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Driving electronic word of mouth on Facebook: a cross-national study

Wspieranie komunikacji nieformalnej w środowisku wirtualnym na Facebooku: ujęcie międzynarodowe

Abstract

There is a growing interest in marketing communications on social media and word of mouth. More and more companies operate in an international context. However, cross-cultural research on the relationship between marketing communications on social media and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is very scarce. By filling the research gap, the purpose of this study is to assess the influence of marketing communications on Facebook on eWOM in different countries. The results of content analysis of 1,040 Facebook posts show that 27% of the variance of eWOM is explained by the geographic market. This study allows a deeper understanding of marketing communication processes in the virtual environment and provides concrete guidelines on content having a positive influence on eWOM.

Keywords
marketing communications, social media, Facebook, electronic word of mouth, social media marketing, international marketing

Streszczenie

Zainteresowanie komunikacją marketingową w mediach społecznościowych i komunikacją nieformalną stale rośnie. Choć coraz więcej przedsiębiorstw działa w kontekście międzynarodowym, liczba badań dotyczących związku między komunikacją marketingową w mediach społecznościowych i komunikacją nieformalną w środowisku wirtualnym (eWOM) w ujęciu międzykulturowym jest nadal znikoma. Celem artykułu jest, wypełniając istniejącą lukę badawczą, ocena wpływu komunikacji marketingowej na Facebooku na eWOM w różnych krajach. Wyniki analizy treści 1040 postów na Facebooku wskazują, że rynek geograficzny wyjaśnia 27% wariancji eWOM. Niniejszy artykuł umożliwia głębsze zrozumienie procesów związanych z eWOM i dostarcza konkretnych wskazówek dotyczących treści mających pozytywny wpływ na komunikację nieformalną w tym środowisku.

Słowa kluczowe
komunikacja marketingowa, media społecznościowe, Facebook, komunikacja nieformalna w środowisku wirtualnym, social media marketing, marketing międzynarodowy

Introduction

The enormous potential of social media for marketing communications lies in people creating this type of media who informally exchange information about brands, products, services and organizations or, in other words, who spread electronic word of mouth (eWOM). The traditional modes of marketing communications appear to be losing effectiveness (Tkaczyk, 2013; Trusov et al., 2009) and the number of users of social media — fields of discussion on brands and products, is

constantly growing, thus marketers and scholars are particularly interested in understanding how to drive eWOM on social media (Chu & Kim, 2018; Morra et al., 2018). Thanks to its enormous reach and accessibility, eWOM has now an unprecedented ability to shape consumers' attitudes toward brands (Purnawirawan et al., 2012; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016) and to influence their buying decisions (Babić Rosario et al., 2016). Moreover, the COVID pandemic has been an important driver and accelerant of e-commerce and eWOM on social media. Prior academic research shows that eWOM on social media has an impact on company reputation (Balaji et al., 2016; Jones et al., 2009), sales (Babić Rosario et al., 2016; Kumar et al., 2013; You et al., 2015) and stock market performance (Schweidel & Moe, 2014; Tirunillai & Tellis, 2012). To benefit from its vital consequences, rather than hoping that consumers will spread positive opinions spontaneously, companies increasingly try to encourage eWOM (Eelen et al., 2017; Haenlein & Libai, 2017). Encouraging conversations among consumers is considered as a fast, cheap and, due to its credibility, an effective way to overcome consumer resistance to marketing communications (Mason, 2008; Purnawirawan et al., 2012; Trusov et al., 2009). Harnessing the potential of the digital environment for eWOM requires production of a "talkable" content (Kimmel & Kitchen, 2014). Although studies have already investigated what a "talkable" content is, the results of prior studies are largely inconclusive and many aspects require further investigation (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016).

Today's companies operate in an international context in which effective marketing communications in the digital environment requires a deep understanding of local cultures and the way they affect consumer behavior. The same technologies are used in different ways in different cultures. However, cross-cultural research on social media and eWOM is still scarce, specifically European markets have been scarcely addressed. In order to fill the research gap, the purpose of this paper is to assess the influence of marketing communications on Facebook on eWOM in different countries. Using Uses & Gratifications (U&G) theory as the background, in the following paragraphs, we explore the gratifications related to the different geographic markets, the appeal of marketing communications, and the brand type and verify how these variables influence the level of eWOM on social media. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework including the analyzed variables, relationships, the main research question, and specific hypotheses.

