

## **Promotion of a Fashion Startup Through Social Media**

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<p>This thesis is commissioned by a fashion startup company. The goal was to find out how to attract new customers via social media at minimal costs.</p> <p>The research was conducted using both quantitative and qualitative research. However, traditional quantitative research had the biggest impact on the results. Relevant literature was reviewed; an interview and a survey were also conducted. The results helped to better understand how to get consumers' attention in a fast developing market, i.e. social media.</p> <p>The theoretical part describes social media in general and the various types of them. It also discusses changes in marketing caused by the increase of digitalization in people's everyday life. One such change is the new fifth P in the traditional concept of the 4Ps of the marketing mix, i.e. participation. It refers to the fact that promotion is becoming dialogical and interactive. This new "pull marketing" strategy suggests that it is best to attract customers gently, letting them come to the company themselves.</p> <p>In order to attain new customers a company has to offer them unique and interesting content. Confirmations of this statement were found at every stage of the research: in professional literature, the interviews and the survey. The survey concentrated on finding the right content for young women between the ages of 20 and 35 around the world. The results showed general tendencies in their interests that can be used in order to engage them in interaction with the company. Among other things, it was interesting to find out what actually influences young women to use social media. The absolute leader turned out to be the category of "humor," as 44% of respondents ranked it as the most attractive; it was followed by the categories of "quality articles" and "statistics." The least influential categories regarding this were "pictures of cats and dogs" and "charity projects." The survey had 190 respondents over a seven-week period.</p> <p>The results of the thesis research are summarized in the form of recommendations for the commissioning party. These can be used for enhancing its marketing strategy and thereby increasing awareness, attaining new customers and strengthening relationships with them.</p>	
<b>Keywords</b> social media, brand content, community management, pull marketing, communication	

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# 1 Introduction

Social media is becoming a bigger and bigger part in every person's life. 2,7 billion people (almost 40% of the world's population) are connected to the Internet, in the developed countries the percentage goes up to 80% (Royal Pingdom 2012). Social media started as a powerful communication arena for people and now it is becoming a marketing tool for companies.

Companies have learned to use the latest technology to reach consumers where they are present – online. The traditional means of promotion are now supported by modern means of communication. Many business experts confirm that the presence online is a new necessity for companies, they also confirm that with the right strategy social media can become an inexpensive and effective marketing channel. The Internet gives an opportunity to reach customers worldwide in no time and sometimes at no cost.

If social media are effective means of marketing, how can it benefit a startup company in a specific industry like fashion with a budget constrained? This thesis is research-oriented; it investigates how social media can enhance marketing of the case company. The results are supported by secondary and primary researches. Findings will assist the commissioning party to efficiently allocate their resources and make maximum use of social media marketing.

The research answers the following questions:

1. What are social media?
2. Why and how companies are using them for marketing purposes?
3. What changes marketing is undergoing?
4. How to win customers online?

The ultimate outcome of the research is guidelines for the case company on how to win new customers and strengthen their loyalty.

## **1.1 Presentation of the case company**

The commissioning party is a fashion startup company based in Paris, France. The product is high-end silk scarves with varicolored prints, produced in Italy. At this stage the company is intending to identify inexpensive and effective means of marketing. From this research it expects to receive practical information on how to attract new customers and cement their loyalty by the means of online social platforms.

## **1.2 Structure of the thesis**

Section 1 presents introduction to the topic of the thesis. The challenge of the thesis is formulated there as well. And lastly, it followed by a brief introduction of the case company.

Section 2 contains description of the methodology applied to the research. It explains why multiple types of research were utilized, what they are and what their particularities are. In the same section it is clarified what limitations had to be made to the research in order to receive results relevant for the case company.

Section 3 contains a theoretical overview of social media marketing. It contains an overview of the concept of social media, changes that marketing is undergoing in the era of the Internet. It also discusses main tendencies in online marketing, introduces a concept of the 5<sup>th</sup> P of marketing and an important nowadays concept of brand content, the key to winning customers.

Section 4 is devoted to the main part of primary research – the survey. First it introduces the case company and its expectations from the research. Secondly, it presents the target group, explains sampling process and presents the questionnaire. And lastly, it reveals the results of the survey research.

Section 5 contains the summary of results formulated specifically for the case company. The summary includes guidelines for application of the thesis results in actual practice.

The thesis concludes with the list of references to the used sources and with attachments.

## 2 Methodology of the research

The method of the research is *triangulation*, which implies that data is collected by applying several types of researches. In order to obtain objective results of the thesis it was appropriate to use secondary and primary researches, as well as quantitative and qualitative researches. The point of departure is the secondary research. It involves reviewing of literature and data, created or provided by scholars, professors or specialists in the field. Secondary research serves as a compliment to the primary research which includes reviews of statistics, an interview (an element of the qualitative research) with a fashion designer and a survey (refers to the quantitative research).

Whereas secondary resources give theoretical and general practical information, survey provides data specifically for the case company. Thus it is the most significant part of the research. Yet, only the junction of secondary and primary researches forms a solid base for ultimate conclusions.

### 2.1 Quantitative and qualitative researches

The purpose of any research is the search for knowledge. Researchers emphasize two methods that make in more effective: qualitative and quantitative; the combination of the two is also often used.

*Qualitative method* tries to interpret the matter in terms of meanings people bring to it. It involves collection of a variety of empirical materials – case study, personal experience, interviews, observations etc. Qualitative data are detailed descriptions of situations, events, people and attitudes.

*Quantitative method*, on contrary, studies the matter by collecting numerical data which are analyzed by mathematical techniques and presented in the form of statistics. Quantitative researchers tend to perceive themselves as realists – opposite to subjectivists, what they call qualitative researchers – as they believe that this kind of study reflects the real situation of the matter. They believe that there is a common reality on which people can agree and that this collective agreement makes data more accurate.

There is no answer to the question “Which paradigm is better?” The better is the one that serves to answer the specific research question. Quantitative research is effective for the types of questions that require numerical information, for example for investigation of the amount of people involved in the matter, a change in this amount through a period of time, amount of people agreeing or disagreeing with a statement etc. Quantitative methods succeed to give information in breadth; however they might fail when it comes to exploring the matter in depth, in this case quantitative research might be shallow. In order to truly understand a phenomenon, it is more efficient to use qualitative techniques. Finally, when the research question requires studying the matter both in breadth and in depth, it is beneficial to use a so called mixed-methods design of the research. Such model is used in this thesis, however the quantitative method predominates. (Newman 1998, 10-16; Bradley 2013, 266-290.)

## **2.2 Secondary research**

Secondary research involves the examination of studies of other researches, academic and business books, dictionaries and articles etc. The majority of secondary resources used in this thesis are books and testimonies of professionals who have big experience in building online marketing. They share best practices of using, inter alia, social media for promotion purposes.

Academic books provided information on methodology, survey conduction, data analysis and other practical knowledge needed for making an accurate research.

## **2.3 Primary research**

Primary research refers to study of a subject through first hand observation and investigation. There are two subtypes of the primary research: qualitative and quantitative researches. Both were used in the course of the thesis.

The quantitative research is objective, numerical and thus is subject to statistical tests and procedures. For this study it is conducted by the means of a survey. Surveys are designed to be answered by a person who is known as a respondent or informant. Questionnaire, the main tool of surveys, is a set of questions used to generate data that



meet specific research and survey objectives (Clow 2013, 63). Questionnaires standardize the data collection process and ensure all respondents are asked the same questions in the same manner.

Usually questionnaires are self-completion and thus require no personal contact. The advantage of it is that respondents have time to consider their answers, with little time pressure they can write full answers to open questions. Although this can be seen as a disadvantage also, since the first instant reaction of respondents is more valuable (Brace 2008, 30).

An obvious tool of the qualitative research is an interview. The thesis includes an interview with a person whose testimonies are highly relevant to the case. The individual in question is a young and successful Russian fashion designer, who has been using solely social media to promote its brand since the very founding of the company till present.

## **2.4 Research limitations**

In order to make the research brand specific, several limitations had to be made.

- The first point to keep in mind is that the research does not answer the question “If the company should use social media for marketing purposes?” the answer is already positive.
- Also, the research concerns only marketing via social media, not online marketing in general. The reason for this is very simple – the budget. Promotion on social media platforms is relatively inexpensive and very efficient if to manage it smartly, comparing to other ways of online promotion that require expenses, for example: ad words from Google, banners on web sites, promotion through bloggers, product placement.
- This is not a market research. Industry, SWOT and other analysis are not required.

- The fourth important limitation concerns answers in the questionnaire. While querying what content the target group seeks on the Internet, the survey gives a limited variety of answers preselected with accordance to the image of the case company. Since the brand has an identity, it is interested in opinions only on topics it finds appropriate for it.

### 3 How a startup company can benefit from social media?

This section is a theoretical overview of social media marketing, its particularities and current tendencies in it. It will explain how social media can be used in order to improve a company's brand awareness and reach its target group. First, it is important to learn relevant definitions.

#### 3.1 What is social media?

Social media are online means of communication, conveyance, collaboration, and cultivation among interconnected and interdependent networks of people, communities, and organizations enhanced by technological capabilities and mobility. Social media enables active participation in the form of communicating, creating, joining, collaborating, working, sharing, socializing, playing, buying and selling. (Tuten 2013, 2.)

Social media platforms are united by the principle of interaction and communication between people by the means of the Internet, but social media is not a coherent entity. It consists of many different services: forums, blogs, micro-blogs, wikis, social networks, sharing services, social gaming and geolocation. Each of these services has its own specifications and appliance:

**Forum.** Forum is an online discussion site where people can hold conversations in the form of posted messages that are temporarily archived. Also, a posted message might need to be approved by a moderator before it becomes visible (Wikipedia 2013).

**Blog.** As statistics has shown half of Internet users read blogs (VanRysdam 2010, 113). Blogging has become a powerful business tool. Because blogs are content rich, they catch the attention of search engines and therefore are ranked higher. The big plus is that blogs give control over the content and grant power to delete humiliating comments. Blogs are a terrific way to showcase product news and information. Besides, they allow companies to monitor the opinions of their end customers. Moreover, reading blogs of competitors is important for keeping a pulse on industry.

77% of bloggers comment on other blogs as a way to drive traffic to their own blog (VanRysdam 2010, 115).

**Micro-blogging service.** Micro-blogs function as ordinary blogs with the difference that they are limited in size of functions. The two most popular micro-blogs are Twitter and Instagam. Twitter allows posting messages of up to 140 characters, which makes it perfect for people who do not have time to write or read a full blog post but wish to stay informed of all current events. Instagam allows to post one photo or one short video at a time. It is perfect for people who prefer to see for themselves rather than to read a description. Another popular example is Tumblr.

