

Socially Acceptable?

Exploring Consumer Responses to
Marketing in Social Media

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Dissertation for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Ph.D.,
in Business Administration
Stockholm School of Economics, 2012

Socially Acceptable? Exploring Consumer Responses to Marketing in
Social Media © SSE and the author, 2012
ISBN 978-91-7258-873-8

Front cover illustration:

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Back cover photo:

Cecilia Nordstrand, 2012

Printed by:

Ineko, Göteborg, 2012

Keywords:

Social media, Consumer responses, Sender origin, Source credibility,
Signaling effects

To
Catrin and Agnes

Foreword

This volume is the result of a research project carried out at the Center for Consumer Marketing at the Stockholm School of Economics (SSE).

This volume is submitted as a doctor's thesis at SSE. In keeping with the policies of SSE, the author has been entirely free to conduct and present his research in the manner of his choosing as an expression of his own ideas.

SSE is grateful for the financial support provided by the Torsten and Ragnar Söderberg Foundations, which has made it possible to fulfill the project.

Göran Lindqvist

Director of Research
Stockholm School of Economics

Magnus Söderlund

Professor and Head of the
Center for Consumer Marketing

Acknowledgements

So, here we are. The home stretch. It is an odd feeling sitting here by the kitchen table, writing the final words of a dissertation project that started out more than four years ago. The end of one road and the beginning of another. Thinking back over the last four years I realize what an exciting journey it has been. I also realize that there are a number of people to whom I am deeply indebted for all their help along the way. These words are but a small token of my deep appreciation.

First of all I want to thank my supervisor Micael Dahlén, who lured me back to Sweden to start the PhD program and who has patiently guided me through it. Micael, we both get embarrassed by sentimentality so I will not go down that route. I hope it is enough that I say how incredibly grateful I am for all you have done for me. Sara Rosengren and Richard Wahlund, who have also been part of my supervisory committee, your words of wisdom when guiding me through this project have likewise been of great help, thank you.

There have been other colleagues, past and present at both CCM and CFR, whose advice and encouragement have helped me through writer's block and worse. Magnus Söderlund, Claes-Robert Julander, Joel Ringbo, Karina Töndevold, Hanna Berg, John Karsberg, Nina Åkestam, Angelica Blom, Fredrik Törn, Niclas Öhman, Henrik Sjödin, Susanna Erlandsson, Fredrik Lange, Jens Nordfält, Mikael Hernant, Per-Jonas Eliaeson, Rebecca Gruvhammar and Cecilia Höft, thank you. Anders Wien should also not be forgotten in a text like this, thank you. I am also grateful to the administrative staff at SSE for all their assistance.

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Erik Modig deserves his own paragraph. Partner in crime over the past four years. They finally put us in separate offices but thankfully they are within comfortable shouting distance so we can still plan mischief. Thanks for everything.

I want to thank the Torsten and Ragnar Söderberg Foundations. Without your generous financial support none of this would have been possible. I am also grateful to the people at BlueCarrot and SSE Riga for expanding my horizons.

Finally, I want to thank my friends and especially my family. My parents, Agneta and Tor, and my brothers, Tobias and Mats, and all my grandparents; your support throughout my life has always been a great source of strength. And to the two most beautiful women in my life (and possibly in the world), my wife Catrin and my daughter Agnes, you inspire me in ways you cannot imagine. I do not deserve you but I am so happy I have you. I love you all very much.

Fiskebäckskil, November 1, 2012

Jonas Colliander

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1. Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to further the understanding of consumer responses to marketing in social media. The rise of social media over the past decade has raised the questions of if, how, and under what circumstances they work for marketing purposes. This thesis is intended to add to that emerging body of research.

With the rise of social media in recent years there has been a heightened interest from marketing professionals in the potential of these new outlets for reaching consumers. Anecdotal evidence suggests that properly executed social media marketing can take a company to new heights. Jaret (2006), for example, describes how one endorsement on a popular blog helped propel a small skin care company from \$100,000 to \$4,000,000 in sales. Figures like this indicate that large numbers of consumers make purchase decisions based on mentions and endorsements in social media. Yet far from all attempts from companies to harvest the potential of social media marketing have been successful. A glance in newspaper archives produces a long list of company failures in social media. For example, Sony and Wal-Mart have both come under fire for creating fake blogs celebrating the companies (Weaver, 2006; Pallavi, 2006). In another case the poor handling of criticism by a low-level employee on Nestlé's Facebook page started an online storm that ended up on the pages of major news outlets such as The Guardian (Fox, 2010).

The vast attention that these failures get both online and offline indicate that consumers are very particular on how they want companies to communicate in social media, highlighting the need for research in this area. This need encompasses both the fundamental issues of the effectiveness of social media, alluded to by the figures from Jaret (2006), as well as the reaction of consumers to doubtful practices and negative word of

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mouth (WOM) as illustrated by the Sony and Wal-Mart cases. The Nestlé experience further calls for research into how consumers react to the ways companies communicate via their official social media channels. That is why this thesis is dedicated to the investigation of consumer responses to marketing via social media. In contrast to previous research on social media marketing, much of which emphasizes the actions and motivations of the individual communicating through social media (e.g. Hennig-Thurau et. al. 2004), the studies presented here focus on the actions and motivations of the recipient of the message. In other words, I intend to add to the emerging body of research on how consumers react to social media marketing and why they react the way they do.

Social media is now an integrated part of the lives of hundreds of millions of people and allow them to connect and communicate to others online. Social media such as forums, Facebook, Twitter and blogs, have grown exponentially over the past decade. Forums now exist on matters ranging from Star Wars to travel. In 8 years, Facebook has gone from a page for Harvard students to more than 900 million members and Twitter is now a more popular online destination than CNN (Alexa.com). At the same time, blogs have grown from a tool for the tech-savvy niches in 1997 when Jorn Barger first coined the term “weblog” (Wortham, 2007) to a cornerstone of the internet.

These social media developments have not gone unnoticed by the business sphere. Many companies maintain their own Facebook page and design their commercials in the hope that they will go viral (Huang et al. 2011). Creating and monitoring one’s own brand forum has been an practice adopted by managers for some time (Fournier and Lee, 2009). Bloggers are frequently sponsored in return for endorsements (Arango, 2009) and Twitter has become an increasingly important source of communication for many companies (Case and King, 2011). In total, eMarketer.com estimated 2010 worldwide social network advertising spending at USD 3.3 billion, compared to USD 2.53 billion in 2009. Yet for the vast sums of money being spent on social media marketing, there

is still a great deal of insecurity among professionals about the best marketing practices in this new arena. The experiences of Sony, Wall-Mart and Nestlé are poignant examples of that.

Despite the managerial insecurity regarding social media practices, research into how the desired consumer responses can be evoked is scarce. To date, much of the marketing research into social media focuses on the motivations of individuals to participate and spread information via these media. Muniz Jr. and O'Guinn (2001) conceptualized brand communities and laid the groundwork for why individuals participate in them. A large number of articles have since delved into the motivational aspects of spreading positive WOM through social media. Muniz Jr. and Jensen Schau (2005) as well as Jensen Schau et al. (2009) investigated the value gained by consumers by contributing in online communities. Wang and Fesenmaier (2003), Lin and Lu (2011) and Muntinga et al. (2011) have also made contributions by advancing our understanding of consumer motivations for participating in social media. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) have also added significant pieces of the puzzle by studying the motivation to spread WOM online.

Contrasting the relatively large number of comprehensive studies on the motivational aspects of social media, however, is the relative lack of studies on how marketing via social media affect consumers. This despite a call to action by Godes et al. (2005) to investigate the effects of "social interactions" as far back as 2005. De Bruyn and Lilien (2008) and Chu and Kim (2011) investigated the aspects of WOM in determining recipients' online behavior. Kozinets et al. (2010) investigated how marketing messages are adapted into different narratives on blogs and the communal reactions to these networked narratives. Contributions have also been made by Algesheimer et al. (2010), who investigated how membership in eBay's customer community affected consumers' behavior on the website, and by Sonnier et al. (2011), who investigated the (significant) effects on sales of positive, neutral and negative online communications respectively.

