

A Study of Social Media Marketing Advantage & Disadvantage

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, social media has become ubiquitous and most important for social networking, content sharing and online accessing. Due to its reliability, consistency and instantaneous features, social media opens a wide place for businesses such as online marketing. Marketing which occurs via social media is known as social media marketing. Social media marketing has made possible for companies to reach targeted consumers easily, effectively and instantly. Besides that, social media marketing also faces several challenges in the field. This article argues on social media marketing's advantages and disadvantages in present era.

KEYWORDS

- Online Marketing
- Sharing
- Online Accessing
- Reliability
- Social Media

INTRODUCTION

Social Media seems to be a new trend, but its roots stretch to the beginning of computer era. What we see today is the result of centuries-old social media development. A user net, which was launched in 1979, was the first progenitor of social media, and the journey from User nets to Facebook is a long one. User nets allowed users to post on newsgroups. It was followed by bulletin board systems (BBS) which allowed users to login and interact. Online services like prodigy were the precursors to BBS. After online services, internet relay chat came into light which gave way to instant messaging.

In the 90s, dating sites and forums were on peak, which led to the development of social networks. But they did not let users make friend lists. Six degrees launched to overcome this feature. It allowed profile creation and listing peers. It was purchased and shut down after playing for a decade. Blogging emerged in this phase, creating a sensation in social media. It is popular even today. Other sites like Black Planet (African-American Social Website) and MiGente(Latino) cropped up having provision to create profiles and add friends.

Modern social networks came into picture post 2000. Apple launched its Friend ster in 2002. It has millions of users. Hi5 and Linked in were launched in 2003. Linked in is a ground for professionals to reach out to one another. MySpace also originated in 2003 and became well known by 2006. Similarly Face book was launched in 2004 and surpassed MySpace, Orkut, Multiply, etc., and is

still expanding. This decade also conceived media sharing platforms like photo bucket, flicker, youtube, instagram, revver, etc., along with news and bookmarking platforms like Digg and Delicious.

Since 2000, Social Media has bloomed to horizon and is still expanding limitlessly. Along with media sharing, many other portals that provide real-time updates were introduced, for example, Twitter, Posterous, Tumbler, etc. In 2007, Facebook launched its advertising system.

EXAMPLES : Facebook, Google

IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The importance of social media is undebatable. It is a powerful channel of marketing a game changer for any business. It provides us the flexibility to communicate at both personal as well as business levels.

Business owners can improve search rankings, leads, sales, and traffic using search media. This can be done at reduced marketing expenses. Besides business, it is a cool platform to connect with friends and dear ones.

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING AND ITS FEATURES

Social media marketing is a new trend and rapidly growing way in which businesses are reaching out to targeted customers easily. Social media marketing can be simply defined as the use of social media channels to promote a company and its products. This kind of marketing can be thought of as a subset of online marketing activities that complete traditional Web-based promotion strategies, such as e-mail newsletters and online advertising campaigns (Barefoot & Szabo 2010). By encouraging users to spread messages to personal contacts, social media marketing has injected a new term of exponential dissemination and trust to mass-communication and mass marketing (Hafele, 2011). By this new approach of outreach and marketing, new tools are being developed and increased in turn for businesses. Social media marketers are now going better and more effective insight through the introduction of analytic applications by official social network site platforms (Hafele, 2011).

ADVANTAGES

According to Watson et al. (2002) cited by Sheth and Sharma (2005) with the popularity of digital marketing on the rise, many businesses are investigating how social media can help them promote their products and services to potential and existing customers. Social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter have transformed the way some businesses think about advertising. Some businesses direct customers toward their social network pages more than they direct them to their own websites. There are certain advantages to market via social media, but there are also related drawbacks as well (Watson et al. 2002; Sheth & Sharma 2005).

The primary advantages of social media marketing is reducing costs and enhancing reach. The cost of a social media platform is typically lower than other marketing platforms such as face-to-face salespeople or middlemen or distributors. In addition, social media marketing allows firms to reach customers that may not be accessible due to temporal and locational limitations of existing

distribution channels. Social media platforms increase reach and reduce costs by providing three areas of advantage for customers (Watson et al. 2002;

First, the marketing firm can provide unlimited information to customers without human intervention. This is an advantage over other forms of contact because the amount of information that can be provided is much greater than in any other form of communication. Additionally, and more importantly, the information can be provided in a form that customers can easily process and understand. For example, airline scheduling and reservation systems are very difficult to create and maintain to serve individual needs. Additionally, in this context, the choices are large and difficult to provide in any format that is better than web-based format (Watson et al. 2002; Sheth& Sharma 2005).

