption and - indirectly - sustainable consumption.

Picture 1: Examples of product reuse



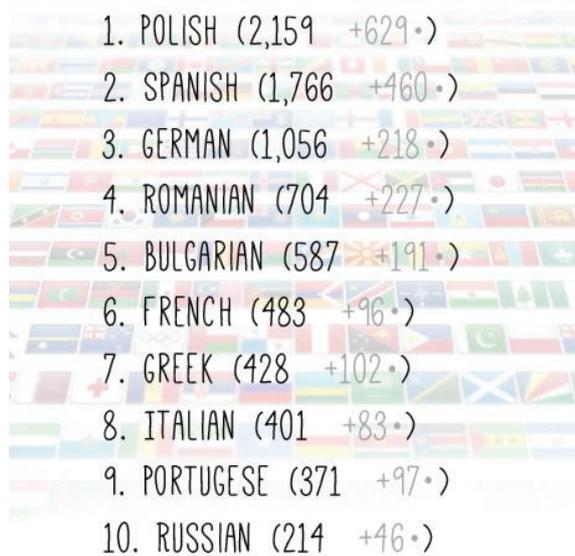
Source: <https://www.facebook.com/handimania.fp>

5. COMMUNICATION LANGUAGE

It should be noted that the language is not strongly influencing limitation. The content of some fanpages is available in the national language of the person handling the fanpage (they are harder to understand by other people, specifically when languages written in different alphabets are used, such as Arabic) and some of them - regardless of the owner nationality - in English. Internal audit from April 2013 of one of the profiles run in English by owner with Polish background have asked their fans to declare their nationality - see Picture 2 – number of fans of particular nationalities and the numerical change since the last measurement are show there. This should be considered as an preliminary example, not final because the investigation at the time of writing has not yet been completed.

Language is not an important issue probably for several reasons. The vast majority of Facebook users are young (less than 35yo), with a degree of knowledge of the popular foreign languages allowing for easy understanding of the content. Another issue may be same content, which is provided. Most often they are pictures (some of them containing a slogan or quote - mostly in English), sometimes movies, many of which have the English subtitles option, and some even the option to select the subtitles in other national languages, which makes it the material may be more accessible. Another issue is the fact that Facebook often appear short entries (maximum content, a minimum of words), written in plain language and referring to the usually simple things. Naturally, there is present more serious content, for example about killing animals in inhumane manner by not following the principles of fair trade, but the shocking materials are most often placed with videos, a photo, or post a link to an external website.

Picture 2: The nationality of Handimania fans



Source: research by Handimania in April 2013 on their facebook profile

6. INFLUENCE

Taking into account the age of the users of social media portals - online communities thrive especially among young people. In terms of attitudes - a situation is very beneficial, because it is easier to influence consumers' attitudes among the young than in the elderly. Young people are also more likely to engage in the promotion of certain ideas. This confirms the information obtained from the Polish fanpage "Buy responsibly" (9274 profiles "likes") that owner agreed to share some statistics of that fanpage.

„Women are about 70% of our fans. Female fans are mostly (38% of all fans) in the age of 25-34 yo, 17% has between 18 and 24yo, and 11% is 35-44 yo. 30% of fans are men, mainly in the age of 25-34 (13,5% of all fans), 6% of all fans are male in age 18-24yo, and 5% - 35-44yo. Largest number of fans comes from Warsaw (2,603), the next cities are: Wrocław (711), Poznań (639), Łódź (422), Gdańsk (391) and Kraków (201).”

The impact on users is also achieved by:

- diversity of content that users face, allowing them to expand their knowledge in many aspects,
- content attractiveness - for example, for six movies from "Do the green thing" fanpage placed on YouTube and accessible by dedicated in application recorded following numbers of views: 10 043, 5 139, 3 685, 4 865, 6 400, 676,
- frequency of content placing - for example, in the "Sustainable Man" profile content is published on average every three hours, generating a very large number of likes and shares (hard to average because they are different depending on content-type, but there is usually no less than 20 shares and upper size reach four-digits value, but they are not the outlier values)
- viral character of content, which through specific user activity - are visible to a wider audience, multiplied initial one by hundreds.

