THE ROLE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS FOR BUSINESS IN THE MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

Damjana JERMAN
International Business School Ljubljana
Ljubljana, Slovenia
damjana.jerman@intereuropa.si

Bruno ZAVRŠNIK
Faculty of Economics and Business
University of Maribor
Maribor, Slovenia
bruno.zavrsnik@uni-mb.si

Abstract

The analysis of social network is not new, but its business application in marketing communication is a relatively new area. This paper describes the role of social networks in the marketing communications area, particularly in the field of public relations. The paper explores how social network is being applied to solving marketing communications problems around designing the right communication programmes. In particular it describes how the social network can be defined, the role of the different instruments of public relations and its implication in the practice. Further more it describes how social networks for business can be used to reach the corporate objectives and to create a positive company image.

Keywords: marketing communications, social network for business, virtual communities

JEL classification: M14, M31

1. INTRODUCTION

People often associate social networks with socialization and interconnection of a group of people with similar interests. Social networking is becoming inevitable part of life and work on the field of communication. It represents communication channels for active communication with users with the help the companies to follow new trends. Social networks are especially appropriate for the increase brand awareness, recognition of a company and its offer, for the improvement of customer relationship and for creation of new groups of users. To achieve those goals it is necessary to analyze current conditions and create corporate communication strategy. The organization must carefully combine and coordinate different strategies, tactics, messages and communication channels for the creation of the
message to be clear and impressive to users. And most importantly, this message must be shared and recommended to friends and acquaintances by users.

Communication is at the heart of the management of relationships with stakeholders. The organization develops and forms its relationships with different publics through communication. Organizations inform customers of new products and prices, remind them of their existing offerings, and attempt to favourably influence their perceptions by using various communication tools. Likewise, organizations communicate with various other stakeholders, such as employees, government, suppliers, intermediaries and investors, in their attempts to manage relationships for mutual benefit. Until recently the nature of this communication has tended mostly to be unidirectional and simple. The Internet is changing the nature of an organization's communication with its stakeholders in ways that are unprecedented. Stakeholder communication will no longer be unidirectional, and as stakeholders increasingly communicate with each other (either about or not about the organization, as the case may be) this communication becomes infinitely more complex. Public relations becomes more than the management of effective communication with stakeholders – it evolves to become the management of communication between stakeholders as well (Van der Merwe et al., 2005).

The definition of a news release has also expanded. The press release is no longer exclusively a media relations tool; now, with the Internet's search capabilities, consider it a direct to-consumer online page of Web content. This sea change for news releases means that consumers now access releases simultaneously with journalists. This has important implications for news release content, style and format (Croft, 2008).

The initial period of internet was characterized by the internet user who had in relation to the website completely passive role - the visitor. The user read and accepted only what firms or individuals offered on their web sites. With the development of new services, arising of programming language, Internet connections, the growth of these users are becoming more curious, difficult, important and active. The dialogue and the relationship began to emerge between the site and its visitors. In addition to the establishing two-way communication, social networking allows users to add comments, participate in forums, add pictures and videos on the Web site, assessing the author’s contributions and content, integrating with other site visitors, sharing opinions and building a network of contacts (Skrt, 2007).

Social networking is a way of communicating and making friends online. There are various popular networking sites and if they are used effectively it can produce a positive image for the business. Social networks mean that there are Web sites where people can find and connect with each other and can have an impact on a specific target public. The advantages of building social networks as a tool of public relations for the organization are the following. Social networks can increase the production of content by user organizations. Also, social networks can help to set up the systems feedback, create members of online social networks and can allow sharing interests and may begin to build relationships. Organizations can build a company brand or its product brand with Facebook and Linkedin profiles or a Twitter account. Through these entities organizations could benefit consistent and efficient corporate communications (Hozjan, 2010).