1. COST-RELATED

According to Weinberg (2009), the main advantage of social media marketing is cost-related. The financial barriers to social media marketing are quite low compared to others. The majority of social media sites are free to access, create profile and post information. Whereas traditional marketing campaigns can cost millions of dollars, many social media tools are free even for business use. Businesses can run highly successful social media marketing campaigns on a limited budget. The advantage of reaching your targeted market for little or no cash investment is substantial, and the audience wanting your information voluntarily joins or follows you. Pay-per-click advertisements on sites such as Facebook are "geo-targeted" according to specific criteria, to reach the correct audience. The viral nature of social media means that each person who reads your posts has the capability to spread the news farther within his own network, so information can reach a large number of people in a short time (Weinberg, 2009).

2. SOCIAL INTERACTION

One of the most notable phenomena of new media is how it has increased and created new forms of social interaction. People spend more than a quarter of their time online involved in communication activities (e.g., emails, IM chat, and social networks), which is equivalent to the total time spent online for general leisure and entertainment (Riegner, 2007) cited by (Hill & Moran, 2011). Social networking sites have become so pervasive that they are the most popular Internet destinations (Burmaster, 2009). Not only has new media demonstrably altered how often people communicate online, but it has also enlarged the pool of individuals they communicate with, and led to new ways for behaviors to be influenced (Burmaster, 2009). Consumer behavior studies reveal that individuals give greater consideration to advice and information shared online, spending more time with websites that provide third-party evaluations (Huang et al. 2009), and other studies indicate such information can directly influence buying decisions, even if received from purely „virtual“ sources (Awad et al. 2006; Weiss et al. 2008) cited by (Hafele, 2011). Indeed many of the reported benefits of new media usage (increased reputation, anticipated reciprocity) relate directly to its social interaction aspects (Kollock 1999; Arthur et al. 2006) cited by (Hafele, 2011).

3. INTERACTIVITY

As observed by Steuer (1992) cited by Ronald P. Hill and Nora Moran (2011) unlike watching TV or listening to the radio, the interactivity of new media lets consumers become more

than just passive recipients of stimulation. Interactivity can be broadly described as the „extent to which users participate in modifying the form and content of a mediated environment in real time (Steuer, 1992). Interactivity is one of the defining characteristics of new media technologies, giving greater access to information as well as supporting increased user control of and engagement with social media content (Fiore et al. 2005) cited by (Hill & Moran, 2011). Interactivity depends on the context. In an online social networking context, interactivity refers to a user- centered interaction with machines, messages, or other users, focusing on the experiential aspect of networking process (Liu & Shrum 2002) cited by (Hill & Moran, 2011).

While interactivity can be simple in certain contexts (e.g., simply filling out forms, clicking links), it can also be more involved and elaborate, such as allowing individuals to develop online content (Murugesan, 2007) cited by (Hill & Moran, 2011). Studies show that increased levels of interactivity can lead to higher involvement (Bucy, 2003) and more positive attitudes toward websites (Kalyanaraman & Sundar, 2003; Hill & Moran, 2011) along with higher source credibility (Fogg, 2003; Hill & Moran, 2011).

4. TARGETED MARKET

Social media provide marketers with the ability to target audiences and consumers based on site users' personal interests and what their friends like. For example, list country music as one of your interests on a social networking site; you will most likely be seeing ads about country music concerts and artists. Some sites' advertising will also highlight which country artists your friends like to provide a personal connection. With such "smart" marketing, and advertising, marketers effectively reach the people who are most interested in what they have to offer. Furthermore, social networking enables word of mouth to promote products beyond what advertising alone does (Hill, Provost & Volinsky, 2006).

5. CUSTOMER SERVICE

Customer service is another crucial area for social media marketing (Helmsley, 2000). Sometimes website designers cannot avoid a certain degree of complexity in the architecture of a website. Therefore, it is necessary to have a thoughtful customer service system. Links to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and links to online representatives are useful in order to assist customers in the selection or buying process. A marketer should not just offer online assistance. In many cases, it is more convenient for customers to call a company. Therefore, the use of a toll free phone number for customers should be considered (Gommanset al., 2001).

