Social Media Marketing and Communication

- A brand-customer relationship building analysis based on the case of E.L.F. Cosmetics

Marketing and Management Communication

Bachelor Thesis

5 May 2011

Manuella Lubomirova Stoilova

Supervisor: Carmen Daniela Maier
# Table of Contents

1. Introduction .................................................................................................................................... 3  
   1.1 Methodology and Structure .................................................................................................... 4  
   1.2 Delimitations and future research ..................................................................................... 6  
2. Background information ........................................................................................................... 7  
   2.1 Company history and marketing philosophy ................................................................... 7  
   2.2 Social media marketing ...................................................................................................... 8  
3. Brand Identity and relationship ............................................................................................ 9  
   3.1 Brand identity definition ..................................................................................................... 9  
   3.2 Kapferer’s Brand Identity Prism ......................................................................................... 9  
   3.3 Aaker’s Brand Identity Perspectives ............................................................................... 11  
      3.3.1 Brand as person ......................................................................................................... 11  
   3.4 Relationship basis model .................................................................................................. 12  
      3.4.1 Brand as a friend ....................................................................................................... 13  
      3.4.2 Brand as an active relationship partner ................................................................... 13  
      3.4.3 Brand relationship quality ....................................................................................... 14  
   3.5 Analytical discussion – applying brand identity and brand relationship theories on a practical case ............................................................................................................................... 15  
      3.5.1 The Beauty Network ................................................................................................. 16  
      3.5.2 E.L.F.’s CMO Ted Rubin’s twitter page .................................................................... 18  
4. Conclusion ................................................................................................................................. 20  
5. Bibliography ............................................................................................................................... 23  
6. Appendixes
1. Introduction

In today’s over-saturated and cluttered market reality consumers are constantly bombarded with advertising messages in many different forms. People have become so accustomed to this daily “noise” that fewer and fewer of these messages actually reach their target. Additionally, even if the message manages to break through the media clutter it often gets “lost in translation” and misinterpreted. Recent neuromarketing research shows that roughly 90 per cent of consumer buying behavior is unconscious\(^1\) which clearly indicates that the time has come to make a shift in the paradigm for the way advertising, marketing and branding strategies are executed. The rapid advances and developments in technology during the past decade allow businesses to not only add new tools to use in their promotional efforts but to completely re-think and re-shape the focus of their strategies back to the individual and emotional needs of the consumer. The continuously wide-spread use and growth of social media creates an opportunity for companies to communicate and connect with customers at a higher level of mutual understanding allowing a faster, much clearer and more personalized communication than ever. Although first gaining popularity in the 80’s, relationship marketing (“Marketing seen as relationships, networks and interaction.”\(^2\)) has taken on a new meaning in the context of new technologies and the spread of social media. According to Theodore Levitt, if developed properly and integrated into all parts of a company’s marketing plan and communication philosophy, a well-implemented relationship marketing strategy can provide a basis for increasing customer retention and loyalty and achieving competitive advantage.\(^3\)

However, recent research shows that most companies are still struggling to implement social media into their communication and marketing strategies effectively.\(^4\) Although the advances of technology technically allow companies to have a larger reach and access to their customers than ever before, marketing professionals and still learning and adapting to the new social marketing reality in which brand awareness is promoted through facebook “friends” and youtube channels and high customer loyalty is reflected by the number of followers on twitter.

\(^1\) Lindstrom, M (2008) Buyology – Truth and lies about why we buy, chapter 9
\(^4\) http://blog.itgovernance.co.uk/companies-struggle-to-address-social-media-risks/
With the goal of finding useful current communication practices and uncovering successful social media strategies I have set up to analyze the social media communication practices of one of the flourishing brands which has based its entire promotional strategy and marketing philosophy on the use of social media as a channel of communication – the U.S. based E.L.F. cosmetics.

On this basis, the following problem statement has been formulated for this paper:

*The aim of this thesis is to examine how a company can establish and maintain a successful customer communication strategy by using social media as a stepping stone for building lasting bonds between the brand and the customer resulting in a long-term profitable relationship.*

In order to answer this problem statement, a theoretical discussion will be carried out in an attempt to present a number of useful social media communication practices which could be employed to build a strong brand-customer relationship. The selection of these communication activities will derive from applying theories and concepts from the fields of communication, marketing and branding. The presented theories will consequently be tested on a number of social media channels employed by the company E.L.F. cosmetics. The brand will serve as a practical example and illustration of the application and relevance of the theories in today’s rapidly changing market reality.

