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The Influence of Marketing Communication in Social Media on Electronic Word-of-Mouth

Doctoral Dissertation

ABSTRACT

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1. Dissertation topic justification

1.1. Marketing communications

Marketing communication is a dialogue between a company and its environment – current and potential customers and other stakeholders (Bajdak, 2013). With the advent of mass media, advertising has become the key form of marketing communications (Kotler & Keller, 2012; Wiktor, 2013) and the number of advertising messages has started to grow exponentially. The constant growth of marketing communication expenditure and the number of advertising messages leads to a constant **decrease in advertising effectiveness** and a constant increase in spending to make it effective (Godin, 1999; van den Putte, 2009). As Godin (1999, p. 38) sums up: "The more they spend, the less it works. The less it works, the more they spend". "A wealth of information creates a poverty of attention" (Simon, 1971, p. 40). Moreover, prior research on advertising highlights a **decline of trust** (Godes et al., 2005) and **negative attitudes toward advertising** among consumers (Internet Standard, 2012; Szubra & Trojanowski, 2018; Taranko, 2018). Therefore, **one of the major challenges for marketers today is to find a new way to capture people's attention and position a brand in the consumers' mind** (Kotler, 2012).

How can this major challenge highlighted by Kotler be addressed on the basis of existing theories in marketing and communication research? Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory is deemed particularly relevant in this case because it assumes the active role of consumers that volitionally decide to participate in the communication process. Furthermore, the U&G theory is functionalist in its approach, thus likely to develop general guidelines and concrete problem-solving ideas applicable in the marketing practice (Morgan, 1984). U&G theory is "one of the most influential theories in the field of communication research" (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 26), considered to be the most appropriate theory to explain why people choose specific media (Ruggiero, 2000; Shao, 2009). This theory is particularly suited for the study of the Internet (Johnson & Kaye, 2003; Stafford, Stafford, & Schkade, 2004) and has been widely employed to examine why and how people use social media (Lee & Ma, 2012; Wagner, Baccarella, & Voigt, 2017; Whiting & Williams, 2013). Diverging from other media effect theories that examine "what do the media do to people", this approach is focused on "what do people do with the media", thus providing an insight into functions served by a specific medium or content (Katz, 1959, p. 2). According to the U&G theory, media usage is guided

by psychological and social needs people seek to satisfy (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1999). The needs motivate audiences to use specific media, in order to obtain specific gratifications.

Over the past decades, the media have experienced a huge transformation. With the growing reach of the Internet, that in January 2019 registered 4,388 billion users (We Are Social, 2019), **the importance of online communications grows year on year** (IAB Europe, 2018; Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Moorman, 2018). At both the European and the global level, the Internet is the medium with the highest share in advertising spending and the highest growth rate (Grece, 2017; Zenith, 2019). Prior research suggests that information and entertainment are the most relevant gratifications in the online environment (Polański, 2017).

This finding is related to another model that provides a theoretical background for the study, namely the elaboration likelihood model (ELM). ELM is a theory of persuasion - a communication-induced attitude change, developed in the 1980s by Richard Petty and John Cacioppo. It proposes two different "routes to persuasion" related to different ways of information processing. Under the "central route" (or in central information processing) persuasion occurs as a result of "a person's careful and thoughtful consideration of the true merits of the information" (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986, p. 125), it requires high cognitive effort and occurs when the information recipient has a high motivation and ability to process the information. On the other hand, under the "peripheral route" (or in peripheral information processing) persuasion occurs "as a result of some simple cue in the persuasion context (e.g. an attractive source)" (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986, p. 125), it requires low cognitive effort and occurs when the information recipient has a low motivation and ability to process the information (Cacioppo & Petty, 1984). Information gratification can be the most relevant when users are able and want to process the information, while in the opposite case, entertainment gratifications may be expected.

The interactive nature of the Web creates an entirely new environment that changes the traditional parameters of mass communication. Hoffman & Novak (1996) explain this media transformation by showing the evolution from a traditional one-to-many marketing communications model for mass media and an interpersonal communication model in the computer-mediated environment to a new model of many-to-many marketing communications in a hypermedia computer-mediated environment where users co-create

content (Figure 1). Both consumers (C) and firms (F) can interact with the medium (e.g., navigate the Internet) and provide content to the medium.

Figure 1. New model of marketing communications in a hypermedia computer-mediated environment
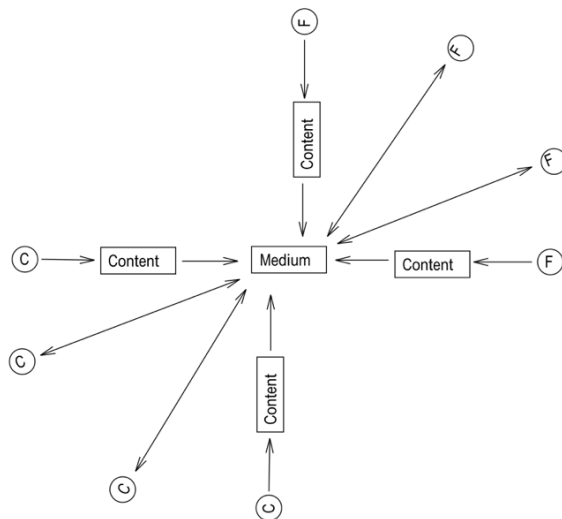
Source: reprinted from Hoffman and Novak (1996, p. 7)

Content co-creation is at the basis of the concept of Web 2.0 - "innovative trends in the use of World Wide Web technology which are mainly focused on creation of virtual communities and passing control over content to the Internet users" (Mazurek, 2009, p. 69).

