THE RATIONALE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

On March 1, 2009 Skittles changed their official homepage to a collage of content from social networking sites. The mix of content included a live Twitter feed and video from Flickr and YouTube.[6] At first glance, the idea seemed revolutionary and core-shaking. The corporate brand finally emerged into the social media space and embraced the power of user-generated content.

However, in a day or two the idea turned into a deadly catalogue of cheap broadband.[7] Online users, either motivated by hunger for Internet fame or desire to display their thoughts to a national audience,[8] were using the word "Skittles" in their posts and quickly devolved the page into an aggregation of racial slurs, profanities and suggestions for crude new slogans. The whole campaign quickly turned into a mockery of the Skittles brand.

The PR idea of getting public attention has worked, the ratings have shown big boosts in the number of mentions and visits. The launch of the new website was quickly picked up by popular blogs like Mashable and Logic+Emotion, as well as by traditional media such as *Forbes* and the *Wall Street Journal*. Nevertheless, the amount of publicity didn't justify the content. Most authors questioned the marketing strategy of the brand, as well as the company's creative idea. A close look at the people who mentioned Skittles marketing relaunch would also reveal that these were mostly marketers and communication specialists, and probably not Skittles' target audience.

Some experts claim that the failure of Skittles' marketing campaign was failure to engage in the dialogue. Social media requires a conversation, but the website represented just an electronic billboard on the web that said, "look who's using the word Skittles!".[9]

Although we should give Skittles credit for the brave experiment with user-generated content, this case is a powerful alert that participation in a social media space must be coupled with a strong strategic approach. The strategy should consider the nature of the target audience, identify influencers and have a clear
objective. Finally, one should keep in mind that interactivity should be a main priority of any social marketing related activities.

Lesson Learned: Having an online presence on social media platforms does not equal business benefits.