### 1.1 Methodology and Structure

As proposed in the problem statement the purpose of this paper has been set to investigate a number of social media communication practices which could help brands develop long-term emotional relationships with their customers. Based on examining various brands which employ social media as a key part of their communication strategies I have selected the U.S. brand E.L.F. cosmetics which has a proven record of marketing success due mainly to its unique approach on customer communication and promotion.

I have chosen to divide the body of my report into two main sections: Brand identity and relationship, and Customer commitment and loyalty. Each section will begin with a presentation of relevant theoretical concepts followed by a practical testing and illustration of the theories on applicable social media communication channels used by E.L.F. cosmetics. By applying theories from the fields of communication, marketing and branding to a rapidly growing and flourishing contemporary brand created through the use of modern technology communication channels, my aim is to attempt to demonstrate the benefits a company could gain in this new business reality from
building a unique kind of brand-customer relationship using social media. I consider this approach to be a deductive method of doing research because a number of specific relevant theories have been selected based on their scope, applicability and practical implications. These theories are consequently employed in a theoretical discussion with the aim of distinguishing the most useful, practical and effective social media communication activities which a company could use to establish a profitable brand-customer relationship.

The overall structure of the thesis is divided into an introduction, main body of theoretical discussion and a conclusion. In the introduction part of the report a brief summary of E.L.F. cosmetics’ history and marketing philosophy will be presented. Secondly, the concept of social media marketing will be presented with the aim of identifying the possible opportunities from employing a communication strategy focused around the social media philosophy.

The main body of the paper starts with a theoretical presentation of concepts and practices stemming from theories on brand identity and brand relationship. Firstly, the general concept of brand identity will be defined by presenting David Aaker’s views on the importance of the idea and its practical implications on the brand management and relationship building process. Following the introduction of the concept, two different models on brand identity will be examined: Kapferer’s Brand Identity Prism and Aaker’s Brand Identity Perspectives system. Essential parts in both models play the concepts of brand personification and brand-customer relationship. After the presentation of these systems, Aaker’s relation basis model will be discussed. The model summarizes and illustrates again the aspects of the brand which directly affect its relationship with the customers. The concepts of brand as a friends and brand as an active relationship partner follow to further demonstrate the components of the relation basis model. The last theory presented in this chapter is on brand relationship quality. Aaker distinguishes between a number of different dimensions which characterize the term and are derived from strong relationships between people. The brand relationship quality suggests how brand-customer relationships should be interpreted and managed.

Finally, the chapter rounds off with an analytical discussion based on the application of brand identity and brand relationship theories on the real life case of E.L.F. cosmetics. The two practical illustrations are formed around the brand’s online Beauty Network site and the company’s CMO Ted Rubin’s twitter page.
The next main chapter of the report will start with a definition of the concepts of customer commitment and loyalty. According to Ellen Goodwright’s article on customer loyalty "customer loyalty is when an organization receives the ultimate reward for the way it interacts with its customers. Loyal customers buy more, buy longer and tell more people - that's true customer loyalty". She further argues that competitive advantage can be achieved through customer loyalty. The author suggests that this is the way to gain the best kind of customers, repeat customers. Repeat customers tend to spend more money and provide the best word-of-mouth advertising. Finally, she proposed that different brand strategies could lead to customer loyalty as well.

Within this chapter, other relevant theories in this context will be presented such as emotional connections between the customer and the brand, direct engagement potential according to Gallup’s research, brand advocacy, Dean Takahashi’s and Ted Rubin’s views on “the wisdom of friends”, one-to-one marketing and a learning relationship. Additionally, the connection between customer service and brand advocacy will be addressed. The last theory examined in the chapter is on integration between customer experience and the social media channel.

Lastly, the report will be concluded with a summary of the most useful social media communication practices which emerged from the theoretical discussion. The goal is to uncover and illustrate how communication, branding and marketing theories regarding brand-customer relationship could be applied in practice through the use of social media channels.

### 1.2 Delimitations and future research

The concept of social media is very broad and covers a wide variety of social media, ranging from social sharing sites such as YouTube and Flickr through social networks such as LinkedIn and Facebook. Because of the limitations of this paper that prevents it from covering all social media communication tools and channels, for the purpose of the theoretical discussion presented in the following chapters I have chosen to focus on just a few of them which I found most relevant. I have

---

6 Ibid
7 Ibid
10 http://blog.zuberance.com/blog/the-wisdom-of-friends-powers-brand-advocacy/
11 http://sbinfocanada.about.com/od/socialmedia/g/socialmedia.htm

BMMC
Manuella Stoilova
Supervisor: Carmen Maier
discussed the way the brand employs the social networking platform twitter and the brand’s own online Beauty Network in the context of illustrating the company’s brand personality and brand-customer relationship. I have also analyzed E.L.F.’s use of youtube channels and the bloggers’ community in the contexts of creating and maintaining high levels of customer commitment and loyalty.