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While these studies have contributed to our understanding of how various aspects of social media affect consumers they still only reveal fractions of how consumers respond to common marketing practices in social media. Results regarding the general effects on consumers of marketing in social media are contradictory and many questions still remain unanswered. Studies so far have failed to investigate if there is a difference between publicity in social media and more traditional media publicity in the way it affects consumers' attitudes and intentions. Furthermore, little or no research exists on the factors affecting social media marketing. What are the factors behind the success or failure of publicity in social media? And what happens when such publicity takes the form of sponsorship or even originates directly from the company? How is that kind of communication interpreted? Are reactions to negative publicity stronger or otherwise different than reactions to positive publicity? Given the scope of the social media phenomenon these are all important questions and they will be addressed in this thesis. By theorizing around and testing the effects of the importance of the source, the credibility and motives of the source and the importance nature of the communication in social media I demonstrate that in these new media marketing has a different logic. In social media, it is more important to the consumer who delivers the message, why they deliver the message and how they deliver the message, than in traditional media. These insights bring established constructs into the new realm of social media and demonstrate the shift in the weights consumer attribute to the various aspects of sender and communication. The studies are thus steps towards illuminating consumer reactions to marketing in social media.

1.1 Aim of the thesis

The aim of this thesis is to further the understanding of consumer responses to marketing in social media. Through empirical investigations it is intended to add understanding to this hitherto under-researched area and contribute to the literature on marketing communications.

More specifically I aim to investigate a) the effectiveness of publicity in social media as compared to traditional media and b) the reasons why consumers potentially view social media differently c) how those underlying reasons affect consumers when the perceptions of the sender is distorted d) how consumers react to negative WOM in social media and e) how consumers respond when companies communicate directly through social media channels using either one-way communication or dialogue. The joint picture emerging from the studies indicates how consumers generally view marketing through social media and gives directions for future research.

1.2 Outline of the thesis

The thesis consists of two different parts, the introductory chapter and a part with the five empirical studies. The introductory chapter starts by presenting a conceptual discussion about the nature and importance of social media from a marketing perspective. It continues with a literature review of previously published studies in the field of social media marketing and an analysis of where potential contributions can be made. Thereafter I present theoretical constructs that together form a framework for the understanding of how consumers react to marketing in social media. I end the introductory chapter by presenting the joint picture obtai-

ned from my studies, the implications for both marketing theory and practitioners as well as directions for future research.

In the second part I present the empirical studies in five articles that are all either published, forthcoming or under review in different marketing journals. The conceptual discussion in the introductory chapter, which will follow below, will simultaneously summarize my research and provide the reader with a theoretical lens through which to view the articles.

2. The nature and importance of social media in marketing

Before reviewing the literature on social media marketing and identifying potential research areas it is useful to first take a step back and try to define the social media concept. I thus want to clarify what is meant by social media and, in addition, provide the rationale behind the decision to investigate it from a marketing perspective. When reviewing the literature on social media one striking impression is the surprising lack of attempts to define what social media actually is. Most researchers who attempt to describe the concept use a definition provided by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010). They describe social media as a set of “internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technical foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (p.61). The problem with using this definition, however, is that it is a bit too narrow for the contemporary use of social media. Whereas I agree that social media is certainly rooted in the concepts of sharing and collaboration that is sometimes called Web 2.0 the definition becomes more difficult to defend when scrutinizing the phrase User Generated Content (UGC).

The common definition of UGC, used by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), is that coined by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 2007. According to the OECD media content has to fulfill three criteria in order to be considered as UGC: a) it has to be published on a publically accessible web site or a social networking site accessible to a select group of people b) it needs to contain a degree of creative effort and c) it has to be created outside of professional routines and practices. The problem with linking social media with UGC is that practices in social media have outrun this 2007 definition. The second criterion is especially problematic as simply reproducing something from another source does not count as UGC according to this definition. However, contemporary content in social media often does not involve a creative effort. For example, sharing the content of others on Facebook or retweeting it on Twitter are just as common. In addition, as companies have realized the value of social media and become more active in it lots of content is indeed created inside professional routines and practices by company employees or hired consultants. For someone researching social media today, it is clear that the working definition of social media needs to be broadened. *For the purpose of this thesis I therefore define social media as widely available internet-based applications with low barriers of entry that allow individuals or organizations to publish material on public websites or social networking sites available to a select group of people.*

In later years the list of various social media that fit into this definition has grown considerably. Author Brian Solis has listed more than 100 different social media in what he calls a conversation prism (theconversationprism.com) and the growth shows no sign of slowing down. But what is different about these new media compared to the numerous media that existed long before the first social medium appeared? Why do we need to study them as a new phenomenon from a marketing perspective?

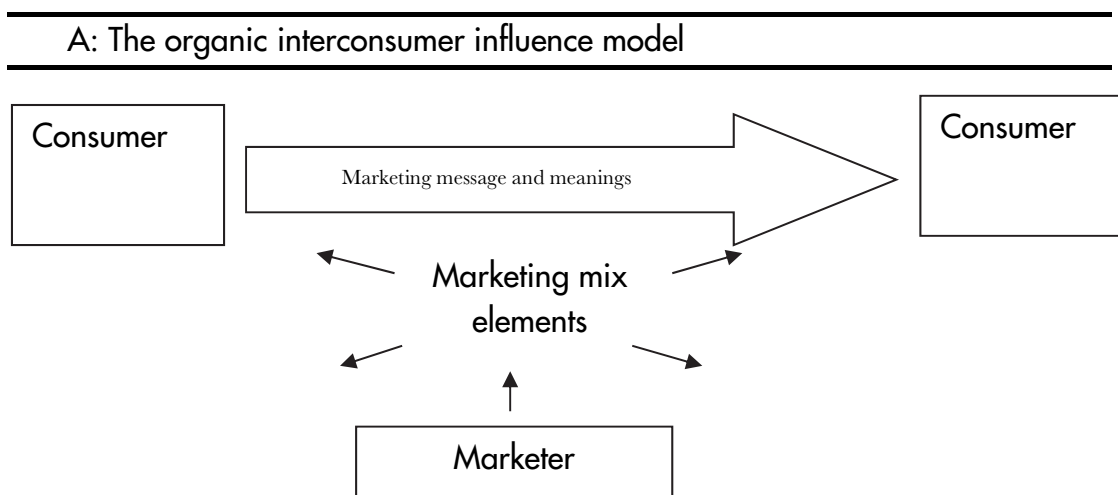
Even though companies use social media to communicate directly with consumers the vast bulk of the communication in social media, as opposed to in traditional media, takes place between individuals. That

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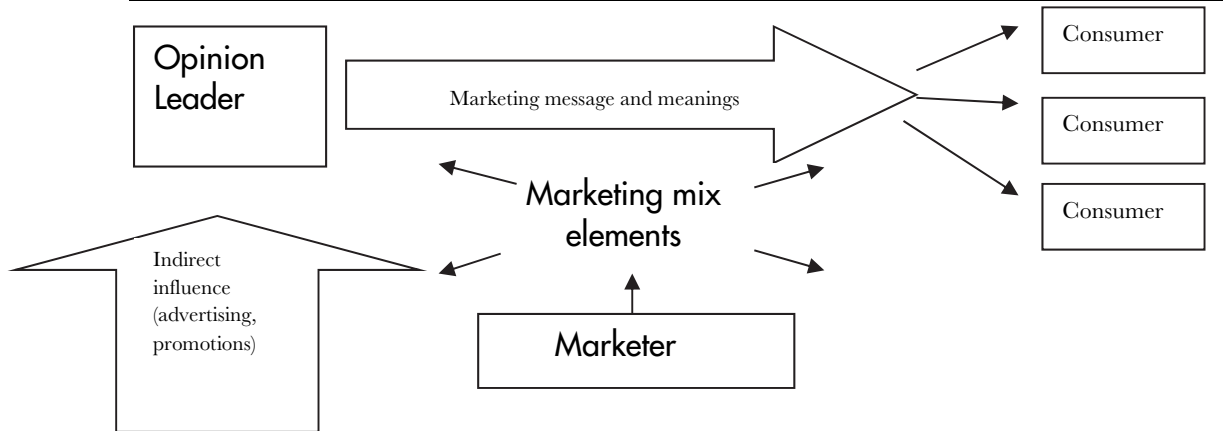
fact makes social media an extension of the personal sphere for many. Social media has been described as hyper-social, allowing consumers to interact far more with others online than they do offline (Moran and Gossieaux, 2010).