We subsequently explain the method used in this study (data used, operationalization of variables and coding) and its results. By using content analysis of a random sample including 1,040 Facebook posts, this study examines the actual behavior of consumers in the natural setting. The discussion of the results and the conclusion including the most important implications for marketing practice are provided at the end of this paper.

Theoretical background and hypotheses

Consumer behavior on social media and specifically eWOM can be explained on the basis U&G theory. According to this theory, media usage is driven by the psychological and social needs people seek to satisfy (Katz et al., 1999). Needs motivate people to use social media to obtain specific gratifications. In the current study, it is argued that eWOM on social media can be analyzed and explained based on individual motivations. Different motivations lead consumers to engage in eWOM on social media to a different extent. We expect that the more the content of marketing communications corresponds to the gratifications users seek, the stronger is its influence on eWOM. The common gratifications of spreading eWOM on social media and using Facebook emerging from the academic literature are self-expression/promotion, entertainment, and social interactions (Bernritter

Figure 1. Conceptual framework
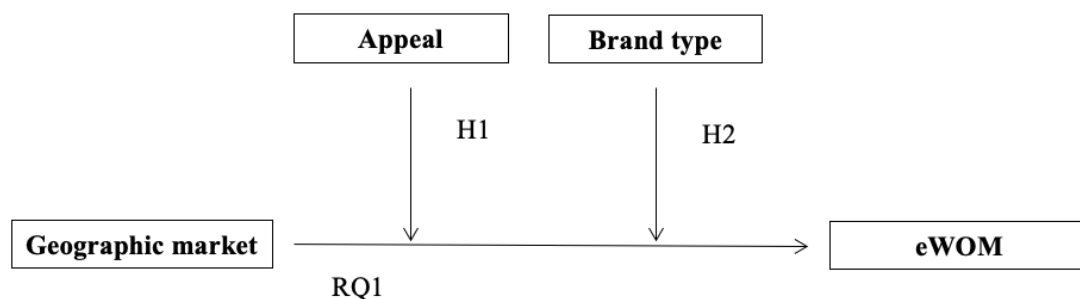
et al., 2017; De Vries et al., 2017; Rohm et al., 2013; Smock et al., 2011). Therefore, in this paper, these three gratifications, together with the results of prior studies, are used as the basis for the development of research hypotheses.

Geographic market

The level of eWOM in different countries is related to Hofstede's cultural dimensions of individualism/collectivism, long-/short-term orientation and power distance (Goodrich & de Mooij, 2014). Individualism/collectivism was also examined in GLOBE (2004) study and studies by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) and Minkov et al. (2017). Individualist cultures demonstrate an independent view of the self that emphasizes separateness, internal attributes and uniqueness of individuals, while collectivist cultures demonstrate an interdependent view of the self that emphasizes connectedness, social context and relationships (Aaker & Maheswaran, 1997). In other words, this dimension reflects the extent to which people are self-centered or group-oriented (Luo et al., 2014). Which gratifications of eWOM spreading on social media are the most relevant in different cultures? Respondents from collectivist cultures tend to perceive the Internet as a means for social interaction (Chau et al., 2002). Due to the expected gratifications of social interactions in collectivist cultures the level of eWOM (especially user comments) may be higher. In fact, in one of the few studies focused on the European market (France and UK), Posey, Lowry, Roberts, and Ellis (2010) confirm that the tendency toward collectivism increases self-disclosure in online communities. The higher participation in collectivist cultures is also confirmed by other studies showing that Chinese users (collectivist culture) engage in eWOM in social networks significantly more than their American counterparts (individualist culture) (Chu & Choi, 2011; Tsai & Men, 2017). However, the results of prior studies are not univocal. For instance, contrary to the studies mentioned above, Chung and Darke (2006) reveal that people from the individualist culture (Canada) spread more WOM than people from the collectivist culture (Singapore). Fong and Burton (2008) show that users of US online discussion boards are more likely to spread eWOM than users of Chinese discussion boards. Lai and County (2013) find that American customers are more likely to provide online product reviews than Chinese ones. Similarly, Bianchi (2021) shows that users in the US are more likely to share brand posts on Facebook than users in Poland. This may be related to another gratification — the higher need for self-expression/promotion in individualist cultures.

Users spread eWOM to express who they are and promote themselves on social media.

