

# THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON A COMPANY'S IMAGE. THE POSSIBILITY OF INTERNET MONITORING

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## **Abstract**

*The paper deals with issues concerning management of a company's image, especially in an crisis situation. This aspect of management is analyzed in the context of social media – the way they function and influence an organization's image. Using the Nestle company as an example the author scrutinizes sources and the development of negative campaigns against the firm. Then the author presents the characteristics and possibilities of applying Internet monitoring aimed at detecting negative phenomena having an impact on the company's image.*

**Keywords:** *image, social media, Internet, monitoring, crisis*

## **1. Introduction**

In analyzing the realities of doing business in recent times, it can be stated that the vast majority of companies realize their business objectives in an environment characterized by extreme complexity. An organization's efficiency level depends not only on economic and legal factors, but also on social, cultural and political ones. Moreover, a company's environment constantly undergoes dynamic changes. It is also vital to realize that there are even more and more factors which influence companies in an *indirect* way. The impact of advanced globalization processes, including the free flow of information and data in a global Internet seems to be especially important. Organizations have very limited possibilities of both influencing and controlling these phenomena. As a consequence, the risk connected with doing business are on the increase including the risk of deterioration of a company's image (Maroń, 2006), which in turn might lead to the development of an image crisis situation. An image crisis is understood as some occurrence which conjures up indignation from the public. Their negative reaction destroys the desired, positive image of a company (Smektała, 2000).

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Nowadays the Internet is becoming an increasingly important aspect in the creation of an organization's image (Łebkowski, 2009). On one hand a company can and should exploit actively the array of public relation instruments which are adaptable to the Internet. It would allow managing image in a concise and integral way. However, it seems essential to realize that a company is not able to control all the factors and phenomena taking place on the net and which at the same time have an impact on the way the organization is perceived by the public.

In this context the so-called *social media* might appear to be especially perilous. This *social media* consists of both the Internet and mobile technology media which allow communication with other people. An especially important element of social media are so-called social portals. Blogs, content services and social virtual worlds also ought to be mentioned as very popular aspects of social media ([www.marketinginternetowy.pl](http://www.marketinginternetowy.pl), access: 12.03.2013).

Basically, social media operate without any control from any organization, including the way they pass on the information connected with a company to the public. It can be stated that currently we are all witness to a global revolution which allows each person to express his own opinion in a both free and sound way. Increasingly more people are taking advantage of this privilege as hundreds of thousands of blogs dedicated to every aspect of life are appearing constantly including those with comments regarding the way companies operate (Sadowski, 2012). In order to show the scale of development and spreading of information on social portals, it would be good to present a few facts such as the following:

- over 50% of all Internet users are active on social nets, which amounts to over one billion people in the whole world,
- on Facebook.com about half a million comments and over 700 thousand new statuses appear every minute,
- on YouTube service each and every minute around 25 hours of new video material is added ([www.e-profit.tv](http://www.e-profit.tv), access: 23.02.2013).

At the same time it appears that over half of the people active in the Internet use this tool to observe some brand or a product. What is more, over one third of them write comments on the net about these brands. Thus, every day in the Internet a large number of comments regarding companies activities, products, brands and services are added. A natural consequence of this fact is a considerable increase in the risk that in the net *negative* information or comments about the organization, its products or employees may also appear. In this way social media have become an extremely important medium which potentially may have a substantial impact on strategies and future operations of even the most prominent, respectable companies holding a strong position in the marketplace.

In spite of all these threats the majority of organizations still have not undertaken any active measures to create a concise, comprehensive system of image management which would include, among other things, the use of Internet monitoring. It is worth presenting the results of research done by Alert Media Communications and Polish Public Relations Society. The results show that every fifth company in Poland still does not feel the need for protection against an image crisis and over 40% of entrepreneurs believe that crisis communication planning is not necessary. At the same time the results show that over half of Polish companies have already experienced a crisis situation ([www.ideo.pl](http://www.ideo.pl), access: 12.01.2013).