However, there are other powerful social communication channels such as Facebook which masterful and mindful incorporation as a part of a brand communication strategy could provide further opportunities and benefits in achieving the aim of building strong and lasting brand-customer relationships. Due to its enormous popularity, outreach and communication opportunities Facebook’s vast potential could be utilized by brands as a valuable source for customer-related information and insight into consumer behavior, values and beliefs. Therefore, I believe that this social networking phenomenon could serve as a basic element around which future theoretical research in the area of brand-customer relationships could be build.

2 Background information

2.1 E.L.F. cosmetics company history and marketing philosophy

E.L.F. cosmetics has been launched in 2004 and guided by celebrity and beauty professional Scott-Vincent Borba it has become a revolutionary new beauty company, able to provide a line of cosmetics that “moisturize, hydrate, and enliven your complexion without taxing your budget”\(^\text{12}\) (the abbreviation E.L.F. stands for eyes, lips and face)\(^\text{13}\). The brand’s makeup products are sold at a very low price, sometimes as little as $1.\(^\text{14}\) The company argues that it is able to maintain these affordable prices by developing quality cosmetics and the highest standard of service, but using the internet for branding rather than higher-priced advertising media.\(^\text{15}\) In addition, the company’s focus is also on sourcing the best ingredients at competitive prices and prioritizing its products, rather than their packaging. The long term goal is to always provide quality and value at affordable prices. Finally, although based in New York, e.l.f. represents itself as an independent company with no retail

\(^{12}\) http://www.eyeslipsface.com/about

\(^{13}\) http://healthbeautyreview.com/e-l-f-cosmetics-review/

\(^{14}\) http://www.eyeslipsface.com/about

\(^{15}\) Ibid
affiliation, and with distribution facilities in several regional centers which allow for fast turnaround and guaranteed delivery.\footnote{Ibid}

According to E.L.F. cosmetics’ company web page the brand’s philosophy is illustrated through the belief that beauty and wellness are interconnected and together form a holistic approach that places good health and well-being at the center of what it means to be truly beautiful.\footnote{http://www.eyeslipsface.com/philosophy} Furthermore, the company suggests that beauty comes from feeling and being one’s best, an inner confidence that translates to the outer-world as attractiveness. The brand’s philosophy stems from the notion that beauty comes from within and it’s our goal to enable every woman to look and feel her personal best through the perfect blend of both the inner and outer person.\footnote{http://www.eyeslipsface.com/philosophy} It is suggested that having this goal in mind, the company has immerged as “a line of simple, luxurious, problem-solution tools that allow you to showcase and believe in your unique, personal beauty.” The focus is on the celebration and accentuation of the individual qualities and characteristics. Finally, in its philosophy statement the company expresses its strong believes that innovative technology, quality ingredients and superb delivery systems should not be limited to prestige retailers and that every woman should have the opportunity to participate in innovation, without sacrificing her budget.\footnote{Ibid}

2.2 Social media marketing

“Social media marketing (SMM) is a form of internet marketing which seeks to achieve branding and marketing communication goals through the participation in various social media networks”. Social media is a term that covers the activities around social interaction, content, videos, images and audio exposure.\footnote{Rognerud, J (2008) Social media marketing beginner’s guide, 2 April 2002 \http://www.marketingpilgrim.com/2008/04/social-media-marketing-beginners-guide.html} Social media marketing consists of the attempt to use social media to persuade consumers that one’s company, products and/or services are worthwhile.\footnote{Ward, S. (2010) Social media marketing, About.com guide, \http://sbinfocanada.about.com/od/socialmedia/g/socmedmarketing.htm} To use social media marketing effectively, businesses have to be perceived as members of the social media community, willing to interact with other members. According to Ward’s article, social media marketing is a type of marketing that could be especially beneficial to small businesses in order to find out more about what their customers are thinking and saying about their brand and their products.\footnote{Ibid} She further claims that the main goals of social media marketing are to build a business’ customer base and to
develop and manage a company’s reputation. Throughout the paper, I will attempt to illustrate how brand communication through social media could also be used to build strong brand-customer relations based on mutual understanding, trust and appreciation.

