

Nastisin, Ludovit; Kmec, Kvetoslav; Kral, Stefan

Article

Consumer's online brand-related activities in Instagram and their impact on word-of-mouth

Marketing i menedžment inovacij

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Reference: Nastisin, Ludovit/Kmec, Kvetoslav et. al. (2023). Consumer's online brand-related activities in Instagram and their impact on word-of-mouth. In: Marketing i menedžment inovacij 14 (2), S. 44 - 50.

https://mmi.sumdu.edu.ua/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/A600-2023_05_Nastisin-et-al.pdf.

doi:10.21272/mmi.2023.2-05.

This Version is available at:

<http://hdl.handle.net/11159/631404>

Kontakt/Contact

ZBW – Leibniz-Informationszentrum Wirtschaft/Leibniz Information Centre for Economics

Düsternbrooker Weg 120

24105 Kiel (Germany)

E-Mail: [rights\[at\]zbw.eu](mailto:rights[at]zbw.eu)

<https://www.zbw.eu/>

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CONSUMER'S ONLINE BRAND-RELATED ACTIVITIES IN INSTAGRAM AND THEIR
IMPACT ON WORD-OF-MOUTH

Ludovit Nastisin,  ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4403-7580>

Ph.D., Associate Professor, University of Presov, Slovakia

Kvetoslav Kmec, 

Technical University of Kosice, Slovakia

Stefan Kral,  ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0584-3934>

University of Presov, Slovakia

Corresponding author: Ludovit Nastisin, ludovit.nastisin@unipo.sk

Type of manuscript: research paper

Abstract: *A comprehensive examination of COBRAs concerning word-of-mouth marketing has yet to be fully conducted. A brand needs to know whether such activities can also entail offline consequences for the brand, i.e. in the form of word of mouth. The distinction between relevant and irrelevant activities is important from the brand's managerial point of view for cost-effective management and the pursuit of its stated goals. The paper intends to examine the consequences of consumers' online brand-related activities, along with word-of-mouth marketing, in the setting of the Instagram social network. Instagram is currently a highly effective medium for fostering brand growth in the digital sphere. The dataset comprises 335 standardised questionnaires amassed in the first half of 2021. Based on the current state of the literature and research, together with the research question, one statistical hypothesis was formulated for analysis. The study focused on determining whether certain consumers' online brand-related activities had a statistically significant effect on word-of-mouth about the brand. The statistical examination of the presented issue made use of Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) employing Maximum Likelihood Estimation (ML) as well as Partial Least Square – Path Modeling (PLS PM). This method was selected based on the fact that the items do not interfere with the internal structure of factors in the instrument, which captures specific aspects of attitudes and perceptions regarding brand-related activities on social networks. The findings revealed that consumers' online brand-related activities exert two statistically significant effects on brand word-of-mouth, specifically concerning content consumption and content creation, at a 0.05 significance level. The context and potential consequences of this discovery are examined in the concluding discussion section, with reference to existing literature and ongoing research.*

Keywords: Instagram, Consumer, Brand-related Activities, Word of Mouth, analysis.

JEL Classification: M31, M39, M19

Received: 12 December 2022

Accepted: 20 May 2023

Published: 30 June 2023

Funding: The creation of this article was made possible by the funding from a VEGA 1/0488/22 - Research on digital marketing in the area of tourism with an emphasis on sustainability principles in a post-pandemic market environment; VEGA 1/0694/20 – Relational marketing research – perception of e-commerce aspects and its impact on purchasing behaviour and consumer preferences; and VEGA 1/0609/19 – Research on the development of electronic and mobile commerce in the aspect of the impact of modern technologies and mobile communication platforms on consumer behaviour and consumer preferences.

Publisher: Academic Research and Publishing UG, Germany.

Founder: Sumy State University and Academic Research and Publishing UG (i.G.), Germany.

Cite as: Nastisin, L., Kmec, K., & Kral, S. (2023). Consumer's Online Brand-Related Activities in Instagram and their Impact on Word-of-Mouth. *Marketing and Management of Innovations*, 2, 44–50.
<https://doi.org/10.21272/mmi.2023.2-05>



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Introduction. In digital marketing, social networks are undoubtedly one of the main means of communication. Along with the website and the content the brand creates and shares, it also builds its image. Consumer engagement with the brand on social media is gaining more and more attention both in theory and in practice. Encouraging engagement with brand-related social media content frequently plays a vital role in a brand's online strategy and performance. The COBRA - Consumers' Online Brand-Related Activities framework differentiates three tiers of involvement, with each successive tier demanding a greater degree of consumer interaction with the content. Such engagement can have other impacts on the brand outside the online space. Considering the managerial viewpoint, it is valuable to discern whether such activities can have offline repercussions for the brand, for example, word of mouth, willingness to recommend the brand, shopping intentions or brand loyalty. It is important to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant activities and pay attention to them accordingly (in theory and in practice, too) (Sojka et al., 2016). Only a very few studies address the effects and impact of the three COBRAs. Therefore, there is room for deepening knowledge in this area. As a result, the paper confronts this research challenge in the setting of the Instagram social network and strives to gauge the effects COBRAs exert on word-of-mouth marketing.

