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**CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN  
THE DIGITAL ERA – EVIDENCE FROM  
ROMANIAN MARKET**

## Introduction

Romanian consumers entered the digital era with more or less enthusiasm, knowledge and openness to communicate and purchase in the new environment. Internet and social networks, blogs and opinion formers, brands present in social media and in online stores are common denominators of the life of many Romanians. Hereinafter, the behavior of consumers in the digital era and the implications for the marketing communication of the companies are presented from both quantitative and qualitative up-to-date perspectives.

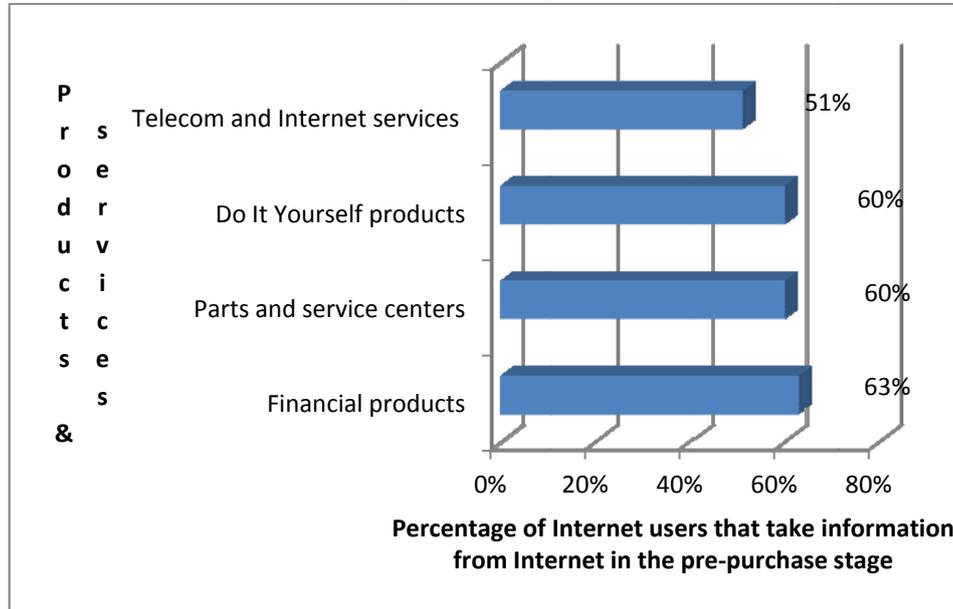
### 1. Internet as information source for customers

Globally, the Internet is an unmatched communication environment. However, there are significant differences among countries as regards the penetration ratio. In 2011, Romania ranged among the European Union member states that had regions where 45% or fewer individuals were regular Internet users (Eurostat, 2012, p. 119). Between 2007 and 2011, the percentage of households with Internet connections doubled to 47% and the percentage of those with access to broadband connections increased 3.8 times to 31% (Eurostat, 2011, p. 2).

Internet became a major source of information for many Romanian users, especially for young people. Consequently, marketers have to adjust their strategies according to the insights relative to the types of Internet information sources used by consumers, the stages within the buying process when such information are accessed and used, the types of products/services for which Internet is the primary information source.

The main Internet sources accessed by Romanians are company web sites, search engines, sites for product evaluation, promotion sites, forums, blogs, social networks, sites for price comparisons and e-mail mailing lists. The Web sites of suppliers are the primary source of information for many consumers during the pre-purchase stage of the buying process (see Figure 1).

Internet is a primary information source in the case of financial services. Probably, consumers faced with challenging commercial terms for their contracts with financial institutions learned that Internet may help them to better understand the features of the specific products as well as the associated costs and to compare the offerings of different suppliers before contacting directly sales consultants for more detailed information. Company Web sites are the second information source for the purchase of electronic products, household appliances and tourism services.

**Figure 1. Use of Internet information during the pre-purchase stage**

Source: Based on GfK Romania (2012a).

Romanian consumers use Internet as an information source before making the purchase decision, in order to identify the existing product and service alternatives available in the market. However, the role of Internet as information source is not limited to the buying process stages that precede purchases. It expands in the post-purchase phase. The information existing in the digital environment may very likely diminish the cognitive dissonance of consumers, may confirm their buying decision and reassure consumers relative to the choices they made relative to the suppliers and product/service brands.

The research achieved by GfK Romania revealed that consumers who use Internet to validate their purchase decision access more frequently this medium than those who use it before purchase (GfK Romania, 2012a). In the case of financial products, electronics and household appliances, auto parts and services, telecom and Internet services, the frequency is 15% higher for those who access Internet in the post-purchase stage than for those who use it in the pre-purchase phase.

According to the traditional perspective of the buying decision process, the consumer may use several information sources to collect data about the competing brands and to narrow down from the awareness set to the consideration set and then to the choice set and further on to the decision set of product/service

brands. A successful marketing strategy is one that brings the brand of a company in the awareness, consideration and respectively the choice set of consumers. The task of marketers becomes more challenging because the Internet provides not only information about the brands known to consumers from the offline environment, but also data about numerous other brands and their features. In the Internet environment the complexity of the search process increases substantially.

The impact of Internet in the buying process is twofold. On one side, information search on the Internet increases the range of competing brands of which online buyers become aware, consider, and choose. On the other side, the types of buying decisions seem to switch from programmed purchase decisions to impulse buying decisions. A research made by GfK Romania showed that after the online searching for information, 84% of the urban Romanian Internet users have taken into consideration to buy other brand than that they had in mind initially. Finally, 57% bought other brand than those originally considered (GfK Romania, 2012b).