3. Brand Identity and Relationship

3.1 Brand Identity Definition

“Brand identity is a unique set of brand associations that the brand strategist aspires to create or maintain. These associations represent what the brand stands for and imply a promise to customers from the organization members.”

The brand identity stems from the company itself specifying the brand’s value and uniqueness. It represents the internal desired image that the company wants to communicate to the target group. A strong brand must have a clear and specified brand identity, which is a set of associations that the company tries to create through, for instance, market communication. By generating a value position, brand identity establishes the relationship between the customer and the company. The benefits can be functional, emotional or self-expressive. According to Van Gelder brand identity declares its background, its principles, its purpose and its ambitions. For that reason brands need to be managed for consistency and vitality. Therefore, the identity concept, the promise to a customer, plays a crucial role within the brand management and relationship building process as a brand needs to be durable.

3.2 Kapferer’s Brand Identity Prism

According to Kapferer, the brand identity prism could be very useful when analyzing brands. It gives a description of how the brand owner wants the target group to perceive the brand identity. According to the model brand identity could be defined by six parameters: physique, personality, culture, relationship, reflection and self-image. These concepts together define the brand identity that can be communicated to consumers.

---

29 Kapferer, J-N. (2005)
I will focus on two of the elements of the prism which I find more relevant to the concept of building emotional connections and relationship between brand and consumer through social media channels: personality and relationship.

Brand personality could be defined as an internal intangible facet which forms the character, soul and identity which are relevant for the brand. With the aim of better communication with the public brand character is being developed. This is a way by which any brand “talks” about its goods and services and could be associated with a particular human person. It describes what kind of a person the brand would be if it were human and its characteristics. A spokesperson can easily form a brand’s personality or it could even be a company representative as it will be illustrated later with the case of E.L.F. cosmetics CMO Ted Rubin.

The next dimension of Kapferer’s prism represents relationship between brand and customer. Every company needs to maintain a strong relationship with its customers and many communication and marketing efforts are dedicated to doing so. The main question to be asked is how a brand wants to be perceived by customers in its promotional communication? Is the relationship based on just a simple transaction or does it rest on trust, confidence and strong bonding experience? Good relationship between brand and customers can increase added value and help to establish good

---

31 Ibid
brand image in customers’ mind. According to Kapferer, brand is a voice that consumers should hear because brands survive in the market of communication. As a vital part of a relationship communication is very important for addressing the different needs of people and present useful information to increase the brand awareness among customers.  

3.3 Aaker’s Brand Identity Perspectives

According to Aaker’s identity system there are four perspectives through which brand identity could be analyzed: brand as product, brand as organization, brand as person and brand as symbol. The model helps to identify different brand elements and patterns which can help clarify, enrich and differentiate the identity. Again the focus will be on one of the four possible brand identities which could be developed and enriched through the use of social media communication: brand as person.

Figure 2 Brand Identity Planning model, Aaker (2002), p.79

3.3.1 Brand as Person

The brand as person personality perspective suggests a rich and complex brand identity which is based on more than product and organizational attributes. Its two main components are brand personality which includes traits such as sincerity, excitement, competence and brand-customer relationships such as friend, adviser. According to Aaker brand personality could help create a self-expressive benefit which empowers the customer to express their own personality. By using products from a certain brand customers often identify themselves with the qualities and characteristics of the

34 Ibid
35 Ibid, p. 83
36 Ibid
brand itself. Additionally, brand personality could lay the ground for a strong relationship between customer and brand. Depending on the portrayed personality a brand could be perceived as a sincere friend, a helpful and competent professional, an admired person or a warm emotional relative.

Both Kapferer’s Brand identity prism and Aaker’s Brand Identity system recognize the importance of presenting a clear and unique brand personality to the customer which could provide them with emotional benefits and inspire a mutual connection where both parties are engaged in the process of building and maintaining a strong relationship.

3.4 Relationship Basis Model

Aaker argues that the concept of a relationship between a brand and a person provides an insightful perspective on how brand personality works. He suggests that this relationship is fairly similar to the one between two people and therefore, could be described through people’s different personality types. According to his model brand personalities could be roughly classified into five categories: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness.