Muntinga et al. (2011) was the first to define activities falling under the concept of COBRA (Consumers' Online Brand-Related Activities). The authors unified the framework of these activities for online media platforms into a three-level concept. The first level is the consumption of content - this is a very passive part of the concept defined by the lowest level of exposure. Next comes a moderate level of engagement, in which users express their viewpoints through content contributions. And finally, there is content creation as the highest level of engagement. These activities are of strategic importance in this environment, and their understanding is vital for brand marketing (Schivinski, 2021). Particularly, they are crucial for enterprises operating following the principles of strategic management in their activity (Kostiukevych et al., 2020). Social media as an online platform is changing the way brands communicate with their audiences (Lamberton and Stephen, 2016). With the help of COBRAs, the level of audience engagement on these platforms could be understood better, thus helping streamline marketing efforts (Ashley and Tuten, 2015). Over the last decade, about two dozen studies which, in some settings, deal with the motives and consequences of brand-related activities in social media environments (COBRAs - consuming, contributing and creating brand-related content) have been written. In order to identify the relevance of the impact of each activity on the brand, the study must address all three at the same time. All three activities are analysed in the studies by Poyry et al. (2013), de Vries and Carlson (2014), Kang et al. (2014) and Jahn and Kunz (2012). Yet, these research efforts do not separately tackle the processes of consuming, participating in, and producing branded content. The first named study (Poyry et al., 2013) perceives content consumption as passive consumption of content and content contribution and content creation as customer engagement (in terms of brand loyalty). The study by De Vries and Carlson (2014) deals with the relationship between the intensity of the use of social networks as a representation of content consumption and customer engagement as a representation of content contribution in terms of brand loyalty. However, the study does not address brand-related content-creation activity at all. The study by Jahn and Kunz (2012) discusses the intensity of the use of brand sites on social networks and content consumption and engagement in terms of brand loyalty without examining the activity of creating content related to the brand. The study by Kang et al. (2014) researched the activities of contributing and creating content in terms of active engagement and brand trust. All of the studies mentioned above deal with only two of the three activities that form part of the COBRA concept. However, there are also studies from other fields that mention selected aspects of this issue to some extent (Jencova et al., 2019; Lukacova et al., 2020).

Table 1. Topology of COBRAs

| Level of brand engagement | Type of Activity | Examples of the use of social media in connection with the brand |
|---------------------------|------------------|--|
| Low | Consuming | - Watch a video about the brand |
| | | - Listening to audio related to the brand |
| | | - View brand-related images |
| | | - Track brand-related comment threads |
| | | - Read product reviews |
| | | - Play brand-related online games |
| | | - Use brand-related applications |
| | | - Downloading brand-related documents |
| | | - Send the brand's virtual gift cards |

Continued Table 1

| Level of brand engagement | Type of Activity | Examples of the use of social media in connection with the brand |
|---------------------------|------------------|--|
| Medium | Contributing | - Product and/or brand evaluation |
| | | - Follow the brand's profile on social networks |
| | | - Engage in brand-related conversation |
| | | - Comment on the brand's blogs, videos, audio |
| High | Creating | - Publish a blog with brand-related content |
| | | - Upload a video with brand, image, or audio |
| | | - Write articles about the brand |
| | | - Write product reviews |

Sources: developed by the authors based on (Muntinga et al., 2011).

The behaviour of consumers on brand pages across social networks can potentially result in offline brand-related repercussions, like word of mouth (De Vries and Carlson, 2014; Poyry et al., 2013). This means that when consumers regularly communicate with the brand under the COBRA concept, they encounter various marketing messages. The objective of these messages is to foster more robust connections with the brand and stimulate engagement in order to enhance brand awareness (Jahn and Kunz, 2012). These actions are also known within the studies of signalling theory in the field of brand management (Park et al., 2022) and approaches aiming at increasing the socioemotional wealth of business (Jurásek et al., 2021). Past investigations have empirically established the positive ramifications of content consumption and participation in word-of-mouth marketing. The positive relationship between content consumption and willingness to recommend a brand was empirically confirmed in the study by Poyry et al. (2013). In the study by Jahn and Kunz (2012), a positive association between following a brand's page, brand engagement, and brand loyalty (including word-of-mouth as an offline effect) was noted. The same connection was corroborated in the research by de Vries and Carlson (2014).