The shift towards non-programmed/'impulse' buying instead of programmed purchase increases the importance of the marketing communication mix. In the online environment, marketers must focus on brand visibility and positioning in order to better compete with the formerly "entrenched" brands and to capture the attention and trust of potential online shoppers.

## **2. Major players in electronic commerce in Romania**

There are numerous small or large players in the electronic commerce. Hereinafter, the case of *okazii.ro*, *eMag* and *ShopMania Biz* are presented.

Established in the year 2000, the site *okazii.ro* introduces itself as the largest e-commerce site in Romania. In 2012, the total number of products traded reached 1.8 million belonging to 100 categories. The total number of monthly unique visitors is 3.7 million and the number of monthly visits is 10.827.246. Buyer or seller on this site may be every person or organization that is interested in an opportunity related to new or second hand products from IT&C items to household appliances, clothing, accessories and decorations to sport items and cars. The site *okazii.ro* positioned itself not only on the consumer segment, but also as a platform for online retailers, on which 636 stores are present.

*eMag* is one of the most important online retailers in Romania. The online store enjoyed a dynamic evolution that led to a turnover of 146 million euros in 2011 achieved by 450 employees. At the beginning, *eMag* was established as an online retailer specialized in IT&C products. At present, the retailing portfolio expanded to different other categories that include more than 60.000 products of 400 internatio-

nal brands. The company is the result of a Romanian entrepreneurial initiative. The outstanding results captured the attention of international investors. In 2012, the South-African group Naspers – one of the major global online players – bought 70% of the eMag shares. The strategic objective is to transform eMag into a regional player. The first stride in this direction was made in 2012 and consisted in targeting the Bulgarian market.

Another reference for the e-commerce is Shopmania.ro that is recognized by many online stores as the best online price comparator in Romania. The platform promotes the concept of smart shopping that allows online buyers to compare prices for millions of products, to read the opinions of other people and to get detailed information about each product. The e-commerce platform ShopMania Biz was developed by Asesoft – supplier of IT solutions and services, part of the Asesoft group – and is currently available in fifteen countries. In 2011, ShopMania Biz took over the operations, know-how and brand of Live2c.ro, an e-commerce application for the development of online stores. There are 3.000 online stores on the platform. Based on a partnership between ShopMania Biz and Netopia Sistem, these stores may integrate the direct payment option by credit card on the Internet.

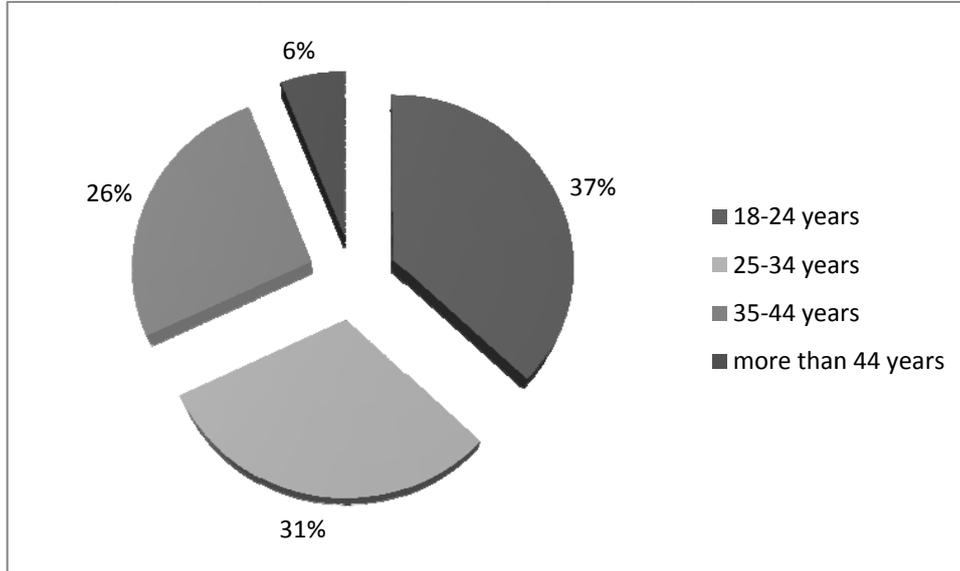
### **3. Romanians as online shoppers**

Internet is used as information source by many consumers. Nevertheless, only some of those who substantiate or validate their purchase decisions on the basis of Internet information are actually online shoppers.

A survey made among Internet users by GfK Romania showed that only 28% of the urban Internet users made online purchases during the last 12 months (GfK Romania 2011a). There is also a core group of Internet buyers that use to purchase relatively frequently on the Internet. A quarter of them buy at least once a month.

The online shoppers are mostly young people. According to the research findings of GfK Romania, the age interval 18-34 years represents two thirds of the online shoppers (see Figure 2).

The interval 18-24 years represents the largest segment of online shoppers (37%). Targeting the buyers between 18 and 44 years, marketers may access in fact 96% of the universe of online shoppers.

**Figure 2. The distribution of online shoppers by age**

Source: Based on GfK Romania (2011a).

