

Generation Z Consumers as a Challenge for a Community Manager

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Abstract— Social media - especially for young generation Z - have become an essential tool for establishing private, professional and consumer relations. People from generation Z constitute an increasingly demanding group of customers. They do not know the era when the Internet or smartphones have not existed. In fact, they have been using these technologies from their earliest years, hence they are often called *digital natives*. The possibility of using social media commercially for marketing purposes gave rise to a new profession - community manager. It refers to a professional who deals with day-to-day communication with fans and interacts with the recipients of published content. He or she answers questions from fans, responds to emails, and often conducts long discussions to keep fans engaged, strengthen the brand's contact with its potential customers and build a positive image of the company. The aim of this paper is to identify challenges/tasks for community managers resulting from special characteristics of generation Z members and their behaviour on social media. As well as literature review, a survey was conducted among 233 students - representatives of generation Z. Analysis of the gathered empirical data gave basis for verifying the formulated research hypotheses and concluding that people from generation Z are not loyal customers, meaning that they usually do not get attached to the brand/company, product/service, and that generation Z customers are not willing to defend a company's reputation on social media. Additionally, the strength of relationships between the analysed variables and a respondent's sex and place of residence was verified.

Keywords— *community manager, social media, enterprise, brand, generation Z*

1. Introduction

Communication with the customer through social media not only guarantees a company monitoring of its customers' satisfaction with the products and

services it offers, but - more importantly - it engages the customer in the process of identifying him/herself with the brand and creating its positive image in a network of links with other users of social media [26].

According to the authors of a 2015 report on social media in Poland, an enterprise that wants to be present in social media needs to be 100% interactive with its community, and listening to reactions from the community and media monitoring is a must today [25]. According to Social Media Analytics company and the publishing company Social-bakers, in the case of communication via social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter, it is necessary to react and respond to minimum 65% of the problems raised by customers. This translates into measurable financial benefits, as the frequency of contacts with customers is 3.5 times higher in the case of the most responsive brands (companies) compared to their less communicative counterparts [26], [14]. According to Oracle, 89% of customers abandon a particular company and brand due to poor quality of customer service - including on social media [25]. This shows that companies not only have to be engaged in activity on social media, but above all they have to learn to listen to their customers through the above-mentioned media. More and more often, this means employing a community manager - a person responsible for dealing with the problems raised by social media users.

Having a profile on Facebook and regularly posting content on it is not sufficient to build a community around a brand and persuade its members to interact with it, to recommend a website or brand to their friends or to revisit the website. Hence, it is important to listen carefully to the consumer, to get to know him/her very well, and most importantly to understand the young generation of consumers - generation Z.

Community managers had existed even before Facebook was created, but were called customer

advisers and functioned at a specific place where products/services were sold. Their task was to provide information to customers and find the best product to satisfy their needs. There is nothing truly original in saying that a person running a fan page is a kind of customer adviser.

The aim of this paper is to identify challenges/tasks for community managers resulting from special characteristics of generation Z members and their behaviour on social media.

2. Theoretical Background – Literature Review

A.M. Kaplan and M. Haenlein define social media as “a group of applications based on Internet solutions that rely on ideological and technological bases of Web 2.0 and enable creation and exchange of user-generated content” [8]. According to another definition, social media are “all activities, practices and behaviour of a community of people who connect online to share information, knowledge and opinions” [21]. Ref. [1] argue that the functionality of social media creates a new path for two-way communication between a consumer and an enterprise. In order to use social media to build a communication system, it is necessary to master not only the forms of information presentation and communication, but also procedures of maintaining contact with stakeholders. Ref. [1] also stress that a seller's response to customer needs (questions, assistance, advice, etc.) seems to be the key factor in customer satisfaction.

