ENGAGEMENT FACTORS IN SOCIAL MEDIA EXPERIENCE

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Abstract:

This paper investigates sufficient strategies and tactics in social media environment with a focus on engagement mechanism and its reflection on social media experiences. One of the research questions was the correlation between social media experience and brand perception. In order to increase participants' engagement and community involvement, several methodological techniques were used during the research process, such as development of social personas, user behavior tracking and actionable social media design. Research question engagement increase within social media environment reflected on brand. Experimental part and research data collection which are presented in the paper had been done during three social media activations Coca-Cola Hellenic 45 Years in Serbia, Smoki King Size Big Byte, and Usce Shopping Center Hire a Santa.

Key words:

interactivity,
engagement,
social media experience,
social personas,
social design,
digital communication,
online communication channels,
community management.

INTRODUCTION

Behind a successful service or brand experience stands meaningful design which can be defined as putting human values in the center of the process of designing for meaningful products, services and environments. Having that in mind, we could say that service and brand experience vastly depends on respect of people's choices and lifestyles, personal beliefs and values. Social Media Environments and the raising of mobile computing, foresees novel scenarios of highly interactive environments in which communication takes place between users and devices, between devices and devices, and between users and other users. Such responsive environments enable automation, interactivity, ubiquity [1] while meeting user expectations and allowing interaction at almost a subconscious level [2]. This has a significant impact on the time-space aspect of service and brand experience embedded into social media environments where people can interact any time at any place with brands in an intellectual (symbolic) way, with which meaning can be transferred between brand users, an emotional (aesthetic) way by which users will hold a sustainable memory of the experience. The core concept behind these modern phenomena is the power of novel online interactions within existing social media landscape. Social media has become widely accessible platform and as such a powerful tool in company's brand awareness and customer services efforts.

INTERACTION DESIGN AND THE PROCESS OF SOCIAL MEDIA INTERACTION

Interaction Design has been pointed by one of its pioneers, Myron Krueger, as a potentially rich medium in it's own Right (Krueger, 1992) which should be judged by the quality of the interaction...: *the ability to interest, involve, and move people, to alter perception, and to define a new category of beauty (Krueger, 1992). In 1973, Stroud Cornock and Ernest Edmonds created* a series of diagrams outlining five different design systems (Cornock, Edmonds, Leonardo 6, p. 11-16). Those diagrams are relevant in defining the role of the user and in highlighting the fundamentals of interactivity. According to them we could define three types of design systems; the Static system, the Dynamic-Passive System and Dynamic-Interactive System. The first one represents design system as a static unchanging object observed by the viewer, this is the model we could address to traditional advertising based on TV commercials and Out of Home advertising. Dynamic-Passive system is very similar to the first one but with the additional sensuality to changes in the environment and time, like we have for example in a BTL advertising based on rich-media promotional events conceptualization. Finally, the Dynamic-interactive system gives to a completely new role to the viewer, he is now a participant who has ability to personally influence brand or service communication platform and as such to build deeper emotional relationship with them. All social media communication channels for brand or service promotions are rooted in this conceptual model of interaction.

Andy Lippman describes the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Media Lab model of interaction as a conversation versus a lecture (Brand,1988); stating the Media Lab's working definition of the term interactivity as Mutual and simultaneous activity on the part of both participants working usually but necessarily towards some goal (Brand,1988). According to this definition, during the act of mutual interaction between the user and the ob-

jects, they are affecting each other, forming kind of a loop. We can track this loop from the interactive design system to the participant and then back to the system again.

Roy Ascott named this the feedback loop, 'The participation, inclusive form of art has its basic principle "feedback," and it is this loop that makes an integral whole of the triad creator/artefact/ observer' (Ascott, 2003). This definition of interactivity suggests that shaping the output of an interactive work depends on the roles played by the creator, the artefact and the user.