Taking into consideration the above-mentioned remarks, it seems that taking active measures in order to take at least partial control over when and what information concerning a company appears on social portals is a necessity. For firms it is essential to attain the possibility of collecting and scrutinizing the opinions expressed in the global net.

As an example of an organization which has experienced the negative impact of social media and which was forced to cope with very serious criticism concerning the way it operates, the case of the Nestle company has been analyzed in this article. In the latter part of this paper the author presents Internet monitoring tools which are currently available for companies feeling the need to actively limit the risk of an image crisis.

## **2. Image problems for Nestle**

The Nestle company has a long and rich history. It was founded in XIX century when Henri Nestle conceived and started production of the first baby food based on milk. Soon Nestle initiated an extensive expansion into foreign markets. Through successive mergers and buy-outs they were able to expand its assortment.

Today Nestle is the largest food company in the world and the leader in producing instant coffee, baby-food, ice-cream, milk, mineral water and food for animals. The company employs 280 thousand people and its products are sold in over 130 countries.

In Poland the company has operated since 1993 as Nestle Polska S.A. Currently it produces and sells food products using brands such as Nestle, Nescafe, Gerber and Winiary. Also, the it is a shareholder of the largest producer of cereals in Poland as well as companies producing and distributing mineral water ([www.nestle.pl](http://www.nestle.pl), access: 07.01.2013).

Definitely one of the most serious image crisis Nestle has encountered in social media concerned issues with one of its most popular and recognizable products – a Kit Kat candy bar. The crisis began on March 17, 2010 when

Greenpeace published a report about the way Nestle operates on its website. In the document it was stated that Nestle, being one of the world's biggest food producers, is a contributor to the destruction of Indonesian rain forests and as a consequence constitutes a direct threat to orangutans living there. In the report it was suggested that the biggest problem concerns the uncontrollable cutting down of trees in order to grow oil palms from which palm oil is extracted. Palm oil itself is one of the main ingredients in many sweets – it is also an ingredient of Kit Kat candy bars produced by Nestle. The bars have been called 'a chocolate destroyer of Indonesian rain forests'.

At this point it ought to be stated that Nestle was not involved in such actions directly. Palm oil was being produced by the Indonesian company Sinar Mas and Nestle was one of its main buyers. However, the accusations of unethical behavior were directed mainly at the Nestle company as a conscious partner of the highly-criticized Sinar Mas company, and so was considered to be an organization which contributes to rainforest destruction and killing of orangutans.

Greenpeace carried out a vast and complex campaign against Nestle in social media, using an array of various instruments. One of the first initiatives was publishing a film in the Internet service, YouTube. The video was a parody of a previous Nestle commercial. In a very believable, while at the same time controversial way it showed a connection between Kit Kat candy bars and uncontrollable cutting down of trees in Indonesian forests and killing of orangutans. This negative information spread through the Internet at enormous speed – in the course of a few days the advertisement was watched by over one million people.

Another Greenpeace initiative was to put on its web page and on numerous social portals a modified version of the Kit Kat logo – the name Nestle Kit Kat had been changed into Nestle Killer. This motif was also used in other Greenpeace activities, e.g. during demonstrations. In this way the *visual* element of the company and product's image was damaged.

Moreover, mainly on social portals, a massive campaign of e-mails being sent to Nestle, including to the president, Paul Buckle, was organized, carried out and publicized. In these e-mails people from all over the world expressed their indignation to the company's irresponsible activities and they were called upon to take proper measures to correct the situation. The scale of the campaign was indeed impressive – all in all Nestle received over two hundred thousand messages. Additionally, supporters of the campaign sent hundreds of fax messages and made a great number of calls to the Nestle customer service department.

The next vital initiative triggered by users of social portals took place on the official Nestle profile on Facebook.com. There they published a new



company's logo with bloody elements which were supposed to symbolize the killing of orangutans and they sent hundreds of negative comments condemning the way the organization operates.

