

Social Media Marketing: From Entertainment to Essential

By

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ABSTRACT

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Social media technologies have transformed the way the world communicates. With over 3 billion people worldwide with access to the internet, and 2 billion on social media, businesses are under pressure from the digital revolution to change the way they market and communicate their brands. What was originally created as an entertainment tool has revolutionized the communications and marketing field. This paper examines the impact and role social media has on businesses.

When utilized correctly, social media marketing can increase brand awareness, promote customer engagement and loyalty, inspire consumer communication about the brand online and offline, drive traffic to the company's website, as well as generate leads and increase sales. Supported by secondary research findings and utilization facts and figures, the author aims to confirm the importance of social media utilization by businesses, ultimately corroborating the idea that there are competitive disadvantages for businesses that do not utilize these outlets.

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Introduction

Situation Analysis

As of 2016, there are an estimated 1.96 billion social media users worldwide. This number is projected to grow to 2.5 billion by 2018. In the United States alone, 185 million people use social media, connoting that 78 percent of Americans are on some form of social media (U.S. population with a social media profile 2016 | Statistic). These numbers are a powerful indicator of the influence that social media have in today's society. Initially used for entertainment, social media has evolved into a powerful marketing tool. In 2014, eMarketer surveyed organizations with 100 or more employees across the United States and found that 88 percent, or nine in 10 companies, are using social media for marketing purposes (Bennett 2014).

When utilized effectively, social media creates brand awareness, offers an easily accessible platform for updates, acts as an effective means for crisis communications, and enhances the relationship with current and potential customers. With hundreds of platforms to choose from, it can be difficult for marketers to understand where their presence is best utilized. What began as simple, free communication tools evolved into marketing moguls with a plethora of sponsored content options. Based on these technology advancements, Forrester Research, a well-respected American independent technology and market research

company, projected that social media spending for businesses will increase from 7.52 billion dollars in 2014 to 17.34 in just five years.

Deemed the most promising communication tool for reaching and interacting with stakeholders, what impact does social media utilization have on the one of 10 companies that is not represented on these platforms (Vernuccio 2014)? As a new and transformative tool, the exact impact in terms of return of investment, or ROI, and overall impact of social media on businesses is still vague and requires more research. This paper explores the power of social media in today's business world while emphasizing the importance of representation for businesses.

Premise

In today's society, businesses that do not utilize social media platforms face competitive disadvantages compared to organizations that effectively implement them as a marketing tactic.

Limitations

As a University of North Florida graduate with a Bachelor's in communications and a career as a marketing communications specialist, conducting research for this paper came as second nature for the author. One of the main responsibilities of a marketing communications professional is managing and creating content for an organization's social media pages. Considering this information, one could assume there was a personal bias in validating social media's importance and impact on

businesses. This personal bias could have impacted the sources utilized throughout the paper, as the author may have excluded sources doubting social media's importance in the workplace.

Another limitation was the timeframe of nine weeks to complete this 75 to 100-page project. Already a short timeframe for such an in-depth project, the author contended with working full time. This left the author with weekends to complete the project, resulting in the utilization of paid time off in order to fulfill the necessary requirements.

This time restriction also eliminated the ability to conduct primary research, which was a previous requirement for other Webster graduates. Had time permitted, the author could have conducted surveys or focus groups with co-workers to learn about their social media usage, how they interact with other businesses, and if social media has ever impacted their purchasing decisions. The author also could have conducted similar studies with her employer's client base while comparing and contrasting the results and insights obtained through the employer's social media accounts.

In addition to the mentioned limitations, social media has evolved rapidly, resulting in limited research surrounding the exact impact and value of social media on businesses. Marketers are still trying to determine best practices and how to leverage insights provided by analytics. As social media utilization continues to multiply and

marketers gain a better understanding of the tool, more studies and research will become available regarding social media and its exact impact on businesses.

Literature Review

With almost half of the population active on the internet, it is no surprise social media has become an essential marketing tool for businesses. As such, marketers and researchers alike are desperate to understand and implement these tools. The secondary research utilized in this paper reinforces the idea that businesses not utilizing social media as a marketing tactic face competitive disadvantages compared to organizations that do.

To establish the grounds of this paper, the author relied heavily on Pride and Ferrell's 2014 edition of *Marketing*. This text supplied the foundation of the paper by defining and illustrating digital marketing and digital media. Social media is a digital marketing strategy that resulted from the dramatic impact of the internet and information technology on the marketing environment. The information provided in this text set the tone for this paper and revealed the sections required to prove the premise.

Some of the most pertinent information utilized for this paper came directly from the four identified social mediums' websites. With \$5.2 billion recorded in advertising costs, it is no surprise that the Facebook

and Instagram for Business page contains endless statistics and case studies demonstrating the power of Facebook and Instagram ads (Seetharaman, 2016). Twitter and LinkedIn have made similar investments in substantiating the power of sponsored content through their mediums. Each corresponding medium provided in depth information on the functions of the business applications as well as proven data associated with their implementation. This information made the social mediums “about” sections vital sources that were easily accessible to the author.

The Pew Research Center, eMarketer, and Statista also provided integral insight and statistics that were imperative to substantiating the premise. The Pew Research Center provides data from social science research on public issues and attitudes and trends that shape America as well as the rest of the world. Statista provides quantitative data and statistics for businesses and academics, while eMarketer focuses on benchmarks and insights from combined methodologies from the world’s best researchers.

For the purposes of this paper, the author utilized a plethora of information from eMarketer and Statista because of their credentials and expertise. Statista is strategic partners with the Interactive Advertising Bureau, the American Association of Advertising Agencies, as well as media partners with sites such as Wall Street Journal and Forbes, many

of which are referenced to throughout this paper as well. eMarketer is one of the most widely cited research providers in the media, quoted by virtually every major news outlet in the world, making both sources critical to this paper.

Several academic journal articles supplied important information regarding the uses and gratifications theory as well as insight into how social media channels and strategies relate to consumer engagement and branding. As a powerful tool with vague statistical benefits, the author benefited from extremely recent research studies.

Although a number of sources were only referenced to once throughout this project, each article played an important role in the quality of this thesis and should still be considered an important element of the body of research on the topic.

Methodology

The idea for this paper began after receiving advice from a Webster University advisor to pick a topic prior to the beginning of the course due to the time limitations. With plenty of personal, educational, and professional experience with social media, the author narrowed the topic down to the validity of social media use for businesses. After refining the topic, the premise statement was created and vigorous secondary research began.

As referenced in limitations, the author analyzed and focused on secondary research. Initially the author utilized the academic journal database, *Communication & Mass Media Complete*, which includes content from two established indexes as well as other major journals in this field. *Academic Search Complete*, or EBSCO, was also used, as it offers a comprehensive multidisciplinary full-text database. In addition, the author also applied several articles from business websites that demonstrated the different implementations and success stories regarding social media. In addition to the communications aspect of this research, the author relied heavily on numerous statistical reports that aided and supported the premise statement.