Methodology and research methods. The study appraises the facets of COBRAs and their implications for the brand, as reflected by word-of-mouth on Instagram. Data was collected in the first half of 2021 using a standardised questionnaire designed by Piehler et al. (2019). The questionnaire was disseminated using the CAWI method. The dataset included 335 questionnaires. The objective of the analysis was to evaluate the impact of COBRAs on word-of-mouth marketing for a specific brand in relation to Instagram. For this purpose, the following research hypothesis was formulated (also supported by several studies (de Vries and Carlson, 2014; Jahn and Kunz, 2012; Piehler et al., 2019; Poyry et al., 2013):

H1: Selected COBRAs taking place on Instagram have a significant impact on word of mouth.

In order to fulfil the set goal and verify the set hypothesis, CFA (Confirmatory Factor Analysis) using ML (Maximum Likelihood Estimation) was used. The selection of this method was based on its ability to accommodate items that do not interfere (or interfere) with the internal structure of factors in the instrument, which captures specific aspects of attitudes and perceptions regarding brand-related activities on social networks. Based on the studies by Fornell et al. (1981) and Hair et al. (2013), the research also made use of the AVE (Average Variance Extracted) and the C.R. (Composite Reliability). The suitability of the analysed latent variables was conveyed through the utilisation of these approaches. The FL (Factor Loadings) was used in the manifest variables to assess their suitability for the CFA. CFI (Comparative Fit Index), RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) and SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual) were also used. In the next step, the analysis was performed using the PLS PM (Partial Least Square - Path Modelling) method, which describes the investigated relationships (Latan and Noonan, 2018; Sanchez, 2013). The connections were separated into two segments, the initial portion highlighting the conditions and their satisfaction concerning their application in PLS PM. These were Reliability, FL and Eigenvalue (Sanchez, 2013). The analyses were carried out using the programming language R in version 4.0.2 and the software IBM SPSS Statistic in version 26.

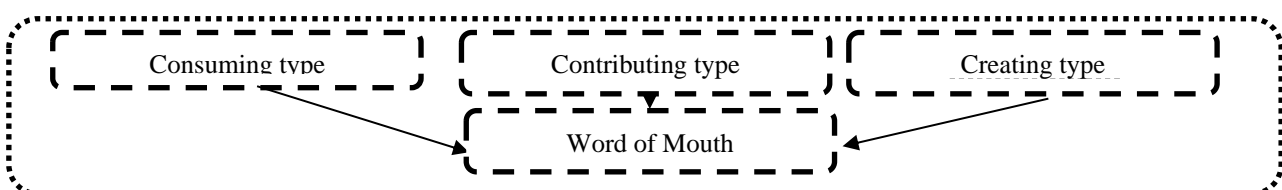


Figure 1. Analysed trajectories of effects

Sources: developed by the authors.

Results In the initial phase of our investigation, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on a sample consisting of 335 observations with 355 degrees of freedom. Its output was significant at the p-value $\chi^2 > 0.001$. The result of this analysis was further followed by the application of PLS PM equations.

Table 2. Confirmatory factor analysis – COBRAs and WOM

| Manifest Variables | Latent Variables | L.F. | CR | AVE |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| IG_Consuming_1 | Consuming Content (Activity) | 0.895 | 0.940 | 0.840 |
| IG_Consuming_2 | | 0.935 | | |
| IG_Consuming_3 | | 0.919 | | |
| IG_Contributing_1 | Contributing Content (Activity) | 0.878 | 0.939 | 0.793 |
| IG_Contributing_2 | | 0.898 | | |
| IG_Contributing_3 | | 0.880 | | |
| IG_Contributing_4 | | 0.906 | | |
| IG_Creating_1 | Creating Content (Activity) | 0.927 | 0.943 | 0.845 |
| IG_Creating_2 | | 0.909 | | |
| IG_Creating_3 | | 0.922 | | |
| IG_WOM_1 | Word of mouth (Brand impact) | 0.855 | 0.944 | 0.737 |
| IG_WOM_2 | | 0.889 | | |
| IG_WOM_3 | | 0.883 | | |
| IG_WOM_4 | | 0.886 | | |
| IG_WOM_5 | | 0.851 | | |
| IG_WOM_6 | | 0.780 | | |

Note: In the «Manifest Variables» column, we provide the coded label of each variable. Each one refers to a specific question in the questionnaire that pertains to the corresponding latent variable. For instance, «IG_Consuming_1» represents the first question that assesses the level of respondents' perceived content consumption activity on the Instagram social network.