The possibility of using social media commercially for marketing purposes gave rise to a new profession - community manager. He or she is a media manager, a person who manages the presence of a brand/company, an initiative at a social networking site via a fan page. According to AERCO, the Spanish Association of Responsible for Online Communities: „Community Managers are responsible for sustaining, increasing and somehow protecting digital relations between companies and their customers. They have the knowledge about the needs and strategies of the organizations and the interests of customers. Also, they know the objectives of their companies and act accordingly. Speaking very generically, community manager are those who preserve the digital identity of a company” [16], [20], [22]. “They are responsible of the community and thinkers of medium and long-term strategies to address communication and interaction services. Their main role is to bring together members around a common interest” [15], [16]. Community managers

should fulfil social and stimulating roles, as until the community is able to support conversations in a natural way, they have to propose topics to make social media a dynamic space [12]. Enterprises should strive to hire community managers, however Burgos García and Cortés Ricart note that their presence in companies is compatible with external collaborations to implement an action plan [3].

A community manager is simply speaking a supervisor of a community. He or she deals with day-to-day communication with fans and interacts with the recipients of published content. He or she answers questions, replies to messages, and often conducts long discussions. All that is intended to maintain engagement, strengthen the brand's contact with its potential customers and build a positive image of the company, measured by speediness and relevance of responses [28]. A community manager is often the first person who has to defuse an emerging crisis embodied by an unsatisfied fan [28].

The profession of a community manager, which did not even exist 8 years ago, is currently one of jobs that are in high demand [5]. Some companies create the position of (employ) a community manager to achieve the following benefits: increased visibility, increased traffic, creation of groups of devoted fans, better insight into the market's needs, creation of contact paths, better ranking of brand search, growth of business partnership, establishment of leadership, increased sales, and reduction of marketing expenditure [26].

A community manager should demonstrate three personality traits/skills that a person managing brand on social media should have: ability to search for information and identify trends, empathy, and tactical instinct [28]. The key competencies of a community manager include, on the one hand, competencies that are related to social media, community, content, engagement and communication, and on the other hand, managerial, specialist, strategic, project-planning, analytical, leadership, marketing, coordination, consulting, editorial, executive and creative competencies. The required availability is virtual availability 24 hours a day [17].

Rojas claims that everybody can become a community manager - the requirement is certain talent and knowledge that goes beyond a simple command of social networking sites and the Internet [20], [13]. Since 2009, the profession of a community manager and its functions have been evolving in order to adapt to the actual and specific needs of various types of companies [5]. As a young profession, social media management can be embraced by people with different education

backgrounds and experience, and the decisive criterion seems to be media competencies of an unspecified character [12]. Rojas thinks that every person who wants to work in Web 2.0 environment has to have a range of individual and corporate skills that enable him or her to adapt to this changeable and complex environment (initiative, connection, transparency management, management of time, global vision, management of uncertainty, etc.) as well as a range of desirable characteristics: knowledge, experience, technical and social skills [20], [13]. It is necessary for a community manager to be able to fulfil his/her role within a specific strategy consistent with his/her company [20], [13].

A community manager uses social media functions to achieve strategic goals of an enterprise, such as communication, marketing, promotion, PR, sales, image creation and branding, brand awareness creation and development, long-term relations and trust building, fundraising, crowdsourcing, advertising, networking, collaboration, and content distribution. The aim is to maximize profit or to achieve the mission of an organization. The range of operational and strategic activities is relatively wide [17].

Numerous findings of research on social media users indicate that people aged 15-24 are a dominant group [7]. Hence, generation Z customers represent a special challenge for a community manager. These are the youngest customers who are just starting their professional careers and are called generation Z or C from the words "connect, communicate, change", which refer to the Internet, communication and readiness for changes. These are people born after 1995 [4], [2], [30], [9]. They have been accustomed to modern technologies since childhood. For some of them, the net and virtual world is even more important than the real world. They think that life is about passion, they usually multitask, like teamwork, but feel better in virtual structures, where they cooperate with different people online, than when they are required to come up with solutions working together on a project in a small space. What will prove their asset in some activities will in other activities make them become quickly bored and quit the job [29].

The new generation Z, so different from the previous ones, was growing up at a time of huge social, economic and political transformation and is thereby very open - its representatives do not define a human being through sex, race or sexual orientation. They are very sensitive to social issues: equal treatment and social justice. At the same time, they are very focused on the environment and ecology. Having witnessed the economic crisis and in many cases having seen their parents lose their

capital, they declare a different, much more pragmatic, approach to money than the previous generations. The representatives of generation Z do not know a world without the Internet or smartphones. In fact, they have been using these technologies from their earliest years, hence they are often called digital natives. At the same time, the world has no boundaries for them - one day they can be in New York, next day in Warsaw, and they feel everywhere at home [23], [27]. As their world is the world of social media, their traditional communication skills are not highly developed [27].