In the literature social networks is often mentioned as the essential factor for business success and has been given considerable attention. This article challenges this view by pointing out positive effects of social networks on reaching success in the field of public relations in general.
The role of communications is the focus of research or discussion of many authors. However, the role of communication within organisations is far from clear, and the large array of academic terms in usage has made it difficult to establish “common definition”. Parallel to this, it is difficult to define also the term “communications professionals” – a term often hears being used in academia and business, too (Kalla, 2005).

There are various interpretations of the term communication(s). At its simplest, the definition for communication is social interaction through messages (Kalla, 2005). On the other hand, Oliver (1997, p.64) provides a more comprehensive definition of communication as “an interchange of ideas, facts and emotions, by two or more persons, with the use of words, letters and symbols based on the technical problem of how accurately the symbols can be transmitted, the semantic problem of how, precisely, the symbols convey the desired meaning, and the effectiveness of how the received meaning affects conduct in the desired way”. In order to understand better the nature of communication(s) and some of the definitions for communications will now be explored.

The impact on the communication profession over the next few years will mean a renewed focus on crisis management and the role communication plays to ensure companies, employees, clients and customers have the tools and mechanisms in place for business continuity, minimal confusion and chaos, and zero human casualties. Crisis communication planning and the ability to lead come hell or high water may become a required skill set for professional communicators (Kalla, 2005).
Some authors distinguish between communication and effective communication (Boveé and Thill, 2000); whereas others take communication to always refer to effective communication (Oliver, 1997). For example, Boveé and Thill (2000, p.4) believe that effective communication only takes place when participants “achieve a shared understanding, stimulate others to take actions, and encourage people to think in new ways”. On the other hand, Oliver (1997) argues that communication is always a persuasive two-way process.

Some authors also distinguish the concept of integrated internal communications. This concept is seen as being composed of all the academic disciplines at the cross-section between communication and organisational life, i.e. business, organisational, management, and corporate communication. Similarly, Grunig and others (2002) define organizational communication as a specialized subject to discipline, which examined how employees interact in the organization and the nature of the effectiveness of communication within the organization. Furthermore, integrated internal communications are not limited to the formal tasks performed by the corporate communication function; instead all formal and informal communication taking place inside an organisation is included (Kalla, 2005).

2.1. The definitions of communities and social network

Many important aspects of social life are organized as networks. Social networking at its beginning means chatting of secondary school pupils and students groups on the website MySpace. Today, many websites are available for creating social networks. Users are increasingly recognizing the usefulness of portals for business purposes. Using these portals to work is becoming more common and many of professional networks have already been created. Date back to 1995, when it was founded Web site Classmates.com, which is one of the sites that have started to build a community network. Over the years, the website was followed by the online sites like Epinions.com, Friendster.com, MySpace.com, YouTube.com and others.

Tönnies began a systematic study of communities in “Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft”. He developed a dichotomy between community and society. Both dimensions are pure theoretical concept. “Gemeinschaft” or community is characterized by the traditional, inarticulate, based on personal relationships, unity, traditions and religions. It is characterized by organic will, which provides for thinking and produced naturally. This theoretical concept is operationalized as a private, natural form, such as understanding, traditions, beliefs, which are private decisions. From these resulting collective forms like style, customs and religion; these are common emotions. On the other hand, “Gesellschaft” or society means urban, industrial, rational organization. Relations in it are impersonal; there are special interests, conventions, laws, law. It is based on the reflective forms which encompasses free will. It has a natural shape: the agreement, low, the doctrine of generating complex forms: conventions, legislation and public opinion. It can achieve a high degree of consensus (Splichal, 1997).

A common definition of social network don’t exists. Muniz and O’guinn (2001) therefore summarize the main features of social network, which are common to most definitions. The common consciousness is an internal connection that community members feel to one another. It is also important feeling of being different from those who are not members of this community. It is therefore a collective sense of belonging to certain common network (Muniz and O’guinn, 2001). Doyle (2007, p.61) define a social network a collection of interconnected people. Social networks comprise different target audience and connections
between those points. These connections may be manifested in many different forms. We can also define social network as common rituals and traditions, deriving from a common history, culture and consciousness. They can reinforce the norms, values and community solidarity. Social network can also be conceptualized as a sense of moral responsibility, which is reflected as an obligation to all communities and individual members (Muniz and O’guinn, 2001).