**Wikis.** A wiki is a type of content management system, it differs from a blog or most other such systems in that the content is created without any defined owner or leader, and wikis have little implicit structure, allowing structure to emerge according to the needs of the users (Mitchell 2008). The most famous example of a wiki is Wikipedia.

**Social networks.** Social Network service is a platform to build social networks or social relations among people who, for example, share interests, activities, backgrounds, or real-life connections. A social network service consists of a representation of each user (often a profile), his/her social links, and a variety of additional services. Social networking sites allow users to share ideas, pictures, posts, activities, events, and interests with people in their network (Wikipedia2013). The main examples of social networking services are Facebook, Google+, Badoo, VKontakte, Orkut, LinkedIn and many others.

**Sharing services.** Sharing services allow users to share content in the format specific to the platform. For example Youtube allows to share only videos, Pinterest – only pictures, Polyvore – only fashion collages. Another specifics of sharing services is that their functions are limited to sharing and commenting, for example Stumbleupon allows to share pictures, videos and links to sites and articles, but that is all.

**Social gaming.** The mission of social gaming is to connect people in a game. The term refers to online games that allow multiplayer participation where players are

connected by the Internet. Most known examples are Texas HoldEm Poker and Farm Ville on Facebook.

**Geolocation.** The idea behind geolocation services is to connect users by their location. The user has to grant his consent to be tracked, after that he can share his location to other users in his network as well as see what places they go to. Such services help to connect people and companies physically by allowing users to post about their current location only from this exact location. A good example is a mobile application Foursquare.

A business would win if it used efficiently all the mentioned services and was present on all platforms, but it takes additional man power to monitor activity on those platforms. This duty in a company is performed by a Community Manager, who has not only to surveille discussions; but to direct and encourage them, resolve arguments with customers, constantly provide them with interesting information, he has to represent the company on the Internet. A community manager can either improve the reputation of the company or ruin it. That is why the company has to seriously evaluate its capacity to control multiple profiles. An optimal decision would be to concentrate on quality rather than quantity, pick a few social media platforms and make the best of them.

### **3.2 Marketing in the 2.0 era**

“Web 2.0 refers to developments in online technology that enable interactive capabilities in an environment characterized by user control, freedom, and dialogue.” (O’Reilly 2005.)

In 1999 the famous “Cluetrain Manifesto” was published online. The authors – four ordinary men whose work related to online activities – said out loud what most businesses could not realize themselves. All 95 theses can be summed up in the following: markets are people and they speak in human voice, they share information, learn from each other and form networks.

Companies that assume online markets are the same markets that used to watch their ads on television are kidding themselves. Companies need to realize their markets are often laughing at them. Companies have to lighten up and join the conversations (Levine, Locke, Searls & Weinberg 1999).

This manifesto signals that the era of vertical communication is coming to an end. Information does not just flow from companies down to people, but flows across people as well. Customers no longer believe advertisements; instead, they believe their peers. “90% of people trust peer recommendations over ads.” (Qualman 2012.)

Yet, no one is trying to diminish the importance of the traditional marketing mix. According to the classic rule of marketing you should locate the promotion in the right place and nowadays that place is on the Internet. “The game has not changed, just the venue.” (VanRysdam 2010, 17.)

Statistics states: if Facebook were a country, it would be the third most populated in the world (Qualman 2012).

### **3.3 The 5th P of Marketing**

“Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large.” (American marketing association 2004.)

The classic view is that organizations accomplish these goals through a marketing mix that includes the so-called 4Ps: product, price, promotion, and place. As social media marketing techniques continue to develop, today there is a need for the fifth P: ‘participation’ (Tuten 2013, 14-15) or according to another version - ‘people’ (VanRysdam 2010, 22).

The culture of participation is based on the belief in democracy: the ability to freely interact with other people, companies, and organizations, share content (comments,

reviews, rating, photos, stories, and more), the desire for self-expression (Tuten 2013, 3-4). People enjoy speaking and being heard. Companies have to communicate with its customers, in this case they will appreciate the involvement of them in the life of the company and respond by spreading the good word, in other words – promote the company. 25% of search results for the World’s Top 20 largest brands are links to user-generated content (Qualman 2012).

Unfortunately it is not enough to gather many followers as long as they are not “the right ones”. Passive followers are as good as no followers at all. On the contrary, the right followers are those who are truly interested in the activities of the company and take an active part in communication with it. Such users will build trust to the company.

### **3.4 Pull Marketing versus push Marketing**

In order to create the online community that will work for the benefit of the company, social media practitioners advise to stop pushing advertising to people but to let them come to you by attracting them with their own interests - pulling them. In this regard, experts distinguish two contradicting marketing tactics: push marketing and pull marketing.

Push marketing is the traditional intrusive marketing: TV and radio commercials that are interrupting the favorite show, promoters handing you leaflets when you are running late for work, spamming text messages, mail and e-mail letters. Customers have learned to defend themselves by streaming online or buying DVDs, creating own playlists of music, blocking spam e-mails etc.

The idea of pull marketing, on the other side, is to encourage customers for dialogue. Let them enjoy the content without interrupting and on their turn customers will appreciate that. With such strategy it will take more time for them to purchase, but the long-term relationship will be stronger, as in the end of the day they have chosen the company.

According to Peter VanRysdam (VanRysdam 2010, 52), the only push medium is worth having is a business card.

### 3.5 The importance of brand content

“Content is the unit of value in a social community. It may include opinions, catchphrases, information, fashion photos, advice, art, or the photos from the wild party last week.” (Tuten 2013, 122.)

**Brand content** is everything that *the brand* creates to entertain its customers and keep their attention. With all the noise out there, you need to have an interesting or useful voice, and you have to communicate regularly enough to stay relevant. This can be in the form of articles, essays, status updates, podcasts, videos, music, and so on. (Treadaway 2010, 58.)

Smaller companies limit the content to posts on social media, blogging, micro-blogging and other inexpensive means of marketing. Whereas big companies publish their own magazines (i.e.: airline companies), create online games (i.e.: Fanta Chase on Facebook), mobile applications, make movies (i.e.: Dior short movies) and even TV series. Note that brand content is almost ad-free.

If your community is representative of a brand with a product or service, your community members know why they're there. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out the purpose of your online community is to drive sales. However, being pushy with the sales tactics will clear out your community lightning fast. It's fine to mention products or drop discount codes once in a while, but don't spam your community every day, or you won't have a community anymore. (Deb Ng, 2012.)

According to a business woman Asya Malberstein it was the right company image and the right content that supported this image and triggered the word-of-mouth and brought her success. She gave an advice: “First you need to have your own style and follow it, the second would be to keep customers up to date, supply them with news of your company and provide interesting and fresh content, create the feeling that they are welcome in to the ‘family’” (attachment 1).



In 2012 Adobe Systems, Inc. (Adobe 2012) conducted a survey targeted at consumers and marketers. The goal of the research was to find out and compare the attitude of both groups to different means of marketing. The results are self-explanatory: 1. 73% of consumers prefer advertising with a catchy story behind it; 2. 67% found that entertaining content, such as a video, sells better than mere persuading; 3. 67% trust peer recommendations; 4. online banners and other flashy advertising online provoke irritancy.

## Consumers want to be told a story

Agreed

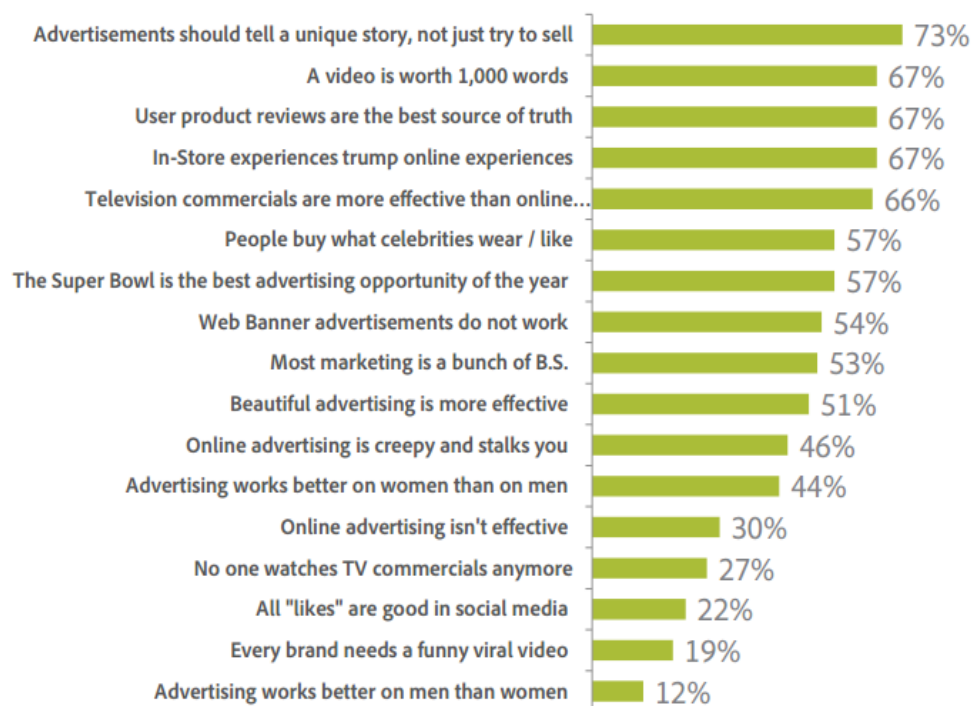


Figure 1. Results of a survey conducted by Adobe Systems, Inc. Answers to the question “What statements do you agree with?”

This data conveys that the consumer expects to be entertained with unique content while being convinced to purchase.

The main challenge any company faces is the creation of the unique brand content that will attract customers. The content should be new, fresh, relevant and engaging. Successful social media marketing requires constant monitoring of customers’ feedback and interests, and therefore an ongoing commitment of human resources. It is false to

think that the only presence will improve the business automatically, quite on contrary: poorly executed online campaign can result in fiasco for the company's image. Once a user sees little or dated content on the page, they will go to the next company from their search engine.

**Distribution of the content** is equally important. Each social media service allows for a different type of content and different types of discussions. The most effective way to keep the community hooked is to provide them with the choice on which platform to follow your company. However, it only makes sense if the content does not *repeat* itself on different services. Also, distribution should not turn into spamming. A good rule is to start conversations or share content one to three times per day (Ng 2012, 13).