Kozinets et al. (2010) has demonstrated that like general interaction in social media, brand related interaction in social media also takes place mainly between consumers, and so fits the classic description of WOM. Moreover, mirroring the logic of social media being hyper-social, Kozinets et al. (2010) have demonstrated that WOM online has recently reached a stage where these messages are communicated more frequently between large networks. That as opposed to the slower offline one-to-one or one-to-many WOM of the past (see figure 1). The new technical gains have thus moved WOM to a new arena and transformed consumer behavior in these media, resulting in a marketing situation that is new to both researchers and practitioners.

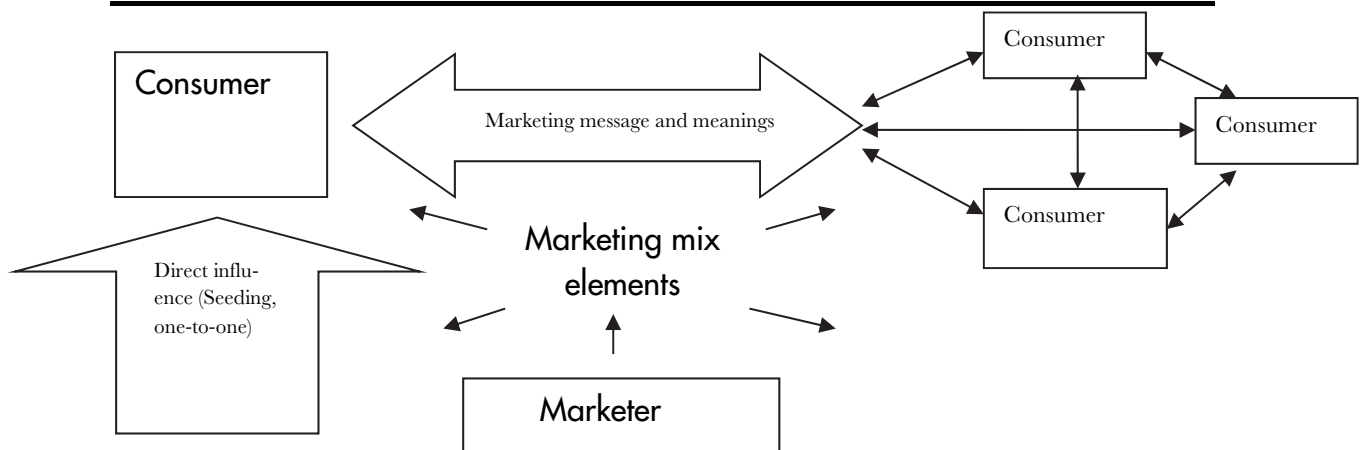
Figure 1
The evolution of WOM theory (Kozinets et al. 2010)



B: The linear marketer influence model



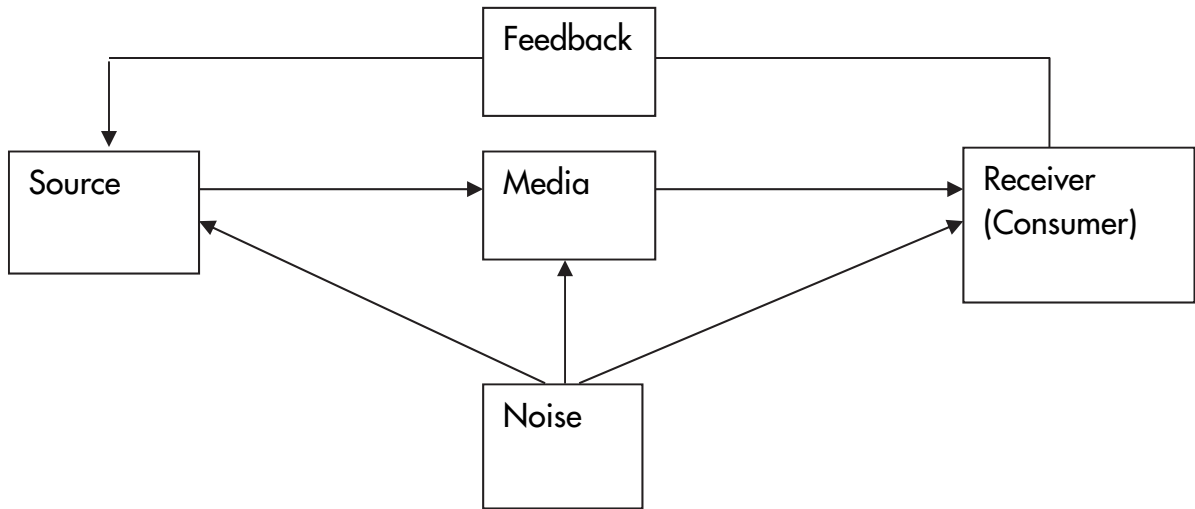
C: The network coproduction model



Authors of popular literature have already drawn that conclusion. Van Belleghem (2010) claims that companies must learn how to become conversation managers and Solis (2012) has aptly named his book “The end of business as usual”. A title such as that suggests a new reality for business and it is a call to researchers to aim our efforts in that direction. In the section below I will synthesize some of the existing research in social media and point out some gaps that I intend to fill in order to further the understanding of consumer responses to marketing in social media.

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Figure 2



3. Previous research

3.1 The motivations for spreading WOM in social media

Marketing researchers on social media have thus far focused mainly on examining the motivations to spread WOM through them. In other words, the emphasis has been on the motivations of the source in the marketing communications model. Considering that the early forms of social media were often open communities, it is a logical development. In the late 1990s, marketing academia began to zero in on the potential of these virtual communities and groups online for marketing purposes. Kozinets (1999), for example, noted how consumers were flocking around common interests online and saw how these groups constituted a

form of tribes that had to be taken into account by marketing professionals. In developing a classification scheme for community participation where members go from tourists to insiders Kozinets (1999) described how the groups exchanged and interpreted information. He not only gave advice to marketers on which members of the community to target but also concluded that the “existence of united groups of online consumers implies that power is shifting away from marketers and flowing to consumers” (p. 258).

With such a power shift occurring the natural next step for researchers became to conceptualize these powerful communities and try to understand what motivated consumers to contribute to them. That way, marketers would be able to steer consumers towards these communities and motivate them to interact once there. In the early 2000s researchers began to map that journey. In a seminal article, Muniz Jr. and O’Guinn (2001) established that a brand community is a “specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand” (p.412). They concluded that the three brand communities in their study all fulfilled the criteria for a traditional community in that they encompassed: shared consciousness (members feel connected to one another and collectively feel different from others not in the community), rituals and traditions (that create meanings and celebrate certain norms and values) and a sense of moral responsibility (a sense of duty or commitment to the community). These findings were crucial to the development of the social media research since they drew a clear parallel between brand communities online and traditional communities offline. Motivations to be a part of a community and spread WOM were thus potentially very similar. Muniz Jr. and O’Guinn (2001) found that in their study, shared consciousness (or consciousness if kind) was the most important aspect of the brand community, even though rituals, traditions and moral responsibility played no small part. As in traditional communities, the researchers thus established that the group inclusion and the desire for structure and meaning

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were key motivators for participating in a brand community and talk to others in them.

Additional research in the years following the publication of Muniz Jr. and O'Guinn's (2001) study strengthen this view. Examining the brand community for the abandoned Apple Newton, Muniz Jr. and Jensen Schau (2005) found that participating in a brand community sometimes fulfill the same need as religious affiliation. In their study of the community they found that "supernatural, religious, and magical motifs are common in the narratives of the Newton community" (p.739). Members in the community exhibited an almost cult-like devotion to a discontinued product, thereby creating an extreme sense of shared consciousness and group belonging.