DISADVANTAGES

The online environment creates not only opportunities, but also complications and challenges for the social media marketing process. The transparency of the web makes online information available to all audiences, and reinforces the need for consistency in the planning, design, implementation and control of online marketing communication (Hart et al., 2000). There are five main disadvantages need to be considered on social media marketing, which are:

1. TIME INTENSIVE

As the name implies, social media is interactive, and successful, two-way exchanges take commitment. The nature of marketing changes in social networks, with the focus placed on establishing long-term relationships that can turn into more sales. Somebody has to be responsible to monitor each network, respond to comments, answer questions and post product information the customer deems valuable (Barefoot & Szabo, 2010). Businesses without a service to manage these social networks will find it difficult to compete. The first preliminary consideration and probably the most important one is that social media marketing requires a significant time investment (Barefoot & Szabo, 2010). As a general rule, simply dabbling in a few social media resources and hoping to realize enormous returns is fanciful. A company must realize the necessary time commitment and either accept or reject that commitment as plausible for its operation (Barefoot & Szabo, 2010).

2. TRADEMARK AND COPYRIGHT ISSUES

According to Steinman and Hawkins (2010), It is of the utmost importance for companies to protect their own trademarks and copyrights when using social media to promote their brands and products. A company's brands and other intellectual property are often nearly as valuable as the products or services that they offer. Social media's capacity to facilitate informal and impromptu communication often on a real-time basis can aid companies in promoting their brands and disseminating copyrighted material, but it can also facilitate third-party abuse of a business' trademarks and copyrights (Steinman & Hawkins, 2010).

When using social media, whether via a third-party outlet or a company's own social media platforms, marketers should regularly monitor the use of their trademarks and copyrights. Companies should monitor their own social media outlets as well as third-party social media platforms to ensure that those providing content through the media outlets are not misusing their intellectual property. Internet tracking and screening services are available to monitor the use of your business's marks and copyrights on third-party sites, including checking social media sites for profile or user names that are identical or substantially similar to your company's name or brands (Steinman & Hawkins, 2010).

3. TRUST, PRIVACY AND SECURITY ISSUES

Using social media to promote one's brand, products, or services can also implicate trust, privacy and data security issues. It is important for companies to be aware of these issues and take appropriate measures to minimize their exposure to liability related to personal data collection, use, and maintenance.

Trust, particularly the unique dimensions of transactional security and privacy (Hoffmann et al., 1999), play a critical role in generating customer loyalty to social media marketers. A study by Ratnasingham (1998) has shown that fear of online credit card fraud has been one of the major reasons customers have not done more extensive online buying (Ratnasingham, 1998). Moreover, privacy concerns have led to a public relations fiasco for some major social media marketing resulting in substantial brand image erosion (Advertising Age, 2000).

Social media companies like Facebook and Twitter generally have their own privacy policies that govern their use of consumer data and third-party conduct on the social media platform with respect to personal data. Marketers using third-

4. USER-GENERATED CONTENT (UGC)

During the last few years, users have spent more time and shared more information, thoughts, and opinions with each other easily via the Internet. Also, new forms of content generation, communication, and collaboration have come out on the Internet. Oftentimes marketing strategies involving social networking sites or other social media incorporate user-generated content (UGC) into the field (Filho& Tan 2009). For example, UGC allows Internet users to make comments in various forms, such as photos, videos, podcasts, ratings, reviews, articles, and blogs (Filho& Tan 2009). Whether it's a video or photo shared on a site or messages that site users disseminate to members of the network, UGC holds much promise as a marketing tool. In addition, user-generated content comes with a relatively high degree of credibility in the eyes of consumers, particularly if someone created the content for example or a tweet between friends. Soliciting user-generated content in connection with a marketing strategy comes with some risk of incurring legal liability for content created by an individual participating in the campaign. Marketers can, however, take certain steps to minimize legal risks associated with marketing campaigns that involve the dissemination of user-generated content through social media (Gommans et al. 2001).

CONCLUSION

Social media can be established anywhere with an Internet connection, and it should be considered by marketers, advertisers, and online content creators as a basic part of their communications because social media affects all aspects of the Internet and transforms the role of Internet in people's lives (Universal McCann 2008).

Today, consumers gain a new role with social media. Consumers are becoming content creators and, thus, functional consumers instead of just consuming, as in the past. Social media applications or tools that facilitate this are blogs, micro blogging applications (such as Twitter), social networking sites (such as Facebook), podcasts, and video and photo sharing sites (such as YouTube and Flickr). Given this reality, it is useful for companies, especially marketers, to integrate social media into marketing and their marketing strategies.

This study has attempted to identify the major advantages and disadvantages determined by the development of Internet technology in the area of social media marketing. Social media is the modern tool for marketers who try every means to get their message out to their target markets. The medium has many advantages and disadvantages based on their firm, and many companies still struggle to find the right way to use it. The average business owners or marketers do not fully understand the risks and challenges in it. The field is still so fresh that it is difficult to evaluate the qualifications of social media "experts" who offer their services online.

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