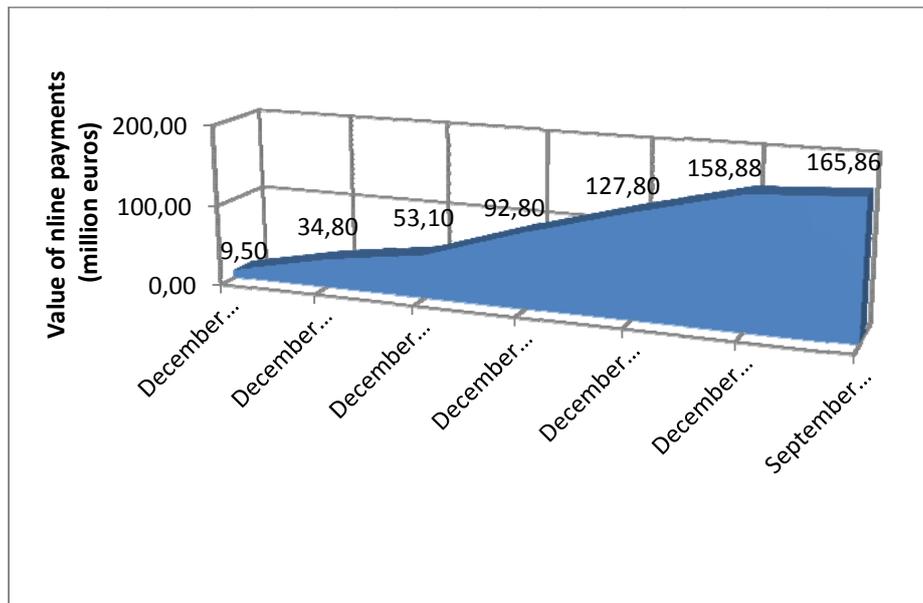
Romanian online shoppers order various durable and non-durable non-food products on the Internet. Electronics, household appliances and phones are primary categories of products ordered by urban shoppers. In 2011, 44% of the Romanian online shoppers ordered such products. Other types of products ordered are clothing and personal accessories (28% of the online shoppers), personal care products (22%), as well as books, CDs, and DVDs (22%).

According to a study made by 2 Parale – the widest online affiliate network in Romania – Wednesday and Thursday are the preferred days for online shopping. An ever greater number of orders are placed during the night after the information gathering on the Internet during the day. The largest volume of transactions is registered during lunch time and after 08.00 p.m. (Vidru, 2012).

As regards the payment method, most Romanian online shoppers prefer cash on delivery (after receiving the product) and to a far lower extent the payment by credit card. During the last twelve months, the former method was used by 83% of the online shoppers and the latter by only 28% of the Internet users (GfK Romania, 2011a). Reasons for this behavior may be the relatively limited trust in online card payments among some buyer segments and the fact that electronic payments did not become a habit for many Romanian consumers. However, the value of the online payments has increased steadily by 75% in abso-

lute terms, during the period December 2006 – September 2012, from 9.5 million euros to 165.86 million euros (Negru, 2012).

**Figure 3. The value of online payments during the period 2006-2012**



Source: Based on Negru (2012).

During the seven-year period, the value of the online payments increased substantially, but the online payment penetration rate grew very slowly. The gap between the two dynamics shows that the augmented value of the online payments is not due to an increased cohort of online shoppers, but to the growth in the value of the online shopping basket. Several products registered significant increases. For instance, the average value of an online donation grew by 184% from 35 euros to 99 euros and the average purchase value of clothing increased by 53% from 73 euros to 112 euros (Negru, 2012).

According to the Eurostat data, Romania registers one of the lowest penetration ratios of online shopping, resembling to other countries from Eastern and Southern Europe. In 2011, Romania had a level of online shopping of 6% of the population, compared to 7% in Bulgaria and 15% in Italy. The rest of the European Union member states registered higher levels: United Kingdom 71%, Denmark 70%, Netherlands 69%, and Luxembourg 65% (European Commission, 2012, p. 14). Experts foresee an ascending trend of the electronic commerce in Romania. They expect an increase of 20-25% during the next three years (2012-2015) and of 50% for the next five years until 2017 (Caraba, 2012).

In essence, many Romanians are open towards buying on the Internet, but less towards card payments. However, those who use online payments have progressively increased the average value of their purchases. The estimates about the future of the electronic commerce in Romania are optimistic.

#### **4. Loyalty of Romanian users towards the online social networks**

Today, the marketing messages communicated through traditional media do not generate the same effects as in the twentieth century. Information received directly from personal influence channels persuades consumers to a higher extent than information received through mass-media (Evans, Jamal, and Foxall, 2009, p. 353). This is the main reason why companies scrutinize all the opportunities provided by social media in the relationships with Internet users.

Globally, social networks have a strong impact on users, especially on young generations. The active members of such a network may be considered a reference group.