Sources: developed by the authors.

The previous table shows the CFA results after removing the two manifest variables (IG_contributing_1, IG_contributing_2) on account of the low L.F. level (< 0.7). All other manifest variables met the criteria for their acceptance, and thus, the value of L.F. was higher than 0.7. This situation also applies to C.R. and AVE statistics, where no value has fallen below the 0.7 level. The value of the RMSEA index was observed to be 0.073, and the SRMR indicator showed a value of 0.047. As can be seen, these RMSEA values are slightly higher than expected. However, based on the complex picture of the conditions of the CFA application, an acceptable level of deviations is evident, indicating that the data structure is appropriate for subsequent processing utilising a PLS PM structural equation regression model with the bootstrap method consisting of 500 iterations (bootstrap resamples).

Table 3. Outputs of the CFA structure for Instagram

| Var | Mode | MVs | C.alpha | DG.rho | eig.1st | eig.2nd |
|---------------------|------|-----|---------|--------|---------|---------|
| Consuming | A | 3 | 0.904 | 0.94 | 2.52 | 0.298 |
| Contributing | A | 4 | 0.913 | 0.939 | 3.17 | 0.458 |
| Creating | A | 3 | 0.908 | 0.943 | 2.54 | 0.258 |
| WOM | A | 6 | 0.928 | 0.944 | 4.42 | 0.585 |

Note: «M.V.s» refer to the observed variables used in the model. «C.alpha» and «DG.rho» are reliability coefficients used to estimate the internal consistency of the measured variables, with higher values indicating greater internal consistency. «Eig.1st» and «eig.2nd» are eigenvalues of the first and second principal components extracted from the correlation matrix of the M.V.s, respectively. «Eig.1st» represents the amount of variance explained by the model, while «eig.2nd» is used to assess whether the model is overfitting the data.

Sources: developed by the authors.

The table above discusses the main outputs concerning the structure of the model. It is evident that in neither case did the variables reach a Cronbach α value less than 0.7 and a Doges ρ value less than 0.8. The eigenvalues columns also acquire acceptable values such as Cronbach's α and Doges' ρ . Here, too, the GOF value is slightly below the expected level of 0.4985. In this case, it is understood as a minimum deviation.

Table 4. Test of the impact of selected criteria on word-of-mouth marketing on Instagram (PLS PM model)

| DV: | Word of Mouth | | | |
|--------------|---------------|------------|---------|----------|
| | Estimate | Std. Error | t value | Pr(> t) |
| Intercept | 0.0000 | 0.0525 | 0.0000 | 1.0000 |
| Consuming | 0.2370 | 0.0553 | 4.2800 | 0.0000 |
| Contributing | -0.1140 | 0.0950 | -1.2000 | 0.2320 |
| Creating | 0.2170 | 0.0937 | 2.3200 | 0.0211 |

Note: «Pr(>|t|)» refers to the p-value associated with the t-statistic for a particular path coefficient estimate or loading estimate.

Sources: developed by the authors.

The impact of word-of-mouth activities on Instagram was assessed. At the level of $\alpha < 0.05$, two activities proved to be significant, in particular, consuming and creating brand-related content. In both cases, the impact is positive. Higher brand-related content consumption and creation values are expected to contribute to word-of-mouth branding.

Table 5. Bootstrap in the context of β coefficients and R2

| Path | Original | Mean. Boot | Std. Error | perc.025 | perc.975 |
|----------------|----------|----------------|------------|----------|----------|
| | | β -coef. | | | |
| CONSUM. → WOM | 0.2367 | 0.2421 | 0.0502 | 0.14179 | 0.3396 |
| CONTRIB. → WOM | -0.1138 | -0.1108 | 0.1096 | -0.32263 | 0.1235 |
| CREAT. → WOM | 0.2171 | 0.2208 | 0.1103 | -0.00923 | 0.4416 |
| | | R2-coef. | | | |
| WOM | 0.0859 | 0.0993 | 0.0288 | 0.0489 | 0.16 |

Note: The metrics «perc.025» and «perc.975» refer to the percentile values of the bootstrap distribution of the corresponding coefficient or R2 estimate. Specifically, «perc.025» represents the value at the 2.5th percentile of the distribution, and «perc.975» represents the value at the 97.5th percentile of the distribution. These metrics provide information on the range of plausible values for the coefficient or R2 estimate based on the bootstrap samples. The range between the 2.5th and 97.5th percentiles is often referred to as the «95% confidence interval».

Sources: developed by the authors.