Engaging interactivity depends on the success of the design process of interaction [3] we could find it in an appropriate balance between the difficulty of the interaction and the resulting complexity of the work. This human oriented design approach to interactivity can potentially produce more specific results from the interaction, as it was expected from the participants and visitors of three social media activations 45 Years of The Coca-Cola in Serbia, Smoki King Size Big Bites and Usce Hire a Santa, which were experimental part of this research. Mostly, engaging possibilities are depending on complexity of the interaction. However, as a consequence, this complexity produces a more complex learning process for the participant. One of the problems to solve was to find social media activation mechanism which is not too complex and usability is balanced so the user can interact without interruption caused by difficulty of the interaction or the limited possibilities it offers.

According to that, the mechanisms we used were basically conceptualized as photo competitions based on ready-made, easy to fulfilled tasks, such as Facebook activation Smoki King Size Big Bites and Usce Hire a Santa cases or emotional connections to local communities participants belongs such as in Facebook activation 45 Years of The Coca-Cola in Serbia case. Participants were in position to collaborate through mentioned social media design and as such to be involved in different ways with social media experiences. The outcomes were results of the engagement controlled by the rules of the designed activation system, through the mechanism, interface and reward. The process of competing, contributing and be rewarded for that, is something all humans are interested to take a part in. In term of social media usage for product and service promotion, major values of such activities are in human engagement with the brand or service more then in the value of end result, so any evaluation must be done from the point of participatory social media experience which engages them [4].

HUMAN-COMPUTER INTERACTION AS INTERACTIVE DRAMA

In the research experiment with the three Facebook social media activations 45 Years of The Coca-Cola in Serbia, Smoki King Size Big Kites and Usce Hire a Santa, as mentioned, crucial issues to investigate were user engagement factors in the interactive process and its effective usage in the services and products promotional and advertising strategies via social media networks. Foundation for deeper understanding of those phenomena could be found in Brenda Laurel book "Computers as Theatre" [5]. She used classical Aristotelian dramatic theory as a guide for understanding human-computer interaction. For her interactivity is "acting within a representation" [5] and as such to describe the user's experience of agency within a representational context she developed the concept of "first-personness". She describes this experience as "engagement":

"Engagement is only possible when we can rely on the system to maintain the representational context. A person should never be forced to interact with the system qua system; indeed, any awareness of the system as a distinct, "real" entity would explode the mimetic illusion, just as a clear view of the stage manager calling cues would disrupt the "willing suspension of disbelief" for the audience of a traditional play". [5].

Even Laurel puts the user in focus her analysis as her work only partly takes the perspective of the computer user. The problem that arises has to do with methodological difficulties and the way of putting collected empirical data in meaningful context.

RESEARCH APPROACH

In the research experiments with three Facebook social media activations theoretical framework has been based on Activity and research methodologies from user-centered design process [6] [7], where focus is on the thing being designed (e.g., the object, communication, space, interface, service, etc.) to meet the needs of the user. As mentioned, time-space aspect of service and brand experience embedded into social experiences became considerably important for the service or brand development success. I found that social media networks could offer a research environment where people can interact through creative collaboration, and share user-generated content on a symbolic, aesthetic and experiential level in a way that has immediate impact on the conscious and unconscious perception. The Activity Theory principle of internalization points on necessary differentiation between internal and external activities. Social Media Activation 45 Years of The Coca-Cola in Serbia, Smoki King Size Big Kites and Usce Hire a Santa essentially tried to connect internal processes such as perception and emotions and express it through external engagement nested in participants behavioral changes such as to win the individual prize or contribute to belonging community.