Reputation and status are also more prominent in image-conscious short-term oriented cultures (Goodrich & de Mooij, 2014; Hofstede et al., 2010) in which people may comment on brand posts to craft their image in online conversations or share posts to satisfy their need for self-promotion. The need for self-promotion is also particularly salient in cultures with high power distance in which social status is of crucial importance. Indeed, Lam, Lee, and Mizerski (2009) find that the more consumers value high power distance, the more they are likely to engage in WOM. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) add another cultural dimension that may be related to eWOM spreading: emotional neutrality/affectivity. In affective cultures, people are more likely to share their emotions with others (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998) and emotional release (for instance related to the satisfaction with a product or service) is one of the reasons why people spread eWOM on social media (Bianchi, 2021). According to most studies, the Polish culture is more collectivist (GLOBE, 2004; Hofstede et al., 2010; Minkov et al., 2017), more hierarchical (Hofstede et al., 2010; Schwartz, 2007) and more short-term oriented than the Italian culture (Hofstede et al., 2010). In Italy, users are more likely to comment on Facebook posts than in Poland (We Are Social, 2020b). Italy is one of the most individualist (Hofstede et al., 2010) and affective societies in Europe (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998). As shown in the Table 1, Italy and Poland show large score differences on scales measuring cultural dimensions, therefore we can expect eWOM to differ between Poland and Italy, but the relationship is not clear. Therefore:

RQ1: What is the difference between the influence of marketing communications on Facebook on eWOM in Poland and in Italy?

Table 1. Cultural dimensions — comparison between index values for Poland and Italy

Cultural dimension	POLAND	ITALY
Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov (2010)		
Individualism	60	76
Long-term orientation	38	61
Power distance	68	50
Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner (1998)		
Individualism	60	32
Emotional neutrality	70	33
Minkov et al. (2017)		
Individualism	–15	5

Marketing communication appeal

Rational appeal refers to rational, concrete, factual information on product benefits, functional attributes and applications. Although advertisers often use factual information (Heath & Stipp, 2011; Vakratsas & Ambler, 1999) to generate highly efficient central information processing (Hansen, 2005), this processing is not feasible in the real world where the attention of consumers is scarce (Hansen, 2005; Heath & Stipp, 2011). Emotional appeal refers to emotional and affect-based messages emphasizing symbolic and hedonic attributes of products, brand meaning and experiences. In recent studies (Luarn et al., 2015; Tafesse & Wien, 2018) a new, interactional type of appeal has been distinguished in the context of social media. Interactional appeal is aimed at driving consumer interactions and conversations. How are the appeals of marketing communications related to the gratifications of eWOM spreading on social media? Tafesse (2015) points out that the content of brand posts corresponds to the needs that users satisfy by using social media. Indeed, in line with U&G theory, the three types of marketing communication appeal seem to correspond to the common gratifications of eWOM on social media and using Facebook. Rational appeals of brand posts satisfy the need for information, emotional appeals are suited for self-expression/promotion and entertainment, while interactional brand posts facilitate social interactions.

The fit of post appeal to users' needs determines user response in terms of comments and shares (Tafesse & Wien, 2018). The common gratifications of spreading eWOM on social media and using Facebook are emotional rather than rational. McKay-Nesbitt, Manchanda, Smith, & Huhmann (2011) find that young adults recall emotional advertisements better than rational ones. Geuens, De Pelsmacker, & Faseur (2011) argue that "emotional ads outperform non-emotional ones in terms of the attitude towards the ad and the brand" (Geuens et al., 2011, p. 424). Based on the analysis of video advertisements shared on social media, Akpinar and Berger (2017) argue that video advertisements with an emotional appeal have a higher influence on the number of shares than those with an informative appeal. In a more recent study, Tellis et al. (2019) confirm that the informative appeal of video advertisements negatively influences sharing, while content that evokes positive emotions stimulates sharing. In the specific context of Facebook, Swani and Milne (2017) reveal that emotional appeals have a positive influence on the number of comments and find no evidence for the influence of functional appeals. Pletikosa Cvijikj and Michahelles (2013) find that an emotional appeal of communications has the largest effect on both user comments and shares. Luarn et al. (2015) show that on Facebook people are more likely to comment on and share entertaining brand posts than informative and remuneration brand posts. Similarly, Lee et al. (2018) find that emotional messages have a positive impact on the number of comments and shares, while informative messages have a negative impact. As mentioned before, the Italian culture is more individualist (Hofstede et al., 2010) and more affective than the Polish culture (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998), thus users in Italy may prefer emotional content which allows them to express who they are, how they feel and show their emotions to others. In the light of U&G theory, the underlying gratification of eWOM spreading on social media in this case is self--expression/promotion. Contrary to most pieces of evidence from the academic literature underlining the importance of emotional content, brand content providing information about products and sales promotions seems particularly relevant for Polish consumers (Ankiel & Stachowiak, 2016; Siuda, 2017). This may also be related to the emotional neutrality of the Polish culture — users are less likely to express their emotions by commenting or sharing emotional posts, the need for self-expression/promotion is less relevant in this culture. Therefore:

H1: In Poland, rational appeals of marketing communications on Facebook have a higher positive influence on eWOM than emotional appeals (H1a), while in Italy, emotional appeals of marketing communications on Facebook have a higher positive influence on eWOM than rational appeals (H1b).