The result of this approach is an academic paper that presents an accurate overview of social media and what it means for businesses.

Chapter 1: The Growth of Digital Marketing

Since the launch of the World Wide Web in 1990, the internet and technology have drastically changed the marketing environment as well as the strategies necessary to succeed. With these changes came the birth of digital media. Digital mediums have created opportunities for companies to target specific markets more effectively, develop new marketing strategies, and gather more information that enables marketers to better analyze and address consumer needs (Pride & Ferrell, 2014).

One of the most defining characteristics of information technology in the 21st century is its ability to change at a rapid pace. With digital media consistently creating new opportunities within the marketing environment, it is imperative for businesses to implement and change their behaviors to fit with emerging technologies and trends. When executed correctly, businesses position themselves to better connect with consumers, obtain valuable insight about their target markets, and convert this information into successful marketing strategies (Pride & Ferrell, 2014).

Digital Marketing

Digital media are considered electronic media that function using digital codes. In other words, digital media refers to any and all media available through computers, cell phones, smartphones, and any other

digital device. These digital mediums are used in digital marketing to develop communication and exchanges with customers through the internet, mobile, and all interactive channels (Pride & Ferrell, 2014).

Due to the phenomenal growth of the internet, marketers have an unprecedented amount of opportunities to forge interactive relationships with consumers. Through advanced communication technologies, businesses are able to reach markets through precision targeting that were previously inaccessible. Because of the internet's ability to enhance the exchange of information between the marketer and the customer, businesses are learning to make the internet a vital part of their marketing strategies. In fact, internet marketing is now incorporated in all digital media, including television advertisements and other interactive media that do not utilize the internet (Pride & Ferrell, 2014).

As such, digital marketing is really an umbrella term used to encompass all aspects of an organization's digital marketing efforts (see figure 1). These tactics include blogging, e-mail marketing, web marketing, digital marketing, search engine



Figure 1

optimization (SEO), mobile marketing, social media marketing and beyond.

With over 3 billion internet users around the world, the internet has changed the way the world communicates (Pew Research Center). To succeed in the digital age, marketers are forced to focus on digital marketing through every channel available. Through these channels, marketers are able to form relationships with a variety of stakeholders, current and future customers, employees, and suppliers through e-mail, smartphones, social networking, wikis, media sharing sites, podcasts, video blogs, and other technologies (Pride & Ferrell, 2014).

Chapter Two: Social Media

Social networking sites, often referred to as social media, are changing the dynamics of marketing and business communication. Because of the accessibility, popularity, potential reach, and low costs, social mediums present tremendous communication and marketing opportunities for any industry, while also posing threats for those that do not engage in digital and online marketing (Pride & Ferrell, 2014).

Definition

In August of 2011, Merriam-Webster Inc. added the word “social media” to the Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary. The official Merriam-Webster definition of social media are:

forms of electronic communication (as Web sites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (as videos).

Merriam-Webster’s editor at the time stated they had been tracking words like “social media” and “tweet” for years, and finally felt their meanings had stabilized enough to be included in the dictionary (2011).

Brief History

Despite Merriam-Webster’s assessment that the first known use of the word social media occurred in 2004, the first recognizable social

media site, Six Degrees, was created in 1997. While social media did not technically exist before 1997, the current social media phenomenon is the result of many centuries of communication development (Hendricks, 2013).

The earliest recognized methods of long distance communication involved hand written letters. The beginning of the postal service dates back to 550 B.C. and is still a widespread, streamlined form of communication today. Fast forward to 1792, and the telegraph was invented. This enabled messages to be delivered over long distances in a shorter amount of time than a horse and rider, and at the time was a revolutionary way to convey news and information. Two more important discoveries occurred in the last decade of the 1800s, the telephone in 1890 and the radio shortly after in 1891 (Hendricks, 2013).

The way the world communicated changed rapidly in the 20th century with the invention of technology and computers, leading to the eventual birth of the internet. Soon after, the first blogging sites arrived, sparking a social media sensation. Sites such as Myspace and LinkedIn gained prominence in the early 2000s, and by 2006, Facebook and Twitter had officially launched the social media phenomenon (Hendricks, 2013). Some of the most memorable forms of communication are

illustrated in figure 2, bringing us to 2016 with over 3 billion internet users and 2 billion active users on social media (Copp).

Interactivity of Social Media

Social mediums offer a new dimension to marketing

that require serious consideration when forming strategic marketing strategies. One of the largest mistakes a marketer can make with digital marketing is treating it as a traditional media channel. Some characteristics that distinguish online media from traditional media are

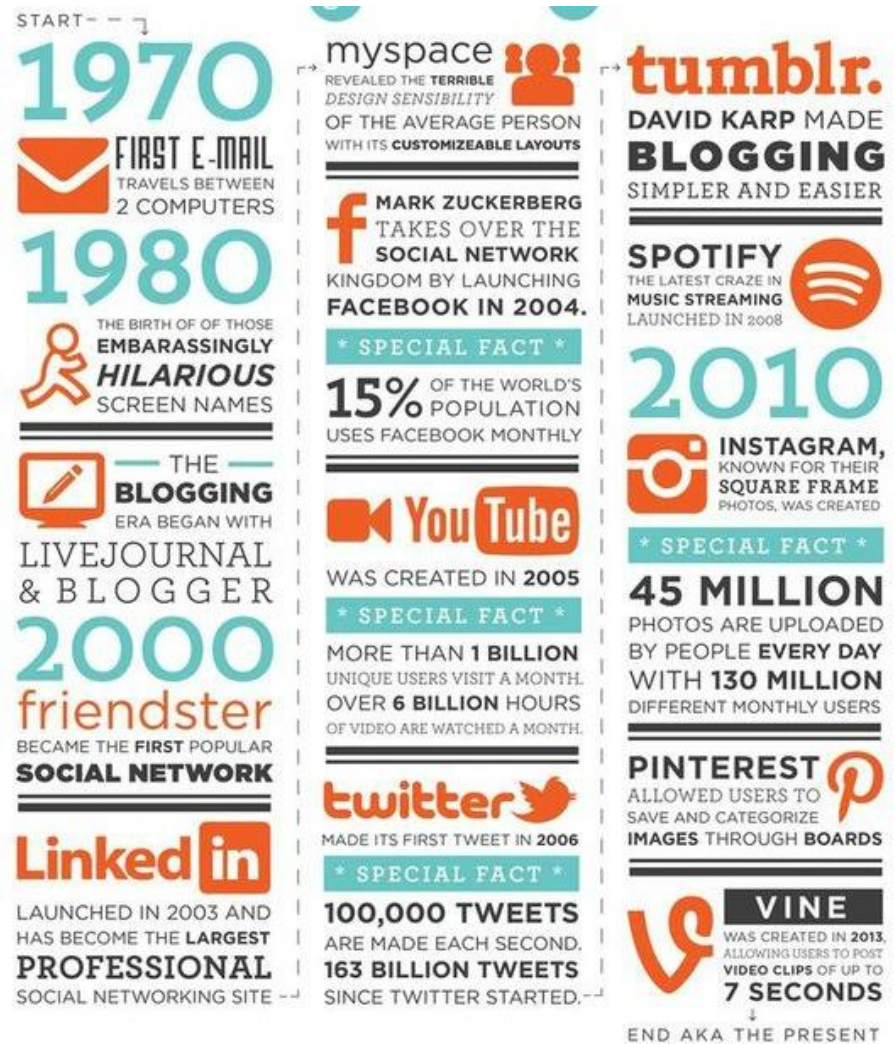


Figure 2

addressability, interactivity, accessibility, connectivity, and control (Pride, Ferrell 2014). These terms are defined in figure three.

