SOCIAL MEDIA IN TODAY'S WORLD

Nowadays, social media are an extremely important and flexible channel through which companies can contact the customers. This is where information on the current promotions, events, or new products are published. The more effectively this tool is used, the greater the need for comprehensive analysis of the users' feedback.

Nowadays, social media are a source of vast quantities of information, they constitute an important channel of interpersonal communication, exchange of thoughts, beliefs, opinions; they also set new trends. The scale of this phenomenon is best reflected with numbers. Currently over one billion people around the world use social networks (over 50% of all the internet users). Every minute, over 700,000 new statuses and 0.5 million comments appear on Facebook, and every day the users give over 4,5 billion "likes". The second most popular social website, that is Twitter, has 500 million users who generate half a billion tweets every day. Many people make decisions based on these comments and tweets. They have a great confidence in the opinions found online, they believe, in a way aptly, that a product assessment made by another customer presents the truth about the product better than an advertisement or the manufacturer's description. Possibility of monitoring and fast responding to the customers' opinions published online is a dream of numerous companies.

Enterprises want to supervise the online flow of information about them, as more and more companies start using this sort of solutions to popularize their product or to communicate with the customers. According to information provided by Facebook, over 16 million companies have their profile on this site, which constitutes a 100% increase compared to the previous year. At this time, it is worth to cite the Gartner's forecast, according to which by 2015 people in every second instance will identify a brand based on its profile in the social media. This means that in half of the cases they will first learn about a company via Facebook or YouTube, not through TV, radio or press. Currently, this value comes to 5%. This forecast provides a certain view on the expert predictions regarding increase in the role that the social media play in the activities of companies and the reception their image.

16 million

that many companies currently have a Facebook profile

Company **and social media**

Currently, social media provide a platform through which companies can inform their customers about on-going promotions, events, or new products. Companies create new positions the main responsibility of which is to maintain the company profile on Facebook or Twitter. This shows how much weight is attached to this sort of information channels. Nonetheless, posting new information and analysis of the users' feedback are two different affairs. Frequently, great number of comments and threads make the number of people required to make such an analysis much greater than the one needed to moderate the profile in the social media. A company fanpage is a platform which features information about the brand, individual products, marketing or sales campaigns, or new products launched. On the other hand, the users provide a great amount of feedback, by commenting individual posts. This generates a huge and complex data set, which carries a great deal of information. Currently, tools which analyse this data are available in the market and they provide the companies with measurable benefits. Data for such systems may originate from various sources: from social websites, such as Facebook, blogs, discussion boards, microblogs such as Twitter, to surveys and questionnaires. In view of the mass of information published online, automation of the content analysis gives the companies a powerful tool and allows them to save both time and money.

Case **study**

The study begins from collecting information about the profiles of the people who express their opinions. It is possible to know the age group and sex of the most active commentators. Apart from the number of comments itself, it is possible to check whether they were positive or negative. By tracking this sort of information, the company is able to better plan its future activities, addressing its marketing to a specific group of custom-

ers who have positive attitude to the brand. On the other hand, an appropriate campaign, making use of means intended to improve the company image, may be launched at the most sceptical users.

Another useful functionality of the social media analysis tools is the option of following individual users and comments, allowing to sort them by specific criteria. Some applications, including Comarch Social Intelligence, automatically assess the overtone of each opinion and comment posted by the user, storing the result in the form of analyses. As part of short-term improvement of customer relations, the employees of the company may find the most negative comments and reply to them. In turn, it is worth to win the most fervent critics of brand to one's own side. Merely taking an interest in such a person's comment has a very positive impact on the user's reception and perception of the brand.

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Apart from observing the customers' opinions on more general matters, such as their view on the company or particular brand, the PR experts also follow the reactions to specific events. Such events include, for instance, a new advertising campaign, launching of a new product or introduction of a new type of promotion. One should remember that it is the social media that provide the most immediate feedback on the customers' reception of a new event. Moreover, through boards and social websites opinions of several users are the source of information and indirectly form the opinion of other potential customers. That is why it is so important to quickly react to disapproving opinions of the internet users as soon as they appear. Recently the banks started to employ well-known faces from the media world to appear in their commercials in order to promote the

brand. In some cases, this practice met with a negative reception, which could be seen in the comments, virtually right after the new series of commercials was aired. It is likely that the banks in question never monitored the internet and failed to withdraw these campaigns; as a result, they spent a lot of money for advertisements which had the opposite effect from what was intended. Had the banks used all the possibilities of social media solutions, they would have quickly and easily discovered that the promotional campaign failed to bring any results. Entries on Facebook appear in a flash, people systematically comment the news they observe, making it possible to moderate a negative reception of the campaign from the very start, or to use the social media to win the users over to one's idea, and to guide the opinions appropriately. This is possible at the initial stage, as what occurs later on is the "snowball" effect, where a single opinion is repeated by more and more people, and any attempts to stop the users from criticizing are only making the matter worse.

Analysing data published on social websites using the social media survey tools, the user may specify which posts were the most popular, and on what days, or at which times of the day, did the most entries appear. This allows the user to see what is the best time for posting new information in the company's profile and once the information has been published, they can observe for how long it arouses the recipients' interest.

Some tools for social media analysis, e.g. Comarch Social Intelligence may be quickly adapted to other purposes. For instance, they can function as the first line of verifying messages in the Help Desk systems. Analysis of words included in the incoming e-mail allows its automatic classification into an appropriate group, whereupon in can be forwarded to a specific consultant. This speeds up the customer service time and allows to reduce the internal message traffic.

Prospects **for the future**

The above-mentioned example of alternative use of the social media analysis tools shows how flexible these solutions are. The social media evolve very dynamically: in this domain, significant changes, new technologies and applications appear every month, week by week. As a result, the social media analysis tools also must evolve and adapt to the market realities. This is a task which the developers of these solutions will most certainly manage, as the demand for such analysis tools is very high. The companies have finally recognized the benefits offered by using the internet for promotions, data collection, monitoring of the customers' feeling, or many other areas of corporate activities. Thus, they will certainly generate more and more demand, issue new challenges. This guarantees that the social media analysis tools will be increasingly abounding with functionalities and will even better react to the users' needs. The internet gave companies a unique chance to streamline their business operations, and they finally started to take this opportunity.

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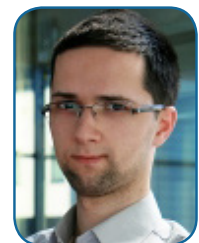
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