Indicators of network are the social relations that arise between individuals, groups and institutions. It is important to the saturation of networks, power connections, and relationships, rate heterogeneity among the units in the network, the impact of situations on the individual and collective action. All this can also be found in social networks (Jankowski, 2009).

Instead of analyzing individual behaviours, attitudes or beliefs, social network put its attention on social entities or actors in interaction with one another and how these interactions constitute a framework that can be studied (Wasserman and Galaskiewicz, 1994).

2.2. The definition of public relations

Public relations tell an organization’s story to publics to foster goodwill and understanding. Public relations practitioners help shape the company’s practices by counselling top management on public opinion and issues, and on the positive and negative implications of certain behaviours. Public relations often moves at a dynamic pace and is driven by a changing competitive landscape and unpredictable shifts in publics opinions. Public relations are a component of the management who are responsible for the effectiveness and efficiency of the relationship between the organization and its public. The process of public relations management processes consist of making sense, directing, planning, organizing, implementing, monitoring and evaluation of projects.

However, there are different definitions of public relations. Among these are differences which arise because the authors of these definitions are not uniform in view of public relations and communication. Some practitioners define communication broader than public relations. Communication is seen as the management of communication functions within an organization.

Public relations on the other site is seen as one of the sub-functions, mostly as publicity, media relations or marketing support. For example Kotler and others (1999) defined public relations as one of the most important marketing tools. The public is any group that has an actual or potential interest or impact on the company's ability to achieve its goal.

Other authors have different view on public relations and they see it as a broader concept. Cutlip and other authors defined public relations as a management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between the organization and the public, which determine the performance of the organization. Regardless of definition public relations is viewed as a management function that conducts research to identify public attitudes, then plans and executes communications programmes designed to earn public understanding and acceptance (Cutlip et al., 2000).

Similarly, Gruban and others (1997) argued that public relations are systematically planned process to influence the creation of public positive impact through mutual communication. With the help of long-term internal and external communications company can maintain or improve the company’s reputation. Indirectly by the company pursues its stated business goals (Gruban et al., 1997). Grunig and Grunig (2002) have developed a theory
that says that public relations impact on the effectiveness of organizations by providing strategic public in the environment and the consequent development of communications programs to build a long term and stable relations with them. This definition presupposes that public relations serves the public interest, develops mutual understanding between organizations and their publics, contributes to informed debate about issues in society, and facilitates a dialogue between organizations and their publics. These are some characteristics of the basic definitions of public relations.

Kitchen (1997) in its survey of definitions of public relations found the following repeating patterns:

- public relations are essentially a communication function, with emphasis on two-way communication;
- public relations are concerned with establishing and maintaining mutual understanding between the organization and its public;
- public relations serve as the intelligence function, which analyzes and interprets trends and topics in an environment that could have implications for the organization and its stakeholders;
- public relations help organizations to design and achieve socially acceptable goals.

The opportunities for professional development in the public relations and communication are many. The vast array of available resources provides practitioners many intellectual feasts.

3. THE ROLE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN SOCIAL NETWORK

The Internet is changing communication between stakeholders. In the past, communications between the stakeholder of an organization and the organization itself were relatively simple. They either used the telephone or wrote a letter to the organization. Electronic communications changed that. Faxes, voice mail systems and now e-mail and the Internet creates more channels of communication, it promotes open communication and, frankly, complicates matters to a large extent (Sherman, 1998). There are great advantages inherent to these new technologies, but organizations have to realize that their communication channels are being transformed, and they need to be aware of the different ways the Internet can be utilized to facilitate communication. This section describes some examples of where this has already occurred.