The research formulation of the methodology can be described with goals of scientific research dealing with the area of user behavior, participation and creative experience by:

- describing the user behaviour and participation;
- predicting the user behaviour and participation;
- discovering the causes of user participation;
- understanding and evaluate achieved engagement

RESEARCH EXPERIMENT AND RESULTS

Chronologically the first Facebook activation 45 Years of The Coca-Cola in Serbia used for the research ex-

periment was launched in June 2013, and lasted for two months. This social media activation eventually ended as one of the regional most successful ever with over 1,7 million votes and 200,000 fans collected during activation period. The idea behind the activation was simple, participants had a chance to support development of the open air gym in their local communities, financed by The Coca-Cola Company. Increase of the collected votes in the first four and a half weeks of the activation was amazing. It started in a first week with 36.153, second week was 236.721 all along to first week of July with 795.725 votes (Fig. 1)
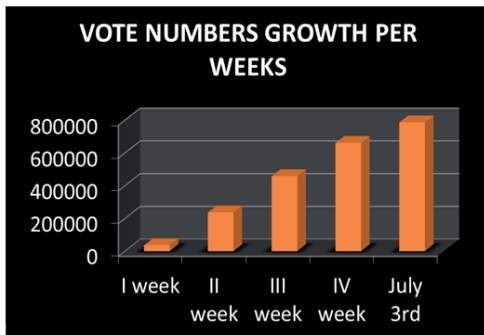

Figure. 1

To achieve this result, especially in the beginning, we were playing with the activation rules in order to lower interaction complexity and minimize engagement difficulties. We did that by reducing steps in the process of voting, maximizing sharable opportunities and by exposing leadership board within interface throughout complete engagement process. Eventually our design system was based on simplicity and provocation that participants are engaged on something they are doing for their local community good.

Qualitative results for the research, in all three cases, were collected from comments left by participants on the brands Facebook pages and other social media channels. Quantitative data were collected from activations database and provide us together with the quantitative with necessary inputs for actionable social media design. Through the analysis of the collected qualitative data, in case of 45 Years of The Coca-Cola in Serbia activation, we found that the crucial factors for the engagements were emotional attachments to local community participants, voting rules which allowed multiple voting and the strong and respectable brand to trust behind the activation. As result not only that they were voting individually on everyday bases but they started to organize themselves in groups with one common daily routine, to vote for their local community and win the prize. The activation lasted for two moths which was also quite untypical for social media activations, which usually lasts for two or three weeks, but showed the importance of correlation between type of the activation and according to that applied timing. The most important The Coca-Cola company provoked a huge attention of the wide audience on a national level with minimal media advertising investment and significant long-term emotional brand affection in the market.

Second experimental activation was conceptualized and executed for famous regional consumer good brand Smoki and it sub-brand Smoki King Size. The idea was to improve product sale with strong support from digital communication channels. Positioned as sub-brand with powerful origins the strategy was directed toward customer segmentation and build of strong online community around the target group to whom it would be possible to communicate Smoki King Size messages on a personal and direct way. Facebook social network was detected as the promising environment to build such community. Once again we had emotional factors we used as the Smoki represents strong emotional brand in the regional market we involved in the activation. As we started to build community from the scratch we decided to develop social media experience based on intensive duration of the activation and community management. Smoki King Size Big Bites activation lasted for four months. The treats were that we will become boring to our community and demotivate them to stay engaged throughout all that time. To keep community active and to stick them to the brand during that period, solution we found was again oriented toward social design system conceptualization which took into account activation mechanism and modification of the rules to increase participant's engagement

First we decided to split the activation into five small challenges and to target different group of consumers with specific tasks definition. On the end of every of five challenges we announced the winner and gave the rewards. That way everybody had second chance to win the prize and we got long-term community engagement. One of the major treats were social media frauds and its immediate reflection on the community engagement and the trust in brand or product itself. To solve such situations we were listening all the time the voice of the community and track anomalies in the competition process. After detection, in order to keep community engaged but not to lose trust of the both groups winners and losers in the competition, we decided to sort out such problems by modifying rules according to type of the fraud we wanted to penalize.

As results we were capable to sketch certain community behavioral pattern and create social personas (http://social.ogilvy.com/designing-social-personas/) to avoid massive community abundance, demotivation and lack of engagement. We achieved over 35,000 likes after first challenge, 61,000 likes in first four months of the community building and increase of product influence on targeted consumer groups (Fig. 2).