### 3.6 Engaging customer in conversation

To win customers' favor, it is important to make them feel welcome to the community. According to Deborah Ng (Ng 2012, 289-296), there are best practices to accomplish that:

- Make new members feel at home. Many new members enjoy introducing themselves. A good community manager will encourage them to do so by simply asking or organizing another creative way to invite them to make the first contact.
- Choose topics for discussion. Customers do not organize their conversations by themselves; in order to retain their interest the company has to offer them new interesting topics daily so that they have reason to come back every day.
- Discourage negativity. It is the company's responsibility to present its behavior policy to the community, as well as to moderate all conversations and to take measures in case of inappropriate behavior or language.

What kinds of content can evoke customers' desire to participate? To answer this question it is important to understand *what* guides people into using social media in the first place, and having understood their needs, it is easier to deliver what they want and make them react.

According to Chris Treadaway (Treadaway 2010, 33), the usage of social media is explained by **seven basic human needs**:

- Love. Finding love, keeping up with loved ones, and so forth.
- Self-expression/emotion. Sharing life’s details with friends.
- Sharing opinions/influencing friends. Using social media as a platform for influencing opinions, usually about politics, religion, or other things we do not typically debate in person.
- Showing off. Sharing life’s success and/or achievements with others.
- Fun/humor. Using social media to get a good laugh.
- Memories and nostalgia. Catching up with old friends and sharing old stories.
- Making money. Using social networks primarily to support professional pursuits.

By triggering one or more of customers’ needs it is possible to make them react. For example asking to share the outfit of the day will trigger the need to show-off and express oneself, asking for an opinion or new ideas will trigger the need to share an opinion, a funny post will make them laugh and share it with friends, a product-give-away will trigger their need for money. The deeper the campaign reaches users emotions, the more feedback it receives. But it is crucial to post the type of content that customers can respond to, open ended content. It should relate to everyone and invite discussion.

There are tactics that allow catching readers’ attention. Tracy L. Tuten (Tuten 2013, 136-137) suggests beginning with the **title of the post**. The title must hook up the viewer and here are examples of five types of hooks:

- Resource hook: “5 methods to ensure a restful night’s sleep” refers to the information that will help to solve a problem
- Contrary hook: “Lose weight with chocolate”. Challenges excite people
- Humor hook promises an entertaining content
- Giveaway hook embeds a sales promotion “Save 50\$ by doing what’s good for you”
- Research hook, people like statistics: “66% of Americans are overweight, but you don’t have to be”

Another effective tool to receive instant feedback is a **poll**. The topic should catch interest and the poll must consist of a single question with multiple-choice answers. This tool refers to human need to influence, be important.

To conclude, it is human nature to communicate. Their mere presence on social media proves that they are open to the dialogue. The only thing a company has to do is make the first step and invite customers to a conversation.

## 4 Survey research

In order to generate content tailored for the client, it is advised to understand his needs and interests. This section presents the survey research which is designed to find out what social media the target group uses and what content responds to their needs. The findings of the survey will lead to conclusions that can be exploited by the case company in its marketing strategy.

### 4.1 Commissioning company analysis

“Wal de Mar” is the brand of silk scarves designed by a young designer and an illustrator Anastasia Zimikhina. She has graduated from two prestigious design universities: the Academy of Fine Arts in St. Petersburg, Russia, and the National University of Decorative Arts (NSAD) in Paris, France. In 2006 she took the first place in a prestigious fashion design competition in Saint Petersburg, Russia, “Russian Silhouette”.

The brand was registered in 2012 in Paris under the name of the entrepreneur Anastasia Zimikhina. The concept of the brand is to design high end silk scarves of high quality and beautiful packaging at affordable price. The digital printing is executed in Italy on high quality silk.

From then moment of the founding till present the designer has been actively working on finding the signature style and designing the printing material. It also took time to find a quality digital printing in Italy and make connections with retailers in Europe. It is foreseen to retail the product through external retailers, to sell in bulk. Nevertheless, the online shop is also being developed.

Visuals are essential in fashion industry, customers are attracted by the appearance of the product and what image they believe this product will give them. Social media allows not only to demonstrate merchandise but also to create an attractive image of the brand by sharing unique content and to improve reputation by communicating with customers. Furthermore, it gives an opportunity to instantly reach them worldwide. Due to these undeniable advantages of social media, the commissioner

regards them as a tool for increasing the brand awareness, attracting customers, generating income on the online shop, cementing the customer loyalty.

## 4.2 Target group

The target group of the company differs from the target group of the research, and here is why:

The product of the company is not for the mass market. The customer is foreseen as a woman in between 20s and 40s (up to late 40s) who appreciates high quality accessories and prefers quality over the price. She also likes to discover new designers and stand out from the crowd.

Since the range of the target group is rather wide, there must be **different means of marketing** techniques in order to reach them. Statistics say that the half of all social media users is between 25 and 44 years old (Royal Pingdom 2012). But those in 20s and early 30s are most active users on social media platforms. “The most active age group in social networking overall was found in young adults, who also are most active during the evenings online” (Creedon 2013).

In section 3 it is mentioned that in order to have successful promotion, it is important to encourage customers to react to communication and initiate it, because passive users are as good as no users at all. Whereas active and vigor ‘followers’ of the company’s account will spread the content which equals to word-of-mouth promotion.

Therefore the target group of this research is women between 20 and 35 years old. The group from 36 and up to 49 years old should be reached by other means, possibly by traditional marketing practices.

## 4.3 Sampling procedures

Target group of the commissioning company has no specific characteristics apart from age as the design of the product is more than less attractive to all kind of women. Therefore the sampling is random; the only requirement for all respondents is to have

access to the Internet. The questionnaire was posted on various social media platforms in order to target random women worldwide.

In the name of experiment, the request to answer the survey was accompanied by a picture (figure 2) that falls into the category 'lol cats' in the questionnaire. The picture received many 'likes' but unfortunately "likes" hardly led to response. This occurrence is well explained by the results of the survey.

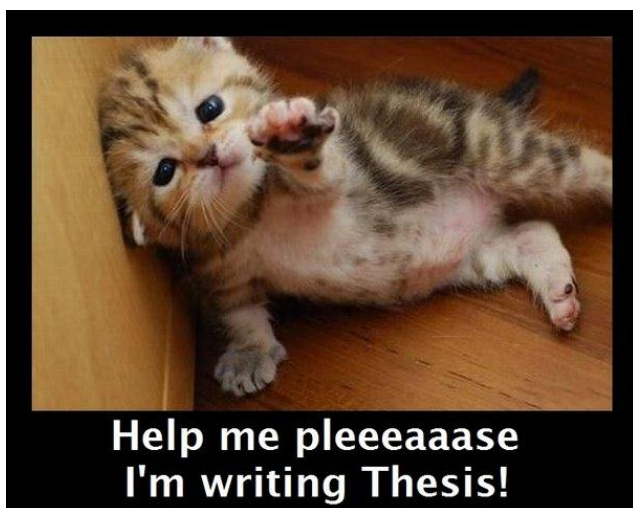


Figure 2. Visual aid to accompany the survey request

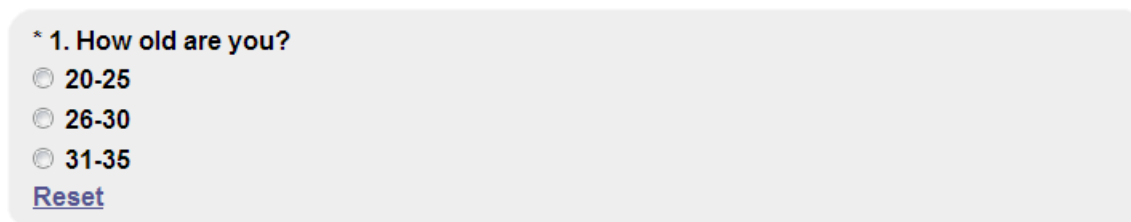
#### 4.4 The questionnaire

The objectives of this survey allow to use multiple-choice, multiple-response, scaled-response and open-ended questions.

- Multiple-choice questions are questions with multiple answers from which to choose.
- Multiple-response questions are a form of multiple-choice questions in which respondents are instructed to check all response options that apply.
- Scaled-response questions allow respondents to indicate a level or degree of intensity.
- Open-ended questions allow respondents to answer in their own words.

The survey consists of 10 questions. Each of them has a certain logic behind.

1. The questionnaire must include so called screening questions that insure that the respondents meet the criteria of the target group. The first question shows limitations of the target group and breaks it in three sub groups. (Figure 3.)



\* 1. How old are you?

20-25

26-30

31-35

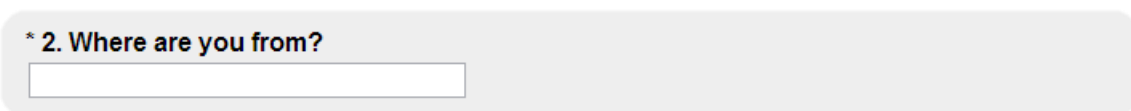
[Reset](#)

Figure 3. A screenshot of the question №1 from the actual survey launched online

2. This question shows where the respondent comes from, which helps to understand:

1. if the survey is international;
2. if answers are country specific.

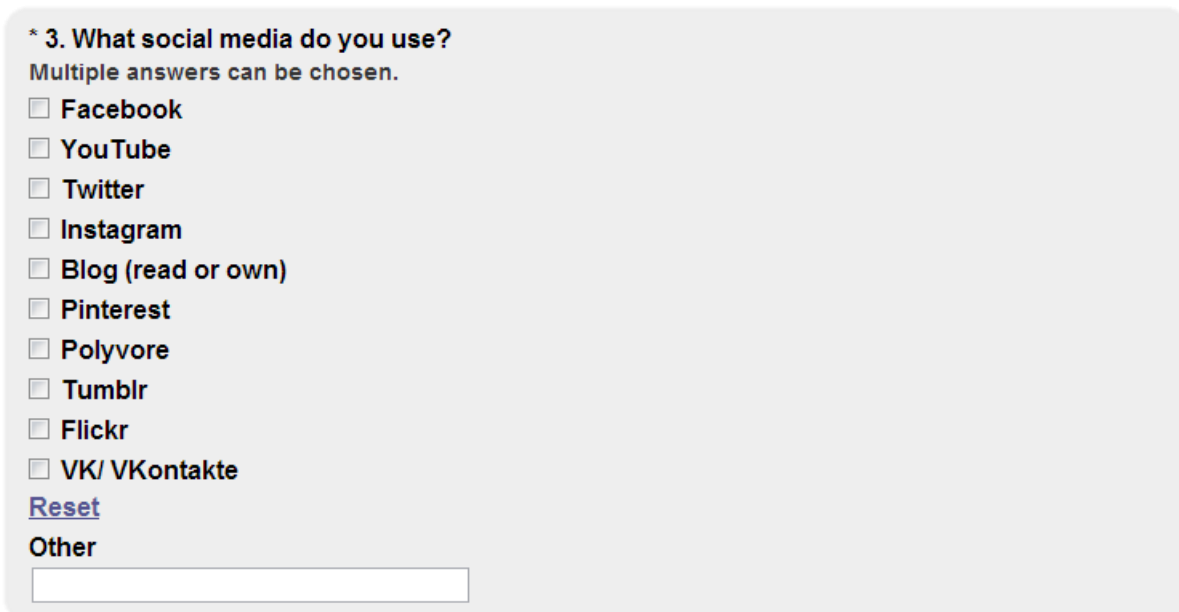
This is an open question. (Figure 4.)