Table 10.1 Characteristics of Online Media

Characteristic	Definition	Example
Addressability	The ability of the marketer to identify customers before they make a purchase	Amazon installs cookies on a user's computer that allow the company to identify the user when he or she returns to the website.
Interactivity	The ability of customers to express their needs and wants directly to the firm in response to its marketing communications	Texas Instruments interacts with its customers on its Facebook page by answering concerns and posting updates.
Accessibility	The ability for marketers to obtain digital information	Google can use Web searches done through its search engine to learn about customer interests.
Connectivity	The ability for consumers to be connected with marketers along with other consumers	Mary Kay offers users the opportunity to sign up for My MK, a system that connects customers with beauty consultants and allows them to develop their own personalized space.
Control	The customer's ability to regulate the information they view as well as the rate and exposure to that information	Consumers use Kayak.com to discover the best travel deals.

Figure 3

Out of these terms, interactivity is the most distinguishing characteristic of social media. Social media enables businesses to interact with its stakeholders, while traditional marketing usually involves one-way forms of communication (Pride & Ferrell, 2014).

Unlike traditional marketing, social media facilitates an open line of communication with the customer. The interactivity of social media alleviates the sometimes lengthy process of attempting to reach an organization. Depending on the form of feedback provided through traditional marketing, consumers may be placed on hold or receive an

automated response, resulting in customer dissatisfaction (Pride & Ferrell, 2014).

By utilizing appropriate social mediums, companies can facilitate interactivity and enable a conversation with the customer. Another benefit of social media is the ability for consumers to view marketing messages at their own pace, taking away from the more intrusive marketing tactics. Social networks allow customers to interact with businesses when they choose, promoting a greater interaction and relationship between the business and consumer (Pride & Ferrell).

Interactivity promotes and nurtures premium relationships with existing customers while shaping customer expectations and perceptions. The internet has provided a myriad of relationship possibilities between business and consumer, as well as consumer to consumer. This relationship between customers opens up an entire different form of user-generated marketing (Pride & Ferrell, 2014).

User-Generated Content

Social mediums are more consumer-driven than any other form of traditional media, creating the opportunity for marketers to utilize user-generated content. According to dictionary.com, user-generated content, or UGC, refers to any data or media that is contributed by individual users of a website. This refers to any material created and uploaded to the internet by non-media professionals. While the concept of user-

generated content has been around in one form or another since the beginning of the internet, the growing availability of the internet has made UGC one of the fastest growing and most dominant forms of global media ("IAB Platform Status Report: User Generated Content, Social Media, and Advertising - An Overview", 2008). As previously stated, over 3 billion people in the world have access to the internet, meaning over 3 billion people have access to create and utilize user-generated content.

In today's booming digital marketing environment, consumers decide where, when, and how they want to engage with brands. Consumers also tend to share their experiences regarding their experiences, products they use, and the brands they prefer. These customer testimonials are highly influential on other buyers as consumer opinions are trusted more than typical brand messaging ("User-Generated Content's Impact on Brand Building", 2014).

Understanding which forums online users are likely to express their thoughts and opinions on enable the business to utilize these mediums to interact with consumers, address problems, and promote their companies (Pride & Ferrell, 2014).

UGC and Millennials

While people have been sharing stories about brands for decades, technology, especially social media, has made it easier to produce and share the content that once depended on word-of-mouth, or WOM. With

millennials leading the economy in numbers and purchasing power, marketers can target this generation through the content they are known to trust the most...user-generated content (see figure 4) (Comcowich).

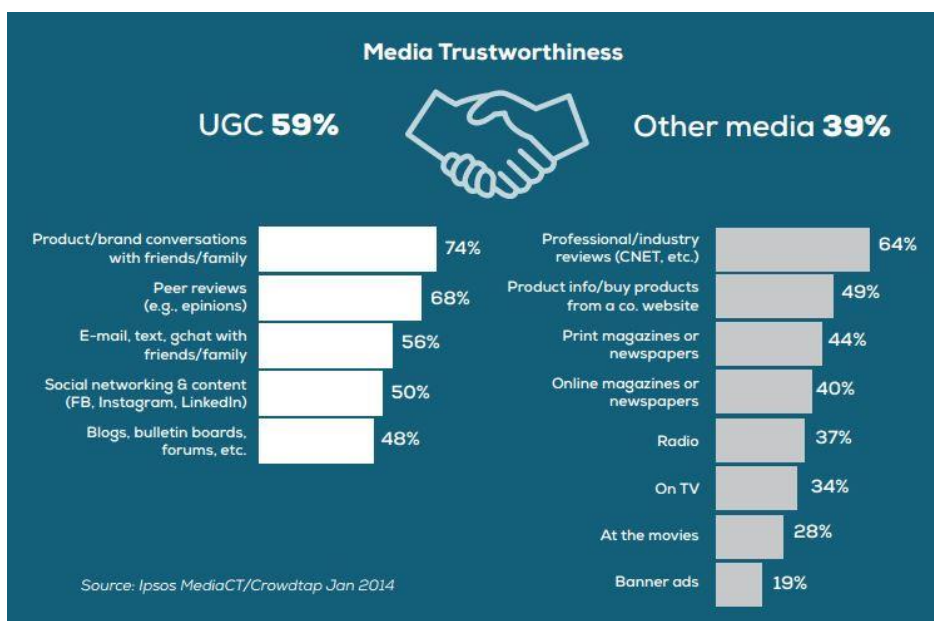


Figure 4

Millennials represent nearly 27 percent of America's population and have an estimated \$1.3 trillion in consumer spending, making it vital for organizations to understand where users are likely to express their thoughts and opinions (Comcowich). Millennials spend nearly 30 percent of their total media time with content that is created and shared by their peers, rivaling the amount of time they spend with any other