In another study on how brand communities create value (and thus on why people participate in them) Jensen Schau et al. (2009) observed 12 value-creating practices in online brand communities and organized them into four categories. The social networking category included the practices of welcoming (greeting new arrivals and teaching them the ways of the community), empathizing (supporting other members) and governing (proclaiming the expected behavior in the community). The authors find that these practices are intended to reinforce the bonds within the community. They define another category as impression management and include the practices of evangelizing (inspiring others to use the brand) and justifying (rationalizing brand use) within it. These practices are expanding the communities as well as legitimizing their existence to outsiders, which strengthens the bonds within them. The third category found is called community engagement and include the practices staking (marking distinction within the community, thus creating a hierarchy), milestoning (marking important steps in brand ownership), badging (recognizing these important steps in the community) and documenting (describing the brand relationship journey). These practices are undertaken to highlight and reinforce the emerging relationship with the brand, recognizing members' brand journeys to the ot-

hers in the community. The final category is called brand use and includes the practices of grooming (caring for the brand), customizing (sharing tips for modifying the brand) and commoditizing (behaviors aimed at influencing approach to and nature of the marketplace). These practices are undertaken in order to improve the use of the brand for the members of the community but also to increase one's status in the community.

Similar motivations for/values gained from participating in online brand communities emerge from these studies. They reveal that group inclusion is a powerful reason for why people contribute. Another powerful motivator seems to be the building of trust between members through various rituals and exchanges. Rituals and traditions such as observed by these authors most likely also contribute a sense of security within the participating individuals whereas the hierarchies and roles assumed in the forums bolster the confidence of community participants. An examination of additional literature dealing with the motivation to contribute in social media and spread brand related content emphasizes the importance of group inclusion and social interaction in particular. It has been highlighted by Cova (1997), Lin and Lu (2011), McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig (2002), Muntinga et al. (2011), Rheingold (1993) and Szmi-gin and Reppel (2004) as a motivator to participate in social media.

The needs for symbolic/material gratification and the needs for sustaining the self concept have also been highlighted in the literature as motivations to participate in online brand communities. Wang and Fesenmeier (2003) argue that online communities can be viewed as gift economies where contributions are made with the expectation that services, usually in the form of information sharing, will be repaid at some point in the future. Whereas the nature of online communities sometimes prevents the reciprocal act between individuals, Wang and Fesenmeier (2003) argue that this reciprocity occurs not between two individual contributors but within the group as a whole. In that way, the whole community will ensure that individuals receive the symbolic/material gratification for contributing.

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Also emphasized by Wang and Fesenmeier (2003) as a motivation for contributing in online communities is the self-concept theory, where individuals adapt to the expectations of the group to achieve an ideal self. That way, they maximize their own prestige and power in the community. Muntinga et al. (2011) also emphasize the shaping of the personal identity as key motivating aspects to create brand related content along with the empowerment of the creator as well as social interaction and entertainment. This is similar to the findings of Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), who found that enhancing the self-worth, along with economic incentives, altruism and the need for social interaction, were the key drivers of spreading WOM online.

The motivations of consumers to spread WOM in social media are thus fairly well established. In other words, when returning to figure 2 above we know a great deal about why people (the source) talk about companies or brands. In contrast, the effects on the receiver of WOM in social media are not as well researched. Nor have researchers dug very deep into what might affect the responses of consumers to marketing in social media. Below, however, are the findings of research in this area to date.

3.2 The effects of social media marketing on consumers

Research indicates mixed effects of social media marketing on consumers. On a general level, some research suggests that WOM in social media has an effect on company sales, perhaps even more so than was

previously understood. Sonnier et al. (2011) investigated the sales effects of the aggregate level of positive, neutral and negative WOM online captured by web crawler technologies and classified by automated sentiment analysis. Building on previous research that show an effect of the overall volume of online comments, Sonnier et al. (2011) compared various models that were designed to predict company sales based on comments online. The authors found that by including the valence of comments they found superior fit when running a model designed to predict company sales. Contrasting the superior fit of the model incorporating valence to the model only incorporating overall comment volume, the researchers conclude that the role of online WOM had likely been underestimated in previous research. In other words, consumers make purchase decisions based on online WOM much more than was previously assumed.

In another study, however, Algesheimer et al. (2010) found that participation in a community did not necessarily drive sales. In fact, they argued that consumers may reduce the amount spent on a brand after joining a community. In a study on members of Ebay's community, the authors found that there was no significant difference in the number of bids placed or the revenue earned on the site. There was, however, a negative impact on the number of listings on the site and the amount spent. The authors argue that this result is due to consumers becoming more efficient and knowledgeable as a result of community participation, leading to more conservative consumption patterns. However, the study gives no indication of the precise conversation that took place during the period of study that might have influenced the results. Furthermore, Algesheimer et al (2010) themselves acknowledge that the "precise underlying psychological processes" (p.763) are outside the scope of their study.

The mixed effects of social media marketing on consumers highlight the need for further research in this area. None of the authors have investigated effects of social media marketing on the consumer level, a no-

table gap in the research. Furthermore, the quote from Algesheimer et al. (2010) above emphasizes the need for understanding the underlying psychological processes affecting consumer responses to marketing in social media. The existing research on this topic is examined in the next section.

3.3 The factors affecting consumer responses to marketing in social media

In a study on the determinants of consumer engagement in WOM on social networking sites, Chu and Kim (2011) concluded that tie strength influenced opinion seeking behavior. In other words, the closer an individual perceives himself to be to others on social networking sites, the more prone he is to seek their advice on products or brands (and, presumably, to be influenced by them). This finding mirrors that of De Bruyn and Lilien (2008), who investigated when online WOM was most efficient at each step in a hierarchy-of-effects model consisting of awareness, interest and final decision. They concluded that tie strength positively influences awareness of a WOM campaign. De Bruyn and Lilien (2008) used email and not a social media in their campaign. However, their results speak to the validity of Chu and Kim's (2011) findings that tie strength is an important factor consumers consider when exposed to marketing in social media.

Another determinant of consumer engagement in WOM on social networking sites found by Chu and Kim (2011) is homophily, how similar to themselves individuals perceive others to be. However, the relationship between homophily and opinion seeking was negative. In other words, individuals tend to seek the opinions of those who differ from them. Again, this finding is validated by the earlier findings of De Bruyn and Lilien (2008). They found that demographic dissimilarity of the

source of the WOM message increased awareness and interest as well as the likelihood of acting upon the WOM. The findings of Chu and Kim (2011), which are validated by those of De Bruyn and Lilien (2008), thus paint an interesting picture. Emotional closeness (tie strength), rather than demographics similarities (homophily), influences consumer responses to marketing in social media.

Chu and Kim (2011) also found another determinant of consumer engagement in WOM on social networking sites in their study, trust. The more trust an individual has in his contacts the more likely he is to seek their opinions in social media. This finding is validated by another important study on the factors affecting consumer responses to marketing in social media by Kozinetz et al. (2010). In a qualitative study where seeding strategies (products being given to influential bloggers) were evaluated, the authors demonstrated a complex pattern for how the messages are spread and received by a community. The strategies used to spread the word are influenced by the current narrative, nature and norms of the blog as well as the nature of the promotion. The adherence of the blogger to these factors determines the response by the community, which in turn influences how the narratives on the blog and among the readers evolve. Properly handled by the blogger, the readers will accept the marketing message whereas they will quickly reject it (and the blogger) if he strays too far from the aforementioned factors. The findings demonstrate the sensitive and fragile nature of the relationship between the source and the receiver in social media. Furthermore, it indicates that the recipient trusts that the priorities of the source should be his (the recipient's) well-being, and not the well-being of the business enterprise that is being promoted. This logic is underlined by the findings of Huang et al. (2011), who concluded that the authority (credibility, trustworthiness and reliability) of the source is crucial for the acceptance of WOM in social media. Also important according to Huang et al (2011), is the quality, authenticity and interestingness of the message.

3.4 Setting a research agenda

Researchers have thus begun to investigate the receiver side of figure 2, how consumers respond to marketing in social media. However, many aspects of this part of the model are still unclear. The results regarding the direct effects of social media marketing are contradictory. Sonnier et al (2011) reported significant sales effects of the aggregated positive, neutral and negative WOM online but Algesheimer et al. (2010) reported negative spending effects of membership in a brand community. Moreover, none of the researchers have investigated the effects of social media marketing on a consumer level. I therefore intend to fill this gap and investigate the effectiveness of social media marketing on a consumer level. I also intend to examine the underlying reasons for why consumers react the way they do.