\* 2. Where are you from?

Figure 4. A screenshot of the question №2 from the actual survey launched online

3. The third question responds very accurately to the objectives of the research. It shows what social media platforms the target group uses. Since many people use more than one, a multiple-response question was chosen with an open question as an alternative option. (Figure 5.)



\* 3. What social media do you use?

Multiple answers can be chosen.

Facebook

YouTube

Twitter

Instagram

Blog (read or own)

Pinterest

Polyvore

Tumblr

Flickr

VK/ VKontakte

[Reset](#)

Other

Figure 5. A screenshot of the question №3 from the actual survey launched online



4. The indicator of a customer's interest in the company is the subscription to the company's profile on social media. Thus it is important to know why people "follow" the brand's page, and the fourth question is meant to investigate what guides them into doing this. (Figure 6.)

**\* 4. Why do you subscribe to a brand's/ company's page?**  
Multiple answers can be chosen.

- To express your loyalty to the brand/ company
- To receive the latest news of the brand/ company
- To receive the latest promotions
- The content of the page is entertaining/ interesting
- To communicate with people behind the brand
- To communicate with other subscribers/ people with the same interests
- I don't subscribe to brands/ companies

[Reset](#)

Other

Figure 6. A screenshot of the question №4 from the actual survey launched online

5. From the fifth question on it is intended to find out customers general interests, meaning "what kind of content they are looking for online". People tend to see other people as role models and therefore pay interest to their activities. Thus certain personas can be used as a part of content, the fifth question queries who they could be. (Figure 7.)

**\* 5. What people do you like to follow?**  
Think of who you would REALLY enjoy reading or learning about. Multiple answers can be chosen.

- High fashion personas
- Street fashionable
- Media personas
- Politician
- Beautiful
- Successful
- Sporty/ motivational for healthy living
- An active traveler
- Funny or "Crazy"/ someone who you can laugh at
- Someone really conceptual/ different from others
- No one

[Reset](#)

Other

Figure 7. A screenshot of the question №5 from the actual survey launched online

6. The sixth question is highly relevant to the purposes of the research. It was designed to investigate what content motivates people to “follow” a certain account or a profile online. (Figure 8.)

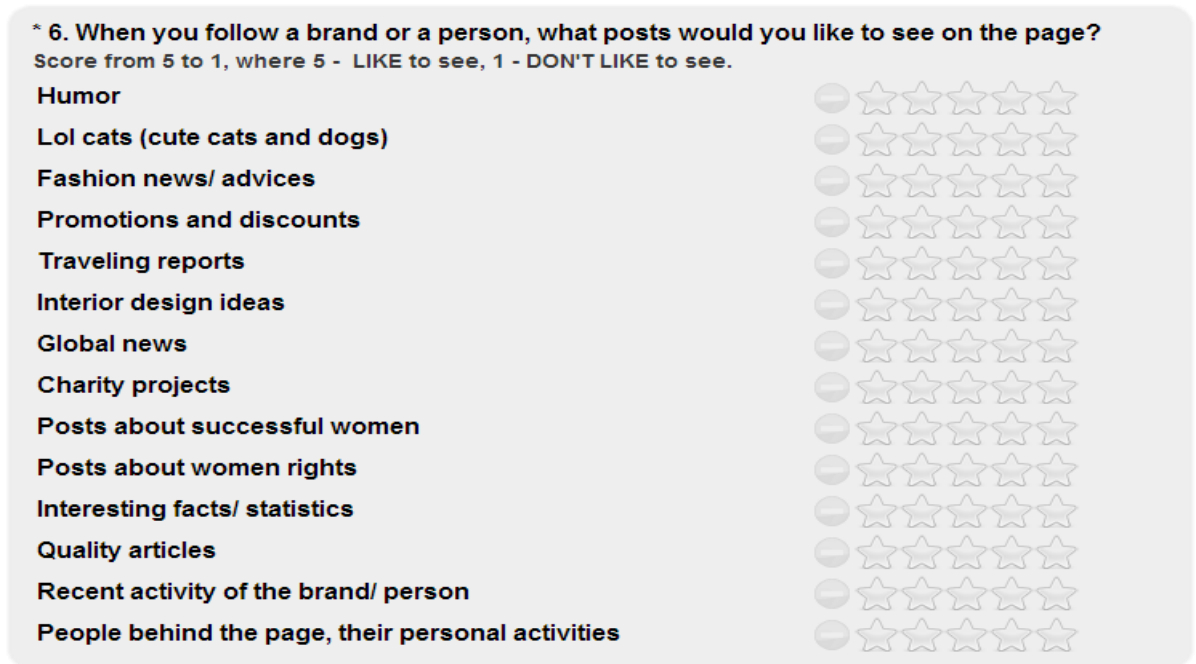


Figure 8. A screenshot of the question №6 from the actual survey launched online

7. Once the company caught customers’ attention it should make the customer work for its benefit. The power of social media lays in ‘likes’, ‘shares’ and ‘comments’. The seventh question investigates what actions people perform more and less often. (Figure 9.)



Figure 9. A screenshot of the question №7 from the actual survey launched online

8. A successful marketing practice on social media implies that the customers take an active part in company’s activities online. ‘Sharing’ is the most beneficial function for the brand, as the shared post appears on the customer’s page and is available for other users. ‘Commenting’ and ‘liking’ indicate the interest of customers but do not function as the tool of promotion.

The following three final questions are almost the same, but the answers are still different. The eighth question helps to find out what content the target group would rather 'like'. (Figure 10.)

**\* 8. What would you rather "Like"?**  
Multiple answers can be chosen.

- Something cute (a baby, an animal, a cake, etc. anything you find cute)**
- Charity projects**
- Motivational story**
- Motivation for sport**
- A global issue that needs attention**
- Shocking/ disturbing news**
- Complaints/ expressions of anger**
- Fashionable people/ fashionable items (shoes, dress, jewelry etc.)**
- Something funny**
- Interesting facts/ statistics**
- Posts about relationships**
- Recipes/ cooking**
- Quality articles**
- Nothing**

[Reset](#)

**Other**

Figure 10. A screenshot of the question №8 from the actual survey launched online

9. The ninth question asks what content the target group would rather 'comment' on. (Figure 11.)

**\* 9. What would you rather Comment?**  
Multiple answers can be chosen.

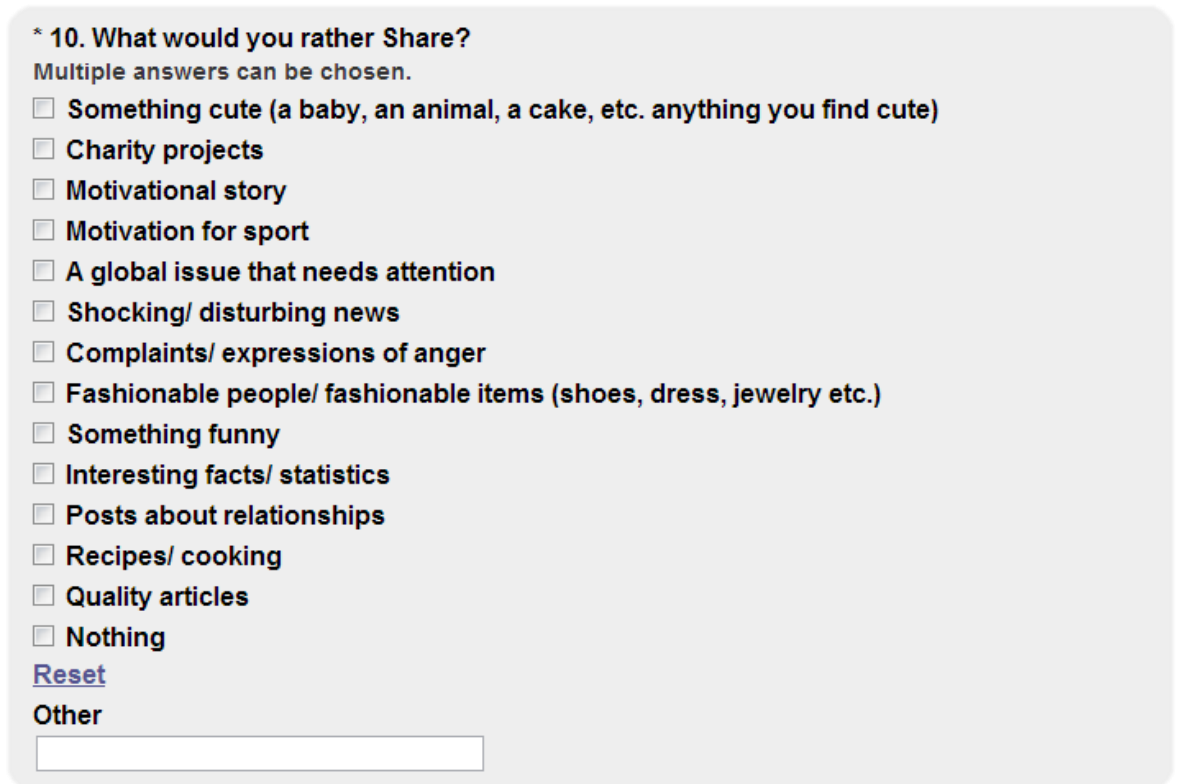
- Something cute (a baby, an animal, a cake, etc. anything you find cute)**
- Charity projects**
- Motivational story**
- Motivation for sport**
- A global issue that needs attention**
- Shocking/ disturbing news**
- Complaints/ expressions of anger**
- Fashionable people/ fashionable items (shoes, dress, jewelry etc.)**
- Something funny**
- Interesting facts/ statistics**
- Posts about relationships**
- Recipes/ cooking**
- Quality articles**
- Nothing**

[Reset](#)

**Other**

Figure 11. A screenshot of the question №9 from the actual survey launched online

10. The final tenth question helps to understand what the target group would rather 'share'. The results of this question deserve special attention when planning a marketing strategy. (Figure 12.)