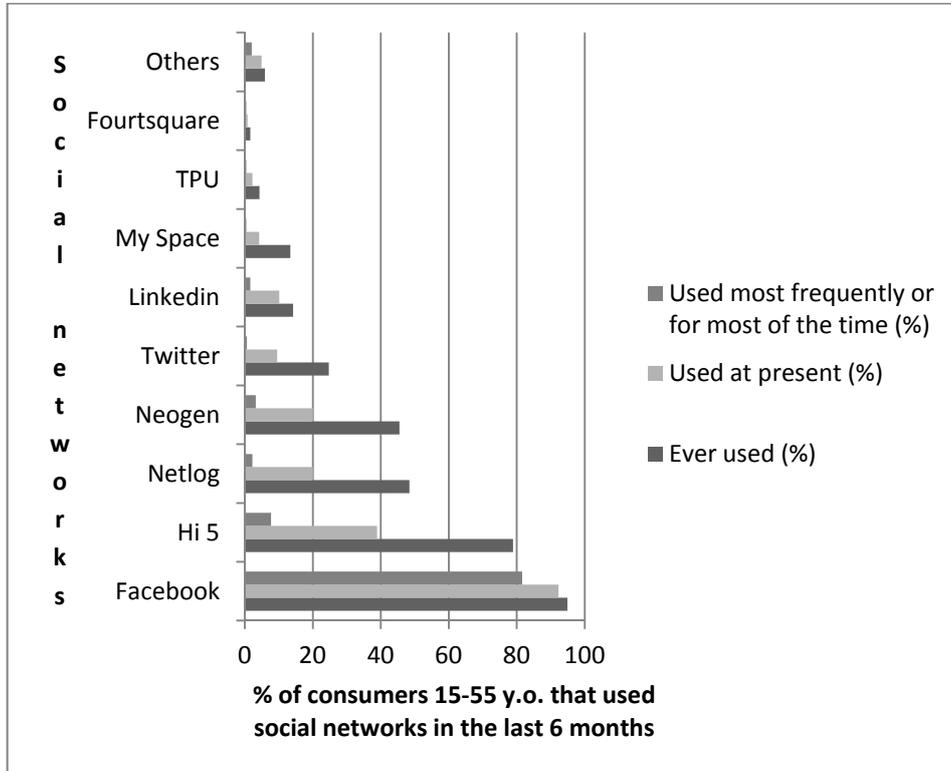
In essence, a reference group facilitates the evaluation and benchmarking of an individual's own opinions, attitudes and behavior. From the perspective of marketers, reference groups are of critical importance because they influence and form consumer behavior (Smyczek, 2012, p. 176).

Almost every present user of online social networks in Romania attempted to live the Facebook experience more or less. Facebook is by far the social network used by most of the Romanian population aged between 15 and 55 years that used a social network at least once in the last six months. In June 2011, a share of 92.3% of this population declared they use Facebook at that moment (Daedalus Millward Brown, 2011). The other social networks that succeeded to attract at least one fifth of the mentioned population were Hi5 (38.9% of the population), Netlog (20%) and Neogen (20%). Networks such as Twitter and LinkedIn reunited fewer users, respectively 10.1% and 9.5%.

Romanians do not stick to a single online social network. They use several networks to various extents. Thus, the loyalty towards online social networks is in fact a shared loyalty.

Except for Facebook, every other social network has a very narrow core of "intense" users that take advantage of it most frequently or most of the time. There is a significant gap between Facebook and the other networks. Specifically, 81.6% of the mentioned population use Facebook most frequently or most of the time, while the similar share of the other networks range below 8% (Hi5 7.7%, Neogen 3.2%, Netlog 2.2%, LinkedIn 1.6% and Twitter 0.6%). Facebook users seem to be the most loyal towards this social network (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4. Social networks used by Romanians**



Source: Based on Daedalus Millward Brown (2011).

It must be noted that in June 2011, the share of intense/loyal users (those who use the most frequently or most of the time) in the number of users of a specific social network varied between 6.3% in the case of Twitter and 88.4% in the case of Facebook.

**Table 1. Share of intense/loyal users\* by social network**

Social network	Facebook	Hi 5	Netlog	Neogen	Twitter	LinkedIn	My Space	TPU	Foursquare
Share (%)	88.4	19.8	11.0	16.0	6.3	15.8	9.5	18.2	50.0

\* Share of the users that use most frequently or most of the time a specific online social network in the number of present users of that social network (in June 2011).

Source: Based on Daedalus Millward Brown (2011).

The loyal users represent a rather narrow “hard core” for the quasi-totality of the online social networks except for Facebook. There are visible gaps between the levels of user loyalty towards the Facebook network on one side and towards other networks on the other side. Are these gaps due to the dynamic evolution of the social networks? Are they due to the progressive reorientation of the attention of users from previously established networks and capturing flows of new and established users? Are they consequences of the fact that owning a Facebook account became fashionable among young people? Are these gaps the impact of Facebook adoption by opinion leaders and by reference groups on the mass of network users? The answer is probably positive to all of these questions. Will this situation continue in the future? The social network landscape will very likely evolve and restructure both the “quota” gained by each network and the behavior and loyalty of users.

The time spent on social networks has slightly increased in 2011 compared to 2010. The average time spent in 2011 was 16 days per month compared to 13 days per month in 2010 (Daedalus Millward Brown, 2011). In 2011, the average Facebook user spent 23 days per month on the network, 43% more than the average user of social networks. Users became more selective regarding the contacts within the social networks. Between 2010 and 2011, the average number of contacts per network user decreased by 33% from 122 to 82 contacts.

In essence, Facebook is the star among the online social networks used by the Romanian consumers. Lately, users showed more loyalty to Facebook than to every other social network. Users started to spend more time in using the network and they became more selective relative to their range of contacts.