![Brand Personality Diagram](image)

Figure 3 Brand Personality


---

37 Ibid
38 Aaker (2002), p.84
39 Ibid, p.159
40 Ibid
Aaker suggests that there are two elements which affect an individual’s relationship with a brand.41 The first component is the relationship between the customer and the abovementioned concept of brand as a person. The second one is the brand personality which is defined by the type of person the brand represents. Aaker argues that the brand personality provides emotions, depth and liking to the relationship which contributes to a stronger long-term brand-customer connection.42

3.4.1 Brand as a friend

A friendship-like link between the brand and the customer is an essential kind of relationship for many companies in today’s oversaturated market. This type of connection is characterized by trust, confidence, respect, understanding and mutual caring.43 According to Aaker a friend relationship can involve many different brand personalities. Therefore, he argues that a focus on the friend relationship rather than brand personality on its own could allow more flexibility in the shaping and implementation of the brand identity.44

In today’s stressful and constantly changing world despite the highly developed technologies people are feeling more alienated and in need of someone they could trust. Fred Posner suggests that brands could step in to fill people’s need for coping mechanisms and true friendships.45 He argues that brands could play the role of an “aspirational” or “trusted” associate by forming either aspirational relationships to provide an escape route or trusting relationships to provide expertise and knowledge in a subject of interest. He also suggests that the type of relationship chosen by a company should be the focal point for developing and executing a brand strategy.46

3.4.2 Brand as an active relationship partner

In Susan Fournier's 1998 article, "Consumers and their brands: Developing relationship theory in consumer research," the author argues that customers have relationships with their brands and that brands can be “relationship partners” for customers.47 In her paper Fournier suggests that for a relationship to truly exist there must be an evident interdependence between partners,

---

41 Ibid, p.160
43 Ibid
44 Ibid
46 Ibid
meaning that the partners must collectively affect, define and re-define the relationship.\textsuperscript{48} She further notes that brand actions have distinctive implications both for the brand personality and the brand-customer relationship.\textsuperscript{49} Fournier research based on the act frequency theory\textsuperscript{50} shows that the main characteristics of a person’s personality could be revealed by continuous observation of trait-relevant behavior.\textsuperscript{51} This means that the true personality is best illustrated through the individual’s behavior. Therefore, analogically, the manner in which a brand acts and behaves could directly affect its perceived personality.

Additionally, Aaker argues that brand actions could also have major effect on the brand-customer relationship.\textsuperscript{52} If a brand demonstrates sudden and unexpected behavioral change either temporarily or permanently moves in a new direction, the brand-customer relationship might be weakened because of feelings of insecurity or dissatisfaction from the customers. On the contrary, practices and routines which reinforce familiar rituals could strengthen the relationship by evoking feelings of familiarity and comfort.\textsuperscript{53}

Therefore, it could be concluded that behavior and attitude of a brand are essential when trying to build a strong relationship between the brand and the customer. Brand personality is not merely a customer perception which could be manipulated at will but rather a two-way communication process where both sides are engaged and responsible for the progress of the relationship.

3.4.3 Brand relationship quality

Achieving high brand loyalty (The extent of the faithfulness of consumers to a particular brand, expressed through their repeat purchases, irrespective of the marketing pressure generated by the competing brands.\textsuperscript{54}) is a major goal for companies, especially in today’s competitive market. In the context of Aaker’s relationship metaphor the goal is to attain high brand relationship quality (BRQ).\textsuperscript{55} He distinguishes between seven dimensions of BRQ: behavioral interdependence, personal

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{48} Ibid, p.344
\item \textsuperscript{49} Aaker (2002), p.165
\item \textsuperscript{50} Buss, David M.; Craik, Kenneth H., The act frequency approach to personality, Psychological Review, Vol 90(2), Apr 1983, 105-126
\item \textsuperscript{51} Aaker (2002), p.165
\item \textsuperscript{52} Aaker (2002), p.165
\item \textsuperscript{53} Ibid
\item \textsuperscript{54} http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/brand-loyalty.html
\item \textsuperscript{55} Aaker (2002), p.166
\end{itemize}
commitment, love and passion, nostalgic connection, self-concept connection, intimacy and partner quality. All dimensions stem from strong relationships between people and suggest how brand-customer relationships should be interpreted and managed.

For the purpose of this paper I will focus on four of these dimensions: personal commitment, self-concept connection, intimacy and partner quality. Personal commitment reflects the level of commitment between the brand and the customer. It is characterized by constant desire for improvement of the quality of the relationship over time. It promotes high levels of loyalty to the brand. The self-concept connection aspect of BRQ is defined by the practice of sharing common interests, activities and opinions. In this case the brand’s and the individual’s self-image are similar, the customer identifies with the brand which re-enforces the feeling of self-being. The intimacy in a brand relationship suggests a deep level of understanding between the parties. The customer will achieve intimacy by knowing details about the brand, its philosophy, values and beliefs. It provokes feeling of mutual understanding, thus strengthening the brand-consumer connection. Lastly, the partner quality of a relationship reflects the evaluation of one partner of the performance and attitude of the other which includes the evaluation of the brand’s attitude towards the consumer. When high partner quality is achieved the customer feels appreciated and being treated as a valued individual.