With regards to the factors affecting the consumer responses to social media marketing, Chu and Kim (2011) have demonstrated that tie strength and trust affect consumers' opinion seeking behavior. Trust and sender motives also appear to be a factor affecting consumer responses in the studies of Kozinets et al. (2010) and Huang et al. (2011). However, more detailed studies on how these factors affect social media differently than other media are still lacking. Researchers so far have also failed to demonstrate the effects on consumers in social media when their perception of these factors is distorted. Other areas that have not yet been investigated with regards to consumer responses to marketing in social media are the effects of negative WOM and the effects of companies communicating in social media directly. I intend to examine all these questions in this thesis. In order to do so, however, a more expanded and detailed framework than those that have been provided so far for the understanding of consumer responses to marketing in social media has to be established. That is the topic of the next section.

4. Towards a framework for understanding consumer responses to marketing in social media

4.1 Sender origin

The findings of Chu and Kim (2011) indicate that tie strength is important for understanding consumer responses to marketing in social media. Marketing research has long recognized the fact that the source of the marketing communication is crucial for gaining the desired response of the target audience. The source of a particular endorsement (or criticism) becomes a particularly crucial factor in WOM communication. As Dichter (1966) noted, one of the key considerations of the listener when he or she evaluates the WOM communication is his or her relationship with the speaker. The argument made in this thesis is that the closer that relationship is perceived to be, the greater the chance of the message being accepted by the listener.

An influential early scholar on WOM, Arndt (1967), found that stronger ties are the most influential ones in the flow of communication between individuals. Twenty years later Brown and Reingen (1987) concluded that such a statement was still “consistent with the general [view] of researchers” (p. 352). Granovetter (1973) found that weak ties play crucial roles in social networks but they do so in their capacity as bridges of information between networks. They are generally weaker in terms of their impact on an individual’s decision making process, where stronger ties tend to prevail. For example, Brown and Reingen (1987) found that:

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“At the macro level, weak ties displayed an important bridging function, allowing information to travel from one distinct subgroup of referral actors to another subgroup in the broader social system. At the micro level, strong and homophilous ties were more likely to be activated for the flow of referral information. Strong ties were also perceived as more influential than weak ties, and they were more likely to be utilized as sources of information for related goods.” (p. 350)

In a more recent study on the defections from service providers, Nitzan and Libai (2011), found that the stronger the tie with a defecting fellow customer, the more impact it had on consumers’ likelihood to leave said service provider themselves. In social media, therefore, the origin of a message is likely to have profound influence on the attitudes and intentions of those who attend to it. The closer the influencing agent is perceived to be to the consumer (i.e. the stronger the tie), the more likely the consumer should be to act upon the recommendation. From a theoretical point of view, clarifying this effect of the message origin is key. Not only does it shed further light on the role of tie strength in social media but it also helps establishing where social media marketing and traditional advertising differ.

4.2 Sender motives

Also highlighted by Chu and Kim (2011) as important factors affecting consumer responses to marketing in social media are trust and sender motives. These findings are substantiated by the findings of Kozinetz et

al. (2010) and Huang et al. (2011). Consumers exposed to marketing in social media ask themselves if the speaker is endorsing this product out of any material gain. In other words, they ask themselves: what motive does this individual have for telling me this? Is this person credible? The argument in this thesis is that the credibility of the source has a major impact on consumer response to marketing in social media.

Source credibility has been the subject of research for well over half a century and is commonly accepted as consisting of two key components; expertise, the ability to make correct assertions, and trustworthiness, the extent to which a source makes assertions that he or she considers valid (Hovland et al. 1953). A robust finding of that body of work is that the higher the expertise and trustworthiness of a source is perceived to be, the more credibility is assigned to that source. That, in turn, will produce a more favorable response among the listeners towards the advocacy (Pornpitakpan, 2004). Conversely, if a source is considered to have lower expertise and less trustworthiness, the persuasive effect will decrease as a result of it. Trust especially becomes a more important factor the closer the relationship between two parties is perceived to be. After all, it is more important to us that we can trust our friends than random strangers we meet on the subway.

In WOM relationships, where advice is shared between friends and acquaintances, the underlying motivation for why statements are made should thus become more important than in distant, commercial, relationships. When browsing through anecdotal “how to...”- guides for how to communicate in social media as a business honesty and integrity are frequently emphasized as being important to consumers. For example, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) write:

“Last but not least, be honest and respect the rules of the game...Never expect that other participants may not find out who stands behind some anonymous user account; after all, you’re dealing with some of

the most technologically sophisticated people on the planet.” (p. 67)

This logic is very likely the reason behind some of the more adverse community reactions in the study of Kozinets et al (2010). For example, when bloggers used an evaluation strategy (minimized or avoided mentioning that they were contributing in a marketing campaign and focused on the product) the reaction was often negative to the marketing and hostile to the blogger. The argument made in this thesis is therefore that the motive of the sender in social media marketing has a profound influence on the recipient’s response.

4.3 The nature of the communication

It is argued in this thesis that, in addition to sender origin and sender motives, the nature of the communication plays an important role when consumers respond to marketing in social media. The nature of the communication is crucial because the manner in which marketing messages are presented sends signals about the communicator to the recipient, which affect the recipient’s responses to the marketing. Recipients should be extra prone to evaluate these signals in social media, which are part of the personal sphere.

Research in advertising has demonstrated that signals can influence the response by consumers to marketing communication. For example, Kirmani and Wright (1989) showed that the perceived expense of an advertising campaign can lead to inferences about product quality. Kirmani (1997) expanded these findings and found that very high levels of advertising repetition can be viewed as a signal of manufacturer insecurity about the product, leading to decreased quality perceptions. In another study, Ambler and Hollier (2004) found that excessive and

extravagant elements of advertising are interpreted by consumers as signals of brand fitness. Along the same notes, Dahlén et al. (2008) found that creativity that does not add to the functionality of an ad signaled greater effort and ability and as such increased both brand interest and perceived quality.

In personal networks and social media, signals sent by the way an individual or company communicates ought to be especially important to the recipient. Unlike the more distant nature of traditional advertising, messages from contacts in a network are within our personal sphere. A consumer should thus be more aware of and pay closer attention to the various aspects of these messages since they have a greater impact on him than more distant messages. Pentland (2008) describes how signals beyond what is actually being stated in face-to-face communication between friends play a great role in how we interpret it. The same logic seems to apply to online relations. Donath (2008) highlights that signals are especially important for assessing others in social media.

How marketing in social media is brought across, the nature of the communication, should thus matter to consumers as they will use it to make inferences about the communicator. For example, dialogue and exchange is one of the cornerstones of the personal sphere and thus of social media. The choice of whether to adapt that communication style will send signals to the recipient of a marketing message. Such signals will affect his evaluation of the sender and the marketing cause.

5. Introducing the articles

To shed light on the discussions in the introductory chapter and contribute to the marketing theory in the field of social media, this thesis incorporates five articles on the subject. They empirically investigate

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various facets of consumer responses to marketing in social media. They highlight important nuances of social media marketing and describe conditions for effective communication to consumers. Separately and as a whole, the articles contribute to the growing theoretical body on marketing through these new media.

Articles 1, 2 and 3 all relate to the question of the sender origin. They investigate the various responses by consumers to marketing in social media depending on who they perceive to be the original source of the message. Article 1 asks the fundamental question of how social media as publicity vehicles perform compared to other, more traditional, forms of media. Articles 2 and 3 dig deeper into the various sender perceptions in social media and investigate how consumers respond if their view of an unbiased social media personality is tainted by sponsorship revelations. All three articles are based on experimental data.

Articles 4 and 5 both deal with the nature of the communication. Article 4 investigates how the attributes of forum posts from consumers complaining about companies or brands shape the responses of other consumers who defend them online. Article 5 highlights the results of using different styles of communication as a company and how it affects consumer attitudes and intentions towards the organization. Methodologically, the two articles differ substantially. Whereas article 5 uses experimental data similar to that of articles 1, 2 and 3, article 4 uses netnographic observations to explore the online defense phenomenon.