Brand type

We still need to understand how the communication content of luxury brands on social media should differ from mass-market brands (Ko et al., 2019; Tafesse & Wien, 2017) and explore the influence of marketing communications of luxury brands on social media on consumer behavior in different cultures (Godey et al., 2016). Lovett, Peres and Shachar (2013) argue that premium brands generate a higher level of eWOM on social media than value brands. How is the brand type related to the gratifications of eWOM spreading on social media? On social media, people are more likely to share content that is unique, self-concept relevant and status-related (Berger, 2014). Self-expression and self-promotion are among the common gratifications of spreading eWOM on social media and using Facebook, and they are also the key motivations of consumer engagement with luxury brands on social media (Pentina et al., 2018). As self-expression on social media, luxury brand

consumption is positively influenced by narcissistic orientation (Kang & Park, 2016). Interesting results emerge from prior research on the motivations of luxury brand purchase in Western and Eastern countries. It seems that for Western consumers luxury is for themselves — personally oriented, often hedonic purchase motivations play a dominant role, while for Eastern consumers luxury is for others, it must be socially recognized and public (Phau & Prendergast, 2000; Wong & Ahuvia, 1998). Luxury has the function of creating social stratification (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009), thus it is particularly interesting to compare consumer behavior in high and low power-distance cultures. In high power-distance cultures hierarchy and status are particularly relevant. The need for self-promotion drives user behavior on social media. Conspicuous brands are used on Facebook to express consumers' ideal selves (Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012). Commenting on brands or sharing interesting brand messages on proper Facebook profile may contribute to one's perceived status and thus lead to user's self-enhancement within a reference group (Pentina et al., 2018; Wolny & Mueller, 2013). In sum, users form high--distance cultures (Poland) may spread eWOM on social media more than users from cultures with lower power-distance (Italy) to obtain status-related gratifications. Therefore:

H2: Marketing communications of luxury brands on Facebook have a higher positive influence on eWOM in Poland than in Italy.

Method

Data

With its global reach and the highest number of users, Facebook is now a key marketing communication channel (Malhotra et al., 2013; Shen et al., 2016; Statista, 2019). In order to obtain a high amount of data for the analysis and provide relevant insights for marketing practitioners, it was necessary to identify a product category in which eWOM is particularly important. In the cosmetic market women, who are more likely to spread eWOM (Phelps et al., 2004; We Are Social, 2020a), are the main target. Brand Finance's (2016) "50 Most Valuable Cosmetics Brands" and Deloitte (2018) "Global Powers of Luxury Goods" reports were used to identify mass-market and luxury cosmetic brands for the analysis. The selection criteria were the highest number of fans and the Facebook global brand page with separate pages for the Italian and Polish markets. The Facebook global brand page allows comparisons of eWOM as a response to highly standardized marketing communication in different geographic markets. The data were obtained from the official Facebook brand pages of eight cosmetic brands: four mass-market brands (Max Factor, Revlon, Rimmel London, Schwarzkopf) and four luxury brands (Clarins, Clinique, Guerlain, Lancôme), each of them in Italy and Poland. The sampling frame included all brand posts published on Facebook brand pages from June 1, 2017 to November 5, 2018. Through a systematic sampling, 65 brand posts were randomly selected from each brand's page in each country, leading to a final sample of 1,040 Facebook brand posts.

Operationalization of variables

The study applied Bianchi's (2021) classification of communication appeals including 12 categories of brand post appeals joined into three broad categories of marketing communication appeal. In this classification, rational appeals include brand posts on product characteristics, special offers, customer reviews, and external articles. Emotional appeals include posts focused on the brand, on celebrities, events and inspirational posts belong to this category. Interactive appeals include brand posts on contests, festivities, live transmissions, and posts soliciting user feedback.