## **5. Romanians interactions with brands in social media**

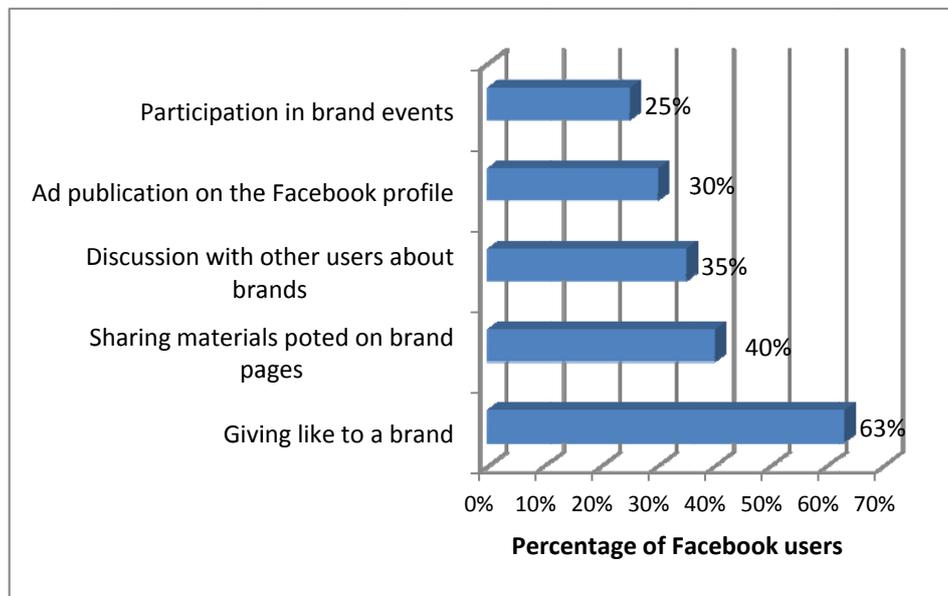
Communication in social media integrates two-way flows between brands and users. Progressively, the Internet environment facilitates the transfer of brand ownership from companies to consumers. Brand fans are the actual promoters or “demoters” of the brands.

Research made by GfK Romania showed that Internet users of 15-55 years from the urban environment prefer websites dedicated to brands rather than company websites. In fact, the former type of site is preferred by 61% of the Internet users and the latter by 41% (GfK Romania, 2011b).

Romanians display positive attitude towards the brands that are present on social media. This attitude leads to behavior that is favorable for the marketing communication of the brand. Specifically, 40% of the Internet users recommend brands by sharing content. In addition, 63% of the Facebook account owners are

fans or gave *like* to at least one brand. The consumer categories that display a friendlier attitude towards brands on social media are women, children and students.

**Figure 5. Interaction of Facebook users with brands in social media**



Source: Based on GfK Romania (2011b).

One third of the Facebook users engage in discussions with other users about brands. Some of them may be in the foreground of marketers' attention due to the role played in shaping opinions and influencing other Facebook users. Brand events organized by companies in social media attract one quarter of the Facebook users, especially young people between 18 and 24 years.

At present, Romanian users of social networks are not fully involved in interactions and communication with brands that are present in social media. The positive attitude leads to behavior that consists mostly in giving *like* to brands on Facebook. For the moment, only some users engage in more active two-way communication with brands.

A survey made by eResearch among urban Internet users of 16-49 years revealed the same relatively passive behavior of Romanians in the social media environment. Specifically, 46% of respondents declared that they never write on the personal wall about their experience with a particular brand and 44% declared that they do not post information on the walls of the brands. Only 4% of the urban Internet users of 16-49 years post daily information about their experience with brands (Mihai, 2012).

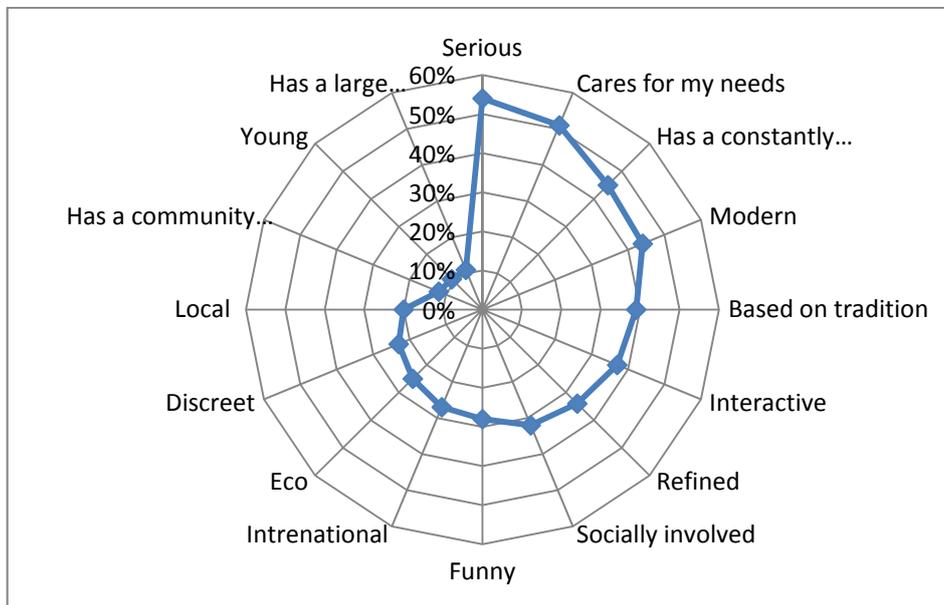
Until now, the majority of Internet users have not changed fundamentally the pattern of communication with the brand. Traditionally, marketing communication relied on consumers as almost passive receivers of information. Today, only few Internet users engage in two-way communication flows. One should also not forget that Internet users represent only a part of the overall population.