Figure. 2

According to participants comments they left on the product page and mini survey done with them throughout community management initiatives we concluded that the rules applied to challenges we were adopting based on

participants' behavior and the way they motivated them over and over again were crucial engagement factor and product promotional success (Fig. 3).

	Q4 2013 - Planned	Q4 2013 - Achieved	Q1 2014 - Planned	Q1 2014 - Achieved
TOTAL LIKES	appx20.000 - 30.000	approx. 52.000	appx 50.000 - 60.000	approx 60.000
ENAGEMENTS	appx 0,29 - 0,5 %	3.89%	appx 0,1 - 0,2 %	0.36%
TALKING ABOUT	appx0,5-1%	30.70%	appx 0,1 - 0,5%	10.19%
APP KPI				
	Per challenge - Planned	Per challenge - Achieved	Ukupno - Planned	Ukupno - Achieved
NUMBER OF PLAYERS	30 per challenge	approx. 40 - 50	150	approx. 200 - 250
UNIQUE VOTES	300 - 500 per challenge	approx. 10.000 - 18.000	1500- 2500	approx. 60.000 - 90.000

Figure. 3

The Facebook activation Usce Hire a Santa started on 1.12.2013 and lasted till 24.12.2014. The way we decided to use to provoke visitors engagement was based on communication strategy mix which consisted of digital guerrilla communication approach from one side and prolonged interactivity. In that manner we used Job Portals to advertise the activation and one more step in the voting process which gave us opportunity before voting to dress and undress potential candidates in the Santa recognizable attributes (cap and beard). This additional perceptional affection were mirrored on community brand communication strategy as throughout all the activation pictures with candidates dressed like that were posted on the center wall. Assumption was that by using such photo instead of plain candidate portraits we will have more intensive emotional impact on participants as more sympathetic and intriguing to our potential emotional attraction and engaging reactions. Activation had great success with low advertising investment and over 10.000 likes (Fig. 4)

Figure. 4

Number of participants was 218 in total and significant organic non paid media visibility was great success (Fig. 5). This time as engagement factors were detected the way we promoted the activation which was consumer oriented rather than brand oriented but it had a huge positive reflection on brand awareness and increase of the visits to the center.
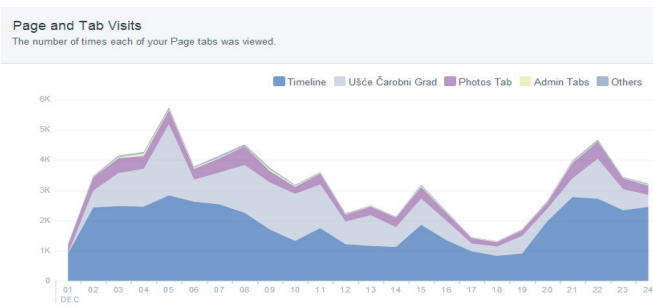

Figure. 5

CONCLUSION

With the three commercial activation we used as research experimental field within social media experience, we were able to empirically detect certain engagement factors and their potentials to build and increase online communities around brands and products. The importance of those consumer groups are in their capability to become valuable brand or product ambassadors and spread its influence in the market in a more human-oriented way then traditional advertising. From that point of view, engagement factors are becoming very important strategic tool for online digital campaigns and their success. Social Media Environment as the most intensive interactive and engaging today, became important digital communication channels to consider in any product or service promotional or advertising activities. What we found as the potential important factors to consider for future social media brand or service promotional success are the following: social media activation mechanism and its flexibility to meet consumer and participants expectations; interaction design based on simplicity and perceptual choices capable to prolong engagement; actionable timing based on participants behavior patterns and listening of the community and proven care for the community such as taking care of the potential and detected frauds. In case of examined social media activations, implementation of those factors were detected as important for the achieved success.

Further research will be oriented toward more detailed investigation of the collected data and their influence on brand and service perception within online communities which we believe will help better usage of social media channels in future digital marketing communication strategies.

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