All five articles are also investigating the effects of sender motives in social media. Article 1 delves into the moderating effects of source credibility in social media. Articles 2 and 3 highlight the motivations of social media personalities as a key experimental condition. Article 4 demonstrates how the motivations of someone complaining about a company online can affect the responses of other consumers. Article 5, finally, examines how various forms of company communications in social media sends signals about company motives to consumers, effectively me-

diating their responses to the communication. In the following sections, each article is briefly summarized. In the summaries, the weight will be on the contribution to the emerging picture of the thesis.

5.1 Article 1.

Following the Fashionable Friend: The Power of Social Media. Weighting Publicity Effectiveness Of Blogs versus Online Magazines.

Published in: Journal of Advertising Research, March 2011

Co-authored with: Micael Dahlén

This article addresses the effectiveness of publicity in social media as compared to the more traditional media. In this experimental study, an identical text celebrating a clothing brand was placed in 7 highly ranked fashion blogs and 7 highly ranked online fashion magazines. Real readers of the blogs and magazines read the posts and subsequently filled out a questionnaire detailing their relationship with the company and the writer of the post. Blogs and online magazines were chosen for their similarity in the publishing format and the prominence of the two media respectively. The study is intended to investigate whether the new or traditional media is more effective as a publicity tool and if so, why and under what condition that result is valid.

The results indicate that social media is indeed more effective as publicity vehicles than traditional media. Readers exposed to the text on blogs reported a higher brand attitude and purchase intention than readers exposed to the text in online magazines. Blog readers also experienced more parasocial interaction (PSI), the illusion of a face-to-face relationship with a media performer, than magazine readers and PSI mediated the effects on brand attitude and purchase intention. What that means is that, in their minds, readers of blogs, to a higher degree than readers of magazines, form relationships such as friendships with media

personalities. Advice from bloggers are thus, to a higher degree than advice from magazine authors, perceived as advice from friends and that results in the higher brand attitude and increased purchase intention. These results are, however, moderated by the writer's perceived relationship with the brand and the writer's credibility. In other words, on blogs, more than in online magazines, it is of outmost importance that readers perceive the endorser as having an unbiased relationship with the brands they endorse and that the endorsers are perceived as credible. Social media thus have high publicity effectiveness, provided that the motives of the endorser are considered pure by consumers

5.2 Article 2

The Blog and the Bountiful: Exploring the Effects of Disguised Product Placement on Blogs that are Revealed by a Third Party.

Forthcoming in the Journal of Marketing Communications
Co-authored with: Susanna Erlandsson

But what actually happens when consumers are informed that the motives of the endorser are not pure? As bloggers wield more influence and companies and PR agencies become more aware if that fact cooperation between companies and social media personalities is increasing. What happens for example when companies pay off influential bloggers and this is revealed to the readers? That practice is becoming more common and the purpose of the second article is to explore that question.

For this article, a comparison was made between blog readers exposed to a post from a famous blogger celebrating a brand (similar to that of article 1) and blog readers exposed to the same text but also to a tabloid article revealing that the blogger in question had been paid for the

endorsement by the company. Both groups were subsequently asked to evaluate the blogger and the brand in a questionnaire and their answers were compared. Both groups were also compared to a control group of blog readers who evaluated the blogger and brand without being exposed to either text in order to establish a baseline for the results. Again, real blog readers from three top ranking blogs were used to ensure the ecological validity of the study. The revelation was perceived by the experimental group exposed to it as coming from a large, nation-wide tabloid that has made similar revelations in the past.

Half of the results of the study were quite straightforward. As predicted the attitude towards the blog and the credibility of the blogger decreased as a result of the revelation, these effects were both mediated by a decreased PSI. This shows the double nature of PSI. It is the source of bloggers' persuasiveness but it can also lead to adverse effects after perceived wrongdoings. Something that was not predicted, however, was the effect seen on the brand attitude and purchase intentions.

Even though one experimental group was subjected to the tabloid revelation their brand attitude and purchase intention still increased as a result of the experiment. Subsequent analysis revealed that these effects were mediated by the writers' perceived attitude towards the brand. The conclusion was therefore that there is a strong element of correspondence bias, the tendency to overemphasize personal disposition and underemphasize situational factors, in social media. In other words, even though readers are made aware that bloggers are being sponsored for their endorsement they still think that the bloggers recommend the brand because they actually like it. The results show that social media personalities have more to lose than brands if a material connection between them is revealed by a third party.

5.3 Article 3

Fashion, She Wrote (Sponsored by X): Exploring the Effects of Sponsorship Disclosure on Blogs

In review for possible publication in the Journal of Consumer Behavior

Single authored

So what happens when the blogger tries to avoid the adverse affects of a third party revelation by disclosing up front that she has been sponsored by a brand to promote their products? That is what article 3 seeks to answer.

Once again, one experimental group consisted of blog readers exposed to a post from an influential blogger praising a brand (as in articles 1 and 2). The other main experimental group consisted of blog readers exposed to the same text but where the blogger disclaimed that she had been paid for the endorsement by the company. Both groups were asked to evaluate the blogger and the brand and their answers were compared. Again both groups were compared to a control group of blog readers who evaluated the blogger and brand without being exposed to either text in order to establish a baseline for the results. As in the first two articles, real blog readers from top ranking blogs were used.

Results indicate that contrary to the scenario in article 2 the attitude towards the blogger and credibility of the blog was maintained when using this strategy. However, the brand attitude and purchase intentions of the group exposed to the disclaimer were not significantly higher than the brand attitude and purchase intentions of the control group. The results indicate that by clearly stating to the readers up front that a blog post is sponsored by a company the blogger maintains the trust of the readers and her own status in the community. However, by ackno-

wedging the sponsorship she also activates their persuasion knowledge of the readers, thereby decreasing the persuasiveness of the post.

5.4 Article 4

Trash talk rebuffed: Consumers' defense of companies criticized in online communities

Forthcoming in the *European Journal of Marketing*
Co-authored with: Anders Hauge Wien

The fourth article investigates consumer responses not to social media praise, such as the first three articles, but to negative messages in social media and how these responses in turn affect the online communities in which they take place. One of the fundamental questions that still cause insecurity among researchers and practitioners is the effect of criticism online. What happens when stories of product and service failure end up in social media? Supported by a number of well documented failures in this area, much of the management and academic literature focuses on the importance of monitoring and responding quickly to criticism before it snowballs out of control. By highlighting the existence of other consumers who defend companies in online communities, article 4 challenges this view.

Deviating from the experimental approach of the first three articles, this netnographic study saw the researchers inserting themselves into four large online communities (one webmaster forum, one family forum, one travel forum and one photography forum) and emerging a while later with considerable amounts of data. Following a grounded theory approach, analysis was performed on 53 forum threads containing 1074 posts in total. The objective was to test an a priori belief that online de-

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fending was indeed an existing phenomenon and to classify the various styles of defending. Further objectives were to clarify what aspects of complaints that influenced the choice of defensive style and how the various defensive styles influenced the outcomes of the forum discussions.

Results confirmed that the online defense phenomenon does exist. A typology of six defensive styles (advocating, justifying, vouching, stalling, trivializing and doubting) was developed and the characteristics of each defense described. Furthermore, the antecedents influencing the defense were identified. The characteristics of the complainer's message affected the choice of defense style greatly, as did the attribution of guilt by the defender in the specific episode. The self-experience of the defender and his perceptions of justice were also heavily influential in the choice of defense style. A variety of outcomes of defending were identified but in most instances the defense was successful in mitigating the complaints in one way or another. This indicates that companies should hold back and not insert themselves into the fray of critical forum discussions too quickly. Oftentimes consumers defend them anyway and companies posting on forums can instead be view as an intrusion and serve as a catalyst for discontent.

5.5 Article 5

Twitter for two: Investigating the effects of tweeting with customers

In review for possible publication in the International Journal of Advertising

Co-authored with: Micael Dahlén and Erik Modig

Should companies want to insert themselves into social media, however, they could instead opt to create their own channel of communication, such as starting their own Twitter feed. As previously mentio-

ned, many have already done so and social media is becoming an important channel of communication for many organizations regardless of their size. The question then becomes: how should companies best use these channels to affect consumers? Should they opt for total control and not let anyone disturb the messages they want to communicate? Or should they aim for a dialogue with customers, which will answer the questions of a few but might move the communication off topic? How will either strategy be interpreted by those who follow the company? These are the questions that article 5 is intended to answer. The article examines the difference in consumer reactions to using one-way communication, publishing one's messages without allowing readers to comment and interact, and dialogue, publishing messages and then interacting with customers by answering questions and comments, in social media.