Social media provide generation Z consumers with new ways to establish contacts with enterprises, acquire information from them, present their opinions - both positive and negative ones - and assess and comment on enterprises, their products and services. Hence, integrating the customer service department with social media is becoming a necessity for enterprises wishing to provide highest quality services and products [18]. Consumer educators and businesses alike should consider the differences of generations as they work with consumers across generations [24].

3. Problem Formulation. Methodology

The aim of the research was to identify challenges/tasks for community managers resulting from special characteristics of generation Z members and their behaviour on social media. The catalog of variables used in the study was proposed on the basis of a critical analysis of literature [19], [11], [6]. The sampling was purposive. The research used a survey questionnaire in the form of an Internet form (CAWI), which was made available on the webankieta.pl platform. The research was conducted in November and December 2018 among students of the Management Faculty at the Czestochowa University of Technology. The participants completed the survey questionnaires by themselves. A total of 264 students participated in the survey, and responses of 223 students were qualified for the analysis. There is no unanimity in the literature regarding the year of birth of generation Z representatives. The most often cited date is the year 1995, which the authors of the paper assumed to be the cut-off year in their study. The basic qualification criterion was a respondent's date of birth - 1995 or later.

The survey aimed to find out the answers to the following research questions:

1. Are generation Z members loyal customers, meaning that they become attached to a brand/company, product/service?
2. Are generation Z customers willing to defend a company's reputation on social media?
3. Does a respondent's sex or place of residence have an impact on being a loyal customer and attachment to a brand/company, product/service?
4. Does a respondent's sex or place of residence have an impact on his/her willingness to defend a company's reputation on social media?

H1: Generation Z members are not loyal customers, meaning that they do not become attached to a brand/company, product/service.

H2: Generation Z customers are not willing to defend a company's reputation on social media.

H3: A respondent's sex or place of residence does not have an impact on whether they are loyal customers.

H4: A respondent's sex or place of residence does not have an impact on his/her willingness to defend a company's reputation on social media.

In the research, qualitative characteristics (nominal and rank scales) were assessed. The specificity of analysing such data is the use of appropriate statistic tools for comparisons. In order to determine the strength of the relationship between variables measured on a rank scale, vectors of Spearman's rank correlation coefficients were calculated. Non-parametric Manna-Whitney U test was used to verify whether the sex has a significant impact on the differences between variables on a rank scale. For variables measured on a nominal scale, hypotheses stating that two qualitative characteristics in a population are independent were verified: H0: characteristics X and Y are independent with regard to alternative hypothesis: H1: characteristics X and Y are dependent.

The "tool" most often used for that purpose is Pearson's chi-squared test. It consists in comparing observed frequencies with expected frequencies assuming null hypothesis (stating that there is no relationship between these two variables). Chi-squared statistic tests whether two variables are related to each other. However, apart from determining whether a relationship exists between variables, the authors examined how strong this relationship is. The value of Pearson's chi-squared could not be used as a measure of relationship strength, hence Kendall's tau-b and tau-c coefficients and Spearman's rank correlation

coefficients were used. For all the analyses, the level of significance of 0.05 was assumed. All the analyses were conducted using software Statistica v.12.

4. Problem Solution

The results of the research indicate that generation Z customers often experiment, and do not become attached to a brand/company, product/service. At the same time, 44% of the respondents described themselves as loyal customers, i.e. ones that become attached to a brand/company, product/service (Table 1).