All indications are that the business, social, political, economic and human environment will change dramatically in the next 10 years and. As a result, so this will change the way we communicate with customers, employees and one another in general. Internet technology is transforming corporate communications, because it is changing channels, publicity, communication tools, form and content of communications, strategic planning and the ability to send feedback. Information technology is changing the structure and the relationship between companies and their publics. In parallel with this it also a shift from traditional vertical and horizontal communication paradigms. An important feature is that the stakeholders get to the Internet a mass medium, where you can access the information by them and thus produce a greater power (Ihator, 2001).

The Internet has experienced a new wave of development in recent years. Some have called this new wave Web 2.0, in contrast to the Web 1.0 of the previous Internet era (O’Reilly, 2005). These two phases differ in the way information is shared. In the Web 1.0 era, information was usually disseminated over the Internet by service providers. For exam-
people, Yahoo! provided news, stock quotes, etc. These providers controlled both the content and the distribution channels; there was little opportunity for users to participate. These changes are illustrated by the rapid growth of weblogs (blogs), which evolved from personal web pages. People use blogs to express their opinions and thoughts, as well as to share these with people they may, or may not, know. Concurrent with the burgeoning use of blogs, “sharing” gradually became a trend on the Internet. Many Internet companies realized that user participation is important to their success and have started using Web 2.0 to build their social networks and their reputation. The willingness of people to share online has been crucial for the development of Web 2.0 and the success of virtual communities. As sharing takes time and effort, the reason that people are willing to share is a topic of interest to researchers (Shu and Chuang, 2011).

The internet has increased the quantity, quality and speed of information flow. As a result, transformational change in the world of media and in the practice of corporate communication is occurring at an accelerating rate of speed. Goldstein (2006) states some examples:

- The press is in decline. The standards of accuracy and rules of journalism are being eroded by the pressures to compete with internet blogs and web advocacy groups and the growing influence of the entertainment side of the media business. The media reporting of blog information increases their acceptance as legitimate news sources, becomes a basis for news reporting.

- Companies face an enormous challenge in trying to communicate their messages clearly and effectively. The chatter and noise factor will grow. The internet has levelled the playing field and disgruntled stakeholders and advocacy groups will gain increasing influence.

- Communication strategists will increasingly look to adopt market research methods like focus groups to pre-assess and post-assess messaging strategies. Brand and messaging strategies will become more targeted and values-driven. And to compete, companies will create their own direct channels to reach stakeholders with internet broadcasting, e-mail and other direct marketing techniques. Companies will establish their own databases of stakeholders and customers willing to defend the firm.

- Political campaigns have already become the laboratories for testing new communication theory and as a training ground for communication professionals who think strategically. In time, experience in politics will be as important as journalism as a criteria for corporate communicators.

- The art of writing will once again be the most valued skill a communicator can offer. In a crowded marketplace of ideas and opinions, the crafting of words that are impactful will be critical in distinguishing and differentiating companies and their messages.

There has been an increased attention given by public relations practitioners to the Internet in recent years with the focus on how best to adapt traditional practices to the new technologies (Ryan, 2003). Public relations concern itself with the management of relationships with the organization’s stakeholders. The public relations function will in most cases be the department dealing with these unplanned messages. As stakeholder strength increases, public relations practitioners will have to develop strategies that deal with the rising power of different stakeholders on the web (Van der Merwe et al., 2005).

There are some differences between traditional and new media. Many of the journalists manning various “new” media can hardly claim the same experience, objectivity and credibility as a traditional print or electronic journalist. Their result often tends to lack objectivity
credibility. Instead of waiting patiently for the scheduled evening/morning newscast or print run, the public has developed a crushing need to access news and information practically before it exists, and so there is a growing dash to find out what's new or breathtaking as quickly as possible via blogs, podcasts, social network sites and other "new" media that mushroom exponentially on a daily basis (Croft, 2008).