traditional media formats combined (Statista). Based on the fact that

over 90 percent

of millennials

have access to

a smart phone

and the

research in

figure 5,

businesses can

assume

millennials

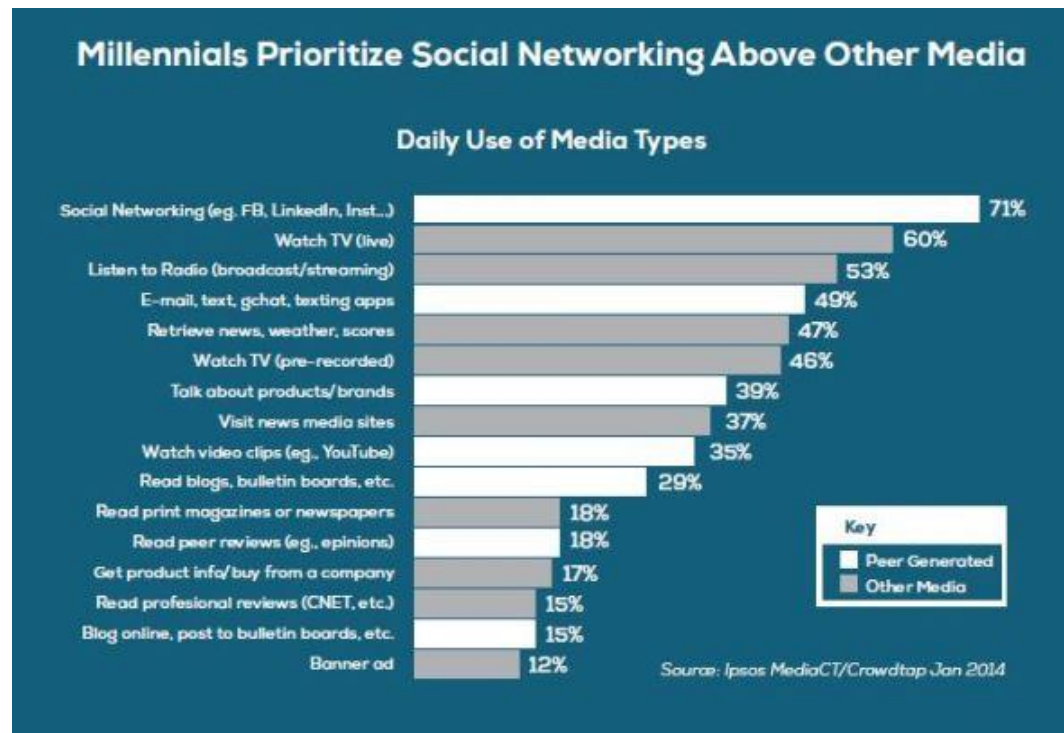


Figure 5

receive the majority of their UGC through social media. With consumer

trust in traditional media dwindling and more time spent with UGC,

businesses are forced to shift their focus to opportunities that drive

media impact.

Chapter 3: Top Performing Social Media for Business: Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter & Instagram

Sometimes referred to as social networking, digital media, Web 2.0, or NextGen PR, social media come in many different forms with different purposes (see figure 6). Social mediums range from blogs, to micro-blogging sites like Twitter, wikis, social networking such as Facebook, podcasting,

video and photo sharing sites like Instagram and YouTube, as well as discussion forums. Social media is considered

distinct from traditional media because it relies on user-generated content opposed to institutional content. The cost of creating and disseminating content on social media is either free or relatively inexpensive. This incentive provides businesses with a low-cost technique to develop

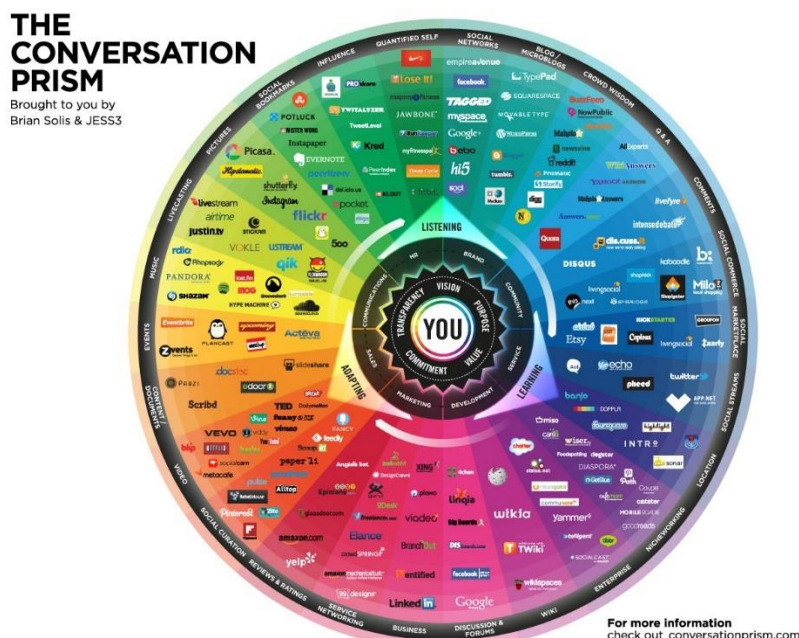


Figure 6

relationships with members of various strategic publics while positively impacting organizational transparency on a world stage (Dainton, Correa, Kohr, Taormina 2013).

Just a few years ago, social media was considered a millennial phase that businesses could not benefit from. In 2016, almost nine in 10 companies in the United States are using social media for marketing purposes (see figure 7). In fact, social media marketing, or SMM, is one of the latest additions to the digital marketing “umbrella”.

Marketing experts define social media marketing as a form of internet marketing that utilizes social networking as a marketing tool. The aim of social media marketing is to produce content that users will share with their social network, ultimately increasing brand exposure and broadening the businesses’ customer reach (Rouse, 2011).

According to a recent study provided by Statista, internet users worldwide spend an average of 118 minutes per day on social media.

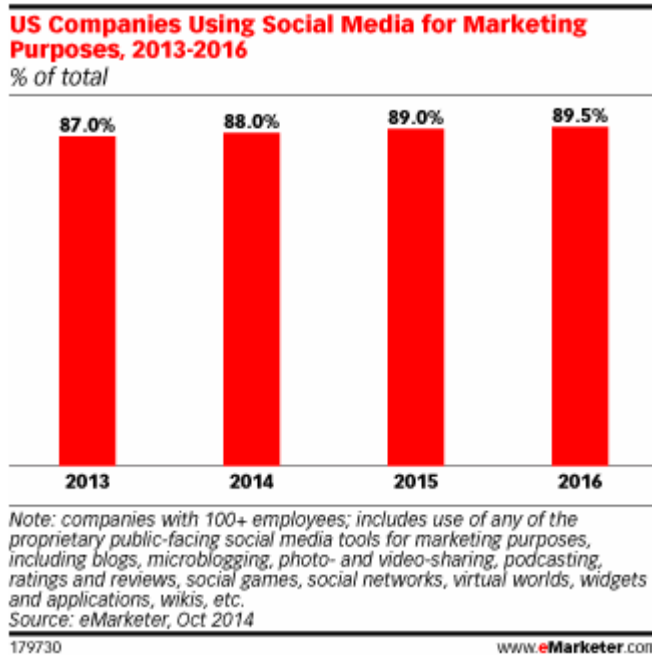


Figure 7

That is 118 minutes a day that businesses are missing an opportunity to reach current and potential customers!