In line with prior studies, eWOM was operationalized as the number of comments on and shares of a brand post. When a user comments on or shares a brand post, this post can appear in the news feeds of the user's friends (Chu, 2011; Kabadayi & Price, 2014). Therefore, commenting and sharing increase the reach and impact of brand posts. It is worth mentioning that the number of reactions, comments and shares on Facebook brand posts can be influenced by post promotion (sponsoring). The higher the investment, the higher the reach of the brand post (i.e., the number of people that see the post) and so the number of reactions, comments, and shares. The data on budget spend on each brand post is confidential and was not available for the analysis. However, it is clear that the more people see the post, the more they "react". The analysis of the sample used in this study confirmed a strong and statistically significant positive correlation ($r = .80$, $p < .001$) between the number of impressions (publicly available data for animations and videos) and the number of reactions. The number of reactions to a single post suggests the size of the audience it has reached. To exclude the influence of post promotion, in the current study the analysis of the dependent variable is based on indicators — comment rate (CR) and share rate (SR), calculated as follows:

$$CR = N_C/N_R \quad \text{(Eq. 1)}$$

$$SR = N_S/N_R \quad \text{(Eq. 2)}$$

where N_C is the number of comments on a brand post, N_S is the number of shares of a brand post, and N_R is the number of reactions to a brand post. The number of comments and shares was related to the size of the audience also in prior studies (Dhaoui, 2014; Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013).

Furthermore, other variables that could affect the level of eWOM as marketing communication form (image, animation, video), product category and day of the week were controlled.

Coding

To assure objectivity in content classification, brand posts used in the current study were coded manually by both the first author and two independent coders (female graduate students) that worked separately, were not aware of the research hypotheses and coded the content on the basis of strict rules for content classification. As underlined by Kim & Yang (2017), in a content analysis of brand posts, manual coding is more accurate than automated coding, due to the human ability of capturing message features and the nuanced use of language. The proportional reduction in loss (PRL) reliability measure used in this study takes into account the possibility of random agreement, can be used for both qualitative and quantitative data as well as for more than two coders (Rust & Cooil, 1994). This measure was used also in prior similar studies (Hershberger et al., 2003; Swani et al., 2014; Wagner et al., 2017). In the current study, the PRL of 0.94 calculated on the full sample indicated a very high level of measurement objectivity.

Results

Rational appeals were used most frequently being dominant in 58% of all brand posts. Emotional appeals were dominant in 24% and interactional appeals in 18% of the analyzed posts. No statistically significant differences were found between the frequency of marketing communication appeals between mass-market and luxury brands. Interactional appeals were used more frequently in Poland (where they accounted for 22% of brand posts) than in Italy (where they accounted for 14% of brand posts). Posts on special offers and contests were used more frequently in Poland. External articles, posts using celebrities and posts on events were more frequent in Italy.

As the independent variables were of a nominal scale and the dependent variables (comment rate and share rate) conceptually related were of a ratio scale, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to answer the research question and to test the hypotheses. In order to normalize the data, the comment rate and share rate were log-transformed.

MANOVA was performed on 474 brand posts for which the data were available for both log-transformed comment and share rates. It confirmed significant results for all independent variables — geographic market: $F_{(2, 471)} = 85.801$, $p = .000$, Pillai's Trace .267, $\eta^2 = .267$; marketing communication appeal: $F_{(4, 942)} = 13.318$, $p = .000$, Pillai's Trace .107, $\eta^2 = .054$ and brand type: $F_{(2, 471)} = 5.882$, $p = .003$, Pillai's Trace .024, $\eta^2 = .024$. Notably, while only 2–5% of the variance of eWOM in the sample is explained by marketing communication appeal or brand type, 26.7% is explained by the geographic market.

Furthermore, the data were analyzed by univariate analyses of variance (ANOVAs) which allowed examination of the influence of the independent variables on each dependent variable on a larger sample. The analysis was performed on 573 brand posts for which the data was available for the log-transformed comment rate and 764 brand posts for which the data was available for the log--transformed share rate. The results of the ANOVAs are summarized in Table 2.

As far as the influence of the geographic market (RQ1) is concerned, the results of the ANOVA revealed a significant result for the comment rate: $F_{(1, 571)} = 15.597$, $p = .000$. The comment rate is significantly higher for the Polish market (M = –2.98, SD = 1.14) than for the Italian market (M = –3.35, SD = 1.08). Furthermore, there is a statistically significant difference in case of the share rate: $F_{(1, 762)} = 187.749$, $p = .000$. Interestingly, the effect is the opposite of the one found for the comment rate. The share rate is significantly higher for the Italian market (M = –2.11, SD = 1.1) than for the Polish market (M = –3.27, SD = 1.22).