An important element of Greenpeace's campaign against Nestle was creating separate web pages in over twenty countries which were devoted to this campaign as they published on negative information and comments regarding the practices of Nestle.<sup>2</sup>

At this point it seems important to mention that, in addition to the campaign carried out in social media, supporters and Greenpeace activists organized demonstrations during annual Nestle shareholders meetings and in front of Nestle factories in Europe and subsidiaries in Beijing and Djakarta.

In summing up, all the initiatives carried out by Greenpeace within the confines of the campaign against Nestle seemed to be characterized by a concise vision of set objectives that were complex. What is more, the whole campaign was based mainly on spreading information through social media. As a result, Greenpeace effectively reached and activated hundreds of thousands of people who joined the protest. Thus, it can be said that Greenpeace undisputedly succeeded in publicizing the case in the Internet and at the same time in convincing people to seeing its point of view.

The important thing undoubtedly is that the success of the campaign was partially caused by inappropriate reactions of Nestle itself. The company made numerous mistakes as far as the principles of image crisis management are concerned. Definitely the first vital mistake was the lack of immediate reaction to publicized accusations. After the Greenpeace report and the YouTube film were made available in the Internet, Nestle failed to make any move for almost 48 hours. Such behavior is always disadvantageous for a company. It is essential to remember that for the first hours after negative information about the way an organization operates has been revealed, negative public reaction is usually substantial. At the same time disorientation and confusion reigns as people make an effort to gain some additional information either to confirm accusations or not (Smektała, 2000). In such an atmosphere speculations appear immediately and people start to create various scenarios explaining the causes and consequences of the scrutinized situation, which most often are very far from the truth. It is also worth remembering that such behavior is a natural human reaction which has its roots in psychological conditions. As a result, various untrue theories appear and spread. Without being verified, they are usually taken for granted as fact. Consequently, the company's image deteriorates dramatically. Therefore, it must be stated that the lack of an instant reaction from the side of the company under attack is a mistake resulting in serious consequences. An immediate message sent to

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<sup>2</sup> Polish version can be found at [www.greenpeace.pl/kitkat/](http://www.greenpeace.pl/kitkat/)

the public, explaining the situation and the company's standpoint, would dampen harmful speculation and calm negative emotions down (Altkorn, 2004; Mitroff, Pearson, 1998). To be able to do it, however, first of all it is crucial to identify the negative information about a company in prompt fashion. For this reason it is so important to take advantage of possibilities offered by Internet monitoring tools.

At the same time it is vital to remember that the very fact of identifying threats by using appropriate applications does not solve the image dilemma. An absolutely crucial step is a fast, well thought-out reaction to the indignation of the public. This is the main role of monitoring tools which enable firms to detect sentiment, time and place of comments regarding the company or its brands. What seems especially important is that these instruments should also serve the purpose of permanent monitoring the public's reaction to remedial measures taken by an organization having been afflicted with an image crisis. In analyzing the example of the Greenpeace campaign it must be stated that Nestle behaved inappropriately where this was concerned. Not only did it procrastinate for almost two days instead of sending a message to explain the situation, but Nestle's first eventual reaction could be said to be not well thought-out and wrong. Ever since the publication of the Greenpeace report, the showing of the film and the creation of the critical web pages, there has been a fierce discussion about Nestle's controversial activities on the web. Official Nestle services on Facebook and Twitter portals were full of negative comments ([www.gadzinowski.pl](http://www.gadzinowski.pl), access: 05.02.2013), modified advertisement of the company's product was watched by almost one and a half million Internet users, and Nestle received over two hundred thousand e-mails. Greenpeace arguments were very convincing, thus it seems natural that as a consequence the vast majority of comments expressed strong criticism regarding Nestle operations.