1.2. Social media

Kaplan & Haenlein (2010, p. 61) define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content". Social media transform broadcast media monologues (one-to-many) in dialogues (many-to-many) and individuals from mere consumers of content in content creators (Reyneke, Pitt, & Berthon, 2011; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016; Smith & Gallicano, 2015). **The number of users and the frequency of social media usage grow every year** (eMarketer, 2016; Królewski & Sala, 2016; Statista, 2017). In January 2019, active social media users reached 3.48 billion people, i.e., 45% of the global population and 79% of global Internet users (We Are Social, 2019). Social networks are the most used type of social media (Parzonko, 2015). With 2.27 billion monthly active users Facebook is the third most visited website worldwide (Similarweb, 2019; Statista, 2019). Information, entertainment, social interactions, and self-status seeking

are the main gratifications of using social media (GlobalWebIndex, 2018; Lee & Ma, 2012; Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009).

The importance of social media for marketing grows year on year. They accounted for 12% of marketing budgets in February 2018 and are expected to expand by 71% in the next five years (Moorman, 2018; Szewczyk, 2015). **Social media are considered to be an essential element in marketing communications** (A. Kumar, Bezawada, Rishika, Janakiraman, & Kannan, 2016; Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Wiktor, 2013) that influences brand awareness, brand image and product sales (Brzozowska-Woś, 2013; Facebook, 2018; Skowron & Skrzetuski, 2015). Almost **40% of Internet users follow brands on social media** (GlobalWebIndex, 2018; Universal McCann, 2017) and **42% of Internet users search for information on products and brands in social media** (GlobalWebIndex, 2018)**.** However, people use social media also to talk about brands.

1.3. Word-of-mouth

Today, the advertising clutter, the relentless flow of advertising messages from offline and online media creates an informational noise in which people get lost. In consequence, when looking for advice on purchase decisions, consumers turn to each other (Kimmel & Kitchen, 2014; Plummer, 2007). Word-of-mouth (WOM) **is perceived as the most trustworthy source of information** (Chu & Kim, 2011; Mangold & Faulds, 2009; The Nielsen Company, 2015). Drawing on extant definitions, in the current study WOM is defined as informal, interpersonal communication between two or more individuals about a brand, product, service or an organization. It is agreed upon in academic literature that WOM has a **much greater impact on consumers than traditional modes of marketing communication** (King, Racherla, & Bush, 2014; Packard & Berger, 2017; Trusov, Bucklin, & Pauwels, 2009). Numerous studies confirm the positive impact of WOM on product awareness (Engel, Blackwell, & Kegerreis, 1969; Sheth, 1971), consumer expectations (Anderson & Salisbury, 2003), pre-usage attitudes (Day, 1971; Godes & Mayzlin, 2004; Herr, Kardes, & Kim, 1991), post-usage judgements (Bone, 1995; Burzynski & Bayer, 1977; Senecal & Nantel, 2004) and sales (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Dellarocas, Zhang, & Awad, 2007; Godes & Mayzlin, 2009).

By facilitating and accelerating the diffusion of information, the advent of the **Internet and social media has broadened the reach of WOM** (Chu & Kim, 2018; De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008; Ertimur & Gilly, 2012). Currently the term "word-of-mouth" includes a more common traditional (offline) word-of-mouth and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), also referred to as "word-of-mouse" (Brown, Broderick, & Lee, 2007; Kimmel & Kitchen, 2014; Steffes & Burgee, 2009). According to a novel definition provided in this study, eWOM is an informal, interpersonal, and Internet-mediated communication between two or more individuals about a brand, product, service or an organization. Consumers spread eWOM on social media in various ways, for instance by posting reviews or ratings on review sites and blogs, participating in discussions in online communities, commenting and sharing brand content on social networks or creating user-generated advertising (Berthon, Pitt, & Campbell, 2008). The personal nature of social networks makes them particularly relevant for eWOM. Information in a social network is more trustworthy as it comes from identifiable, known sources (Chu & Choi, 2011; Chu & Kim, 2018; Hennig-Thurau, Wiertz, & Feldhaus, 2015).

Given its enormous reach and accessibility, eWOM has now an unprecedented ability to influence buying decisions. Academic literature to date shows that eWOM in social media helps consumers to make more informed purchase decisions (King et al., 2014; Senecal & Nantel, 2004). eWOM in social media influences consumer attitudes toward brands (Doh & Hwang, 2009; Purnawirawan, De Pelsmacker, & Dens, 2012; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). It makes consumers more convinced that a product or service meets their needs and preferences (Clemons & Gao, 2008), trust the seller (Awad & Ragowsky, 2008; Ladhari & Michaud, 2015; Mazzucchelli et al., 2018), thus making the consumers more willing to pay higher prices (Ba & Pavlou, 2002; Clemons & Gao, 2008; Pavlou & Dimoka, 2006).

