Study: The use of social media for service delivery: How do end-users use customer service 2.0?

The study is based on the question how the customer uses the service of companies in times of Web 2.0. The online survey was based on a standardized questionnaire. The target group were end users, who connect daily with goods and services from various suppliers and consciously or unconsciously use the service of companies every day. It was not possible to complete the questionnaire repeatedly, thus preventing a distortion of the results. A limitation is made via the IP address of the interviewee. With regard to answering the research question, the terms Web 2.0 and Customer Service 2.0 are defined first. It also addresses the challenges of Web 2.0 and customer expectations. Digitization captures every aspect of life, whether it is private or professional. The role of customers is increasingly influenced by digital change. With Web 2.0 technologies and social media, customer service has changed massively. Customers expect competent responses, quick reactions and a perfect digital service from companies. Therefore, they must consider not only the communication with the customer, but also their customer service.

Introduction

Through the connections in social networks, customers become more autonomous in their purchasing decisions and more demanding in terms of advice and service. In the various phases of a purchase process, which includes the information search in advance and feedback remarks in retrospect, feedbacks are made with the community. Customers should therefore be accompanied in as many phases as possible. If you offer excellent customer service in the social web, let the world see how customer advisors explain the current problems, answer questions from potential buyers, highlight services, announce innovations and solve the problems of existing customers. In the public consultation, a company markets its products and services through a continuous customer dialogue. Special attention must be paid to the development of the Internet in terms of Web 2.0, which results in a customer service 2.0 with comparable features. Customer Service 2.0 therefore refers to the development and implementation of customer service through the perspective of Web 2.0 (Bock 2012, p. 3).

1 Definition web 2.0

When we speak of customer service 2.0, we should first define what exactly is meant by this keyword. In general, the focus is on the development and implementation of customer service...
through digital media, especially through the Internet. Since the term Web 2.0 was coined by Tim O’Reilly, it developed into a marketing keyword (Lammenett 2012, p. 239). For him, Web 2.0 is a further development of the Internet, which is characterized primarily by participation and involvement of the Internet user (Bruhn 2014, p. 1037). The term does not refer to a special technique or software version, but rather to the interaction of different methods and tools and a corresponding social and economic development (Lammenett 2012, p. 239). The World Wide Web is seen as an execution platform to connect with other Internet users (Bruhn 2014, p. 1037). The difference is made by the users, who now have a completely different meaning: their participation becomes the purpose and goal of Web 2.0 (Langkamp and Köplin 2014, p. 68). Through their technical possibilities, users actively participate in the design and content of the information offered on the Internet (Ruisinger 2007, p. 193). The special importance of these technical possibilities arises, above all, from network formation and the linking of people and groups. What is crucial in this context is Reed’s Law, according to which the value of a network grows enormously through new members, if groups can be formed in the network (Evans 2008, p. 52). Platforms such as Wikipedia, Facebook and Twitter would never have achieved such a great success without this basic idea (Langkamp and Köplin 2014, p. 68). Social media technologies take many different forms including blogs, business networks, enterprise social networks, forums, microblogs, photo sharing, products/services review, social bookmarking, social gaming, social networks, video sharing and virtual worlds. The development of social media started off with simple platforms in the Web 1.0. Unlike instant messaging clients such as ICQ and AOL’s AIM, or chat clients like IRC or iChat was the first online business that was created for real people, using their real names. However, the first social networks were short-lived because their users lost interest. Improved technologies, such as Web service APIs, AJAX, RSS, or the basics of creating blogs and wikis to facilitate the use of the offers, enable a faster and easier use of new websites by consumers and providers.

Web 2.0 describes the phenomenon that content and pages on the Internet can no longer only be created and changed by selected specialists or companies, but by the community of Internet users themselves (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, p. 60). Thus, content is no longer only centralized by large media companies and distributed over the Internet, but also by a large number of individuals (Lammenett 2012, p. 239). The greatest change is social. The Web 2.0 platforms call on the users to participate and thus enable the social exchange. In addition, the platforms are based on user-generated content. These are all forms of content created by users themselves and published and exchanged in the Web 2.0 (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, p. 61). The Internet user, who in the past has only been able to consume online content passively, is in Web 2.0 able to act as a producer of content and to communicate with the companies on the same level (Schiele, Hähner and Becker 2007, p. 6). He becomes an active participant, who is actively involved in the Internet, can create and distribute content himself (Kreutzer and Merkle 2008, p. 149). Information and exchange platforms become all the more attractive as the number of people working on them (Langkamp and Köplin 2014, p. 68).