\* 10. What would you rather Share?  
Multiple answers can be chosen.

- Something cute (a baby, an animal, a cake, etc. anything you find cute)
- Charity projects
- Motivational story
- Motivation for sport
- A global issue that needs attention
- Shocking/ disturbing news
- Complaints/ expressions of anger
- Fashionable people/ fashionable items (shoes, dress, jewelry etc.)
- Something funny
- Interesting facts/ statistics
- Posts about relationships
- Recipes/ cooking
- Quality articles
- Nothing

[Reset](#)

Other

Figure 12. A screenshot of the question №10 from the actual survey launched online

#### 4.5 The results of the survey

The questionnaire was posted on different social media platforms with the intention of getting random respondents worldwide. In seven weeks the questionnaire was answered 190 times. The response rate is rather low, although it is difficult to estimate it percentagewise due to lack of information about users flow on platforms where the request was posted. Yet, 190 responses have right to represent contemporary tendencies in young women's interests and to aid the case company to satisfy them.

Despite the low response rate, the spread of information around the world is impressive: answers were received from 37 countries in Europe, Northern and Southern America, Northern Africa, Australia and Asia. The majority of respondents resign in Russia (26,9%) and Finland (23,8%).

1. **Demographics** of respondents are the following:

50,26% are women between 20-25, 39,15% - women between 26-30 and 10,58% - women between 31-35 (figure 13). These data show that though it was said earlier that the vast majority of social media users is between 25 and 44 years old and those in 30s are the most active users, for some reason representatives of the group of age 31-35 did not respond to the survey much. It is hard to determine the source of this occurrence: the placement of the survey could have been chosen poorly for this group, or the representatives were not attracted to such activity, or they appeared to be passive in sharing information.

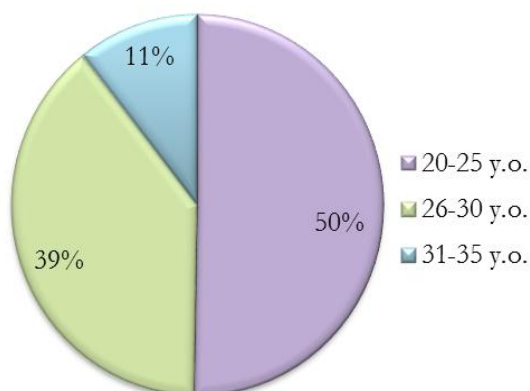


Figure 13. Demographics of survey respondents (n=190): groups of age 20-25 (n=95), 26-30 (n=75) and 31-35 (n=20)

2. **The leader** among social media is Facebook, 96,8% of respondents use it. Youtube is catching up with 78,8%; the third place takes blogging: 41,3% of informants read or own a blog. Instagram is a new trend launched in 2010, and according to the survey 37,6% use it. (Figure 14.)

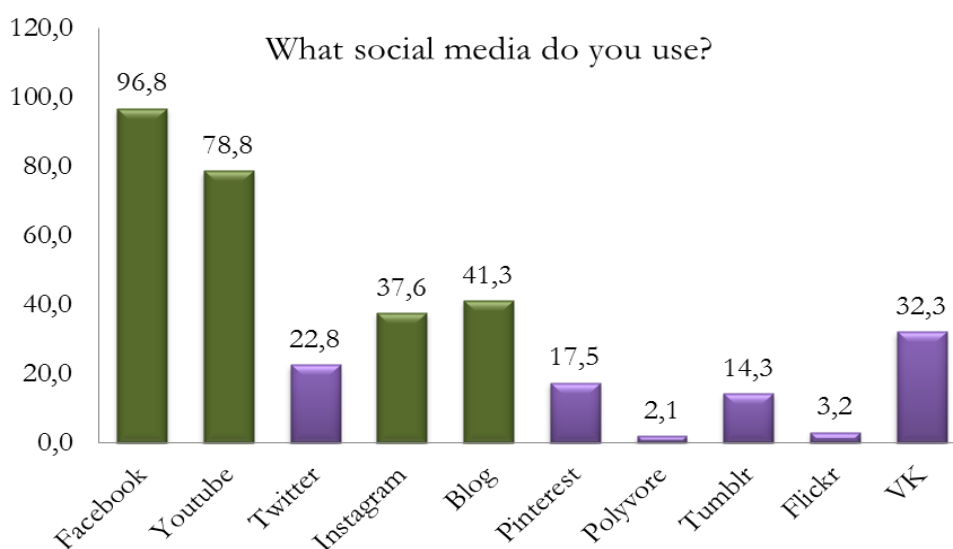
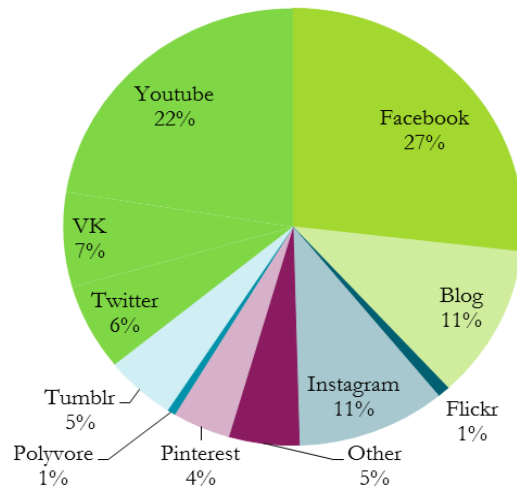


Figure 14. Rating of the usage of social media platforms by all respondents (n=190)

An interesting observation was made: the choice of social media varied in accordance with age categories. The third group shows decrease in interest towards Facebook and increase of interest towards Youtube. The first two groups use Instagram more. (Figures 15 - 16.)

Age group 20-25



Age group 26-30

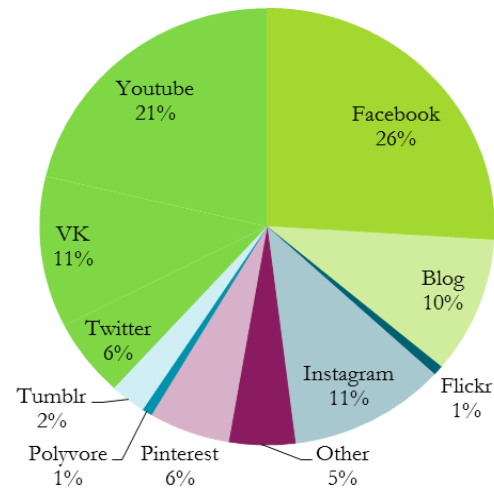


Figure 15. Usage of social media platforms by each of age groups in details: 20-25 (n=95) and 26-30 (n=75)

Age group 31-35

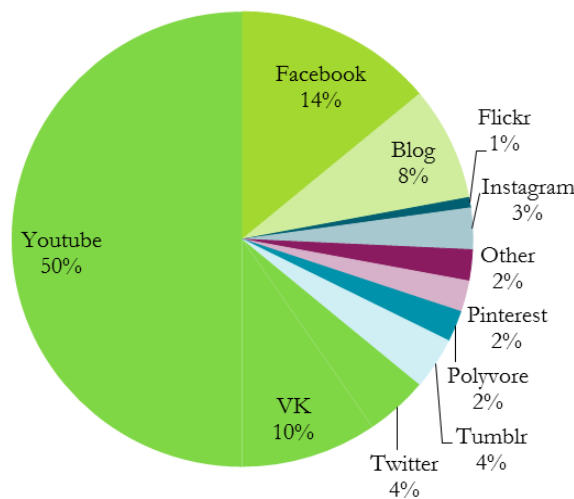


Figure 16. Usage of social media platforms by each of age groups in details 31-35 (n=20)

3. The following statistics show what **the main reasons** that drive people to subscribe to a company's or a brand's page are. According to the results, there are three main

reasons: 1. To receive the latest news of the brand/company – 27%; the second place is shared by 2. To receive the latest promotions – 21%, and 3. The content of the page is entertaining/interesting – 21%. These data show that the vast majority of respondents are driven to follow a company’s page by general interest in the company’s activities. However, almost each fifth is driven by the basic need to receive monetary benefits, as Chris Treadaway suggested (Treadaway 2010, 33), and again each fifth is attracted by the content of the page. This proves on practice the importance of brand content a company has to generate in order to win new customers and keep grip on old ones. (Figure 17.)

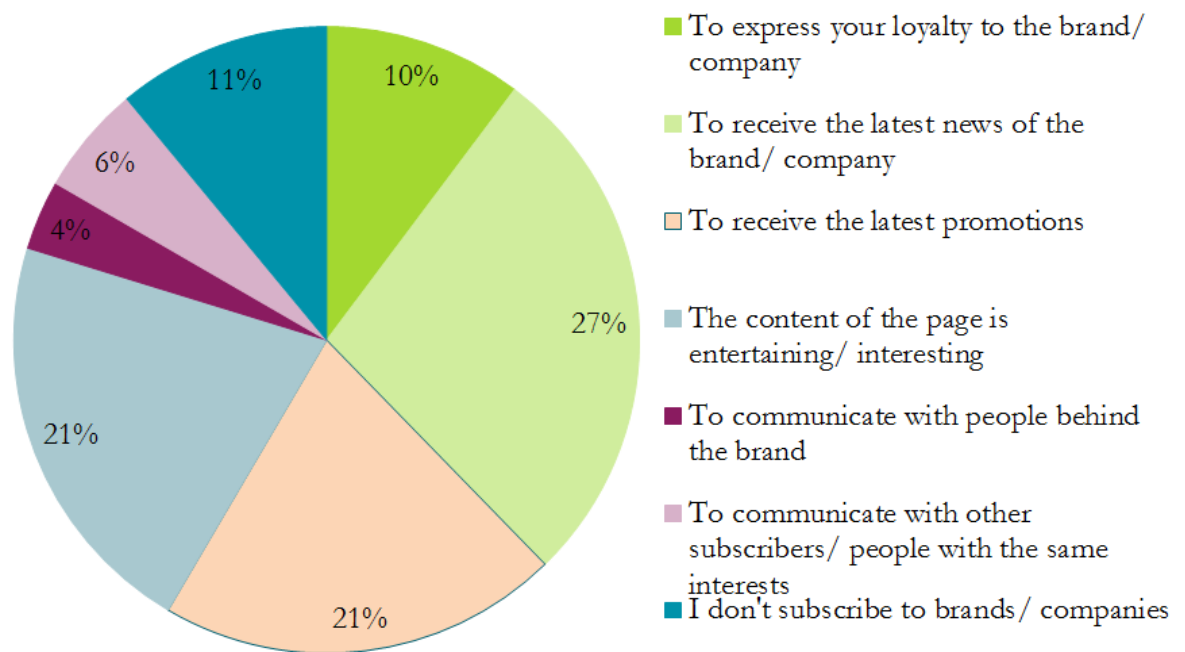


Figure 17. Reasons why respondents (n=190) subscribe to a company’s/brand’s page

4. As it was mentioned before in the questionnaire review, some people find inspiration in other people, that are either famous, or attractive, or with a distinctive personality. For a fashion company it is a win-win if its target group is interested in fashion personas, thus the content could be both interesting and relevant to the brand. For the question “What people do you like to follow”, informers were offered to select several answers, if needed. Figure 18 (figure 18) demonstrates the results:

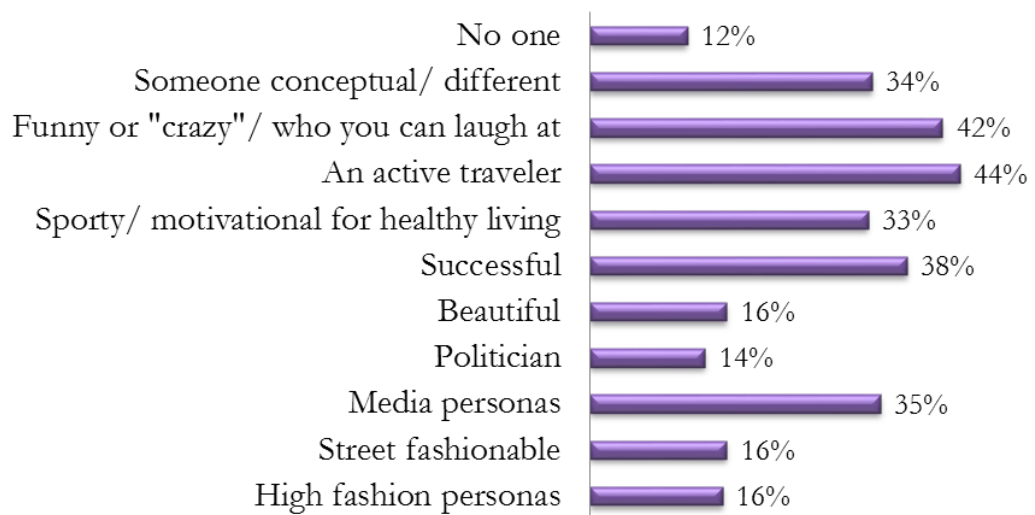


Figure 18. Answers to the question “What people do you like to follow?” (n=190)

As we can see on the graph, 44% of respondents answered that they prefer to follow active travelers, 42% - a person who would make them laugh, 38% are interested in successful people who would share his valuable experience. Public personas, which we often see on TV and in magazines, have a share of 35%, and lastly, those who promote healthy way of living and sports attract 33% of respondents.

Surprisingly, but beautiful or fashionable characters and people in politics are not very popular among online community, they received approximately the same amount of votes – 14-16%. And 12% do not subscribe to pages of other people.

The question included a graph ‘other’, where several respondents added to the list the following characters: independent reporters, smart people, musicians, cooks, educators, writers, photographers, scientists and royalty. These answers will be taken into consideration while preparing report for the case company, but their frequency is too low to be presented percentagewise.

5. A series of questions has been approached, answers to which will tell exactly what the online community wants. Respondents had to rank each type of content from 5 to 1, where 5 is what interests them most and 1 - does not interest at all. The results have shown that rates of each type of the content between 2 and 4 are more or less even, the biggest contrast is between two extremes: the 1<sup>st</sup> position and the last position. The



comparison of least favorite and most favorite content will help to determine do's and don'ts for the community management of the commissioning company. (Figure 19.)

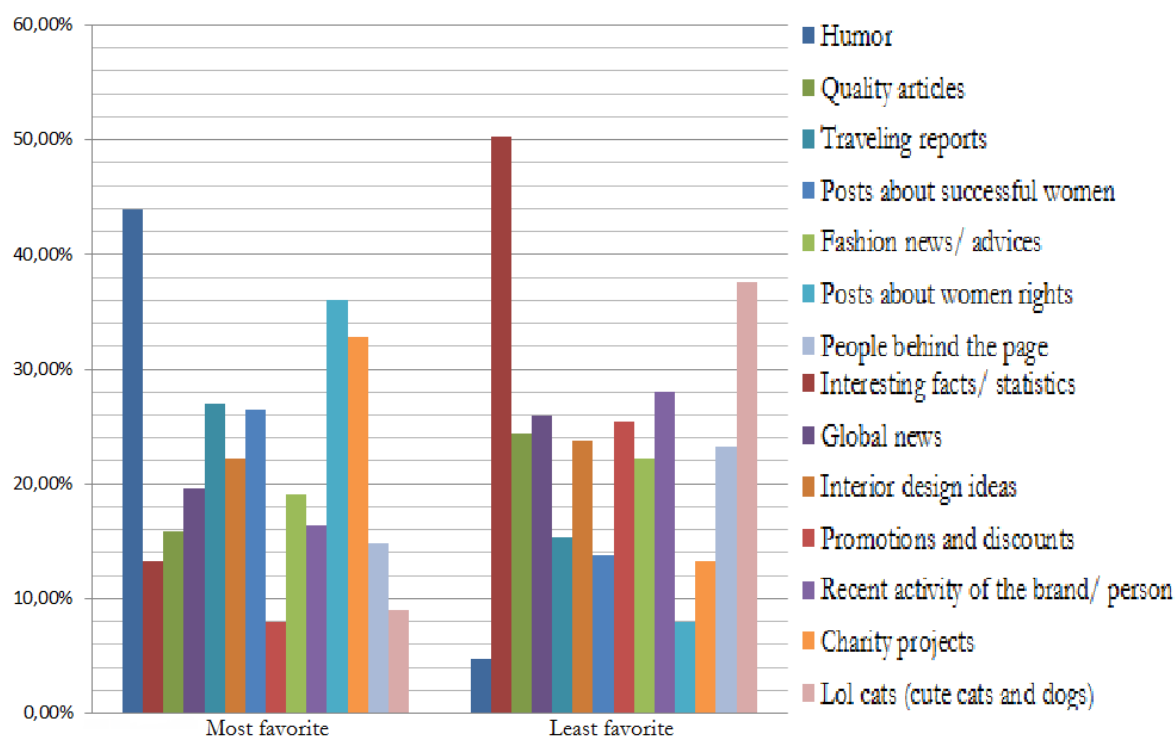


Figure 19. Results of ranking types of content. On the left – content that was ranked as the most preferred; on the right – as the least preferred

The leader between all contents is ‘Humor’, 44% of respondents ranked it as the most anticipated; this result supports once again the theory of Chris Treadaway (Treadaway 2010, 33) about basic human needs that drive people into being a part of an online community of any kind, and humor is one of those needs. ‘Interesting facts and statistics’ were favored by 36%, ‘Quality articles’ – by 33%. ‘Traveling reports’ and ‘Global news’ are favorite topics of 27% and 26% of respondents respectively. Other votes were distributed relatively equally.

As for the posts that the community prefers to avoid, they are led by ‘Lol cats’ which were chosen as the least interesting by 50,3% of informers. This might explain why the promotion of the questionnaire on social media accompanied by a picture of a cat did not have much success; and though it collected some “likes”, it did not help the survey. The next rather large number of 38% refers to ‘People behind the page and their personal activities’. This result is interesting for the following reason: it was said that

customers want to communicate with the company, but as it has turned out, this should not be confused with communicating with people behind the brand on their personal issues, customers are still interested in the brand before all. ‘Women rights’ posts almost gathered one third, but stopped at 28%; still this is a large number. An interesting information has come out from this result: young women are not very interested in women rights, an assumption could be made that it is a less mainstream topic nowadays then it was years ago. Other topics received negative responses relatively equally.

However, the total score of each type of content gives a bigger picture. Each answer could get maximum 5 points and minimum 1 point from a person. With 190 respondents, the absolute maximum an answer could get is 950 points and the minimum is 190 points. (Figure 20.)

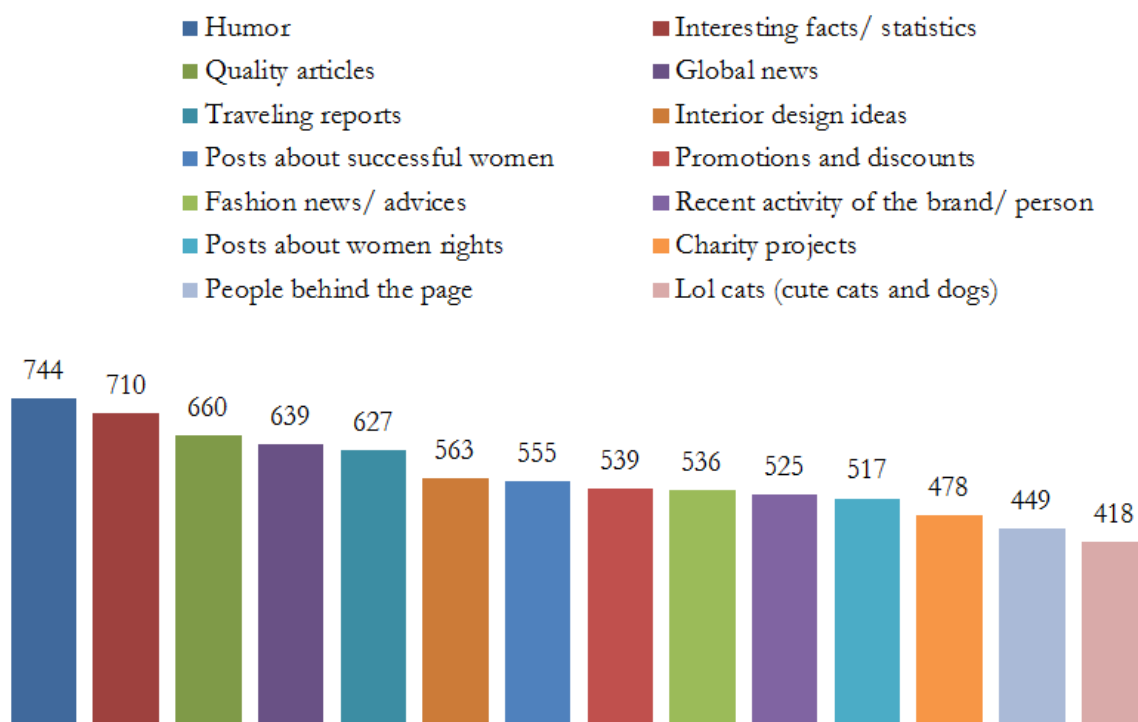


Figure 20. Ranking of types of media from the most preferred to the least preferred according to the total points given to the each

As we can see, no content is on the true bottom, which means each of them has the right for existence, although there are obvious winners that deserve the most of attention.