In conclusion, a strong brand-customer relationship could emanate both from the brand personality and identity and from the behavioral practices of the brand which consequently could influence and modify the personality itself. Therefore, for a brand to build a lasting friendship-like connection, it is very important for a company to integrate its brand strategy and communication efforts in order to create transparency and evoke confidence and trust in the customer.

3.5 Analytical discussion – applying brand identity and brand relationship theories on a practical case

---

56 Ibid
57 Ibid, p.167
58 Aaker (2002), p.167
59 Ibid
60 Ibid
In order to put the theories on brand identity and relationship presented in this chapter into practice, I will analyze two of E.L.F. cosmetics’ social media communication channels: the Beauty Network homepage⁶¹ and CMO Ted Rubin’s twitter page⁶².

### 3.5.1 The Beauty Network

The E.L.F. Beauty Network is an online brand community⁶³ which serves as gathering point for the majority of the brand’s social media communication channels. According to Muniz and O’Guinn a brand community could be described as “a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand.”⁶⁴ The authors also state that brand communities exhibit three traditional markers of community: shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility. They claim that brand communities are formed when customers feel an important connection to the brand.⁶⁵

As mentioned above, the Beauty Network web page plays the role of the brand’s social information hub where customers have access to all the virtual communication channels of the company in one place. As seen in Appendix 1 the main menu on the right includes links to all the brand’s online social spaces which include company pages on facebook and twitter, a photo gallery on flickr, a channel on youtube and a company beauty blog. In addition, there are links to the Beauty Network’s message boards, groups and an online beauty expert. The center of the page is filled with the latest posts and feeds from the different social channels so that the user can get a quick update on the most recent news and developments connected with the brand. At the top left corner of the page there are two user menus for each individual customer’s account and messages. They contain links to the user’s account details and profile on the Beauty network including the user’s friends and group affiliation as well as the personal messages and notification of the customer.⁶⁶ The menu at the bottom of the page consists of four tabs: About us, Customer service, Help, Contact us.⁶⁷

The selection of all of these menus and functions is not in any way random. The choice of the presented information and functionalities of the network are in sync with the overall brand

---

⁶¹ Appendix 1 - http://www.eelfbeautynetwork.com/default.php
⁶² Appendix 2 - http://twitter.com/#!/TedRubin
⁶⁵ Muniz, A and Thomas O’Guinn (2001)
⁶⁶ Appendix 3
⁶⁷ Appendix 4
communication strategy of the company of creating a unique brand personality and maintaining a strong brand-customer relationship. The desire of the company to represent its brand on the one hand as a trusted friend and on the other as a competent and friendly professional is visible in the options for communication and connection E.L.F. presents the customer with.

First off, from the beginning of the user’s entering of the web page, they are invited to peek at all the latest important developments concerning the brand. Just as they would act with a close friend, the users have the opportunity to check out the brand’s facebook page, learn about the company’s most recent actions and initiatives on twitter, flip through E.L.F. photo gallery from the latest social gathering or watch a video on youtube to get the scoop about the newest makeup trends. By providing all these different types of social communication channels the brand allows the customer to get to know the company better and more importantly be a part of the brand “social life” and development.

Second, the choice of including the “About us” link on the Beauty Network page (usually found on the main page of a company) further proves the desire of the brand for honest and transparent relations with its customers. By giving the user a quick access to the company’s history, main goals and philosophy the brand reinforces and supports the customer’s need for a strong bond and open friendship. Additionally, it provides intimacy as a part of the brand relationship quality by allowing customers to know the company’s goals and aspirations.

Furthermore, the “Customer service” link illustrates E.L.F.’s commitment towards achieving brand relationship quality. The personal commitment and desire of the brand to continuously improve the relationship with its customers is evident in the company’s attempt to be as accessible and helpful as possible providing various options for communication: 24/7 e-mail contact option with a short response time, five-day a week call service and an option for live chat every day. This also helps the partner quality in the context of the BRQ by making the users feel treated with respect. By providing them a fast and easy option to share their opinions, ask their questions or voice their concerns the brand strengthens its relationship with the customers making them feel valued.