From the companies' perspective, prior studies show that eWOM in social media has an impact on reputation (Balaji, Khong, & Chong, 2016; Dellarocas, 2003; Jones, Temperley, & Lima, 2009), sales (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Gopinath, Thomas, & Krishnamurthi, 2014; Liu, 2006) and stock market performance (Schweidel & Moe, 2014; Tirunillai & Tellis, 2012). Prior research suggests that among social media, social networks are perceived as the most impactful on a company's performance (Moorman, 2018).

In order to benefit from its important consequences, rather than hoping that consumers will spread positive opinions spontaneously, **companies increasingly try to manage and**

encourage both traditional WOM and eWOM (Barreto, 2014; Godes & Mayzlin, 2009; Haenlein & Libai, 2017). Word-of-mouth marketing "finds ways to engage customers so they choose to talk with others about products, services, and brands." (Kotler & Keller, 2012, p. 562). It is about giving people a reason to talk about a brand, product, service or an organization, and making it easier for conversations to take place. Encouraging WOM is considered as a fast, cheap and, due to its credibility, an effective way to overcome consumer resistance to marketing communication (Notarantonio & Quigley, 2009; Purnawirawan et al., 2012; Trusov et al., 2009).

The scope of this study (Figure 2) is related to the examination of how the hypermedia content provided by the firm to the medium (distributed computer network) influences eWOM - the additional content consumers provide.

Figure 2. Scope of the study
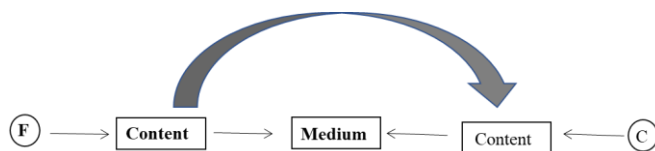
Source: own elaboration

1.4.   Research gap

In view of the decreasing effectiveness of traditional modes of marketing communication (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Tkaczyk, 2013; Trusov et al., 2009) and the growing importance of personal sources of information on social media, the understanding of how electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) can be influenced by marketing communication in social media becomes crucial. This issue, scarcely investigated in academic literature, attracts the attention of both academics and marketing practitioners. The review of the extant literature on marketing communications, social media and word-of-mouth in this study includes 303 articles from academic journals. Two hundred forty-five of these articles (81%) were published within the last 15 years. Furthermore, the review has been enriched by 25 books, one lecture and 37 web sources for a total of 366 references (of 537 used in the entire study).

It allowed identification of some important research gaps the study aims to address:

A. Influence of marketing communication form and appeal on eWOM in social networks

B. eWOM and marketing communication effects in social networks in different product categories

C. Marketing communications of luxury brands on social media in an international context

D. Differences between countries in social media usage and eWOM

It is worth mentioning that European markets have been scarcely addressed in marketing literature on social media and WOM. Specifically, only 26 articles providing empirical research findings from the Polish market and 18 articles from the Italian market have been identified suggesting a significant research gap. Moreover, in many of these studies, there is a lack of theoretical background and some methodological issues that cast doubts on research findings (e.g., sample bias, response bias, lack of validity and reliability verification, lack of an appropriate statistical analysis). Furthermore, in neither of the two markets studies examining the influence of marketing communication in social media on eWOM have been identified.

2. Problem statement and hypotheses

By filling the research gap, the **purpose of this study is to assess the influence of marketing communication in social media on eWOM**.

Specifically, **the main research problem of the study is to understand how marketing communication in social networks influences eWOM while considering the:**
- **communication form (image, animation, video)**
- **communication appeal (rational, emotional)**
- **brand type (mass-market, luxury)**
- **geographic market (Poland, Italy)**

The main research problem requires specific questions to be answered:
1) How does the form of marketing communication in social networks influence eWOM?
2) How does marketing communication appeal in social networks influence eWOM?

3) How does marketing communications of mass-market and luxury brands in social networks influence eWOM?

4) What are the differences between the influence of marketing communication appeal in social networks on eWOM for mass-market and luxury brands?

5) What are the differences between the influence of marketing communication appeal in social networks on eWOM within the Polish and Italian markets?

The common gratifications expected of spreading eWOM on social media and using social networks emerging from the literature are self-expression/promotion, entertainment and social interactions. These common gratifications are used for the development of the research hypotheses in the study. On the basis of the academic literature review, the following hypotheses are stated:

- **H1**: *Marketing communication in social networks using videos has the highest while using images has the lowest positive influence on eWOM.*

- **H2**: *Emotional appeal of marketing communication in social networks has a higher positive influence on eWOM than rational appeal.*

- **H3**: *Marketing communication in social networks has a higher positive influence on eWOM for luxury brands than for mass-market brands.*

- **H4**: *For luxury brands emotional appeal of marketing communication in social networks has a higher positive influence on eWOM than rational appeal.*

- **H5**: *The influence of marketing communication in social networks on eWOM varies according to geographic markets.*

The conceptual model (Figure 3) illustrates the independent variables (form and appeal of marketing communication, brand type, geographic market), the dependent variable (eWOM) and the analyzed relationships.