In addition, it has become disturbingly clear that the growing popularity of new media and its ability to address specific target audiences has the potential to impact negatively on public relations agencies' ability to continue to earn a good living. Especially if an agency is still running largely in tandem with traditional media to meet client business and communications needs and has not developed awareness of or the skills necessary (Croft, 2008).

Internet provides better information to the public and they consequently require organizations to be more informed. That is, organizations must adapt and become available to users also on the Internet. For the effective and successful communications, company has to accurately identify their target audiences. In the past it was much easier to target certain target groups and organizations to choose the appropriate medium for reaching them. Internet has due to its geographical features of breaking national, cultural and political boundaries and, therefore, determines target audiences and communicates with them more difficult. At the same time we are witnessing the traditional media moving online, which means to attract both old and new audiences, and this imposes difficulties when trying to accurately determine its public (Ihator, 2001). We must choose a different approach and identify those social communities where our target audiences gather; we must monitor them and participate in them. This allows controlling the situation, while providing opportunities for two-way communication. It is also easier to determine who are the opinion leaders and give more attention to them.

One of the major differences between traditional media and the Internet are therefore modified characteristics of the public. Burnett and Marshall (2003, p.201) state that “internet enable its public to make the transition from passive, hierarchy, centralization and isolation to a more active involvement in the production of meanings, interactivity, nonlinearity, coherence and decentralized. Internet as a medium also differs from than traditional media in its hypertexts, multimedia, reciprocity, and timeliness. It represents a complex communication platform that produces complex web of interconnected activities and communications arenas”. So, the interactivity creates Internet. The information is changed; the newly applied and sent to other receives. It is a cultural production, it is that access and opportunity to create content and indirectly increase the effectiveness of the Internet as a cultural phenomenon (Burnett and Marshall, 2003).

Before the introduction of the Internet, organizations were able to carefully monitor all forms of communication. With the introduction of internet organization should identify those social networks representing their target audiences. Social capital can be seen in the context of the term social networks i.e. personal connections between participants (Hanson, 2001). The advantages of building social networks as a tool of public relations for the organization is that public relations on the Internet also cost-effective, because there is no intermediary, and we also implement virtual events, conferences and research.

Social networks are a type of virtual communities which can be affected by the online environment and can be defined as a social network of individuals who communicate through a specific and well-defined medium. Each social network that is connected to the organization represents a potential target organization. Each should therefore be assessed in terms of potential impact on the organization. We also have to set the level of cooperation of
the organizations in it and build a relationship with it. When users for some time participate in such social network, gain some confidence of other members. Organizations can set up their fields of knowledge and other users can turn on them when they need advice. Those who are most trusted and most know, have also a higher status than other participants. There exist internal norms and rules of behaviour, conflicts fight for control in times of crisis as well as integration to achieve common interests. When such a community is growing, is also growing their impact (Holtz, 2002).

It is not necessarily to restrict organizations to already established social networks, they can build themselves. The structures are established when members recognized common communication features of their professional, social characteristics, or common values that they want to maintain or expand. Parallel to the establishment of such structures, additional sources of information, communication, according to hierarchical levels, common tasks is created. Additional resources are forcing people to communicate and further specifying the topics of communication.

3.1. The use of social networks in public relations practice

As demonstrated by the popularity of social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, Internet-based social networks have become an important part of daily life, and many businesses are now involved in such networks either as service providers or as participants. Furthermore, inter-organizational networks are becoming an increasingly common feature of many industries, not only on the Internet. However, despite the growing importance of networks for businesses, there is little theoretical study on the social responsibilities of businesses in such networks, and how these responsibilities are affected by different types of networks (Chen and Bouvain, 2009). We describe social responsibilities of businesses in social networks, which have been developed from studies of social networks of individuals and can be used to shed light on corporate responsibilities in social networks.