In addition to changing the way people around the world communicate, social media platforms have become vital marketing tools, offering an array of benefits for businesses (Statista). Just as quickly as

it became clear social media is a necessary

tool for businesses to

thrive, it became

equally as clear that

businesses struggle

with determining which

social media outlets to

utilize and how to use

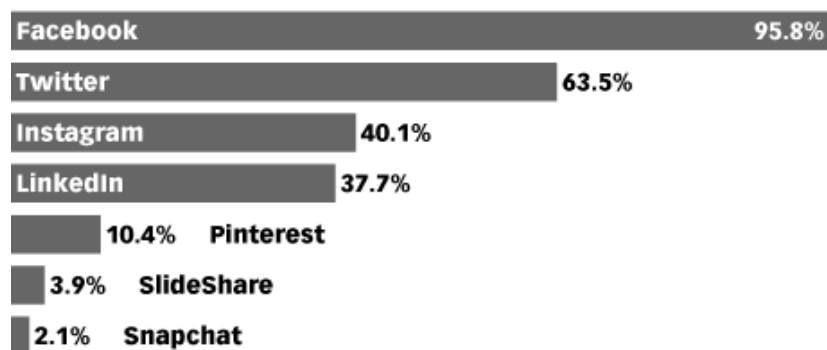
them. With over 50 different social mediums to choose from, businesses need to understand where to invest their time and attention. For the purposes of this thesis, the author focuses on four of the most popular social mediums worldwide, which are illustrated in figure eight.

Facebook

Facebook was launched on February 4, 2004. Created by Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook's mission is "to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected." Recognized as the biggest

Social Media Platforms that Produce the Best ROI According to Social Media Marketers Worldwide, March 2016

% of respondents



Note: n=456; respondents chose up to 3
Source: Social Fresh, "The Future of Social" in collaboration with Firebrand Group and Simply Measured, April 21, 2016

209388

www.eMarketer.com

Figure 8

social media network on the Internet, Facebook has managed to accumulate 1.71 billion monthly active users in only 12 years. Nearly 1.13 billion people access Facebook every day, whether through desktop or through their mobile device (Company Info | Facebook Newsroom).

Originally headquartered in California, Facebook has 14,495 employees with offices all over the United States as well as

internationally. In order to support a global audience, Facebook supports 70-plus languages and the ability to translate



Figure 9

text while on Facebook. Approximately 84.5% of Facebook's daily active users are outside the US and Canada (see figure 9).

Facebook Pages

Introduced in November of 2007, Facebook Pages are public profiles that allow businesses, artists, public figures, brands, organizations, and non-profits to have a presence on Facebook. When a user decides to like a Page, they begin seeing updates in their news feed. When a user likes or comments on a Page's post, this activity may be

shared with their friends, increasing the Page's exposure and reach (Facebook).

Marketing on Facebook begins with creating a Page. Pages give businesses a voice and presence on Facebook, and are designed to help promote and connect the business. With people all over the world visiting Facebook to connect with friends, when utilized correctly, Facebook can drive online sales, increase local sales, and raise brand awareness. Pages are also available on mobile devices, making them easily accessible to the billion people that visit Facebook Pages each month from their smart phone (Facebook).

Facebook Pages are completely customizable, and help demonstrate what businesses are really about. Adding business information like company website, hours and contact information, descriptions, services, etc. allow customers to discover the business, as well as make it more accessible from search engines like Google. Customers also have the ability to rate the business and write reviews, which tend to be the most trusted form of marketing.

In addition to showcasing information about the business, Facebook Pages allow businesses to create Page Posts. Page Posts keep customers and potential customers informed about the business. Facebook Page Posts can be as simple as plain text, to eye catching photos and videos, to event invitations, to milestones, and even to added

links to drive engagement to businesses' website. All of these capabilities are free within Facebook Pages.

Facebook Ads

Facebook also gives businesses the option to create sponsored content based on their business goals. Facebook Ads allow businesses to create ads for as little as \$5 and are highly targeted and actionable. Businesses are able to choose who they want to reach and where with Facebook Ads. Through targeted ads, businesses can target ads by country, state, zip code, or the area around the businesses. Facebook targeting also allows businesses to choose their audience through demographics such as age, gender, interests, and languages they speak. Or businesses can target audiences through their interests and behaviors. Through Partner Categories, Facebook helps businesses target people based on their offline behaviors (Facebook).

Reaching the correct audiences enables businesses to stay in touch with existing customers while finding similar people like them on Facebook. Businesses are even able to create custom audiences using a customer contact list or website traffic. Facebook ads are shown to target audiences along with stories from their families and friends. It helps businesses find people who are similar to their best customers, increasing the probability of new customers that will also love their products (Facebook).

Facebook Page Insights

Facebook measurement tools allow organizations to see how people are responding to their Page and ads, helping making informed decisions about reaching customers. Page Insights allow businesses to see how customers engage, or do not engage, with their page. Insights provided by Facebook include likes, reach, page views, posts, and people (Facebook).

Facebook likes enable the organization to see how many likes they have, how this number changes over time, and where the likes come from. The reach of each post informs the company how many people like, comment, and share their content. Businesses are also able to tell which parts of reach were organic and which is attributed to advertising, if any. Page views assist organizations with understanding where section of their Facebook Page respond to the most and where the traffic is originating from. Finally, Facebook Page Insights help businesses understand their audience by breaking down the demographics into age, gender, location, and what times viewers are most active on the page. This information enables businesses to understand when, what, and where to post to gain maximum exposure (Facebook).

[LinkedIn](#)

Founded by Reid Hoffman, Allen Blue, Konstantin Guericke, Eric Ly and Jean-Luc, LinkedIn launched on May 5 of 2003. LinkedIn is

considered the world's largest professional network with more than 450 million members. The networking site is available in 24 different languages with users in 200 different countries around the globe (see figure 10).

Headquartered in California, LinkedIn has more than 9,000 employees in 30 cities around the globe (About Us | [LinkedIn Newsroom](#)).