Regarding the influence of the appeal of marketing communications (H1), in both countries the results were significant for the comment rate only: Poland $F_{(2, 301)} = 8.429$, $p = .000$, Italy $F_{(2, 266)} = 12.679$, $p = .000$. In Poland, post-hoc Tukey HSD test revealed that the comment rate is significantly higher for emotional (M = –2.80, SD = 1.00, p = .026) and interactional appeal (M = –2.62, SD = 1.21, p = .000) than for rational appeal (M = –3.22, SD = 1.11), therefore H1a is not supported. The influence of emotional appeals on eWOM (comment rate) is higher than the influence of rational appeals. In Italy, post-hoc Games-Howell test showed that the comment rate is significantly higher for interactional appeal (M = –2.68, SD = 1.31)

Table 2. ANOVA results

	POLAND						ITALY					
	comment rate			share rate			comment rate			share rate		
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
Geographic market	F = 15.597***			F = 187.749***			F = 15.597***			F = 187.749***		
	304	−2.98	1.14	305	−3.27	1.22	269	−3.35	1.08	459	−2.11	1.1
Sign. differences at p < .05	I<P			P<I			I<P			P<I		
Appeal	F = 8.429***			F = 1.754			F = 12.679***			F = 2.697		
Rational	161	−3.22	1.11	172	−3.34	1.23	150	−3.38	.94	273	−2.06	1.07
Emotional	68	−2.80	1.00	71	−3.03	1.15	75	−3.66	1.02	118	−2.06	1.22
Interactional	75	−2.62	1.21	62	−3.33	1,22	44	−2.68	1.31	68	−2.37	.97
Sign. differences at p < .05	R<I, R<E			—			R<I, E<I			—		
Brand type	F = 8.742***			F = .348			F = .012			F = .163		
Mass–market	166	−2.80	1.24	140	−3.31	1.41	111	−3.34	1.06	221	−2.03	1.21
Luxury	138	−3.18	.95	165	−3.22	1.02	158	−3.35	1.09	238	−2.18	.97
Sign. differences at p < .05	L<M			—			—			—		

Note. n = sample size, M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, comment and share rates are log-transformed, ***p < .01

than for emotional (M = –3.66, SD = 1.02, p = .000) and rational (M = –3.38, SD = .94, p = .005) appeals. Therefore, H1b is not supported. In Italy, there is no significant difference between the influence of emotional and rational appeals on eWOM (comment rate).

As far as the influence of the brand type on eWOM is concerned, significant differences related to the comment rate were found only in Poland: F (1, 302) = 8.742, p = .003. In Poland, the comment rate for mass-market brands is significantly higher than the comment rate for luxury brands. ANOVA of luxury brand posts revealed a significant difference between the two countries for the share rate F (1, 401) = 108.169, p = .000, however contrary to the expectations marketing communications of luxury brands on Facebook have a higher positive influence on the share rate in Italy than in Poland, thus H2 is not supported.

Discussion

The results of this study confirm that the influence of marketing communications on Facebook on eWOM varies according to geographic markets. The comment rate is significantly higher for the Polish market than for the Italian market. In high power-distance cultures people are more likely to engage in eWOM on social media than people in a low power-distance cultures. In a more collectivist, Polish culture (Hofstede et al., 2010) the need for social interactions may be particularly relevant. The highest comment rate for mass--market brands in Poland further supports this explanation. Users are more likely to comment on posts of brands that are accessible to a broader group of people that can add further comments. The higher share rate in the Italian market may be related to a more individualist society in which users are more likely to express their uniqueness and share brand posts to satisfy their need for self--expression/promotion. In fact, Pagani, Goldsmith, and Hofacker (2013) reveal that self-identity expressiveness of the Italian users has a positive impact on the active use of social media.

Contrary to expectations, the use of an emotional appeal had a positive influence on the comment rate in Poland and a negative influence in Italy. In Poland, emotional appeals drive more comments than rational appeals, while the differences between the two types of appeals are not significant in Italy. The results highlight the important role of interactional appeals in driving eWOM. In both countries, interactional appeals drive more user comments than (the most often

used) rational appeals. These appeals may allow users to satisfy the need for social interactions. Interactional posts often include questions and users reply to them by commenting on posts. Both the content of interactional brand posts and the act of commenting can also be a source of entertainment.