Corporate social responsibility of each organization results from the impact of its activities on society in terms of improving the welfare of society. At the same time organizations want to obtain a personal benefit. Special role in the revised context of social responsibility also have public relations. We encountered the creation of the international campaigns of social networks also in the field of public relations, particularly with regard to charitable events. Donors usually identify the key public relations tool, which helps your target audience. One of the most important tools of public relations is also social networks. Through social networks, organizations can raise funds for the preparation of charity events, or organize a virtual charity conference. Create a charitable event communication is just one of the instruments of public relations. Through online social networks, organizations can achieve the objectives in the field of public relations, including through the implementation of virtual events and conferences for charitable purposes. For example, organizations wants to make its vast resources of information more accessible and readily available and launch a multi-language online advertising campaign as the human rights charity ups its digital activity. The international campaigning group can appointed search agency to manage its natural and paid search, as well as to look at how it can utilise social networks and online public relations. The charity has to identify key target social and demographic groups towards which organization can focus its online efforts (Copper, 2008). In this way it can concentrate on different target groups.
With the introduction of social networks, public relations have the opportunity to use new digital media and thus become more important in their communication strategy. Social networks are a type of virtual communities, which have an impact on a particular group of consumers. We are talking about the personal impact when communication is carried directly. The emphasis is on members of the network in their personal relationships and how to understand each other. Users social networks indicate some common features such as searching for information, and also participant in these networks want to encourage interaction and dialogue.

The function of public relations is not only to inform the public of crisis situations, but most important, and according to some authors like Sears (2009), the equivalent part of marketing communication mix. Through public relations firm builds its image, identity, and reputation. Public relations help to impact on consumer attitudes, which are consequently reflected in the shopping (and other) decisions to the public, which company is involved. Advantages of public relations compared to other marketing communication tools are mainly the following: lower costs, greater confidence, capacity to reach specific groups, but require careful strategic planning and choosing the right activities at the right time.

Social networks are also used in other areas of marketing communications, for example in the field of sales promotions. Some companies support the use of social networks for business purposes, because they believe that the positive effect and encourage the testing of certain products or services (Sears, 2009). Organizations that use of social networks should be aware that through social networks they can not directly sell their products, but they can build certain relationships through forums, blogs and other forms of social media.

Another area of marketing communications is the development of an interactive internet home page. With the increased popularity of the Internet, companies are spending a great deal of money on establishing Web sites processes and protocols that encompass sophisticated tools for handling purchase transactions, providing customer information, gathering competitive market intelligence data, and monitoring site performance. However, organizations would like to know just how effective the Web is or can be as a marketing tool before they adopt it as part of their marketing strategy (Lynn, 2002).

Twitter has become the latest medium in the field of public relations, where you can find the most new information, themes, and responses to them. Many public introduce their products or services to the public via Twitter, which has a strong influence on some other forms of public relations (Žbogar, 2010). Yaxley (2008) noted some examples how should public relations practitioners engage with social networking:

- Social networking is about engaging in conversations, so organization has to be prepared to leave comments.
- Organizations should also monitor what is being said about the organization or the brand using Google Alerts (http://www.google.com/alerts).
- There is also important to pro-actively manage organisation’s online footprint, because it is important to be aware of what is being said, and ensure there is accurate, reliable information available.
- It is important to connect with others online – the point of networking is to make connections with colleagues, contacts and information resources.
- With sharing information organizations add value to its presence - what information can organization share or offer that will be of use to others and help build organizations online reputation?
Blogging and participation in social networking can optimise the organization presence online and make what organization has to say more prominent.

Social networking is a great sucker of time so be purposeful in your use of online tools rather than aimlessly engaging with trivia, and look for smart opportunities to engage with the media, such as via mobile technologies.

Professional communicators use video and audio as well as the written word, so organization has to look out for useful podcasts and vcasts which you can download to an iPod or mobile phone to keep up with the latest online happenings.

As the internet evolved as a marketing tool, consumers have faced the challenge of marrying an anonymous Web visit with offline data to facilitate targeting. Banner-ad targeting rheas on online behavioural indicators like the keywords visitors search on or the pages they viewed in the past which are recorded by cookies (Goodwin, 2007).