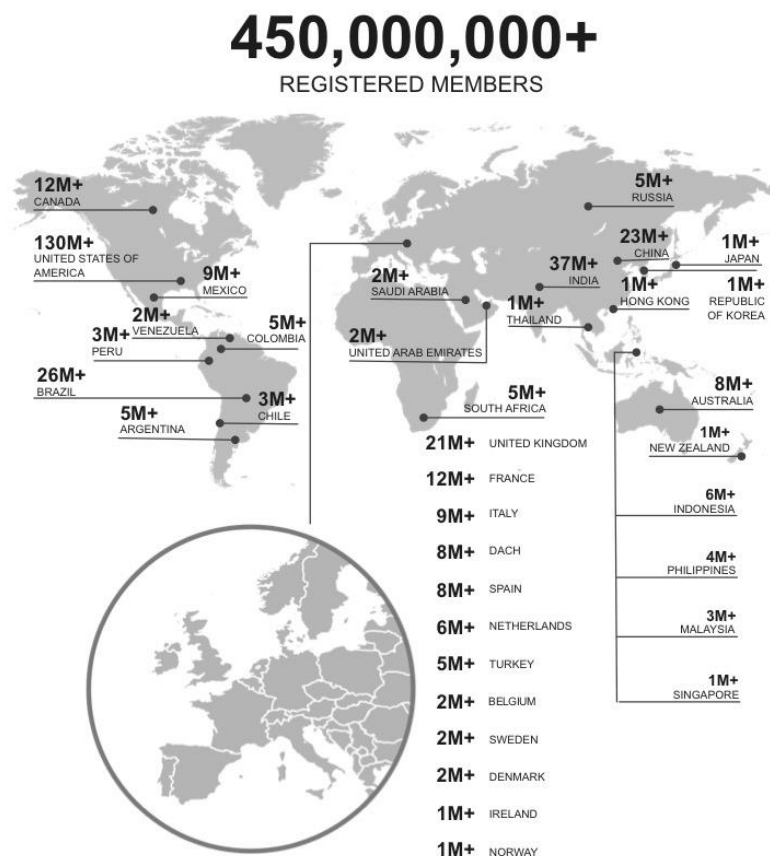


Figure 10

Unlike other social mediums, LinkedIn is the first of its kind with a mission focusing on professionals. LinkedIn aims to connect the world's professionals, enabling them to be more productive and successful through access to people, jobs, news, updates and insights (About Us | [LinkedIn Newsroom](#)).

LinkedIn Company Pages

A LinkedIn Company Page creates the opportunity for businesses to raise brand awareness, form relationships, promote career opportunities, and educate current and potential customers on their

products and services. With more than 450 million users worldwide, statistics suggest that 80 percent of LinkedIn members want to connect with companies to enhance their professional decision making. Members are also 50 percent more likely to buy from a company they interact with on LinkedIn (LinkedIn).

Like Facebook Pages, LinkedIn Company Pages are search engine optimization, or SEO, friendly. Google allows up to 156 characters of page text, enabling businesses to promote their vision, purpose, and value in a quick overview. Once the profile fields are completely filled out explaining an organization's business, expertise, and industry focus, LinkedIn members are able to find the company page through keyword searches (LinkedIn).

With this information filled out, businesses are free to begin fostering relationships by attracting followers. Current employees and clients are priceless brand ambassadors, as both can impact people's perceptions and businesses through their recommendation. Studies show that employees are 70 percent more likely to engage with Company Updates, amplifying the reach of each company update. When a follower likes, shares, or comments on a company update, the message reaches their first degree connections as well. Each of these amplifications acts as an endorsement for the content and the business (LinkedIn).

LinkedIn Sponsored Content

While the majority of LinkedIn's features are free, sponsored content is available through their marketing solutions. Over 433 million professionals worldwide gather on LinkedIn, making it the most effective platform to engage decision-makers, influencers, and executives. Research indicates LinkedIn is 277 percent more effective at lead generation than Facebook or Twitter, making it a valuable marketing tool (LinkedIn Sponsored Content).

LinkedIn Sponsored Content allows Business Pages to target the right audiences and tailor content based on how professionals engage on the platform. This can help generate high-quality leads, raise awareness, and build relationships with current and potential customers. Targeted audiences allow updates to be tailored towards followers based on geography, job function, industry, company size, and seniority (LinkedIn Sponsored Content).

LinkedIn Company Page Insights

With any marketing campaign, success is determined by the ability to measure performance and use that information to optimize future content. LinkedIn's analytics help organizations understand the changes in size and composition of followers as well as the engagements on the Company Page.

Engagement is the ration of clicks, licks, comments, and shares to total impressions. This enables businesses to understand how often users take action on their updates. Amplification rate is the ratio of likes, comments, and shares compared to total updates impressions. Amplification rate helps businesses understand which content is the most interesting, giving the business a better idea of what content to share in the future (Conversion Tracking | LinkedIn Marketing Solutions).

For Sponsored Content, LinkedIn utilizes conversion tracking. Conversion tracking shows businesses how many leads they are generating from their campaigns, helps them understand their return of investment from advertising within LinkedIn, and optimizes results. The Campaign Manager displays the interaction from desktops, mobile, cost per conversion, and conversion rate based on the company's analytics. The Campaign Manager also shows which campaigns, ads, and audiences are driving leads for the business. This information enables the organization's marketing team or designated administrator to understand which content works best, assisting in future content creation (Conversion Tracking | LinkedIn Marketing Solutions).

Twitter

Launched in March of 2006 by Jack Dorsey, Twitter is ranked as one of the leading social networks worldwide based on active users (see figure 11). With over 313 million monthly active users, users tweet an average of 6,000 tweets every second, resulting in nearly 350,000 tweets sent per minute (Twitter Usage Statistics). Tweets now have the capability to move billions of dollars in the stock market, break news

before

traditional

media hears

about it, and

allows Earth to

communicate

with people

and machines

residing in

outer space

(Langer).