## 6. Romanians expectation from the brands existing in social media

Romanian Internet users appreciate the brands that display their interest in the specific needs on the potential customers. There are also consumers that do not have a favorable perception about the brands that are present in social media.

Some consumers consider that brands in social media are irritating. According to the study made by eResearch (on a representative sample of Internet users aged of 16-49 years from the urban environment), this is the perception of 20% of men and of only 10% of women (Mihai, 2012). Women display a higher propensity to engage in the communication with brands in social media. More precisely, 26% of women, compared to only 17% of men, declared they would add a brand to their contact list.

**Figure 6. Expectations relative to the brands in social media (in percentages of Internet users)**



Source: Based on Mihai (2012).

The Internet users expect from brands primarily to be serious (54% of the Internet users), to care for their needs (51%), to constantly update the page/profile (45%) and to be modern (44%). Relatively few Internet users expect from brands to have a community of fans (12%) or to have a large number of fans (11%).

Brands should not apply one or more of the following practices considered disagreeable by the Internet users: to excessively promote (opinion expressed by 28% of the Internet users aged 16-49 years), to post incorrect or outdated information (10%), to advertise aggressively (9%).

The primary expectations from brands in social media do not differ fundamentally from those related to the offline environment. For the moment, consumers are rather passive in their relationships with brands in social media and less than 37% of the Internet users focus on expectations such as interactivity, being funny, having a brand community or lot of fans/friends. The requirements will very likely change as users of social media will switch from being mostly readers of others' posts to being active members of the social networks.

## **7. Bloggers influence on buying decisions of Romanian consumers**

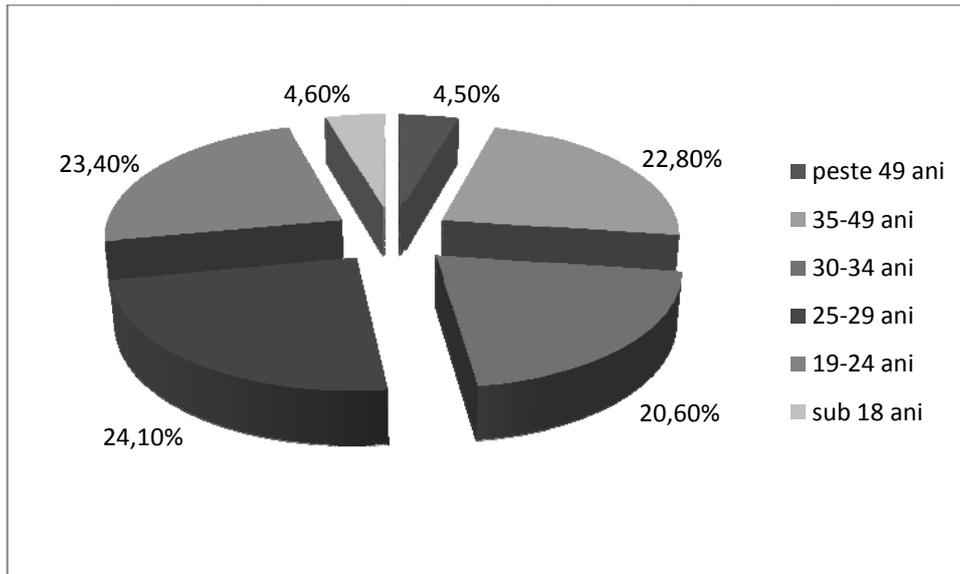
The blog audience in Romania consists in young, above average income and higher background readers. Consumers started considering the opinions and recommendations of bloggers.

A research on the audience of Romanian blogs achieved by the Standout agency revealed the profile of blog readers (Standout, 2012). They are also active Internet users and owners of accounts on social networks: 84.2% on Facebook, 36.7% on Google+, 35.9% on YouTube, 24.7% on Titter. Blogs provide them information. On one side, these users bring to the discussion of their groups the topics about which they read. On the other side, their friends ask for their opinion. These research findings are valuable to marketers because they underline the direct and indirect impact of blogs on Internet users.

Survey findings show different propensities to read blogs among the age segments (see figure 7). All age intervals are represented within the blog audience. The consumers aged 19-49 years represent 90.9%. Nevertheless, young users are a major segment of the blog audience. The persons aged 19-29 years represent almost half of the blog readers. Less than one in twenty users below 18 years engages in blog reading.

Most readers are loyal to blogs; 82.5% of them access blogs at least several times per week (Standout, 2012). More specifically, 48.7% access blogs daily at least once and 33.8% access blogs several times per week.

**Figure 7. The distribution of the blog audience by age**



Source: Based on Standout (2012).

As regards consumer buying behavior, blogs and bloggers have significant influence (Standout, 2012). The impact is twofold:

- bloggers shape opinions.* The information posted on blogs influences the opinions of readers. Only 29.4% of blog readers declare they are not influenced, while 70.6% changed or confirmed their opinion relative to a product/service brand or company based on the opinions expressed by bloggers;
- bloggers' recommendation drive purchases.* Almost two thirds of the blog readers (63.1%) have used the recommendations made by bloggers to choose the right product, service or application.