The established research hypothesis investigated the impact of COBRAs and offline activity on the brand - namely, word-of-mouth marketing. The analysis revealed two effects, primarily related to the consumption and creation of brand-specific content. The hypothesis that the selected COBRAs taking place on Instagram have a notable effect on word-of-mouth was supported by the results.

Conclusions. The paper analysed a set of three possible COBRAs and the impact of offline activity on the brand-word-of-mouth marketing. Two significant impacts in terms of consumption and content creation were identified. Here, a parallel with the studies of Piehler et al. (2019), Jahn and Kunz (2012) and de Vries and Carlson (2014) was identified. These also revealed the significant effects of COBRAs on brand loyalty as a broader aspect of the brand's offline impact, which also includes WOM. But as was the case with the social network Facebook, these studies contradict each other in terms of the undetected significance of the content contribution effect, where only the study by Piehler et al. (2019) identified a similar result. It is crucial to consider the nuances of Instagram, whether pertaining to the algorithm, content type, demographics, or the particular offline effects being analysed. Studies by Jahn and Kunz (2012) and de Vries and Carlson (2014) analysed the broader notion of brand loyalty and came to conclusions contrary to ours. However, the results arrived at by Piehler et al. (2019) in terms of WOM confirmed the results of the presented study. The content consumption activities were also confirmed by Poyry, Parvinen, and Malmivaara (2013), but probably due to different coding activities, they were no longer able to confirm the active engagement, which was understood as a combination of content creation and content contribution. Content creation activities have been confirmed by Kang et al. (2014). However, the investigation did not examine activities related to content consumption. Content creation is fuelled by personal motives mostly, as consumers expect recognition from others, be it for their (content-creating abilities, their knowledge of the subject matter or other personal aspirations.

Author Contributions: conceptualisation, L. N.; methodology, L. N. and K. K.; software, S. K.; validation, S. K.; formal analysis, L. N.; investigation, L. N.; resources, K. K.; data curation, K. K. and S. K.; writing-original draft preparation, L. N.; writing-review and editing, L. N. and S. K.; visualisation, L. N.; supervision, L. N.; project administration, L. N.; funding acquisition, L. N.

Conflicts of Interest: There are no conflicts of interest to report by the authors.

Data Availability Statement: Upon request, the authors can supply the data.

Informed Consent Statement: The study obtained informed consent from all subjects involved.

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Лудовіт Настісін, Ph.D., доцент Пряшівський університет, Словаччина

Кветослав Кмес, Кошицький технічний університет, Словаччина

Стефан Крал, Пряшівський університет, Словаччина

Онлайн-активність споживачів щодо брендів в Instagram та їх вплив на WOM-маркетинг

Результати узагальнення наукового доробку у сфері маркетингу свідчать, що всебічне дослідження WOM-маркетингу («сарафанного радіо») ще не проведене в повному обсязі. Торгова марка повинна знати, чи може WOM-маркетинг мати позитивні та негативні наслідки для брендінгу в офлайн. Розмежування релевантної та нерелевантної діяльності є важливим з точки зору менеджменту для економічно ефективного управління та досягнення поставлених цілей. Метою статті є дослідження наслідків діяльності споживачів в Інтернеті, а також маркетингу "сарафанного радіо" у межах соціальної мережі Instagram. Наразі Instagram є високоефективним цифровим середовищем для просування торгових марок серед споживачів. Вибірку дослідження сформовано на основі результатів обробки 335 стандартизованих анкет, зібраних у першій половині 2021 року. На основі аналізу наукової літератури було сформульовано гіпотезу дослідження: чи мають певні дії споживачів статистично значущий вплив на ефективність "сарафанного радіо". Для перевірки дослідницької гіпотези у статті застосовано підтверджувальний факторний аналіз (Confirmative Factor Analysis, CFA) з використанням оцінки максимальної правдоподібності (Maximum Likelihood Estimation, ML), а також частковий метод найменших квадратів (Partial Least Square – Path Modeling, PLS PM). Ці методи обрано на основі того, що окремі елементи не впливають на внутрішню структуру факторів, які відображають специфічні аспекти ставлення та сприйняття активності у соціальних мережах. Результати дослідження показали, що діяльність споживачів має два статистично значущих ефекти на "сарафанне радіо", зокрема, щодо споживання контенту та його створення, на рівні статистичної значущості 0,05. Контекст і потенційні наслідки цього дослідження можуть бути корисними для бізнесу з метою формування релевантного набору маркетингових інструментів для промоції торгової марки у цифровому середовищі.

Ключові слова: Instagram, споживач, діяльність, бренд, поголос, аналіз.