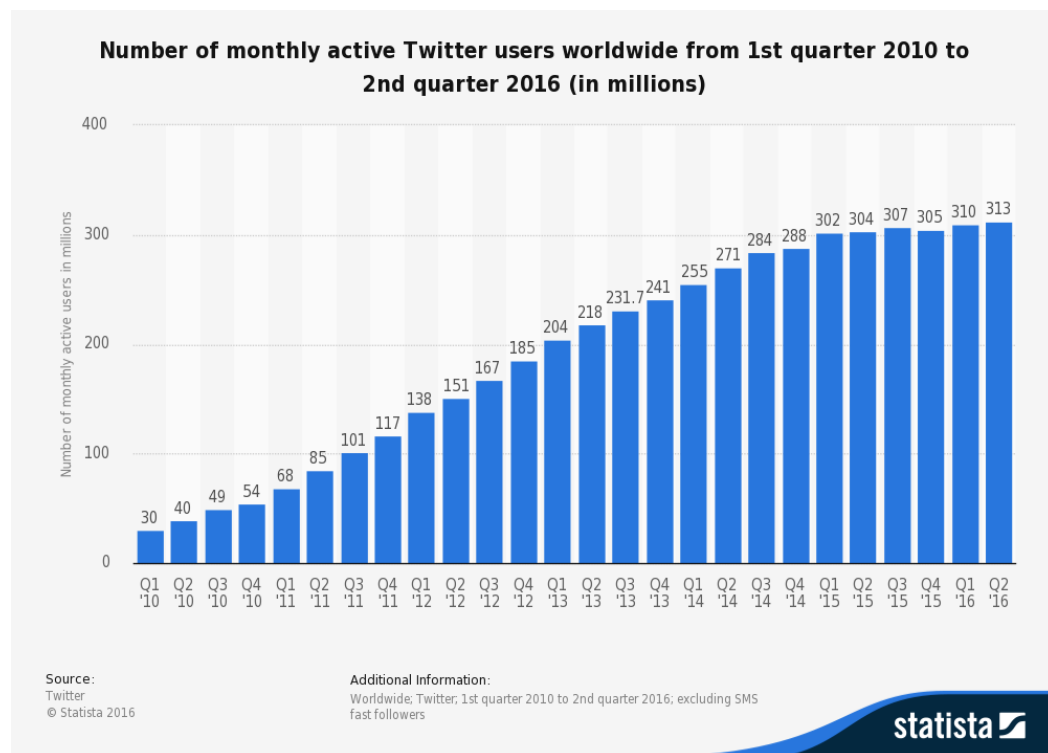


Figure 11

Headquartered in San Francisco, California, Twitter employees nearly 4,000 employees in over 35 offices around the world. The social medium is available in over 40 languages and nearly 79 percent of all accounts reside outside of the United States. Unlike other social mediums, tweets have a 140-character limit. This idea came from the

SMS text limit, as Twitter was designed to interface with the web with people's mobile phone, allowing them to send and receive tweets as SMS messages (Dugan). This character limit emphasizes Twitter's mission of giving everyone the power to share information and ideas instantly, in a short and concise manner.

Promoted Tweets

As one of the highest ranked sites on the Internet, Twitter launched Promoted Tweets in 2010. Initially resisting the urge of introducing a traditional Web advertising model in effort to optimize for value before profit, Twitter realized the open exchange of information creates opportunities for individuals, organizations and businesses alike (Biz). With hundreds of millions of users and over 500 million tweets sent a day, statistics show that 66 percent of users have discovered new small or medium-sized businesses on Twitter. They also show that 94 percent plan to purchase from companies they follow on Twitter, and 69 percent purchased from a business because of something they saw on Twitter (Twitter).

Similar to sponsored Facebook and LinkedIn content, businesses can utilize Twitter to expand their reach and connect with new and existing customers. Twitter gives organizations access to what is going on their respective industries, communities, and around the world. Twitter for Business can increase brand awareness, provide timely customer

service, and connect with current and potential customers, brand advocates, and influencers. Whether the organization aims promote a followers campaign, website conversions, video views, tweet engagement campaigns, or leads, Twitter Ads provides step-by-step instructions to align with the campaigns with the business' goals (Twitter).

Through ad targeting, Twitter offers a variety of targeting options to help businesses achieve their goals. Businesses can target audiences through language targeting, gender targeting, interest targeting, follower targeting, device targeting, behavior targeting, keyword targeting, geography targeting, as well as custom CRM, or customer relationship management, lists (Twitter).

For larger scaled campaigns, businesses can utilize the Twitter Ads editor. Through Ads editor, businesses can build, test, optimize, and measure several campaigns at the same time. This helps businesses create timely campaigns around events, trends, and holidays. Ads editor also streamlines optimization by allowing businesses to make changes across an entire marketing strategy (Twitter).

Twitter Analytics

Twitter's campaign analytics help businesses understand what their audience is doing with the content they share on Twitter and how these actions impact the business. Through Twitter's activity dashboard, businesses are able to view metrics for all of their tweets. These metrics

tell how many times viewers have seen, retweeted, liked, and replied to each tweet. This view also helps businesses determine what content resonates the most with their audience, so they can tailor future content (Twitter).

The Tweet activity dashboard displays a detailed analysis of a business' Twitter activity. Each tweet has a trackable number of impressions, engagements, and engagement rates. The top Tweets tab of the Twitter dashboard shows businesses their best performing tweets and allows them to share them with a wider audience by utilizing the quick promote tool (Twitter).

Finally, Twitter analytics enable businesses to get to know their followers. The dashboard displays follower growth, followers' interests, as well as demographics like language, gender, and location. After compiling enough data, businesses are able to see data regarding their followers' consumer behaviors, lifestyles, and activities on their mobile devices. Being able to access this information allows companies to create content that is relevant to their audience, ultimately boosting engagement (Twitter).

Instagram

Unlike the other social mediums discussed in this thesis, Instagram is a social network that focuses on connecting the world through pictures and videos. Founded by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger in 2010, Instagram reached one million users within two months of launching and was later acquired by Facebook in 2012. Since joining forces with Facebook, Instagram has become one of the fastest growing social mediums (see figure 12). Surpassing Twitter in 2014, and doubling the size of Snapchat, Instagram celebrated 500 million monthly active users worldwide in June of 2016. This milestone enforces Instagram’s

mission of getting closer to capturing every experience in the world (Instagram).

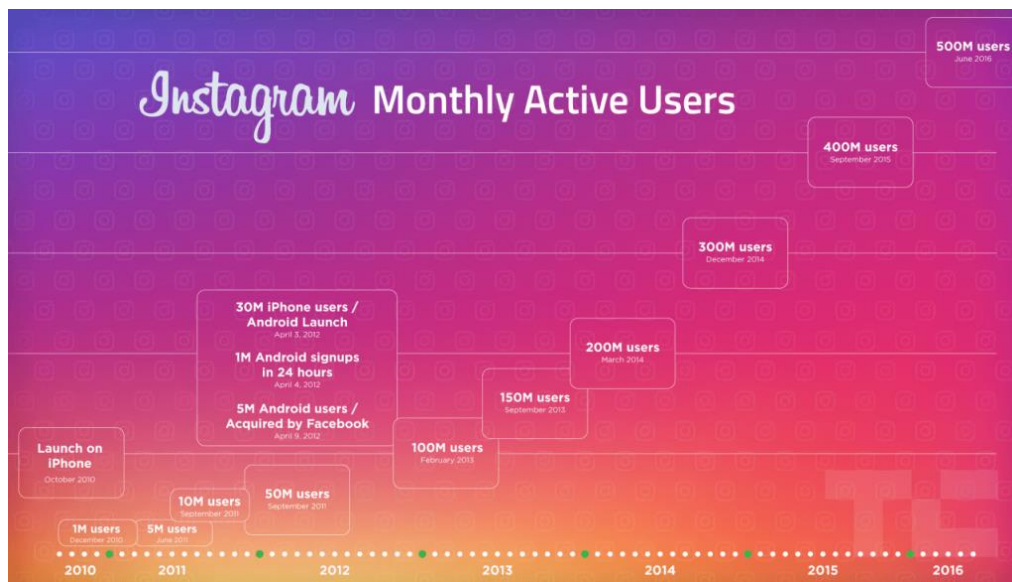


Figure 12

With nearly 80 percent of Instagram’s users residing outside of the United States, Instagram is available in over 30 different languages. Usage rates suggest that pictures and videos have the ability to cross language barriers and result in 95 million posts and 4.2 billion likes in one day (Constine).