One aspect that should be noted is the high conversion rate (90%) from information seekers influenced by blogs into purchasers based on bloggers' recommendations. Blogs may influence consumers in all the stages of the buying process: need identification, information search, supplier selection, actual purchase and post-purchase behavior.

Due to their impact on consumers, blogs and bloggers are considered by the specialized agencies that design and implement marketing campaigns. In 2011, 21% of the companies dealing with social media included independent blogs in their campaigns (GfK Romania, 2012c). Agencies select bloggers based mainly on the number of visitors (70% of agencies) and the topics covered (66%). The companies that apply to bloggers consider also the reputation and image of bloggers (55% of companies that turned to bloggers) and the recommendations received from the agencies they work with (44%).

Bloggers are opinion formers that influence the opinions and buying decisions of the Internet and social network users. In essence, opinion formers are people who are actively and deliberately involved in the process of shaping and forming the thoughts of others with regard to products/services (Evans, Jamal, and Foxall, 2009, p. 353).

In marketing communication, the credibility of a message sent by an opinion leader or opinion former increases if the receivers think that the source of the message has qualifications that are relevant to the endorsed product. When consumers perceive that the source is marked by knowledge bias or reporting bias, the beliefs about product/service attributes weaken (Solomon, 2009, p. 320).

The bloggers generate topics for discussions and reasons ‘for’ or ‘against’. They set trends and provide information to other opinion leaders, having an indirect impact on the mass of Internet users.

At present, flogs (fake blogs) are also an option for Romanian companies to generate word-of-mouth relative to a brand or marketing event. Compared to the actual blogs, flogs are initiated and developed by companies, not by experts, opinion leaders and opinion formers.

## **8. Companies investment in social media in Romania**

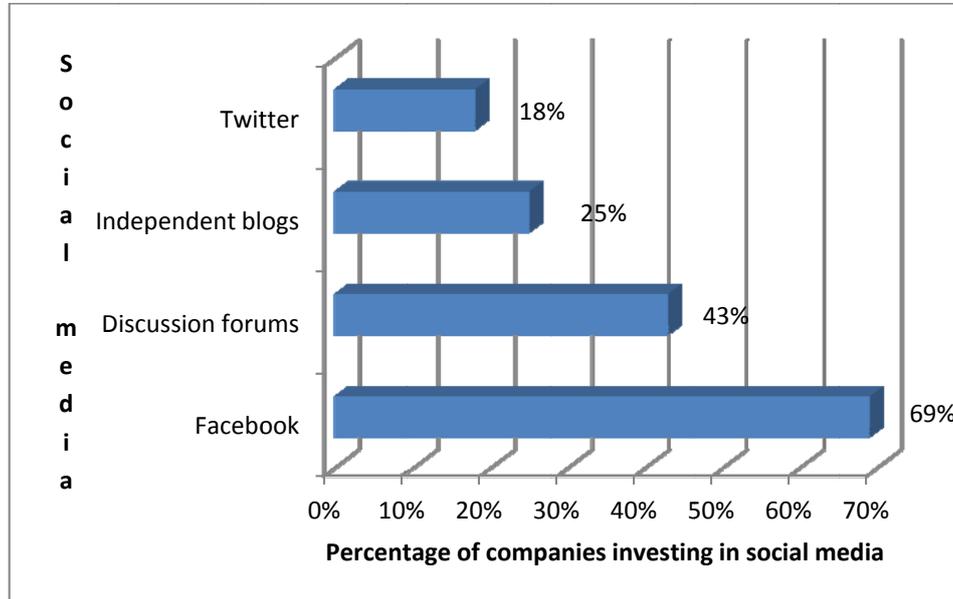
On the Romanian market, there are companies that trust the marketing opportunities provided by online social networks. They started to invest in social media campaigns and research shows they will continue investing in online marketing activities.

The survey findings released by GfK Romania in June 2012 revealed an ascending trend in the investments in marketing activities on social networks. Half of the companies that developed social media campaigns in 2011 have invested more than in 2010 (GfK Romania, 2012d). Almost 60% of the companies that were active on social networks in 2011 intend to increase the investments by up to 25% in 2012.

The investment behavior is influenced by the company size. Larger companies seem to be more confident in the benefits of social media campaigns, compared to smaller companies. This state of facts is reflected by the share of the social media expenditures in the total marketing and communication budget. Large companies of more than 250 employees allocate between 16% and 25% of their marketing and communication budgets, while medium companies (between 50 and 250 employees) allocate 6-15% and small companies (below 50 employees) up to 5%.

Most companies that invest in social media design and implement themselves the campaigns. Only 22% outsource social media services from specialized agencies (GfK Romania, 2012c). The main reasons for outsourcing are the experience of such agencies (49% of the companies) and their efficiency (11%). The main reasons against outsourcing are the following: budget unavailability (48%), inappropriate solution (20%), availability of specialized capabilities within own company (17%).

Even the companies that outsource the social media services use to have internal liaisons to communicate with specialized agencies. The research achieved by GfK Romania showed that one or more liaison employees exist in 75% of the companies that apply to outsourced services. Out of these companies, 56% employ 1 or 2 persons in this respect, while 44% employ three or more persons. The significant share of outsourcing companies that employ at least three liaison persons may raise some question marks relative to the effectiveness of these in-house human resources. The investment in social media campaigns is still at the beginning in Romania. Most companies rely on in-house human resources either to directly design/implement the campaigns or to liaise with the representatives of the specialized agencies to which the social media services are outsourced. Practice shows that Romanian investors in social media use a range of online channels. The portfolio is dominated by Facebook (GfK Romania, 2012e). In 2011, 69% of companies invested in communication campaigns on this major network.