Figure 3. Conceptual model
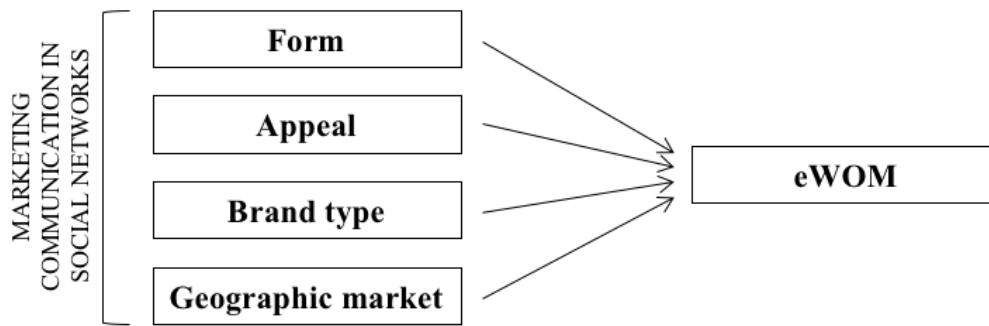
Source: Own elaboration

3. Research method

Traditional methods used in U&G research that depend on self-reported gratifications have been criticized for not measuring the actual behavior of individuals (Ruggiero, 2000). Most empirical studies on social media and WOM are based on quantitative research. In particular, as the survey method is often used, the results of the extant studies are likely to be affected by response bias. In order to derive findings from the analysis of the actual behavior of consumers that is evident due to specific features of social networks, **content analysis** has been selected for the current study. According to Babbie (2010, p. 333), content analysis is the study of recorded human communication particularly well suited to understand "who says what, to whom, why, how, and with what effect?" directly addressing the problem of this research. Furthermore, satisfactory results, high validity and reliability levels of content analysis have been confirmed by prior research. Content analysis is frequently applied in all areas of media research (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011) and many prior social media studies (McKenna, Myers, & Newman, 2017). Dwyer (2007) explicitly argues that it is recommended to use content analysis to determine the importance of text messages posted to online communities.

In this study, particular attention is devoted to the criteria of objectivity, reliability, sampling and systematization to ascertain the methodological rigor of content analysis. The study draws on guidelines for methodological rigor and best practices described by Kolbe & Burnett (1991), McMillan (2000), Krippendorf (2004), Babbie (2010), Wimmer & Dominick (2011) and Lacy, Watson, Riffe, & Lovejoy (2015).

Facebook is now a global social network with the highest number of users and also a key marketing communication channel (Lemanowicz & Gańko, 2014; Malhotra, Malhotra, & See, 2013; G. C.-C. Shen, Chiou, Hsiao, Wang, & Li, 2016). In order to obtain a high amount of data for the analysis, to compare different European markets and brand types, fill the research gap in academic literature and to provide practical relevance to the results, content analysis was applied to Facebook brand posts of mass-market and luxury cosmetic brands. On Facebook brand pages data are publicly available, thus the cause (marketing communications – brand posts) and the effect (eWOM) can be observed together.

In order to ensure the validity of the research, data source triangulation was applied. Data were obtained from the official Facebook brand pages of eight cosmetic brands (four mass-market and four luxury brands), each of them in Poland and Italy. In order to compare brands with a similar number of fans, cover all four product categories of cosmetics and obtain a high amount of data, the following brands have been selected:

- *Mass-market cosmetic brands*: **Revlon** (make-up), **Max Factor** (make-up), **Rimmel London** (make-up), **Schwarzkopf** (haircare)
- *Luxury cosmetic brands*: **Clinique** (fragrances, make-up, skincare), **Lancôme** (fragrances, make-up, skincare), **Clarins** (make-up, skincare), **Guerlain** (fragrances, make-up, skincare)

The identified luxury cosmetic brands had been analyzed in previous studies focused on luxury brands.

A Facebook global brand page includes a complete list of posts published by a brand in each country. The sampling frame was defined as all brand posts published on Facebook brand pages from June 1, 2017 to November 5, 2018, covering over seventeen months. It is worth mentioning that there was a large difference between the numbers of brand posts in the sampling frame between the two markets. In the same period, there were 2,551 brand posts published in Italy and only 1,573 brand posts published in Poland, showing the lower frequency of brand posts in the Polish market. There were 2,277 posts of luxury brands and 1,847 posts of mass-market brands, which suggests that, contrary to what one would expect considering the skepticism of luxury brands about social media, luxury brands use them more

frequently. All the 4,124 posts were downloaded and saved. In order to guarantee the accuracy of the data that may change over time and ensure independence from potentially changing Facebook policies, as recommended by McMillan (2000), all data for the analysis were collected in short time (i.e., within two days). Most of the studies on marketing communications, social media and WOM examined by the author are based on non-representative convenience and purposive samples. In this study, a systematic **random sample** of brand posts was used. As no periodicity had been observed in the sampling frame, systematic sampling was deemed appropriate for the sample selection. In each brand page the first post selected at random was followed by every *k*th (sampling interval) post being selected by moving through the sampling frame, thus each item had an equal chance of being included in the analysis. Through this systematic sampling, 65 brand posts have been randomly selected from each brand's page in each country, leading to a final sample of **1,040 Facebook brand posts** (520 of mass-market brands and 520 of luxury brands, 520 in Poland and 520 in Italy).