Table 1: Impact of a Respondent's Sex on Whether He or She is Described as a Loyal Customer

Select the statement that best describes you	Sex (% of the total)		Row in total
	Male	Female	
I am a loyal customer, i.e. I become attached to a brand/company, product/service.	7.17%	37.22%	44.39%
I often experiment, I don't become attached to a brand/company, product/service.	11.21%	44.39%	55.61%
In total	18.39%	81.61%	100.00%
Statistical analysis			
	Chi-squared	Df	P
Pearson's Chi ²	0.586887	df=1	p=0.44362
Kendall's tau-b and tau-c	b= 0.051301	c= 0.039494	
Spearman's rank R	- 0.051301	t= 0.7636	p=0.44589

The analysis has not given a basis for stating a significant relationship (p=0.44) between the variables: a respondent's sex and label of a loyal customer, i.e. a person who becomes attached to a brand/company, product/service (Table 1).

Results of the research indicate that generation Z customers usually do not defend a company's reputation on social media (63% of respondents in total). The most often cited arguments were that an enterprise does not have to respond to every attack on social media (32%) and that an enterprise employs a person responsible for communication at a fan page (22%) (Table 2).

Table 2: Impact of a respondent's sex on willingness to defend a company's reputation on social media

Willingness to defend a company's reputation on social media	Sex (% of total)		Row in total
	male	Female	
no, I don't defend a company in a discussion, because it doesn't have to respond to every attack	5.38 %	26.46 %	31.84 %
no, I don't defend a company in a discussion, because lapses in an offer and customer service should be publicised	2.69 %	6.28 %	8.97 %
no, I don't defend a company in a discussion, because a company has a person responsible for communication at a fan page	2.69 %	19.28 %	21.97 %
yes, I defend a company in a discussion, if the accusations are unfounded and absurd (do not match the reality)	4.04 %	17.49 %	21.52 %
yes, I defend a company in a discussion, when the author of a critical statement hides himself/herself behind a fake name (it is clear that his/her personal data is untrue)	1.79 %	4.93 %	6.73 %
yes, I defend a company in a discussion, when a negative opinion is presented over and over again and becomes annoying for other	0.90 %	4.04 %	4.93 %
yes, I unconditionally defend a company (I like) in a discussion	0.90 %	3.14 %	4.04 %
In total	18.39 %	81.61 %	100.00 %
Statistical analysis			
	Chi-squared	Df	P
Pearson's Chi ²	3.911902	df=6	p=0.68860
Kendall's tau-b and tau-c	b=-0.024076	c=-0.023407	-
Spearman's rank R	-0.026902	t=-0.4001	p=0.68949

The analysis has not given a basis for stating a significant relationship ($p=0.68$) between the variables: willingness to defend a company's reputation on social media and a respondent's sex (Table 2).

Over half of the respondents (53%) live in rural areas, whereas only 11% of those surveyed live in big cities with over 250 thousand inhabitants. The least numerous (9%) group among the respondents consisted of inhabitants of cities with 50-100 thousand inhabitants (Table 3).

Table 3: Impact of a respondent's place of resident on whether he or she is a loyal customer

Statement	Place of residence (% of the total)					Row in total
	Rural area	City with up to 50 thousand inhabitants	City with up to 100 thousand inhabitants	City with up to 250 thousand inhabitants	City with over 250 thousand inhabitants	
I am a loyal customer, i.e. I become attached to a brand/company, product/service.	22.87 %	7.17 %	3.14 %	6.28 %	4.93 %	44.39 %
I often experiment, I don't become attached to a brand/company, product/service.	30.49 %	5.83 %	5.83 %	7.17 %	6.28 %	55.61 %
In total	53.36 %	13.00 %	8.97 %	13.45 %	11.21 %	100.00 %
Statistical analysis						
	Chi-squared	df	P			
Pearson's Chi ²	2.257937	df=4	p=0.68844			
Kendall's tau-b and tau-c	b=-0.016280	c=-0.018581	-			
Spearman's rank R	-0.017655	t=-0.2625	p=0.79318			

The analysis has not given a basis for stating a significant relationship ($p=0.68$) between the variables: a respondent's place of residence and label of a loyal customer, i.e. a person who becomes attached to a brand/company, product/service (Table 3).