---

68 Appendix 5
69 Appendix 6

BMMC
Manuella Stoilova
Supervisor: Carmen Maier
The ease of communication access is also illustrated through the “Ask an expert” option. It provides the customer with an opportunity to directly connect with a knowledgeable brand representative who will address their inquiries, give them advice and expert opinion on their topic of interest. This further strengthens the brand’s personality portrayal as a trusted friend you can share your ideas with and a competent and approachable professional who could give expert information and advice.

3.5.2 E.L.F.’s CMO Ted Rubin’s twitter page

In a post from November 2010 titled “Do CMOs Really Understand the Value of Twitter?” Chief Marketing Officer at BearCom Wireless and Co-Publisher of Social Media Marketing Magazine Kent Huffman discusses the importance of engaging customers through social media and voices his surprise at the very slow pace at which CMOs are adopting twitter as means for communication with their brands’ customers. According to Huffman’s observations at a CMO Club’s semiannual CMO Summit in San Francisco in November 2010, only sixteen out of more than eighty organizational CMO’s attending were active on twitter. He also notes that the majority of the CMO’s who did use twitter were representing B2B organizations although most of the attending CMO’s were B2C company representatives. Additionally, he observes that very few of the so-called “big brands” on either B2B or B2C market are represented by their CMO’s on twitter. Addressing the issue, E.L.F.’s CMO Ted Rubin – the most followed CMO on twitter, also attending the seminar, according to Huffman stated: “Most CMOs barely understand the value of building relationships with customers and giving them a voice, let alone how to navigate and make use of the world of Twitter. Social media marketing to most in the C-suite is still something campaign based, but social media marketing needs to be woven into fabric of all marketing channels, strategically managed from a 360-degree perspective... The key here is to convince CMOs to get personally involved in social media by having someone with hands-on knowledge mentor them, so they get first-hand knowledge, build their own personal following, and learn from the ground up. That way, they can properly guide and manage the integration process.”

---

70 Appendix 7
73 Ibid
74 http://twitaholic.com/TedRubin/
75 Huffman, K (11 November 2010)
John Dragoon, the Chief Marketing Officer at Novell, adds: “All markets are conversations, and good marketers are embracing new tools to have these conversations. The beauty of social media tools is they allow you to experiment quickly and learn even faster. Active participation is the key to success.”

A vital part of E.L.F.’s brand communication strategy is focused on integrated social media marketing. CMO Ted Rubin recognizes the importance of “walking the talk” when it comes to building and maintaining a certain brand image. He argues that it is essential for a brand to have a “face” and to support the brand at a high organizational level. The brand value could then be extended if the customers feel that they have an emotional connection to a brand representative from the highest level of the company.

If we analyze Rubin’s twitter page in the context of building a brand-customer relationship there are several aspects to focus on. The first thing that catches the eye of visitor of his page is the background on which the main page is placed. On the left side of the page, below a photo of Rubin, are placed links to all other social media channels where he is active – his facebook page, his personal blog, his LinkedIn page and his youtube channel. This, on one side, supports his brand communication philosophy of striving towards completely integrated social media marketing. On the other side, it could be interpreted as a method for strengthening the brand relationship quality by giving the customer a quick and easy access to more platforms for communication. It also further allows him to share his interests, views, opinions and even matters concerning his personal life with his followers. This creates a self-concept connection with the customers where shared interests, beliefs and opinions are presented. It also helps to establish a much deeper emotional friendship-like connection with the users. As he poses as an official E.L.F. representative, customers are likely to associate his personal characteristics and behavior with that of the brand.

On the right side of the background there is some brief information about his professional affiliations as well as some of his core beliefs regarding, social media marketing and brand-customer communication. This also encourages intimacy in the brand-customer relationship because customers feel like they “know” the person, and consequently the brand, what he stands for and what are his beliefs.

---

76 Ibid
77 http://www.tedrubin.com/no-more-mixed-messages-integrate-social-media-marketing/
78 Ibid
79 Appendix 8
80 Appendix 9

BMMC
Manuella Stoilova
Supervisor: Carmen Maier
Looking at the central part of his twitter page, there are also a number of things that immediately make an impression on the visitor. The first one is the statistics box about his twitter account.\textsuperscript{81} He has an impressive number of followers – 49,669 and an even larger number of tweets – 56,531.\textsuperscript{82} Another interesting fact is that the number of twitter users Ruben himself follows is also very big – 48,383. This goes on to show the importance he places on building relationships with his brand’s customers establishing a partner quality connection rather than a one-way communication channel. By following his followers\textsuperscript{83} he additionally encourages personal commitment and intimacy which help to establish a strong and enduring brand-customer relationship.