A Facebook brand post represents the unit of analysis in this study. Figure 4 illustrates two examples of units of analysis – brand posts from Lancôme's global brand page. The global page is divided into separate country pages. The example shows the brand page on the Polish and Italian markets. Different content and local language are used in marketing communications within the two markets, and the brand page brings together the local brand community. Under each post, which includes both textual and visual content, the number of reactions, comments and shares are shown. The content of comments is publicly available and users are identifiable.

Figure 4. Examples of units of analysis
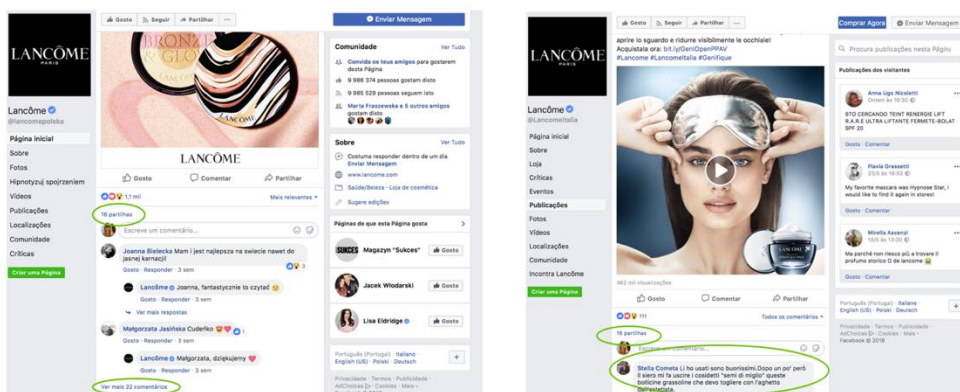
Source: reprinted from Facebook – Lancôme's global brand page (Poland and Italy)

Coding of the independent variables draws on qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Mayring, 2000), applies an inductive approach to generate coding categories and a deductive approach in the coding procedure.

The recording units were the form of a brand post, its appeal, brand type (mass-market, luxury) and geographic market (Poland, Italy). In addition, product category (more than one, fragrances, make-up, skincare, haircare, none) and day of the week when a brand post was published were coded for each brand post. The coding categories were derived from empirical data. Regarding **brand post form**, in a careful examination of all 1,040 brand posts, three forms of visual content were discovered: image, animation and video. As far as **brand post appeal** is concerned, marketing literature to date offers different models for content classification often based on the distinction between rational and emotional communication appeals. In order to distinguish specific types of messages within the rational-emotional dichotomy, relevant to the analyzed data, a new brand post appeal classification was developed in the study. Single brand post appeals were aggregated into twelve broader categories and joined into three broad categories of marketing communication appeal (Table 1).

Table 1. Marketing communication appeal classification

BRAND POST APPEAL	CATEGORY OF BRAND POST APPEAL	AGGREGATED CATEGORY OF MARKETING COMMUNICATION APPEAL
Product features	Product characteristics	Rational
Product performance		
Product range		
Product awards		
Product tutorials		
External articles	External articles	
Customer reviews	Customer reviews	
Gifts	Special offers	
Discounts		
Celebrities	Celebrities	Emotional
Brand values	Brand	
Brand places		
Brand heritage		
CSR		
Senses	Inspiration	
Inspiration		
Lifestyle		
Events	Events	
Contests	Contests	Interactional
Questions	Feedback	
Festivity	Festivity	
Live transmissions	Live transmissions	

Source: Own elaboration based on Luarn et al. (2015, p. 508-510), Tafesse (2015, p. 933-934), Tafesse & Wien (2018, p. 241-253)

A rational appeal refers to concrete, rational, factual information on product benefits, functional attributes and applications. An emotional appeal refers to emotional and affect-based messages emphasizing symbolic and hedonic product attributes, brand meaning and experiences, while an interactional appeal is aimed at driving conversations and consumer interactions. It is worth mentioning that the three aggregated categories of marketing communication appeal seem to correspond to the common gratifications of eWOM in social media and using social networks (information, self-expression/promotion, entertainment, and social interactions). This observation has important implications. If user reactions a to brand content are related to the gratifications satisfied by eWOM in social media and using social networks, then the communication appeal which drives the highest engagement of users may indicate the most important need users seek to satisfy by following brands on social networks.