The company reacted by publishing a statement on the official profile of Kit Kat requesting that only official logos of the company and the candy bar be displayed and that all comments were to be deleted. The motivation was to stop the spread of the modified logotype Kit Kat – Nestle Killer. What is more, the firm asked that the video on the YouTube portal to be deleted. At the same time it invoked the copyright law for the product and the brand. The admonishing and threatening tone of the statement conjured up increased public indignation and as a result it sparked off other critical comments. The company was blamed for trying to implement censorship. Moreover, administrators of Nestle's profile got involved in a quarrel with the service users and both sides wrote malicious comments ([www.prestauracja.pl](http://www.prestauracja.pl), access: 04.02.2013).

All the analyzed measures taken by Nestle must be judged to be both wrong and harmful. It should be concluded that the people responsible for creating and managing the image of Nestle and its products were not able to estimate properly the character and power of the Internet, including some etiquette and rules of communicating with the Internet society. The company did not implement permanent monitoring of social media in order to detect comments regarding the company and its products and it allowed negative opinions and indignation to increase. As a consequence, the image crisis became more and more serious. Unfortunately, the company's reaction reveals its lack of skills to initiate dialog with Internet users. It seems that if Nestle had benefited from the possibilities offered by tools of social media monitoring, the efficiency of image crisis management would have been considerably greater.

The above example of Nestle's image problems is not the only negative occurrence in this field which at the same time was connected directly with social media. One of the most serious situations was the case of the allegedly dangerous banana mousse. On August 5, 2011 a Pole living in Great Britain put a comment (in English) on Facebook's portal, warning people against banana mousse produced by Nestle as a piece of glass was said to have been found in one batch. After four days the first comment in the Polish language appeared. Gossip began to spread and a dramatic increase in information and comments appeared before the end of August. What is important is that up until then Nestle had not reacted in any visible way. The company had not noticed the first signals of upcoming problems and allowed an uncontrollable increase in negative information regarding its product. As a consequence, according to an independent analysis carried out using the Internet monitoring tools, information about a piece of glass in banana mousse was seen by 3,4 million Internet users ([www.gazetaprawna.pl](http://www.gazetaprawna.pl), access: 24.03.2013).

Although the information about glass in the mousse turned out to be not true, most probably it was the consequence of previous troubles with a similar Nestle product. It is true that a piece of glass was found in one Nestle product. However it was not mousse, but banana puree ([www.finanse.wp.pl](http://www.finanse.wp.pl), access: 20.03.2013). What is more, the problem concerned only one batch of the product which had been launched only in France ([www.wyborcza.biz](http://www.wyborcza.biz), access: 15.01.2013). Nestle withdrew the whole batch from selling points and on its web page it published official information in which it was explained thoroughly which product was in question. Appropriate information appeared also in Poland and the company ensured that Polish children were absolutely safe ([www.fit-up.pl](http://www.fit-up.pl), access: 19.02.2013).

Nestle made the mistake of not monitoring clients' comments and sentiment after the case of the banana puree had been explained. The whole problem was misrepresented, consciously or not, and the first untrue comments

concerning another product appeared. However, Nestle was not aware of the hazard because of the lack of proper monitoring instruments. In a very short period of time negative rumors led to a serious image crisis.

A bit of similar untrue information spread through social media initiated by a person living in Lublin, Poland. She put a comment on Facebook in which she claimed that in her baby mousse she found a rat. Internet users reacted quickly and in an instant a few hundred new comments were added, and within 24 hours the information was passed on to around five thousand people. Moreover, the whole case was covered by Internet media ([www.wykop.pl](http://www.wykop.pl), access: 11.03.2013). As a reaction to the claim, Nestle sent a sample of the product to be checked by independent public laboratories and the company published an announcement regarding the whole issue. The document explained that the tests confirmed that it was impossible to place any foreign body in a single package during the production process. At the same time it was assumed that the object found presumably was simply a lump of mousse, which had been created as a result of a contact with water during the preparation process of previous portions taken from the analyzed package ([www.nestle.pl](http://www.nestle.pl), access: 21.02.2013). It seems important to stress that, despite the company's correct reaction which dispelled all customers' doubts, the negative information spread in the net very fast and in fact it was only a matter of hours. This proves very firmly how much social media constitute a potential threat to a company's image.