In article 5 we are back to experimental territory. Twitter was chosen as the medium since it is increasingly common for companies to use a Twitter account to communicate to the public. To test the difference between the two forms of communication, three real company twitters were identified that used one-way communication as well as three real company twitters that used dialogue. A number of respondents that followed none of the feeds were subsequently recruited and randomly assigned one of the Twitter feeds to follow for one week. At the end of the week, the two groups were asked to evaluate the companies they had followed in a questionnaire. The respondents who had followed the companies using one-way communication were compared to a control group of respondents that evaluated the same companies but had not read the company Twitter. The control group thus served as a baseline so that it could be established how the experimental group's views of the company had changed over the course of the week. The same comparison was made between the respondents who had followed the Twitters using dialogue and a control group that had evaluated those companies.

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The results indicate that using dialogue with consumers in social media is more effective than using one-way communication. Whereas the brand attitude and purchase intention of the group exposed to dialogue had increased over the course of the week, the brand attitude and purchase intention of the group exposed to one-way communication had not. Subsequent tests revealed that the increase in the brand attitude and purchase intention of the group exposed to dialogue was mediated by the perceived effort and the perceived expense that consumers thought the companies using dialogue devoted to their customers. In other words, the form of communication used signaled to customers how much resources the companies devote to keeping the followers informed and content and that has a clear effect on their attitudes towards the brands and their intentions to purchase the products. These results show the importance of the signals that companies, through their various tactics, send to consumers.

6. The larger picture of the thesis

The articles in the thesis are intended to contribute to the emerging field of marketing in social media. They supplement existing marketing literature that focus more on the motivations of individuals to use social media and not so much on how consumers respond to marketing in it. The articles paint a joint picture in that they highlight the importance of the source, the underlying motives of the source and the manner in which the communication is presented. In trying to elicit the desired response from consumers when engaging in marketing in social media, the articles show that these three factors have become crucial on this new arena and they deserve further scrutiny from researchers and practitioners alike. The results of the studies in this thesis show that getting them right can make the difference between success and failure of a campaign.

The aggregated conclusion of the five articles is illustrated in figure 3, which synthesizes the findings of this thesis. It shows the different factors that affect the receiver in the standard marketing communications model (figure 2) when subjected to a marketing message in social media. The first factor is the sender of the message. The consumer implicitly asks himself who the source is and how closely tied to him this individual is. The second factor is regarding the motives of the source. The consumer implicitly asks himself why the source is trying to communicate this marketing message to him. The third factor is the nature of the communication. The consumer implicitly asks himself how this message is communicated and what that says about the individual or organization behind the message.

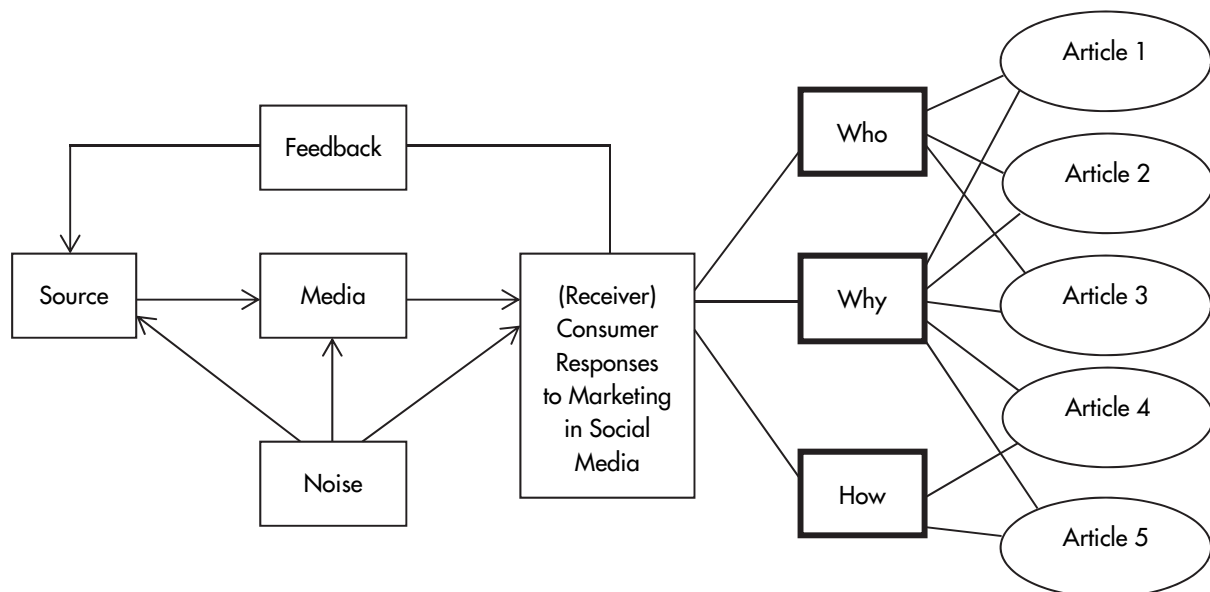
With the studies showing the importance these three factors, the central statement which brings the articles together is that when marketing products or services in social media, the who, why and how of the communication has become increasingly important. In other words, when exposed to marketing in these channels consumers' responses hinges upon who delivers the endorsement, why they deliver the endorsement and how they deliver it. This logic is more pronounced in social media than in other media.

The results from articles 1, 2 and 3 show conclusively that the origin of the message, who the perceived sender is, plays a big role in how consumers perceive it. Article 1 shows that publicity in social media is indeed more effective than marketing in traditional media because the source is perceived to be closer to the recipient. However, increasing levels of cooperation between companies and influential bloggers has alerted readers, regulators and traditional media alike. Social media personalities engaging in these activities now often find themselves either forced to disclaim such cooperation up front or being exposed as corporate sell-outs by others in the wake of such sponsorships. Regardless if how their involvement with companies comes to the attention of their audience it changes the readers' perception of who the sender of the message is.

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Article 2 and 3 present interesting mirror images of what happens after these two shifts in the perception of the sender. It turns out that the blogger is facing an interesting dilemma. If they disclaim their material connection with the brand they keep their credibility with their readers but the publicity effect of the post is minimized, possibly causing the companies to question their incentives for sponsoring the blogger. Should the blogger maximize the benefit for her sponsors and not disclaim the cooperation, however, she risks shattering her credibility if the practice is exposed. The findings show that the emphasis consumers put on the origins of the message is greater in social media than in many other forms of media. Because social media is an extension of our personal sphere, we pay extra attention to these aspects.

Figure 3: Factors affecting the consumer responses to marketing in social media



The results from articles 4 and 5 show that the nature of the communication, how messages are brought across, plays an equally great role in how consumers respond to marketing in social media. Whether it is a company attempting to communicate positive news with its customers via Twitter (article 5) or disgruntled individuals trying to bash organizations and thereby invoking responses from other consumers (article 4), how communication is presented is a crucial factor in how consumers respond to it. The options available for how to communicate through these new media are different from the media of the past. Both article 4 and 5 shows that the choice of communication style becomes an important aspect to consider before entering the social media sphere as it will influence how marketing messages are received by consumers in this arena.

Coexisting with both the who and the how is the why. The motive of the sender is a recurring theme in the articles and is the one factor that keeps coming back in all of them. As was found in articles 1, 2 and 3 the motive of the sender is intimately tied to the origin of the message. The question of sender motive becomes more important to us when delivered by someone in social media, which is so close to us, than when marketing is delivered by another known individual, for example in celebrity endorsements, who is bit more distant to us. The findings from article 5 (and to some extent in article 4) reveal that part of the reason that the nature of the communication matters to us in social media is because it says something to us about the underlying motives of the communicator.