The opinions of international experts are provided and taken into account in the operationalization of eWOM. **eWOM is operationalized as the number of comments on a brand post and shares of a brand post** on Facebook. In order to exclude the influence of post promotion, the analysis of the dependent variable is based on indicators - comment rate (CR) and share rate (SR).

It is worth mentioning that content analysis with a qualitative approach can be stigmatized as subjective (Sabate, Berbegal-Mirabent, Cañabate, & Lebherz, 2014). In order to assure objectivity in content classification, the brand posts used in the current study were coded manually by both the author and independent coders. As recommended (Kolbe & Burnett, 1991; Lacy et al., 2015), coders were independent of the author and worked independently of one another on the basis of a comprehensive coding scheme that was provided after the training session. Intercoder reliability measures are reported in the study following the best practices suggested by prior studies. The author reports both the coefficient of agreement (also referred to as simple agreement, percent agreement or proportional agreement) and proportional reduction in loss (PRL) reliability measure (Rust & Cooil, 1994). The PRL measure is one of the most recent measures of intercoder reliability developed specifically for qualitative data used in marketing research, it takes into account the possibility of random agreement and can be used for more than two coders (Rust & Cooil, 1994). As the PRL measure values are provided in tables only for a limited number of coding categories, on the basis of the equation defined by Rust & Cooil (1994, p. 11), a Gnu Octave (high-level programming language for scientific computing) scripts were developed for the computation of PRL reliability measure. The author makes the scripts available for all researchers willing to use them in further studies. The reported intercoder reliability measures are above the desired levels, indicating a high level of measurement objectivity.

Examination of user comments includes sentiment analysis, i.e. "a computational study of opinions, sentiments, emotions, and attitude expressed in texts towards an entity" (Ravi & Ravi, 2015, p. 14). The analyzed 1,040 brand posts had 9,552 user comments. All the comments were carefully read one by one by the author and classified as positive, neutral or negative. After the positive, neutral and negative comments had been coded by the author, all the comments were evaluated again by two independent coders (female graduate students) who coded negative comments. Coders worked independently of one another and were not aware of how the author assessed the comments. The author coded the number of shares of

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brand posts, as well as the brand type, geographic market, product category and day of the week.

As independent variables were of nominal scale and dependent variables (comment rate and share rate) conceptually related were of ratio scale, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to test the hypotheses. Furthermore, the data were analyzed by univariate analyses of variance (ANOVAs). The use of both MANOVA and follow-up ANOVAs is a recommended (Leary & Altmaier, 1980) and common approach, used in prior studies (e.g. Gavilanes et al., 2018; Sen & Lerman, 2007; Tafesse & Wien, 2018) which in the current study allowed examination of the influence of the independent variables on each dependent variable on a larger sample.

4. Doctoral dissertation structure

The study is organized as follows. The first chapter presents an overview of the extant literature on marketing communications, social media and word-of-mouth. The first section is dedicated to marketing communications. It describes the essence of marketing communications, its primary goals and challenges. By presenting the U&G theory, marketing communications models and the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) the first section of the first chapter lays the theoretical foundations and outlines the scope of the study. Furthermore, the marketing communications mix, the elements of online marketing communications, online media types and media share in advertising spending are discussed, providing an extensive overview of marketing communications from a practical perspective with a focus on changes that have occurred in the last decades. The second section is dedicated to social media and their role in marketing communications. User Generated Content (UGC) - the key element of social media, functionalities and types of social media are discussed in this section. Furthermore, social media users' characteristics, motivations of social media usage and types of user behavior on social media are examined. Last but not least, this section provides an overview of the concept of social media marketing including presentation of prior studies on antecedents and consequences of consumers' brand engagement in social media, as well as on social media adoption and content strategies used by companies. The third section is focused on WOM – its definition (including a novel definition developed by the author), valence, people's motivations of spreading WOM and its role in marketing communications. Particular

attention is devoted to eWOM, its definition and characteristics. A novel definition of eWOM is provided in this section, traditional and electronic WOM are compared. Furthermore, eWOM in social media and the crucial role of online communities are discussed including motivations of spreading and searching eWOM in social media, as well as its consequences for both consumers and companies. In addition, word-of-mouth marketing - a new mode of communication within the marketing communications mix proposed by Kotler & Keller (2012) is thoroughly described. This description includes different approaches to WOM management and the main types of activities performed by companies in order to encourage WOM with a focus on clarification and comparison of different terms often not correctly and interchangeably used in prior studies. In addition, social network characteristics as one of the factors that affect viral reach and the main approaches to model the contagion process are described. The last section of the first chapter highlights the research gap that the current study aims to address.