In summary, Web 2.0 includes Internet applications and platforms that actively integrate users into value creation – whether through their own content, comments, tags, or even through their virtual presence. The main characteristics of value creation are interactivity, decentrality and dynamics (Walsh, Kilian and Hass 2011, p. 6). The use of social media channels in Web 2.0 can contribute to the long-term success of the company, but it is also associated with challenges. Three key factors explain the abrupt behavioral change and the growing Web 2.0 offerings like platforms such as Wikipedia, Facebook and Twitter. On the one hand, two technical changes offer new possibilities. Better availability of technologies is a prerequisite for user integration. The second technical factor is the improved infrastructure, which is the proliferation of Internet broadband access, which allows the rapid transmission of video and photos. On the other hand, a fundamentally changed usage behavior of the users was recognized, since many can be technically more experienced by the growing up in the computer and Internet age (Bruhn 2014, 1038). Another factor is mobile internet usage. The increasing use of mobile, Internet-enabled devices – from laptops,
tablet PCs and smartphones to smartwatches – is an important driver of mobile marketing. It is important in all these developments that the increasing use of mobile devices such as tablet PCs and smartphones, does not replace stationary access but enables new usage situations (Kreutzer 2014, p. 4).

2 Challenges of web 2.0

A company is vulnerable, as it opens up to the social network and opens up a dialogue with its customers. However, this is intended to make the brand a topic of discussion. Not only praise and positive expressions can be produced. The responsible persons should be aware of this beforehand and develop a plan to appropriately respond to criticism. Opportunities result from positive as well as negative criticism for the company. A company is motivated by praise and encouraged to continue the path already pursued. Negative criticism should be appreciated as a piece of advice, as honest expressions are an opportunity to improve and innovate (Neumann 2010, p. 28). Eventually, any business comes into the situation that users write critically about the company, its products or services. In this case, it is important to deal with the criticism correctly, in terms of time, style and content. Negative feedback in the social web can be roughly classified into the following categories (Wolber 2012, p. 191):

Normal problem – someone has a problem with a product or service and he needs quick help. Feedback of this type is negative because it puts the company in a bad light, but it can help in uncovering actual problems.

Constructive criticism – contains a suggestion. The customer expresses suggestions for improvement for products or services.

Authorized attack – A customer attacks the company because it has done something wrong. Often there is a lack of support, poor service or a binding response to problems and questions of the trigger for emotional reactions.

In general, if negative feedback is given, it is necessary to decide which reaction is required. The reaction to criticism, even to unjustified ones, must be positive and constructive in order not to lead a public dispute. Whether the response is a personal or a public message depends on how common the problem is and how many customers have already reported. Regardless of this, corrective measures should be initiated according to a fixed scheme, which informs the customers (Wolber 2012, p. 192). For an acceptance in the social media, it is important to achieve a high credibility as a communicator. For this reason, employees who work in the company name should make their origin clear by giving their own name, function and company (Kreutzer 2014, p. 24). In the following, the customers’ wishes regarding the service of a company will be explained.

3 Customer expectations in web 2.0

The fact that social media has become a fixed part of the private and professional world is evident. The increasing use of the Internet and networking in the social networks have redefined the power relations between companies and consumers. The position of the customer improves as opposed to the company. Digital media will make the consumer more informed, active and influential. For he gets himself the information he is looking for and actively contacts with companies or other customers. The possibility of always accessing the required data, exchanging information with other users and helping to shape products and services has given him a previously unknown autonomy. This enables him to make special demands on services. The customer in times of Web 2.0 expects from a company that (Dimitrova, Kolm and Steimel 2011, p. 20):

• addresses these needs and wishes with tailor-made product solutions,
• this provides the customer with digital communication tools,
• the dialogue is transparent and open,
• this can react quickly – within hours instead of days – to its concerns via digital channels (e-mail, contact form, (video) chat)
• provides this easily accessible information,
• qualified employees deal with their concerns, because automated responses are rather undesirable and are accepted only when they are complete,
• provide enterprises service applications that provide help and guidance around the clock.