**Figure 8. Use of social media for marketing campaigns in Romania, in 2011**

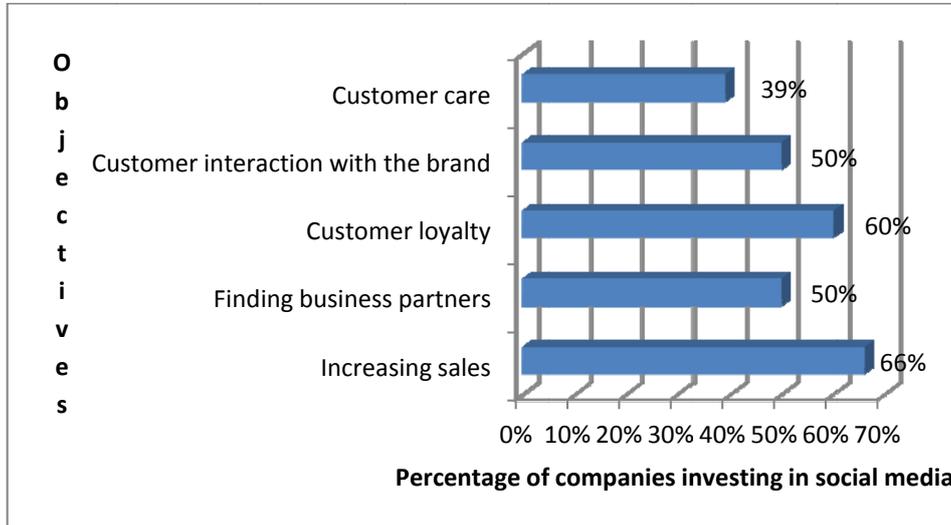
Source: Based on GfK Romania (2012e).

Research findings relative to the investments in social media are in line with the data about the use of social networks by consumers. In June 2011, 92.3% of the users between 15 and 55 years that used a social network at least once in the last six months declared they use Facebook. As regards the companies investing in social media, 69% of them executed campaigns on Facebook in 2011. Marketers are aware of the social media trends and do not consider them fads, but long-term realities.

Although independent bloggers and Twitter are used by fewer companies, the trends for 2012 reflect increases. More precisely, the share of companies investing in campaigns on Twitter is estimated to register an increase of 8% and on independent blogs of 6%.

A major shift in the marketing and communication campaigns on social media relates to their objectives. The background trend consists in setting objectives focused on augmenting sales. Nevertheless, experts notice an ever greater orientation towards objectives centered on customer relationships.

Customer loyalty development ranks the second in the list of objectives according to the corresponding percentage of companies investing in social media. While in 2011, 49% of these companies set loyalty objectives, in 2012, the share grew to 60%. A considerable share increase characterized the objectives related to customer experience with the brand, from 34% to 50% during the same period.

**Figure 9. Objectives of the campaigns on social media in Romania, in 2012**

Source: Based on GfK Romania (2012e).

## Conclusions

The online communities and social networks represent a totally new environment for companies compared to the traditional offline landscape. Experts do not hesitate to remind marketers they should rethink their strategies and attitude towards consumers.

The recommendations for companies abound. Some of them refer to the guiding principles that companies should implement in the online communities and social networks: to be transparent (to identify the company and the comments posted); to be part of the community (not just to market to it); to adapt the marketing efforts to the nature of the site (more or less commercial); to take advantage of the unique capabilities of each online venue (just banners and pop-up ads vs. advertising and activities that extend beyond the traditional boundaries) (Hawkins and Mothersbaugh, 2010, pp. 231-233).

For the Romanian companies, the online environment provides a lot of opportunities for new marketing and communication techniques. In order to achieve a complete approach of customers, marketers will integrate various channels into a 360 degrees pattern.

As regards social networks, in 2011, almost all Romanians between 15 and 55 years that ever used a social network were Facebook users. Besides Facebook, the other networks that attract a double digit share were Hi5, Neogen, and

Netlog. The rest had shares below 10% in the population of network users. Thus, Facebook provides outstanding opportunities for marketers due to the high usage rate. Making information accessible to consumer in the digital environment will support all the stages of the buying decision process.

Except for Facebook, the ability of the online social networks to generate loyal users is rather low. The “hard core” of intense/loyal users is restrained. However, those relatively few users may share similar values and behavior. They may become a homogeneous niche that may attract marketers. An approach targeted to such niches may generate a reasonable response rate that could sometimes prove more valuable than the response of a large and heterogeneous online community.

The marketing and communication strategies focused on Internet and social media should also consider the impact of bloggers as opinion formers. Their impact is either for or against brands and companies. Blogs may influence heavily a wide range of Internet users, especially young and educated users with above average income, a very attractive segment for companies and their brands.

Social media users progressively develop a status of actual brand owners. They can “make or break” brand equity with the speed of a click. The development of social networks, discussion forums and blogs leads to an increase in the power of consumers over the brands and their suppliers. Two-way marketing communication and 360 degrees approaches in marketing campaigns will be the norm. In their relationships with customers, companies must learn how to better communicate to achieve high performance on social media. Becoming more open to consumers, listening to them and acting more friendly, involving consumers in socializing events are the major shifts in the marketing communication field.

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