### **3. Internet monitoring tools**

Currently in the marketplace increasingly more companies are appearing offering the possibility of using tools to monitor the Internet. Some systems are very complex and they allow thorough analysis of the Internet users' activities. It is worth taking a closer look at the features of these applications which determine their practical worth for organizations interested in implementing them to efficiently manage the company's image.

One of the essential parameters of an application is its range. It is important that this tool be able to seek and collect *all* results concerning the organization, product, brand or service. Only in this way is a company able to determine the real, concise character of a parameter and thus take rational, effective decisions in the field of image management. If a monitoring tool focuses only on a few of the most popular social portals, it will produce incomplete results. It is important to remember that social media consist of a lot of various platforms and services. Moreover, new forms of communication between the Internet users are still being created. For this reason the *whole* complex system of virtual communication needs to be monitored.



The moment an image crisis appears, meaning the moment the public receives some information about a company resulting in a negative reaction, a prompt reaction is especially important. Information must be published clarifying the situation and expressing company's point of view (Larkin, Regester, 2005).

According to the principles of image crisis management in the case of an image crisis an organization should react within less than one hour (Zelek, 2003). To be able to do this, however, a company must receive information regarding developments of the situation and public sentiment almost immediately. For this reason it is so important to update monitoring results quite frequently, preferably the system could do this every few minutes. It is especially vital in the case of the Internet, where information spreads extremely fast and within minutes the situation may slip out of control of the people who are responsible for the company's image management.

Another important feature of the application is the possibility of storing information gathered in archives. In other words, to be able to gain fast access to basic data regarding the web page on which some information appeared and the data about the person who published the information in question. In this way it would be possible to establish parameters such as: number of users a day, monthly number of accesses to the page, number of people who have 'friend' status of the author of some information or a comment. As a result, a company is able to carry out a statistical analysis and draw rational, useful conclusions.

One of the crucial fields in which Internet monitoring tools could be used is in the analysis of so-called sentiment to a brand, product or company. Sentiment should be understood as an emotional attitude of a person who publishes some comments about a company or its product. Analysis of sentiment is automatic and enables defining the level of emotions both negative and positive and which are an inherent part of comments published in social portals. It is then that a company gains the possibility of quickly identifying the source of signals regarding the scale and tendencies in the perception of an organization. This instrument seems especially valuable as a prevention tool in crisis management. It allows immediate identification of the place where negative information appeared and as a result, a reaction is possible before the information spreads in an uncontrollable and perilous way or in other words – before the image crisis appears.

It is very important to remember, however, that it is extremely difficult to identify the sentiment precisely. The applications which are supposed to serve this purpose are equipped with very complicated algorithms, which nevertheless are not fully effective. The results of such monitoring can still only be treated as general information. Still, the possibilities of following

and detecting the level of emotions connected with some product, a brand or an organization on the net seem to be so valuable that even only general, approximate results constitute very precious information for a company.

An extremely important value of monitoring the Internet, including analysis of sentiment, is the possibility of gaining precious knowledge about the features of company's customers themselves. This aspect is called brand-monitoring. The objective of the applications in this field is to reach the places where the people who buy the product are active. Thus, a company gains information about both who these people are, what they like, how they are segmented according to territory and demography, and it learns what their preferences regarding behavior in the net are. A firm receives data concerning the places where customers are most active. This gives considerable insight into their life style. Thus, these applications enable companies to achieve the basic objectives in marketing research. From the point of view of managing the image of a company or a brand, brand-monitoring, similarly to sentiment analysis, can contribute to reducing the risk of an image crisis. In fact, both sorts of monitoring complement each other, and thanks to the synergy effect it is possible to identify potential danger even more effectively.