The second chapter outlines the research. The first section provides justification of the examination of social networks, presents the research problem and specific research questions. These research questions, on the basis of an extensive review of prior studies, lead to the development of research hypotheses presented in the second section of the chapter. The conceptual model depicts the analyzed relationships. The third section of the second chapter provides the justification of the research setting within Facebook and the cosmetic market as well as the relevance of the examination of luxury brands and the Polish and Italian markets. The following section describes the research method – content analysis and explains the reasons why it is deemed the most appropriate for the research problem. Particular attention is devoted to the criteria of objectivity, reliability, sampling and systematization to ascertain the methodological rigor of content analysis. Data collection is described in the fifth section, while the sixth section describes how data were coded – coding categories and coding procedure. A novel classification of brand post appeals is also proposed in the latter section. In order to assure objectivity in content classification, data were manually coded by both the author and independent coders. Intercoder reliability measures are reported following the best practices suggested by prior studies. Moreover, the opinions of international experts are provided and taken into account in the operationalization of eWOM. Examination of eWOM includes sentiment analysis of user comments. The second chapter finishes with an overview of the statistical analysis method applied in this study – multivariate and univariate analysis of variance.

Empirical results are described and discussed in the third chapter. The first section of the chapter provides descriptive statistics for the analyzed data including frequency, measures of central tendency and measures of variability. The second section describes the research hypotheses testing. Contrary to many academic publications that report summary of the results without testing the assumptions of the selected statistical analysis method, an extensive statistical analysis includes testing of the assumptions of both multivariate and univariate analysis of variance as well as the examination of interaction effects. The results are discussed in the third section of the chapter.

Finally, the last section of this study provides conclusions that include a summary of the research findings, theoretical and practical implications, limitations and directions for future research.

5. Results and conclusions

The description of the results of this study follows the best practices to allow and improve replication research provided by Bergh, Sharp, Aguinis, & Li (2017). They include reporting precise p-levels rather than cut-offs and preliminary verification of models.

As far as the communication form is concerned, images were the most frequently used communication form, they accounted for 70% of all brand posts. More vivid content was much less frequent. Videos were used in 18% of all brand posts and only 12% of the analyzed posts were animations. Images were used more frequently by mass-market brands and animations were used more frequently by luxury brands. In Poland animations were used more often than in Italy.

Product characteristic was the most frequent appeal, dominant in 47% of brand posts. Product performance and product features (e.g., ingredients or color range) were described more often. The second most common category included inspirational brand posts, however, they accounted for only 10% of all brand posts being much less frequent than the previous category. Brand posts that solicit user feedback had a similar share of 7%. Rational appeals were used most frequently. They were dominant in 58% of all brand posts. Emotional appeals were dominant in approximately a quarter (24%) of the analyzed brand posts, while brand

posts with an interactional appeal, specific for social media, accounted for 18% of the analyzed posts. No statistically significant differences were found between the frequency of marketing communication appeals between mass-market and luxury brands. In Poland interactional appeals were used more often than in Italy.

Sentiment analysis confirmed the results of prior studies on eWOM in social media (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2015; Mangold & Smith, 2012; Tkaczyk, 2018) showing that most of the comments (60.56%) were positive. Negative comments accounted for 8.68% of all comments and were related to only 129 posts in the sample. As the posts with negative comments were distributed across different categories and the small number of posts with negative comments would not allow obtaining meaningful findings, negative comments were excluded from further analysis.

There were 467 brand posts (45% of the sample) that received no comments and 276 brand posts (27% of the sample) that had not been shared (or, in other words, for which the data on eWOM were missing) showing how difficult it is to obtain eWOM effects. The main research question of this study that includes the comparison of the relative influence of different forms and appeals of marketing communications, for different brand types and within different geographic markets implies that, in order to be compared, the eWOM effects should be observed in each of the analyzed groups. The analysis of brand posts with no comments or shares would bring no results and due to the inclusion of these posts in the statistical analysis the final results could be biased. Therefore brand posts that received no comments or that had not been shared were excluded from the analysis. In order to normalize the data to meet the assumptions of ANOVA, the comment rate and the share rate were log-transformed.

As far as the research hypotheses are concerned, the results indicate that:

- **H1 is partially supported:** marketing communication in social networks using images has the lowest positive influence on eWOM, while there is no statistically significant difference between the influence of animations and videos.

Videos and animations are more vivid and more entertaining. These forms of marketing communications might be more effective in attracting users' attention and in satisfying their need for entertainment. The results of additional analysis of the influence of marketing

communication form on eWOM for mass-market and luxury brands (provided in the appendix) suggest that video content is particularly relevant.

- **H2 is not supported:** there is no statistically significant difference between the influence of the emotional appeal and the rational appeal of marketing communication in social networks on eWOM.

The study reveals that different communication appeals entail a different behavior of users and this behavior may be explained on the basis of different motivations. Firstly, interactional appeals of communications drive user comments. It may allow users to satisfy the need for social interactions. Specifically, on Facebook, users are the most likely to comment on live transmissions for luxury brands and brand posts related to contests for mass-market brands. Secondly, emotional appeals used in marketing communications have a positive influence on sharing brand content. Sharing of this type of content may allow users to express and promote themselves in the digital environment. Specifically, users are the most likely to share brand posts related to celebrities, events and those including links to external articles.

- **H3 is not supported.** The effect of the brand type on eWOM is statistically significant for the comment rate only and the relationship is different than expected – the comment rate is higher for mass-market brands than for luxury brands.

Users are more likely to comment on brand posts of mass-market brands than on brand posts of luxury brands. The expected gratification of social interactions that can be easier to obtain for common ground topics may explain this finding.