Table 4: Impact of a respondent's place of residence on willingness to defend a company's reputation on social media

Willingness to defend a company's reputation on social media	Place of residence (% of the total)					Row in total
	Rural area	City with up to 50 000 inhabitants	City with up to 100 000 inhabitants	City with up to 250 000 inhabitants	City with over 250 000 inhabitants	
no, I don't defend a company in a discussion, because it doesn't have to respond to every attack	17.04%	4.93%	1.79%	4.04%	4.04%	31.84%
no, I don't defend a company in a discussion, because lapses in an offer and customer service should be publicised	4.04%	0.90%	1.35%	1.35%	1.35%	8.97%
no, I don't defend a company in a discussion, because a company has a person responsible for communication at a fan page	11.21%	2.69%	0.00%	4.93%	3.14%	21.97%
yes, I defend a company in a discussion, if the accusations are unfounded and absurd (do not match the reality)	13.90%	1.79%	2.24%	1.79%	1.79%	21.52%
yes, I defend a company in a discussion, when the author of a critical statement hides himself/herself	3.59%	1.35%	0.45%	0.90%	0.45%	6.73%

behind a fake name (it is clear that his/her personal data is untrue)						
yes, I defend a company in a discussion, when a negative opinion is presented over and over again and becomes annoying for other	2.69%	0.90%	0.90%	0.45%	0.00%	4.93%
yes, I unconditionally defend a company (I like) in a discussion	0.90%	0.45%	2.24%	0.00%	0.45%	4.04%
In total	53.36%	13.00%	8.97%	13.45%	11.21%	100.00%
Statistical analysis						
	Chi-square	df	P			
Pearson's Chi ²	35.07129	df=24	p=0.05305			
Kendall's tau-b and tau-c	b= -0.023773	c= -0.021416	-			
Spearman's rank R	-0.030519	t= -0.4539	p=0.65034			

The analysis has not given a basis for stating a significant relationship (p=0.05) between the variables: a respondent's place of residence and label of a loyal customer, i.e. a person who becomes attached to a brand/company, product/service (Table 4).

5. Conclusion

Analysis of the literature indicates that in the era of social media, after a period when most enterprises decided to be present in the Internet media space e.g. by launching a fan page on Facebook, it can be easily noticed that companies that are successful in that area are not those that transfer their traditional marketing practices and business goals into the space of Internet communities. Quite the contrary - success is achieved by enterprises that focus on customers' unmet social needs, and even become an integral member of the community. Social media

impel users to write comments - often it is a process stimulated by profiles of companies. Companies post information, sometimes not very reliable, untrue or even hateful one, to stimulate discussion and build a group of potential customers. It is important to sense how a particular message will be received by a target group. It should be formulated in a way that will make it interesting and encourage interaction. This is a task for a community manager.

Analysis of the gathered empirical data enabled verification of the formulated research hypotheses and concluding that:

- generation Z members are not loyal customers, meaning that they do not become attached to a brand/company, product/service,
- generation Z customers are not willing to defend a company's reputation on social media,
- the sex or place of residence of a generation Z representative does not have an impact on whether he/she is a loyal customer, which was most often supported with arguments that an enterprise has to respond by itself and employ a person responsible for communication on a fan page (community manager),
- the sex or place of residence of a generation Z respondent does not have an impact on his/her willingness to defend a company's reputation on social media.

It should be stressed that the study was not conducted on a representative sample, hence the conclusions above refer to the population that was examined, and generalizing them to the whole population would require further research.

Analysis of characteristics and attitudes of generation Z as well as analysis of the gathered empirical data can be a basis for formulating special challenges/tasks for a community manager. Generation Z members are young and mobile customers/consumers - they seek novelty and experience. They expect speedy communication, faster than email. They appreciate the convenience offered by the use of the Internet. Online shopping cannot give them tactile sensation, therefore generation Z expects product/service descriptions with dynamic content, aesthetic images, 360° rotation, video demos adjusted to their age group, and reviews optimised for their sceptical minds. Generation Z likes visualisations and expects sellers to be "cool", show them how products/services are used and present them in the best light so that they can become desirable, available and tactile. Generation Z seeks customized non-standard products and personalized marketing experiences. However, such content should be provided with an appropriate offer, dynamic content, etc. Apart from that, a

representative of generation Z does not want to look like everybody else. That is why they will like limited edition goods, unique products, good looking stores and authentic brand stories.

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