In addition to the efficient processing of inquiries, customer service 2.0 is particularly concerned with the customer dialogue. Customer communication is human and less technical, rather emotional, and only conditionally rational. The open dialogue, which should be managed confidentially, significantly increases customer satisfaction. To this extent, modern services should be optimized for communication by using the technical possibilities and make it easy for the user. The relevance for customers increases with honest conversations and not with technical structures. The challenges addressed are the result of the concept of customer service 2.0, which is described below.

4 Customer service 2.0

The oldest and classic contact channels of the customer service are the personal conversation in the shop or the advice at home. Similarly, a letter can be written to the customer service. The Internet accelerated the letter through electronic mail and chatting via text or video chat. Added to this was the contact form on the website of the offerer (Bock 2012, p. 16).

Today, digital services are no longer only sent via e-mail, but also via the Internet and interactive social media platforms like Facebook or Twitter. Here users have the opportunity to post questions, opinions, problems and complaints actively on the corporate social media page of the company. As a rule, the site is managed by a company’s social media team. The posting of the users and the reaction of the company are also visible to other users. The documented service knowledge can be saved accordingly in a service community as well as used for the positive recommendation by verbal transmission. Compared to classic service offerings, such as a telephone hotline, there are differences. Thus the interaction between companies and users in the social media is transparent to the public. Therefore the individual service experience is collected. The service process receives a public attention. In addition, the company’s service activity can also be understood as marketing communication, since it must be anticipated by other users and the forwarding of the service interaction.

The transparent online service is above all the customer satisfaction and the solution of the customer problem (Rossmann and Tangemann 2015, p. 169). The customer expects companies to understand the social web as a platform for dialogue, to make the dialogue transparent and open, to react quickly to requests, and to provide service applications that offer help and orientation around the clock. In the past few years, corporate websites have evolved significantly: they have increasingly focused on product and company information, and are increasingly turning into networking sites (Dimitrova, Kolm and Steimel 2011, p. 10):

• Step 1: Companies often operate their own forums or corporate blogs, which serve direct communication with customers and prospective customers. Employees can act as bloggers and maintain and control communication in the community by switching on when necessary. Through the transparent communication between the company and its customers the credibility can be increased. Furthermore, these discussions provide valuable insights into the quality of service as well as suggestions for improvements.
• Step 2: The social media sites like Facebook, Xing & LinkedIn are a hot topic for branding experts, because they offer numerous possibilities for the maintenance of customer relations. This type of customer support is particularly recommended when the target group is active in the social web. Unlike the communities on their own website, the vendors can only control the dialogs here to a
limited extent.

- Step 3: The biggest challenge for companies, however, is the discussions on the social web, because this sphere cannot directly be influenced by the company. In blogs, forums, etc., however, much of the communication takes place. Still, there are only a few companies that systematically operate social media monitoring in order to detect conspicuous conversations outside the company’s four walls and to ensure proactive support.

Properly understood and used, this new source of knowledge can contribute to the company’s accelerated learning capability and generate valuable competitive advantages. If this opportunity is not used, however, it is to be feared that the company will not be able to keep pace with the increased development rate and will lose market shares to the more competitive competition. Therefore, it is essential to take advantage of the developments outlined at an early stage and to make valuable use of them within the company. This will present new challenges to the companies concerned, which they can only cope with if they have anchored their ability to adapt to their culture in the sense of a dynamic adaptability (Rossmann and Tangemann 2015, p. 171).

5 Survey

As described at the beginning, the study is based on the question how the customer uses the service of companies in times of Web 2.0. The studies were conducted in March 2017 by means of an online questionnaire. The target group were Internet users, who were asked to participate via the social media and e-mail.

Interview participants (n): 180
Survey: Online questionnaire
Period of investigation: March 2017

![Figure 1: If you have a service request, which of the following communication channels do you use (multiple entries possible)? [n=180]](source: author)

Nearly 82.2% of respondents use e-mail as a communication channel for customer service. This is especially interesting in view of the fact that the e-mail has already been declared superfluous by the various possibilities of social media. At least 38% of the customers use the contact form. These two ways of making contact give the company the opportunity to answer thoughtfully. 42.2% of respondents admitted 24 hours to the company for an answer. Prominent 78.3% of respondents would like to be contacted by telephone. The particular relevance of the telephone, possibly as a complementary contact channel on the company’s website, is probably due to the fact that the telephone as a real-time contact channel provides the consumer
with a time-offset with a response to his question or a solution to his problem. The high level of consumer demand is also reflected in the fact that consumers expect to be able to make contact with the company at any time. This also applies if customers move in another medium. Social media play a subordinate role in service requests with just under 19.44%. Likewise, the (video) chat with 6.67%. This is surprising because the contact on social media in the literature is praised as the measure of things.