An interesting observation: 27% of respondents answered that the reason why they subscribe to a company is to receive the latest news of it, however 'Recent activity of the brand' is in the bottom of the content that interests them.

**6. Like, comment and share** are the way a customer can express his interest and promote the company.

According to the results, the most frequent action respondents perform on social media is 'like', 46% do it often and 33% - from time to time, and only 5% do not do it. Likes build trust to the company, a post with many likes will attract more attention to newbies. Also likes improves rating of posts inside the platform. (Figure 21.)

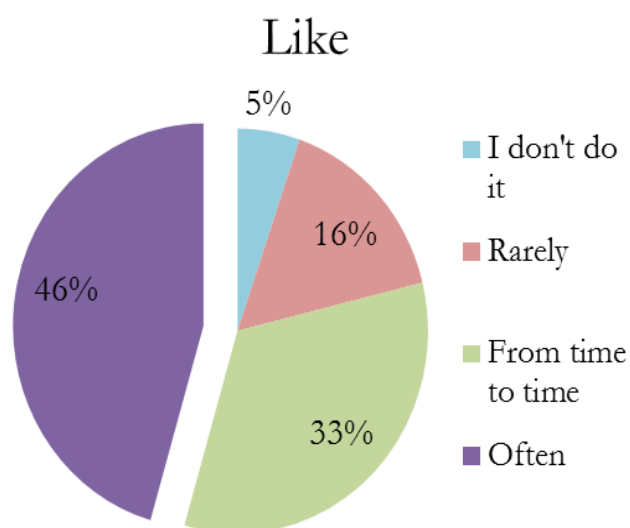


Figure 21. How often respondents (n=190) 'like' content

Comments are important for bringing community together; commenting equals communication. As results have shown, a large number of respondents comments rarely. A quarter does not do it at all and another quarter does it from time to time, and only 6% do it often. What conclusions does it tell us to make? Commenting takes more efforts than liking and sharing, thus only truly engaging posts can encourage a customer to share his opinion on the matter. (Figure 22.)

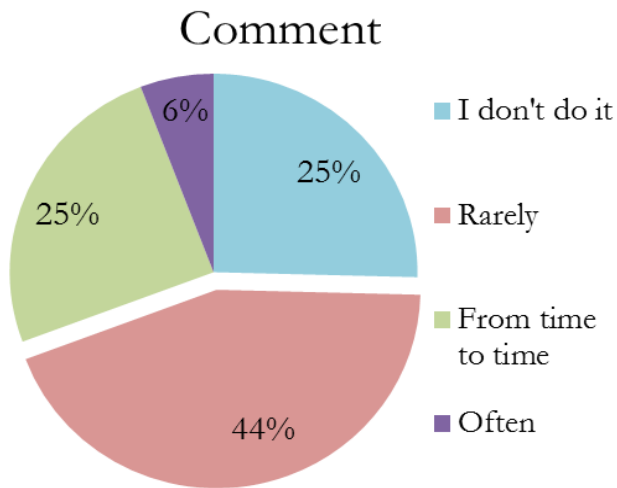


Figure 22. How often respondents (n=190) comment on content

Share is the essential element of word-of-mouth on social media, unfortunately, to make customers share your content is a tough case. 44% of respondents do it rarely, 28% do not share at all and 21% do it from time to time. Social media users take sharing seriously; after all, it should be good enough to deserve a place on their personal pages. (Figure 23.)

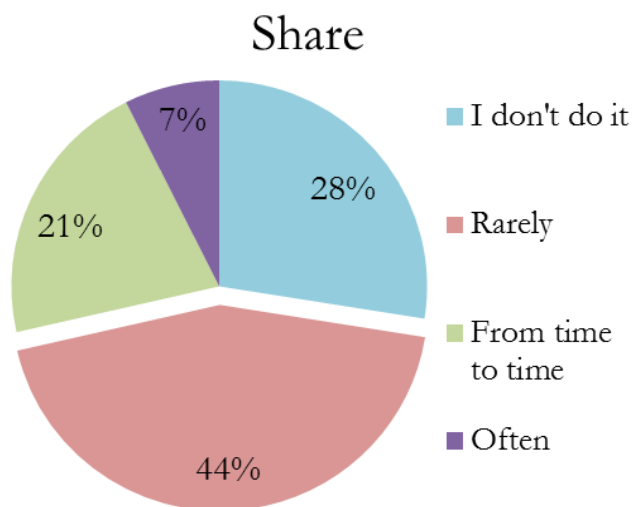


Figure 23. How often respondents (n=190) share content

7. It is time to analyze what content the online community perceives as worthy of liking, commenting and sharing. The respondents were offered to choose from a list of various types of content, what would they rather like, share and comment. In attachments you will find the full graph comparing percentagewise what topics would encourage which action (attachment 2).

The respondents expressed their will to ‘like’, comment and share at high rate the content with the following topics (figure 24):

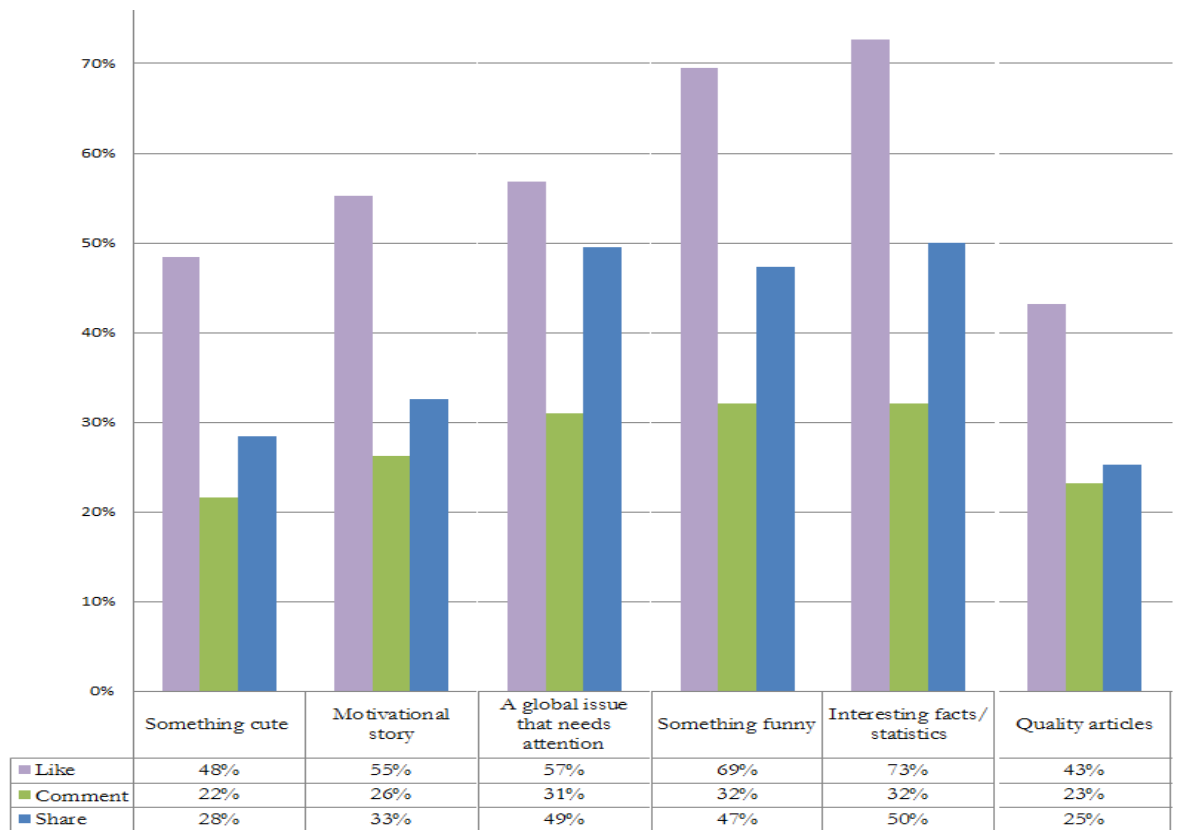


Figure 24. The highest scores of comparison of what types of content respondents (n=190) would rather ‘like’, comment or share

‘Interesting facts and statistic’ gained the most of votes for all three actions: 73% would ‘like’ it, 50% - share, and 32% - comment. Funny content most likely to be ‘liked’ by 69%, shared by 47% and commented by 32%. This data corresponds well with what we have seen earlier: Humor and Interesting facts were favored by informers the most. The third type of content in the rank was Quality articles, but in fact 43% would ‘like’ it, and only 25% - share and 23% - comment. Instead, respondents marked two other topics that encourage them to express their sentiments about them: ‘A global issue that needs attention’ would receive 57% of ‘likes’, a high rate of shares – 49% and 31% would comment on it.

The rest of results are lower in general but still are rather positive. Only 2% will not ‘like’ any posts, 11% are not ready to share, and every fifth respondent will not comment at all. Shocking and disturbing news received a lot of attention, but not as

much as it could; votes distributed equally: 25-27% would perform all three actions. Charity projects are likely to be shared by 25%. (Figure 25.)



Figure 25. The lowest scores of comparison of what types of content respondents (n=190) would rather ‘like’, comment or share

‘Relationships’, ‘Fashion’, ‘Recipes’, ‘Motivation for sport’, ‘Complaints’ mostly have a chance to be ‘liked’, but there is not many respondents who would comment on them or share.

The results of the survey show what topics receive more attention and which of them encourage viewers to share their opinion, ‘like’ and share with friends. The findings will be incorporated in the guidelines for the case company.