- **H4 is not supported:** for luxury brands, there is no statistically significant difference between the influence of the emotional appeal and the rational appeal of marketing communication in social networks on eWOM.

The results of the analysis of marketing communications of luxury brands are similar to the results of mass-market brands suggesting that the motivations on the basis of spreading eWOM in social networks are the same for both types of brands.

- **H5 is supported.** The influence of marketing communication in social networks on eWOM varies according to geographic markets.

In Poland more than in Italy, Facebook users are likely to comment on brand posts, in particular of mass-market brands. The comment rate in both countries is the highest for brand posts using interactional appeals. Contrary to some pieces of evidence from prior research which suggest that Polish users prefer a rational appeal of marketing communication, this study reveals that Polish users are more likely to comment on emotional posts than on rational posts. On the other hand, the share rate was significantly higher for the Italian market. The need for social interactions may be particularly relevant for Polish users and the need for self-expression and self-promotion that may be a key driver of users' behavior in Italy which may be related to the characteristics of the two cultures.

Studies on social media represent an important development for the field of marketing and can have a significant impact on the future course of the discipline (V. Kumar, 2015). Although the research on social media is growing, due to their dynamic character, the practice is still ahead of the theory. This study replies specifically to the call for content-level analyses in social networks (Sabate et al., 2014; Swani, Milne, & P. Brown, 2013; Tafesse & Wien, 2017) for different types of products (Ketelaar et al., 2016; B. Shen & Bissell, 2013) including luxury brands (Annie Jin, 2012; Dhaoui, 2014; Üçok Hughes, Bendoni, & Pehlivan, 2016) in an international context (Bartosik-Purgat, 2018; Godey et al., 2016; Wagner et al., 2017). **The specific contribution of this study to the development of marketing communication theory is related to:**

- The examination of the influence of the marketing communication form and appeal on eWOM
- The development of a novel classification of brand post appeals
- A comparative analysis of mass-market and luxury brands
- A comparative analysis of European countries

To the best of the author's knowledge, this is the first study to empirically investigate how the form and appeal of marketing communication in social networks influence eWOM including the investigation of brand type and geographic market. From a theoretical standpoint, it allows a deeper understanding of marketing communication processes in the virtual environment and their antecedents.

The interactional appeal of communications is strictly related to the interactive nature of social media, allows users to become content creators and brands to exploit the potential of social media and obtain eWOM effects. However, the results of this study suggest that most of the brands' communications resemble auto-referential broadcast media monologues. As noticed by Kotler et al. (2017), the current research reveals that companies still seem to treat social media as another unidirectional means of communication. **From a practical perspective, this study provides** marketers with explanations of consumers' behavior on social media and concrete guidelines on communication content to be used in social networks, in order to achieve eWOM effects. These principles take into account both mass-market and luxury brands, and the perspective of companies operating in different geographic markets. A novel classification of brand post appeals proposed in this study allows the identification of specific appeals that have a positive influence on eWOM.

Given the wide scope of the study including a comparative analysis of different brands and markets, the study unavoidably has some **limitations**. First of all only one type of social media and industry were examined, thus the results may not hold in other types of social media and industries. The second limitation is related to users commenting and sharing brand posts. Although WOM, by definition, 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 size of the analyzed sample, as well as the examination of different brands, increase confidence in the research findings. Thirdly, apart from the variance in the share rate explained by the geographic market for which a large effect size was found, in case of other relationships most often the effect sizes were small. As previous similar studies using the same research and statistical analysis methods (i.e., Chauhan & Pillai, 2013; Luarn et al., 2015; B. Shen & Bissell, 2013) do not report effect sizes, it is not possible to assess whether the effect sizes revealed in this study are consistent with prior findings, however they suggest that there are other variables that may significantly influence eWOM. Fourthly, although data were coded by both the author and independent coders and the intercoder reliability measures were adequate, the subjectivity related to the chosen research method can be minimized, however, it cannot be excluded. Last but not least, in the current study, it is argued that eWOM in social media can be analyzed and explained on the basis of individual motivations. However, the possible gratifications expected from spreading eWOM in social networks (self-expression/promotion, entertainment and social interactions)

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 in social networks considering the differences between mass-market and luxury brands as well as different counties and cultures is an interesting topic for **further research**. In addition, personality traits may be taken into account. The traditional methodological approach of the U&G theory with surveys among consumers in different countries may be employed in further studies. Researchers may also replicate the current study in other countries where there are large differences on culture dimensions. It would be also interesting to gather data from other industries and types of social media (e.g., Instagram) to see whether the results still hold. The classification of brand post appeals proposed in this study can be used in further studies on marketing communication in social media. Finally, by obtaining the data on post sponsoring and eWOM programs implemented by a company, further research can examine the influence of post sponsoring, which may have a significant influence on eWOM. Other possible independent variables to include in further studies may include best-selling products or those which are advertised in other media. In the current study, it was observed that the number of comments and shares on some specific products was particularly high. In sum, numerous issues require further investigation and provide fruitful and exciting areas for further research.

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