Among other things are called Correspondence, WhatsApp, Office, Internet and personal contact.

Figure 2: What is important to you in electronic customer service (social media, contact form, mobile apps, etc.)? (multiple entries possible) [n=180]
Source: author

Both for consumers as well as for businesses, social media offers should primarily meet functional and security-related requirements. The functional characteristics are both “simplicity and clarity” as well as “quick response”. The security-related characteristics are “data protection” and “transparency”.

Simplicity and clarity are the most demanded by users at 87.78%. Quick response is second only to 72.22%. The user wants to get an answer in a simple and uncomplicated way. What exactly quick response in this case means, clarifies the third question (see figure 3). Simplicity and clarity means that the customer can quickly find his way to the website or the platform and simply reach the link to customer service. Data protection as a security-related property is only just two-thirds of the participants in the survey important. Transparency stands for 24.44% of users. For the customer, the solution to their specific problem is the focus, not the data protection.

Other matters include “clarity and reliability”, “sympathetic and competent advice”, “intelligibility” and “no prefabricated standard responses”. In addition, five users have excluded the use of electronic customer service for various reasons.

Figure 3: When do you expect an answer to the electronic customer service? [n=180]
Source: author
Altogether, almost 55% of respondents are waiting 12 hours or more for a response from companies. Almost 42.2% of respondents are patient and generally wait 24 hours for a response to a service request posted on the Internet. Almost 45% of the customers are expecting an answer within six hours or less. Almost 8.67% expect a reaction within an hour.

6 Summary and outlook

The compiled subject literature speaks a clear language: the customer expects companies to understand the social web as a platform for dialogue and to make the dialogue transparent and open. It is therefore surprising that only about 19.4% of respondents use social media as part of customer service. Old-established channels such as e-mail, contact form and telephone remain in the foreground.

When using electronic customer service via social media, contact form or (video) chat, the main focus is on the functional aspects of simplicity and clarity. This is quite understandable, since an end user does not want to fight through a complex jungle of forms in the event of a problem. The security-related aspect Data protection is felt by two-thirds of respondents as important.

Further tendencies in customer service are already identified in the literature. The development towards the Internet of Things, Industry 4.0 and other technical innovations leads to an increasing network of devices and applications in the customer’s environment. This creates a wide range of opportunities to grasp customer satisfaction and proactively respond to emerging difficulties. Thus, for example, it is possible to detect problem occurrences on the user terminal which are reflected in repeated requests or aborted service processes. If the customer makes his / her dissatisfaction air, for example, by spreading his / her problem on social networks, the above-described customer service 2.0 can provide a remedy. However, there should be a significant darkness of customers who are able to help themselves with an emergency solution or give up frustrated without escalating their problem and obtaining a satisfactory solution. This creates a latent dissatisfaction that accumulates over time and thus increases the likelihood of a change of provider at the earliest opportunity. The traditional recording of the customer feedback by questionnaires takes place with a great time delay, is incomplete and can provide an explanation afterwards, but the customer no longer change their minds. In this situation, it is advantageous to continuously analyze the state of the ongoing service processes and the hardware and software used in the process, and to solve occurring problems as quickly as possible (Rossmann and Tangemann 2015, p. 168). The subject of confidentiality is to be taken very seriously and discussed beforehand. The customer should have the possibility to consciously select services of this kind, if he has built up sufficient trust in the provider and is convinced of the advantages. As long as this is not the case, it is not advisable to use these technical possibilities. The service should be modular and can be installed on request. Here, technical possibilities and confidence building must be carefully considered in the interests of customer loyalty.

Literatúra/List of References

Kľúčové slová/Key Words

social media marketing, customer service, web 2.0, service marketing sociálnych médií, zákaznícky servis, web 2.0, služba

JEL klasifikácia

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Résumé

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Recenzované
18. apríl 2017 / 20. máj 2017