In the case that organizations reach a specific goal, it is necessary to possess a certain level of impact on social networks. The degree of influence is a term that is closely linked with power. The impact of social networks can often be described as capacity or as something that allows it to do things or to do other than we want. Like Gruning and others (2002) argued, those organizations that have an excellent level of communication and those organizations with their managers positioned in a higher position, have the greater power to influence the entire organization's reputation and values.

Although importance will be placed on understanding the proliferation of channels driven by technology, the range of options available, and the strengths and weaknesses of each, a fascination with channels shouldn’t distract communicators from addressing the bigger issue of having poor content to communicate in the first place.

4. DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

We are facing the change in the communication professions, but this is not enough to challenge the controlled messaging and traditional media utilization that have served communicators well for decades, but which have now been rapidly altered by new realities of globalization, technology and new patterns of audience behaviour.

The future research should also highlight the issues like international communication and the role of social media. We have to be aware of trends like globalization and internationalization of the business, so more attention should be given to research of international communications strategy. The media is also becoming more globalized and that in turn is leading to some globalization of social and cultural factors in the business environment. For example, interest in environmental issues is growing in many countries and the media has played a major role in this. Likewise, the globalization of the media has also helped create some globalized social phenomena such as the international teenage culture whose are familiar with the usage of social network.

The implications of this would be that organizations could target groups of consumers who have similar wants and needs on a global or maybe European basis, without the need to refer to national differences. This would open up new opportunities for the usage of public relations techniques and social media. There should also be very beneficial the research of cross-cultural communications and its impact in on public relations practice and social media, too.

Following the last information trends it will be helpful to more deeply explore the concept "next frontier" of technologies beyond multimedia and discusses streaming video,
broadcasting, virtual worlds, and mobile communications. All these issues should be discussed by public relations professionals looking to optimize their communications in today's competitive business environment.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Globalization and the Internet have transformed the function of public relations, outlining best practices and providing strategic advice for communicating. Organizations can use a variety of techniques like popular social networking tools like Twitter and Facebook and reach new online audiences and create new marketplaces. The role of public relations is no longer in doubt. It is a function that plans and manages relationships with key target audiences and company stakeholders. Public relations allows organizations to alter opinions, views, attitudes, goals, products, countries, companies, institutions, and individuals, no matter in what capacity the individual acts and what are the mutual expectations of the environment. The function of public relations is to be the equivalent part of marketing communication mix. Through public relations, firms build their image, identity, and reputation. Public relations help to impact on consumer attitudes, which are consequently reflected in the shopping (and other) decisions to the public, which company is involved.

By the introduction of the Internet environment, changing the practice of public relations. The Internet is both a medium and a social space where social networks are formed. These are based on the interaction between participants, through which they establish a relationship, common awareness, a sense of belonging, and moral responsibility to the community. Social networks have changed the role of public relations, and we need to include them as the individuals and as a company.

Virtual communities are manifested through social media, which also include a social network. For organizations, it is important that these proactive media work, joining the conversation virtual communities perform other activities such as gathering feedback, conflict resolution, and support for consumers, which can be seen in virtual communities and businesses. We can conclude that social media can be an effective tool for public relations.

First, this article has presented a way of looking at communications through the changing word of communication, enabling us to see it as all different aspects of information technology changing the way of communication which is taking place within communication. Second, viewing social network as a medium used in public relations field may help us to understand how communication contributes to the organization’s competitive advantage. This warrants further research to be conducted.

References

http://www.mad.co.uk/Main/Search/MadSearchResults/Articles/2bd0e47f9b3247719c112e0b3f3968aa/amnesty-looks-to-utilise-social-media-in-latest-global-campaign.html [Accessed 25 October 2011].


[26] Sears, N., 2009, Measures should be taken to provide granular control over each social networking site. Engineering & Technology, June 6 - 19 June 6, p.6.

[27] Sherman, K., 1998, Let the seller beware. CIO Magazine, November 1, Section I.