It is also worth mentioning the possibility of using Internet monitoring to follow discussions about particular people. Although politics and show business seem to be the most natural and obvious area for exploiting such a kind of an application, various organizations are showing a demand for such information. The image of a lot of companies is very much dependent on particular personalities who constitute the 'face' of a firm. In most cases they are the people who manage a company or who own them and sometimes valuable employees with unique knowledge and skills. These people are usually well-known and respected by the public, adding trustworthiness and credibility to a company as clients see their words as a guarantee of high quality. Therefore, it is so important to monitor public sentiment for these people in social media, which would allow a fast reaction in the cases a negative comments appears.

Applications in the field of so-called *social customer service* constitute another possibility for identifying comments put in social media. Currently more and more companies are realizing that social media can be used as one of very important channels of communication with a customer. This way of communication revolutionizes the idea of being in contact with a client. By reaching portals, blogs, forums on which a company's client is active, apart from getting to know his opinion on an organization or a product, it is possible to start a dialog, to initiate some interaction between the customer and a representative of a company. From an image management point of view, it allows an organization to monitor the way it is perceived on a continual basis and a form of prevention is being taken. This constitutes one of the key

areas of image crisis management. At the same time initiating planned, well thought-out dialog with a client improves considerably loyalty to a company and a brand. Taking into consideration today's realities in doing business, the fast and dynamic changes in a company's surroundings, and the constant struggle with strong competition, creating customer loyalty seems to be one of the most essential strategic objectives of any organization. This idea constitutes foundations for the concept of so-called *relation marketing*, which emphasizes the need of being in constant contact with a client throughout all phases of a product's life. This means that the customer is involved in designing a product. He is accompanied by the firm throughout the whole purchasing process and also after the product has been used and modified. (Peppers, Rogers 1997; Storbacka, Lehtinen, 2001). By sustaining customer relations in all stages connected with the purchasing of a product or service, it becomes possible to build loyalty and trust to a product and a company. From a client's point of view it is important that clients know that an organization notices them, treats them as individuals and tries to learn and discuss their needs. (Yeshin, 1998). Such individual treatment is the key to increased client satisfaction leading to a strengthened, positive image.

There are still more and more companies which realize the enormous potential of social media in the field of initiating and managing relations with a customer. As a result, they are taking active measures. Companies are employing people whose only responsibility is to find a client in the net and to initiate some dialog. Some organizations even create separate organizational units, kind of commanding centers, which focus on customer relations management in social media.

In scrutinizing the tools of Internet monitoring, it is also important to mention that there exists the possibility of measuring efficiency of a company's promotion activity. This function seems to be especially useful during promotional campaigns and when a firm is interested in estimating how many people received the promotional message and what reaction it sparked off. Applications allow monitoring discussions about a brand or a product and collected data serve the purpose of building graphs which illustrate the intensity of this discussion. With a company's gains in insight into changes in the number of ongoing discussions on all levels of social portals, there exists the possibility of comparing this activity with each measure taken within the confines of a promotional campaign and thus another form of market research.

Systems of the Internet monitoring also can be used in order to support the sale of a company's products. Such tools could make it possible to identify potential clients of some product or brand. Applications allow detecting some particular words, expressions, which have been used by people active in social media and which are perceived by an organization as important

hints of those people's interest in company's products. Thanks to such immediate identification, the company is able to reach the person in question, initiate dialog, present an offer, and – as a consequence – convince him to buy a product. What is important here is that it seems that such a kind of identification of a client might be especially attractive for smaller companies whose brands are not commonly known or recognizable. A customer is searched through the identification of *common* words which in some way suggest some interest in a particular product, not by the words which constitute the name of a company or a brand. For instance, the words 'trip', 'vacation', 'Turkey' suggest a potential client from a travel agency. Thus, there is no need to have a recognizable name of a company or a brand to be able to use this application effectively.

