

SUMMARY FOR GENERAL PUBLIC

STRATEGIES AND INSTRUMENTS FOR BUILDING NON-FINANCIAL BUSINESS VALUE IN SOCIAL MEDIA - EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH WITH FICTITIOUS BRANDS

There is an increasing number of companies which dedicate large resources to enhance their Internet presence. However, the Internet, especially social media, creates entirely new conditions and contexts for companies and brands to grow. Scholars worldwide warn that the Internet works in a completely different way than traditional media and it differently affects businesses. Unfortunately, little has been done to explain scientifically how social media impact brands, consumers and companies. The question about building business value in this new environment of social media, is, therefore, one of the basic and most important issues to address empirically nowadays.

The main objective of my research is to explore the possibility of developing non-financial business value in social media. Why "non-financial"? Because social media are not sales tools. It is unreasonable and almost impossible to investigate monetary profits generated by the presence on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, or YouTube (esp. due to the difficulty in separating adequate financial flows). In order to express business non-financial value in the most universal and complete way, I applied a customer-based brand equity indicator, which very well reflects the condition of a company in given environments, markets and timeframes. Brand equity is a powerful construct developed in consumers' minds that accrues as a result of what individuals have ever experienced, felt, and thought of a brand over time in response to marketing programs, activities and other brand-related stimuli. In my research, I will test how various marketing programs, strategies and tools may (or may not) influence brand equity.

The most valuable are those studies that show causal relationships, not just correlations. I will, therefore, apply experimental methods, as they allow for highly controlled manipulations and thus for higher reliability of final results. Experiments are very difficult to conduct, as they require full control over treatment conditions. In order to maintain the greatest control over the treatment conditions, fictitious brands (i.e. individually designed by the researchers) will be used in this study. The use of fictitious brands stems from the need to test several branding strategies in social media with fully controlled manipulation, and eventually to bring more credibility to the final results. I will implement a modification of a classic controlled experiment plan with two measurements scheduled during and after experimental treatment and with control groups. Such an experimental design will allow to collect extensive and valuable data, and to arrive at very informative conclusions.

In the era of vastly changing marketing communications environment, non-financial business value becomes even more critical to a company's development, than ever before. There exists little scientific evidence on cause and effect relationships in social media and nothing is known on how business value might be built in this new setting. So far, there have been no experiments conducted that would search for causal relationships within this field. A plethora of articles, whitepapers, and blogs have been written by marketers and media enthusiasts on superiority of social media in building brands and businesses, but these texts frequently involve theoretical conceptualizations unsupported (or insufficiently supported) with relevant empirical material. Such oversupply of optimism stems also from practitioners' inclination to monetize these new forms of marketing communications. It thus necessitates conducting thorough academic studies, unaffected with business-oriented interests and desires.