The joint picture that the five articles paint for us is thus that when companies wish to enter the social media sphere for marketing purposes, they need to remember that consumers have a different set of priorities there than when they consume other, more traditional, forms of media. The importance attributed to the who, why and how is more pronounced in social media and in order to achieve success through these channels it is important to keep that in mind.

7. Contributions to marketing research

The aim of this thesis was to further our understanding of consumer responses to marketing in social media. From a research perspective the thesis will add to the limited body of research focusing on this particular aspect of these communication channels. By taking well researched theoretical constructs and applying them in a new setting I demonstrate the rebalancing of consumer priorities when judging marketing in social media.

The tendency to form intimate bonds with social media personalities to a greater extent than with traditional media personalities is an example of where a well researched concept becomes increasingly relevant in a social media setting. PSI has been frequently studied in a television context (e.g. Auter, 1992), which previously was one of the media that gave consumers the most insight into the daily life of media characters. The communication style and unaffiliated nature of modern social media personalities such as bloggers, however, increases the likelihood of readers forming parasocial relationships with them as well. That was indeed a finding of study 1. Social media personalities thus become closer connected to consumers and their recommendations carry more weight. The findings of this thesis thus substantiate and expand the findings of Chu and Kim (2011), who found that tie strength influenced the opinion seeking behavior of consumers online. However, such close relationships make sources in social media more vulnerable to shifts in the perception of their credibility.

Studies over the last half-century have conclusively demonstrated that a credible source is more persuasive than a non-credible source (Pornpitakpan, 2004). Study 1 demonstrates that this persuasive gap bet-

ween credible and non-credible sources is even wider in social media than in traditional media. In other words, shifts in the credibility of an endorser have a greater effect on consumer responses to social media marketing than on consumer responses to marketing in traditional media. That finding demonstrates the increased weight of source credibility in social media marketing. Studies 2 and 3 underline this logic and show significant effects on the evaluations of both social media personalities and the brands they endorse resulting from perceived shifts in the credibility of a blogger. Chu and Kim (2011, Huang et al. (2011) and Kozinets et al. (2010) have all pointed to its importance in the social media sphere and their findings are substantiated and expanded in this thesis.

This thesis also contributes to theory by illuminating consumer responses to negative WOM online. In particular it does so by highlighting the usefulness of justice and equity theory when evaluating consumer responses to negative WOM in social media. Related to but distinct from practices such as governing found by Jensen Schau et al (2009) it shows that responses are affected by the desire to achieve balance in the forum. Equity theory posits that in social interactions people strive to balance to outcome of others with the input of those individuals. That way, individuals are rewarded or punished for behavior seen as just or unjust (Konow, 2003). Study 4 shows that this behavior is very much a factor when consumers respond to negative messages about companies or brands in social media. Individuals evaluate the efforts and motives of others in social media and adapt their responses so as to balance those efforts and motives. These findings not only contribute to the direct understanding of consumer responses to negative WOM in social media. They also emphasize that marketing messages in social media are part of social interactions and are to some extent governed by the laws of social interactions. This thesis therefore underlines the importance of taking these laws into account when evaluating consumer responses to marketing in social media.

The illumination of marketing signals as an important part of consumer responses to marketing in social media is another theoretical contribution of this thesis. Researchers such as Ambler and Hollier (2004) and Kirmani and Wright (1989) have shown that various aspects of traditional marketing such as advertising can send signals to consumers about the organization behind the messages. Those signals can affect the evaluations of the organization. It is argued in this thesis that contemporary consumers are more able and willing to evaluate the motivations and intentions of marketers. This is especially true in social media, which is viewed as part of the personal sphere. They are thus more able to pick up on the signals sent by marketing in social media, which in turn affect their responses to it. The results of study 5 show that signals do affect those responses and that signals matter a great deal when evaluating organizational efforts online. This thesis is thus one step in moving signal theory firmly within the realm of marketing in social media.

All in all, the thesis has added bits to the emerging research body on consumer responses to marketing in social media and will hopefully give future researchers a bit more solid ground to stand on when they make further explorations into this fascinating area.

8. Contributions to marketing practice

In addition to building on the existing theory on social media marketing this thesis also contributes to marketing practice. The main takeaway for practitioners can be summarized as follows: use social media, but use it with caution. Article 1 shows that social media is indeed more effective than traditional media, but that it only works under certain conditions. The remaining articles all reinforce this point.

Given the weight attributed to the source and his motives in the articles it is now easy to see why there was such a backlash to some of the company failures mentioned at the beginning. When Sony and Wall-Mart had their fake blogs exposed as such people felt cheated. To evoke that feeling among consumers is bad enough in traditional advertising but it is even worse to evoke it in a setting so close to consumers' hearts as social media. Deceit hurts more the closer the relationship. And given the rate at which stories like that spread these days such catastrophic publicity should be avoided at all costs. That is not to say that all criticism is necessarily of evil and should be handled by a company crisis team, however. As article 4 demonstrates, criticism of a brand can energize other users in the network and spur them to defend the company online, leading to positive effects. An intervention at an early stage of such a conversation by the company could not only lead to the loss of the positive effect, but also give members of a community a feeling of "big brother is watching" and possibly serve as a catalyst for discontent. Instead, companies can opt for using their own social media channel, such as a Twitter feed, for communication. When doing so, however, the findings of this thesis underline the importance of adapting the communication to fit the more intimate nature of social media. Doing so will send positive signals about the organization to consumers and positively influence their evaluations of it.

In sum, social media is an extension of consumers' personal sphere. If companies wish to enter that sphere they have to adhere to the rules there. They have to generate value without appearing as having ulterior motives for their actions and produce marketing content that is not perceived as such. It is thus a delicate balancing act indeed but one that has the potential of generating huge rewards for those who master it.

9. Limitations and further research

The articles in this thesis have a number of limitations that are discussed at the end of each one. However, there are also limitations to the combined picture presented in this introductory chapter and gaps that should ideally be filled by future researchers.

The studies show conclusively that the sender origin, sender motives and the nature of the communication matter to consumers when exposed to marketing messages in social media. However, the relative weight of these factors when evaluating such marketing has not been examined. In other words, figure 3 does not show if the sender motives are more important to consumers than the sender origin and nature of the communication or if consumer responses hinge more on the perceptions of the latter two. Getting these consumer priorities straight should be the focus of future research.

In addition, the content of the actual marketing messages in social media have not been accounted for. Different messages with regards to valence, tones etc. were not tested in the experimental studies but such factors could potentially have significant effects on consumer responses. In fact, the results of study 4, where message characteristics influenced the choice of defense style, indicate that the nature of the message itself is important. Previous research has also found homophily to be a potential factor that can affect consumer responses to marketing in social media and not including it as a factor in any of the studies is a limitation of this thesis. I urge future researchers to test for the effects of these factors.

But attitudinal change, for example, does not only depend on the sender and the message. It also depends on the target of the communication. The reactions to marketing in social media could be very different depending on the mood, current attitudes or levels of experience (just to

name a few variables) of the consumers subjected to it. Investigating how the elements of the recipient of marketing in social media affect the outcome is another area for future research.

In addition, one interesting dependent variable should be included in future studies. As stated at the beginning, many companies hope that their marketing messages will go viral in social media (Huang et al. 2011). Therefore, measuring consumers' intention to pass the WOM marketing on to other consumers will add an extra layer of clarity in the attempts to map consumer responses to marketing in social media

With regards to the setup of the studies, three out of five use experimental methods where the construction of the stimuli and the publication of the material were controlled. Whereas real existing social media were used for the studies the validity of these experiments can thus not be completely guaranteed. Testing the phenomena investigated in these studies in their real natural format is therefore a task left to future researchers.

Returning at the end of this introductory chapter to figure 2 we also see that there are more building blocks in that model than the source (that has been the focus of much previous research), the medium and the receiver (that are the focus of this thesis). Also included in that model is a feedback loop. As Kozinets et al. (2010) have pointed out; meaning in social media is often coproduced by all actors in a network through this continuous feedback. More research into this coproduction and how it affects actors in social media is needed. Last but not least, the noise surrounding the communication in figure 1 has the potential of affecting all stages of the model. Rosengren (2008) has investigated how noise and clutter affects communication in traditional media. Extending those results by studying how it affects communication in social media is the final area I urge future researchers to investigate.

10. References

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