Facebook, as perhaps no other social media portal provides an easy way to diversify the content. Possibly that is why it is so popular. Consumer interested in sustainable consumption can for example:

- view photos that will be the source of his hedonistic experiences (eg, showing him how in a simple way at home, with available materials, can create something unique, which will be a source of satisfaction for each day), as well as deeper reflection (eg about the impact of its consumption on the environment),
- watch the video, both as to how to do things yourself (DIY - do it yourself), as well as to raise awareness on various environmental issues, such as what happens with unsorted waste,

- to be informed about interesting initiatives, events, meetings, which will develop its socially responsible attitude,
- speak out on issues important to him, for example by observing the activity of the profile will be informed of the law creation, which could adversely affect the environment; knowing about it and being redirected directly to the appropriate page - can easily formally sign up a petition or objection on the discussed topic,
- familiarize themselves with a large dose of information given in a very accessible way, for example in the form of infographics - for example to show easy way how much water is needed to produce food, clothes and other day to day items
- take part in the research on specific topics and thus express his/her attitude, or opposition toward some ideas, actions ect.

Picture 3: Infographics on the social media leading to reflection on own consumption



Source: Facebook.com; Photos of *Do the green thing* profile

7. INTERCONNECTIONS BETWEEN PORTALS

Facebook discussed earlier, is not the only social media site that allow you to shape attitudes toward responsible consumption. According to the authors - every tool / channel of social media is valuable. Therefore, it is difficult to refer to any and examine its specificity. However, taking the example of other portals, such as Pinterest, YouTube etc. is visible that the ideas of sustainable consumption can be freely developed there as well. At one place in the form of photographs strong idea of promoting the 3R (reduce, reuse, recycle) behavior can be cultivate, in other - promoting products handmade (DIY - do it yourself) trough instuctional videos can help to raise environmental awareness. Nevertheless - there is a presumption that the promotion and development of such content would be more difficult without current popularity of Facebook, which gathers a large number of users and their interactions, including reaching other places on the Web trough it. Millions of Facebook users are creating enormous positive external network effects in this case.

8. DISCUSSION

Example of Facebook so it is not the only one. As you can see it helps to spread the ideas, without even calling them directly, making it easier to get to the recipient, because such way bypasses the barrier that often exists in the form of personal.. A housewife who faces rather low income and wants to save on daily expenses may not be interested in an informed, responsible consumption, which can be perceived as expensive or more complicated (for instance the fair trade product may be more expensive and not available around that causes additional costs). But probably tracking some news how to reduce costs of living, reduce waste and increase efficiency of paid resources like gas, water and electricity already used will be interesting her. Although both examples are regarding the same concept: making consumption behavior sustainable - consumers may not be aware of it, and in some cases he needn't to. On the one hand, to talk about the attitude of the consumer - the consumer expresses it through conscious choices and declarations. So even if described housewife is demonstrating behavior conforming the ideas of sustainable consumption – one cannot say that this means she has pro-eco attitude manifested. On the other hand, if there are other reasons she wants to act in a manner conducive to sustainable consumption - perhaps in the future, when resistance to some of the content is watered down - there is a greater chance that the behavior will become a conscious attitude. So if the purpose of activities aimed at development of responsible consumption as protection of the environment, fighting with degradation, and more efficient conservation of natural resources – using social media can be an easy way to get engagement. Without huge amounts of money it is possible to create a campaigns simply by supporting persons which created the fanpages/ profiles and are active in this field. However, if the goal is of actions toward responsible consumption is to develop certain attitudes - the answer is more difficult. Probably one needs long-term actions, so in the short term - as any campaign, no matter whether online or offline cannot be sufficient.

9. CONCLUSIONS

Social media is a great tool for affect in easy and enjoyable manner the user-consumer behaviour. To promote behaviour that will benefiting for him/her, the environment and other people, which expresses the idea of responsible consumption. Being in touch with the content published with high-frequency, and allow to diversifying them, to offer the community members possibility of sharing interesting content, and remain in the interaction with alike people - it all causes valuable ideas to spread.

Appropriate use of this communication channel can affect change of attitudes through behaviour change (eg, spreading the idea of reduce, reuse, recycle), increased awareness (videos, infographics, references to articles on the topic), increased involvement (providing content that interest him/her, with which consumers want to identify and share) and the continuous spread of the idea virally reaching new people.

Taking into account the advantages of promotion in social media - it makes the ideas more easily and faster spreadable. The fact that people do not feel that behind this is particular brand, but the idea, is a serious advantage (with idea is much easier to identify than with other things).

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