## 5 Guidelines for the commissioning company

### 5.1 Time allocation

In order to start an online promotion of a brand on social media, it is important to allocate time for community management. It is better to have fewer accounts that have quality content and loyal community than many accounts that are badly managed. Community management requires commitment, according to a blogger and writer Beth Kanter (Kanter 2010), it takes up to 16 hours per week or 3 hours per day to share content, communicate with customers, monitor discussions, building community etc. (Figure 26.)

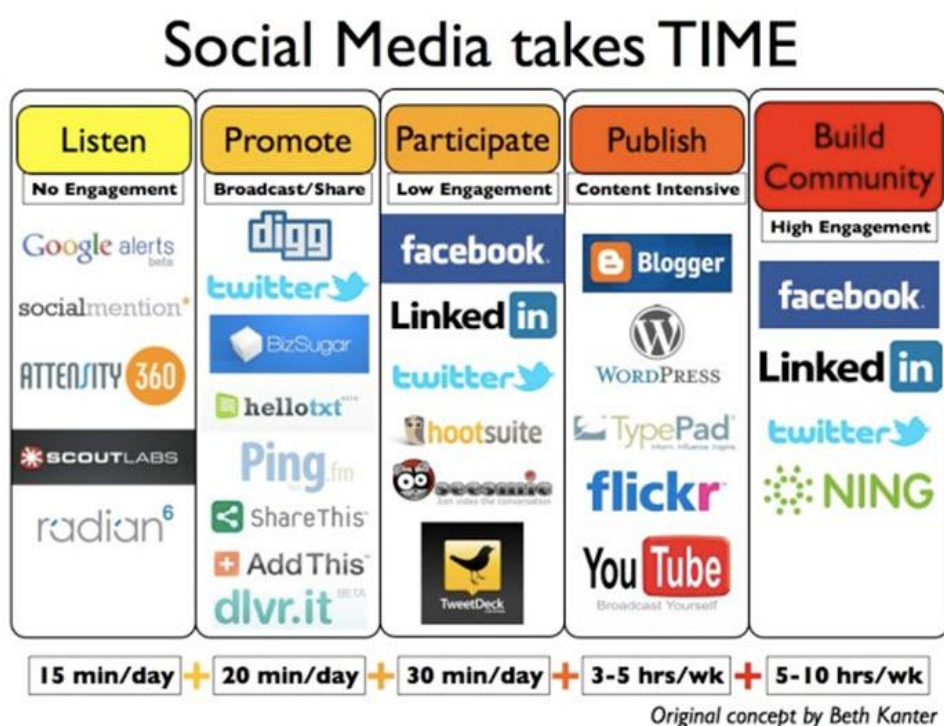


Figure 26. The chart of daily time allocation for marketing activities on social media, created by Beth Kanter

**Building community** takes most of time; it is as well proven by the survey that shows reluctance of users to comment, express their opinion: 44% does it rarely, 25% do not do it at all, 25% comment more frequently and only 6% do it regularly. This means that the community manager has to work hard to engage customers in conversation. **Publishing** of the content also takes time and consideration. 21% of the target group representatives listed ‘Interesting content on the page’ as a reason to subscribe to a

company's account. In order to attract new followers, the content must be engaging. One to three posts per day on each social media platform will keep followers interested. Answering to the comments from customers, resolving tense situations in discussions, in other words – **participating**, will take around 30 minutes per day.

## 5.2 Optimal social media

An optimal solution for a fashion startup is to be present on Facebook (96,8 of survey respondent use it) and Instagram (37,6%). Instagram is a micro-blogging service that allows sharing pictures and short videos; in other words – visuals, that can be effective for scarf promotion. Plus, 68% of users on Instagram are female, making it the second-largest population of women using a social network (Creedon 2013)

If time allows, a blog (41,3%) could be created. However, blogging takes more time in terms of content creating. Youtube (78,8%) is a very popular service, but filming videos also requires a lot of efforts and time. For the beginning it is advised to start with a few social media and concentrate on building a loyal community.

## 5.3 Optimal content distribution

In order to provide customers with fresh content, it is recommended to make an editorial calendar that will contain a schedule of what operations one has to perform daily to keep followers satisfied.

As the survey shows, any content appeals to somebody, therefore the company has the liberty to publish whatever it finds relevant to its image. However there are several topics that receive more and less attention. (Table 1.)

Evidently, it is better to avoid the content that target group does not favor but if it is inevitable (like fashion news are unavoidable for a fashion company), they still can be published, given that every brand can find followers that appreciate it.



Table 1. The list of favored types of content and the least favored types of content

Favored	Less favored
Humor	Lol cats
Interesting facts/statistics	People behind the brand
Quality articles	Charity projects
Global news	Posts about women rights
Traveling reports	Politicians
Interior design ideas	Fashion personas
Successful people	
People with a distinct personality	
Intelligent people	

Experts also advise **to use different platforms** for different type of content, so that customers can have a choice. But all platforms must have links to one another. For example Instagram could be used to share pictures of the product, fashion photo shoots, videos from photo shoots, pictures that support brand's image, announcements of promotions and other visual content. Sometimes Instagram pictures can be shared on Facebook, in order to invite subscribers to visit the Instagram account. There is a couple of good practices of how to increase subscribers to your account:

- Use hashtags (a hashtag looks like this: #yourtextthere). Hashtag is a description of a picture. Instagram has an option to find a picture by a search word, and the application searches through hashtags of all the images available and finds those, whose hashtag corresponds to the search word. There are tags that are most popular. By placing them under the post, you attract new viewers. The list of the top 100 hashtags can be found on <http://web.stagram.com/hot/>. There are also tags that announce that you are seeking for attention, for example #10likes, #100like, #follow etc.

- ‘Like’ and comment pictures of others, especially with the same tags as yours, thus they will reciprocate and maybe subscribe to the profile, if they like the rest of your content.

Facebook could be used for sharing various contents, starting with humor and articles, and ending with statistics and inspiring people. Thematic should be also chosen according to the brand’s image, for example art and everything that is connected with it. Facebook allows building community by asking subscribers questions or feedback, announcing competitions etc.

#### **5.4 Budgeting**

Creation of accounts on most of social media does not cost anything. Facebook page for small businesses is also free of charge. Therefore, it is possible to manage the community with no fees.

## 6 Summary

Based on the literature overview and the survey research, the following conclusion can be made: social media is indeed an effective and inexpensive means of promotion. More and more people make themselves available on social media, because they are driven by a human need to communicate with others. If companies find an agreeable way to communicate with people, they will receive new loyal customers.

It is possible to manage the online community free of charge, but it requires dedication: around 3 hours per day of monitoring, publishing and communicating. Without the necessary commitment poor community management can blemish company's reputation. And good management on the other hand can improve company's image. Nowadays customers want to perceive companies as friendly personalities and sources of entertainment. According to the survey, every fifth social media user subscribes to brands' pages because of their interesting content.

Once the company earned active readers by providing them with engaging content, it can start a dialogue. Customers must feel welcome on company's page, feel that it is created especially for them. Good social media account management includes engaging in conversation with the online community, asking for opinions, requesting feedback, monitoring their satisfaction. "Building a community for the benefit of your customers builds trust and, in turn, should build leads and sales" (VanRysdam 2010, 115-116). In other words, the more customers see a friend in the company, the more they purchase from it.

The survey, completed by the target group of the case company, demonstrates what kind of content may attract customers. The highlights of the survey conclude that the majority of women between 20 and 35 years old are present on Facebook, Youtube, use Instagram and read or own blogs. Most of them are looking for humor, quality articles, interesting facts and global issues. And less than anticipated are interested in topics related to relationships, cooking, beauty industry and fashion.

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## Attachments

Attachment 1. Interview with a fashion designer. 2 pages

### Background

Brand Asya Malberstein appeared in 2006 in St. Petersburg, Russia. It started as a small entrepreneurship and grew into a manufacturing business. The signature product is a leather backpack with a simple, but sleek design. The newest direction of the company is original leather accessories and ready-to-wear clothes for men and women.



### Interview:

Interviewer (I.): Tell me please, how did you get an idea to start your line of leather bags?

Asya Malbershtein (A.M.): I graduated from an architectural university, and after working awhile in this area I found my true passion which are photography and creating fashion.

I.: Did you have any support in starting a business?

A.M.: No, I was all by myself. My startup capital accounted to pieces of vintage leather and a sewing machine. But being aware of my situation I knew that in order to be noticed I had to differ from others.

I.: And how did you find the solution?

A.M.: First I had to create a unique image of the brand. It was not hard to do, I just translated my personal style to my brand. With my friends we took edgy photos that conveyed our view of being cool and modern. We don't only sell the product, but the story behind it, the image it carries.

**I.:** I know that you started with an online shop on one of a social networks, please tell about it.

**A.M.:** Yes, this is true. In the beginning I created every bag myself and the quantity was very limited, so as the revenue. The retail channel had to be either free of charge or very cheap. It was our image that attracted customers, they liked our creativity, shared with each other. Plus, nowadays there are so many mass market brands that people want something original, and it turned out, they are ready to pay 100€-300€ for a bag from an unknown designer because it is different, and cool of course.

**I.:** As I understood, you attracted customers by your image and the content on your brand's profile. Now you own shops in St. Petersburg, Moscow and Hong-Kong.

**A.M.:** I couldn't pull this off on my own. I met a girl who became my friend and a business partners. Now she manages the brand. It was she who persuaded me to take a loan, it was not a big loan, we didn't want to take risk in case we fail. We found a leather supplier in Italy, rented a space for manufacturing and hired seamstresses. Our production volume is not big; every product is handmade and is in limited quantity, this is what our customers appreciate.

**I.:** Can you tell me what you have done to promote the brand?

**A.M.:** Our main promotion is the word-of-mouth, we keep our customers happy and they pay us back with new customers. We prefer to allocate our budget into the production and design, rather than advertising. That is why we make a big use of social media. At the moment we have profiles on Facebook and VK (former Vkontakte), and my own Instagram account that I use for the purposes of the company. I believe that when you show your life behind the brand it brings you closer to customers.

**I.:** Can you give a few advices on how to benefit from social media?

**A.M.:** First you need to have your own style and follow it, the second would be to keep customers up to date, supply them with news of your company and provide interesting and fresh content, create the feeling that they are welcome in to the 'family'.

**I.:** Thank you and good luck with further development.

**A.M.:** Thank you too and good luck with the research.



Attachment 2. Complete comparison of what types of content respondents would rather 'like', comment or share