Furthermore, the findings show that the effect of the brand type on eWOM is statistically significant for the comment rate only. Contrary to expectations, in Poland, the comment rate is significantly higher for mass-market brands than for luxury brands. The possible explanation of this finding is that in a more collectivist country, users may be more likely to talk about common ground topics (Berger, 2014). Expressing opinions on products that are more accessible can drive conversations with a broader group of consumers satisfying the need for social interactions. Furthermore, in catholic countries, ostentatious display of hedonic goods may not be seen positively (Stępień & Mruk, 2018), thus it may be the same with commenting on and sharing luxury brand content. The higher share rate of luxury brand posts in Italy, than in Poland may be related to the fact that in Italy luxury brands are more recognizable and appreciated as part of the national heritage, thus people are proud to share their content.

Conclusions

This study replies to the call for content-level analyses in social networks (Bernritter et al., 2017; Ketelaar et al., 2016; Tafesse & Wien, 2017) including luxury brands (Dhaoui, 2014; Godey et al., 2016; Üçok Hughes et al., 2016) in an international context (Bartosik-Purgat, 2018; Farías, 2017; Wagner et al., 2017). The main contribution of this study to the development of marketing communication theory is related to the cross-cultural examination of the influence of marketing communication on social media on eWOM. To date, there was only one study dealing with this topic. Furthermore, the current study provides an empirical verification of brand post appeal classification proposed by Bianchi (2021) which, in comparison to prior classifications, is rooted in the theory and allows a more exhaustive and detailed classification of brand posts. Last but not least, this study suggests that commenting and sharing are driven by different motivations which leads to consequences for both research (the two behaviors should be analyzed separately) and marketing practice.

Practical implications

As far as the practice is concerned, firstly, this study shows that marketing communications content driving comments is different from the one driving shares and suggests that in some geographic markets it is easier to obtain eWOM effects by leveraging on user comments and in others on user shares. Secondly, the study shows that the choice of the geographic market is of crucial importance. 27% of the variance of eWOM is explained by the geographic market. Thirdly, the results of this study suggest that, in order to exploit the potential of social media and obtain eWOM effects, marketing communications on social media should include more interactional appeals (especially contests and live transmissions). Finally, this paper provides marketers with explanations of consumers' behavior and concrete guidelines on communication content to be used on social media. Marketing practitioners should provide content that will allow consumers to satisfy their needs for self-expression/promotion, entertainment and social interactions. Specifically, marketers in Poland seem to underestimate the importance of emotional appeals. Posts on events and those using celebrities should be used more often. In Italy, brand posts on contests are very rare (1% of all brand posts), their more frequent use would allow obtaining higher eWOM effects.

Limitations and further research

Unavoidably this study has some limitations. First of all, only one industry and two countries were examined, thus the results may not hold in other industries and countries. Secondly, although, by definition, WOM is an informal way of communication between consumers and comments of companies (e.g., beauty shops) were excluded from the analysis, it is not possible to exclude that some of the users commenting and sharing brand posts could work for the company. However, the sizes of the analyzed sample, as well as the examination of different brands, increase confidence in the research findings. Thirdly, the subjectivity related to the chosen research method cannot be totally excluded. Last but not least, the common gratifications expected from spreading eWOM on social media and using Facebook used as the basis for explanations of consumer behavior are drawn from prior studies and have not been empirically tested.

Examination of gratifications expected and obtained from spreading eWOM on Facebook (and social media in general) including the differences between mass-market and luxury brands as well as

different countries and cultures is an interesting topic for further research. Specifically, it would be interesting to explore the relationship between cultural dimensions and two different user behaviors — commenting and sharing brand content on social media. A study including luxury brands may provide particularly interesting results due to their relevance for self-promotion. Researchers may also replicate the current study in other countries where there are large differences on cultural dimensions. It would be also interesting to gather data from other industries and types of social media to see whether the results still hold. In sum, there are numerous issues that provide fruitful and exciting areas for further research.

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Dr Anna Bianchi

Adiunkt na Wydziale Zarządzania Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego i doświadczony ekspert ds. marketingu. Od 15 lat opracowuje i wdraża strategie komunikacji marketingowej dla międzynarodowych marek. Pracowała w Polsce, Włoszech i w Stanach Zjednoczonych zarówno w dziale marketingu, jak i w agencji reklamowej. Jako międzynarodowy specjalista w obszarze marketingu internetowego i w mediach społecznościowych prowadziła projekty, które były wielokrotnie nagradzane. Jej badania naukowe i publikacje koncentrują się na mediach społecznościowych i komunikacji nieformalnej. Jest przedsiębiorcą, doradcą biznesowym oraz trenerem prowadzącym zajęcia na temat innowacyjnej komunikacji marketingowej zarówno dla studentów uczelni wyższych, jak i pracowników działów marketingu.