Another fact that makes impression on Rubin’s twitter page is that he posts a tweet several times a day, sometimes hourly trying to respond to the vast number of tweets send at him.\textsuperscript{84} This proves his commitment towards maintaining a personal and “living” relationship with the customers making them feel heard and valued. This also ensures equality and partnership in the relationship when both parties feel that there is mutual understanding and respect.

Finally, Rubin’s tweets cover a variety of different subjects and provide a lot of valuable expert opinions and advice – from interesting articles on marketing practices, branding ideas, information on different events and seminars to his own social marketing and brand managing ideas and views. In the brand-customer relationship context, this places him in the role of the friendly and helpful professional which is knowledgeable and trustworthy but open and accessible at the same time.

6. Conclusion

The whole paper has been structured around the idea to examine how a company can establish and maintain a successful customer communication strategy by using social media as a stepping stone for building lasting bonds between the brand and the customer resulting in a long-term profitable relationship. The report presents a theoretical discussion build around a number of brand management and communication concepts which are then illustrated and but to the test by real life cases of social media communication implementation by the U.S. cosmetics brand E.L.F. The company has been selected because of its very active presence in many social media communication platforms. However, the company is not just “being there” on the surface just because it is

\textsuperscript{81} Appendix 10
\textsuperscript{82} http://twitter.com/#!/TedRubin
\textsuperscript{83} After, for the purpose of this report, I became Rubin’s follower on twitter, he followed me back within the hour.
\textsuperscript{84} Appendix 11 and Appendix 12
fashionable to do so but, so far, successfully manages to utilize the opportunities these social channels provide for a new and improved type of brand-customer communication which in time helps build strong emotional relationships based on mutual understanding, trust, shared interests, commitment and loyalty. The body of the paper has been divided into two main chapters comprised of theory presentation followed by discussion.

The first section covers the topics of brand identity and brand relationship discussing various models in this theoretical context such as Kapfere’s brand identity prism, Aaker’s brand identity perspectives, the relationship basis model and the brand relationship quality system. All these methods of looking at the brand identity and relationships are united by the common suggestion that brand personification and brand-customer relationship building are key for building a lasting emotional connection between the brand and the customer when using social media as means of communication.

The second section discusses the topics of customer commitment and loyalty. These concepts include themes such as emotional connections between the customer and the brand, direct engagement potential according, brand advocacy, the notion of a switch from the “wisdom of crowds” to “the wisdom of friends” mentality, one-to-one marketing and learning relationships. Also, a connection between customer service and brand advocacy is examined in the context of integrated communication efforts both on social media channels and in actual company performance. Lastly, the theory of integration between customer experience and the social media channel is addressed. The aim is again to establish a directed communication effort which supports the brand’s strategy and is evident in its company practices and actions.

As a conclusion from all the theoretical investigation and the practical illustration and application of the framework on a modern day brand, the findings of the paper suggest that contemporary social media communication channels could provide invaluable help to the communication and marketing practitioners. Their aim is often to build a strong brand-customer connection which has been proven to establish long term brand loyalty and commitment – an aspiration for vast number of companies in today’s competitive market. However, it is very important to note that in order for a relationship of this type, between a brand and a customer, to be functional it has to provide benefits for both parties. Therefore, a friendship-like kind of connection is highly desirable because it promotes feelings of trust, honesty, confidence and mutual respect and understanding. Although not an easy task, having in mind the enormous spread and outreach of modern social media communication
channels, it might prove to be a brand communication effort well deserving of the time, dedication and consistency it requires.
6. Bibliography:

Books and articles


Buss, David M.; Craik, Kenneth H., The act frequency approach to personality, Psychological Review, Vol 90(2), Apr 1983, 105-126


Lindstrom, M (2008) Buyology – Truth and lies about why we buy, chapter 9


Mårtensson, R. (2008)

Internet sources


Huffman, K (11 November 2010) Do CMOs Really Understand the Value of Twitter


http://blog.itgovernance.co.uk/companies-struggle-to-address-social-media-risks/


http://blog.zuberance.com/blog/the-wisdom-of-friends-powers-brand-advocacy/

http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/brand-loyalty.html


http://twitaholic.com/TedRubin/

http://www.tedrubin.com/no-more-mixed-messages-integrate-social-media-marketing/

http://twitter.com/#!/TedRubin