In analyzing applications for social media monitoring, it is also worth mentioning a few concrete systems available on the market. Definitely one of the most interesting systems is Radian6 ([www.radian6.com/](http://www.radian6.com/), access: 08.03.2013). It allows online monitoring of information appearing about the company, products or new topics for discussion. It identifies and defines topics, words and expressions in each kind of social channels, including forums, blogs, files sharing services. The system has an array of analytical tools and the results are generated as a concise visual presentation. At the same time there is the possibility to send data and graphs to other applications ([www.webershandwick.pl](http://www.webershandwick.pl), access: 10.03.2013).

Similar solutions are offered by a Scout Labs system, which is designed mostly for small and medium size organizations. The idea of the application is to focus more on the quality of data rather than quantity. Hence, the system offers, apart from standard applications which collect quantity data, complex techniques of identification of client's preferences. What is important is that Scout Labs is promoted as a tool which is useful especially for public relations experts and so it supports a company's image management to a vast degree. ([www.socialmediaexplorer.com](http://www.socialmediaexplorer.com), access: 03.04.2013).

Apart from the above-mentioned systems offered by foreign companies, services in the field of social media monitoring provided by Polish companies have begun to appear on the Polish web. ([www.sentymetr.pl](http://www.sentymetr.pl), access: 10.04.2013; [www.performancemedia.pl](http://www.performancemedia.pl), access: 10.04.2013). Definitely one of the most important advantages of these applications is the fact that they are adjusted to Polish realities, which means that they are able to identify words and expressions in Polish language in a more precise and complex way. Systems offered by foreign companies often collect numerous results in a foreign language, while at the same time omitting results in Polish language. Moreover, foreign applications often do not monitor local sources of public opinion, like Polish forums or web 2.0 services ([www.e-profit.tv](http://www.e-profit.tv), access:



23.03.2013). Taking this aspect into consideration, it can be expected that the level of interest in the offer of Polish firms will increase and, as a consequence, the offer itself will be even more complex and concise.

Summing up the analysis of applications currently available on the market, it ought to be pointed out that each system has some specific unique features and functions which make it different from the competition. At the same time every organization constitutes a separate, unique system, which is conditioned by specific factors, both internal and external. That is why it is very difficult to assess the efficiency of each social media monitoring application precisely, because every company ought to implement solutions which match its individual characteristics. Thus, for each organization the optimal choice might mean a different application.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Nowadays, in order to create and manage a company's or brand's image efficiently, organizations are forced to scrutinize people's activity and information appearing in the Internet, especially in social media. They become a powerful and potentially dangerous medium.

Vast, often global campaigns against companies become a common phenomenon. Free formula of social media, unlimited transfer of information put firms and their brands under big pressure from the public. On one hand, thanks to a concise strategy and a system of image management it is relatively easy to create a positive picture of a company. However, it is even easier to lose this image ([www.gadzinowski.pl](http://www.gadzinowski.pl), access: 13.03.2013). It may happen especially when there is lack of awareness of how the Internet community behaves and what principles of communication they obey.

It seems that the above-analyzed examples of Nestle's problems mostly resulted from the lack of implementation of appropriate signal detecting systems. Surely majority of those image crises could have been avoided, or at least their negative impact on the way the company was perceived could have been limited. It is essential to realize that most image crises develop gradually and before they turn into a crisis, which means before some negative information regarding a company or its products reaches the public, they give numerous warning signals. Therefore, it is so important to create a system of early identification, thanks to which a company gains a possibility of fast reaction, denying all gossips and submitting proper statements, before the harmful information spreads in the Internet in an uncontrollable way.

Currently appearing on the market are more and more companies offering services in the field of Internet monitoring. Such tools allow quite complex and effective identification of the Internet users' activities in social media,

including the behavior which is vital from an image management point of view. It is important for organizations to acknowledge these possibilities and, as a result, to increase their efficiency in the field of creating and controlling the way they are perceived by the public.

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