Prof. dr hab. Grzegorz Karasiewicz

Full Professor, Dean and Head of the Marketing Department, at the Faculty of Management, University of Warsaw. He is a PMD program graduate of Harvard Business School. He actively cooperates with business practice, developing and implementing training projects for many international brands. He is the author of numerous publications on international marketing, marketing strategy, pricing, retail, and assessment of the effects of marketing (sales) decisions.

Prof. dr hab. Grzegorz Karasiewicz

Dziekan Wydziału Zarządzania Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego i Kierownik Katedry Marketingu na tym Wydziale od 2003 roku. Absolwent Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego oraz Harvard Business School. Przewodniczący Rady Naukowej miesięcznika „Marketing i Rynek". Jego zainteresowania naukowe koncentrują się na następujących obszarach tematycznych: strategie internacjonalizacji przedsiębiorstw, decyzje cenowe przedsiębiorstw, zmiany strukturalne w handlu detalicznym i ocena efektów działań marketingowych.
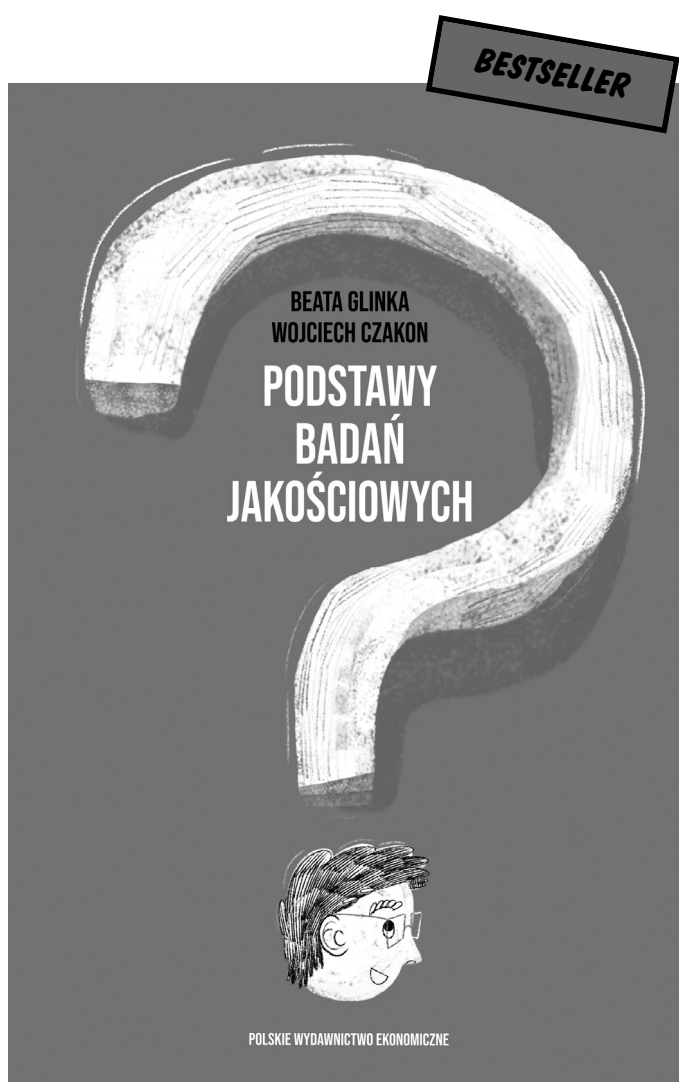
PWE POLECA

W ostatnich latach w polskich i światowych badaniach prowadzonych w obszarze nauk o zarządzaniu i obszarach pokrewnych wyraźnie zauważalny jest wzrost popularności metod jakościowych. Coraz szersze grono badaczy dochodzi do wniosku, że do opisu i zrozumienia dynamicznego, często niejednoznacznego świata konieczne jest wyjście poza ramy istniejących teorii i hipotez. Taką właśnie możliwość oferują badania jakościowe, które ze swej natury dobrze nadają się do opisu tego, co zmienne, a także tego, co subiektywne. Badania jakościowe w wielu środowiskach ciągle jeszcze nie są uznawane i legitymizowane na równi z badaniami ilościowymi. Ta sytuacja zmienia się, ale nadal pokutuje wiele stereotypów, które umniejszają postrzeganą wartości badań jakościowych. Prezentowana publikacja ma się przyczynić do upowszechniania wiedzy na temat prowadzenia badań jakościowych oraz doskonalenia praktyki badań jakościowych, a przez to do zmiany tych stereotypów.

Po więcej informacji zapraszamy na stronę PWE: www.pwe.com.pl