Instagram for Business

Instagram initially introduced advertising for select brands in October of 2013. After two years of testing and rolling out different advertising tools, Instagram launched its advertising service worldwide in September of 2015. With a community of more than 500 million people, Instagram is now one of the world's largest mobile platforms with more than 500,000 advertisers (Instagram).

Over the past six months, the number of Instagram advertisers growing their business around the world has more than doubled. With the United States, Brazil, United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada being the top five most adaptive countries, businesses in the US not using Instagram are at a serious disadvantage. With Instagram's 500 million followers, 50 percent of users follow a business. More importantly, 60 percent of Instagram users say they learn about a product or service on through Instagram (Instagram).

Since launching sponsored content in 2013, Instagram has implemented new tools for businesses. Businesses now have the option to convert their profiles to a business profile, and in the two months following this option, more than 1.5 billion businesses converted their profiles. The business profile provides an easier way to connect with customers, learn what resonates with their audience through insights, and promote posts from within the Instagram application (Instagram).

Sponsored Instagram Content

Similar to the other top social mediums discussed in this project, Instagram's advertising solutions support several different campaign goals. These goals can range from clicks to website, website conversions, mobile application installs, mobile application engagement, video views, reach and frequency, page post engagement, and guaranteed impressions (Instagram).

Targeting options for sponsored Instagram posts are the same as those available on Facebook. Targeting options allow businesses to target audiences based on location, demographics, interests, behaviors, and more. Like Facebook, Instagram allows businesses to target ads based on custom audiences as well as lookalike audiences. Since Facebook acquired Instagram, businesses have the option to run ads on their Facebook Business Page as well as their Instagram page. Running an ad on both platforms is simple in the sense that the advertisement will be optimized based on the selected objective on both Facebook and Instagram, while ensuring the placement receives the desired impact at the lowest cost. Should an organization choose not to create a business account on Instagram in addition to Facebook, Facebook advertisements can still service as an advertisement on Instagram (Facebook).

While it appears Instagram is still developing and tailoring their marketing tools, research suggests that 1 billion actions have been taken

on Instagram ads since its launch in September of 2015. In fact, more than half of performance campaigns generated significant increases for online conversion or mobile application installations. Since evolving the link ad format in June of 2016, performance increased more than 45 percent (Instagram).

Instagram Analytics

As a subsidiary of Facebook, Instagram analytics are identical in nature to Facebook Page Insights. Instagram Insights offers demographic details about businesses' audience by location, age and gender. Location information assists businesses by understanding their audience as well as knowing when to post content. The follower analytics section also displays how many followers were gained on an hourly and daily basis. This enables businesses to understand which posts are the most effective in converting users to followers as well as which posts spread virally (Instagram).

Instagram Insights allows businesses to track data on things like impressions, reach, website clicks, and other insights. Impressions refers to the total number of times the post was viewed, while reach indicates the number of unique users that have seen the businesses' posts. Instagram, unlike Facebook and other social mediums, relies on visual content. These analytics are presented as a grid of image thumbnails so organizations can understand which images appeal the most to their

audience, guiding them to more successful content in the future (Instagram).

Implementation Tips and Reminders

While simply creating a social media account for a business is a step in the right direction, it is important to remember that participation, sharing and collaboration are requirements for success. With Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and Instagram being recognized as some of the most powerful social mediums available, effective utilization can enable businesses to communicate directly with consumers and other stakeholders, monitor and stay ahead of industry trends, and launch and test new product ideas while responding to criticisms and concerns simultaneously (Rosendale, 2014).

Companies that are active on social media platforms are able to influence consumers to spend more annually on their brands compared to their competitors. As such, businesses should always keep in mind that the majority of Fortune 500 companies are also represented on social media, and businesses should plan to keep social media in their strategic vision and long-term plan (Rosendale, 2014).

Chapter 4: Uses and Gratifications of Social Media

Based on the information provided in chapter 3, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram are four of the most power social mediums in today's marketing environment. With a portion of marketers' top concerns regarding social media addressed through the in-depth analysis of each social medium, marketers are still faced with one major obstacle.

While making contact with consumers via social media is predicted to show great returns for marketers in the coming years, but there is little understanding of how and why consumers use social media (Whiting & Williams, 2013).

Uses and Gratifications Theory Explained

The uses and gratifications theory, or UGT, is an approach to understanding why and how people actively seek out specific media to satisfy various psychological needs. The theory was originally introduced in the 1940s, but is primarily credited to the research of Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch. According to them, uses and gratifications research is concerned with:

The social and psychological origins of needs, which generate expectations from the mass media or other sources, which lead to differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in need

gratifications and other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones (Sundar & Limperos, 2013).

Unlike other communications theories, the uses and gratifications theory suggests users take an active role in selecting the media they consume. UGT focuses on free will of audience members, as media can be interpreted and integrated in different ways and for different purposes. While some communications theories suggest audiences are passive respondents of the media, the uses and gratifications theory implies the audience has full control over the effect of media and its role on their lives (Mishra).

According to the uses and gratifications theory, human needs and gratifications can be divided into five broad categories (Mishra). These five categories are displayed below (see figure 13).

Table 23.2 Needs Gratified by the Media

NEED TYPE	DESCRIPTION	MEDIA EXAMPLES
Cognitive	Acquiring information, knowledge, comprehension	Television (news), video ("How to Install Ceramic Tile"), movies (documentaries or films based on history, e.g., <i>The Other Boleyn Girl</i>)
Affective	Emotional, pleasant, or aesthetic experience	Movies, television (sitcoms, soap operas)
Personal integrative	Enhancing credibility, confidence, and status	Video ("Speaking With Conviction")
Social integrative	Enhancing connections with family, friends, and so forth	Internet (e-mail, chat rooms, Listservs, IM)
Tension release	Escape and diversion	Television, movies, video, radio, Internet

Source: Adapted from Katz, Gurevitch, & Haas, 1973.

Figure 13

UGT and Social Media

Social media is relevant to the uses and gratifications theory because of its origins in communications literature. As discussed, social media is a communications mechanism that connects billions of people around the world (Whiting & Williams, 2013). Because of technology advancements and the internet, the concept of an active audience has become a reality. Social media technologies now offer actionable properties that are visually suggestive of users actually interacting with media. These actions not only allow users to experience media in new ways, but users now have the ability to contribute their own content, otherwise known as user-generated content. UGC, covered in chapter two of this project, has profoundly altered the sender-receiver equation of communication, but more importantly, implicated rise to new gratifications (Sundar & Limperos, 2013).

Interactivity, also referenced in chapter two, supplies a user-based gratification through audience activity by allowing users to interact through social media as well as the internet. Research suggests that some interactive features on social media such as the amount of likes received can trigger disappointment, signaling a need for interaction. These new gratifications are expected due to the proliferation of interactive media, and users will only expect greater levels of activity from media in the future (Sundar & Limperos, 2013).

Studies show that gratifications received are trustworthy predictors of media use and recurring media use, enabling businesses to understand what drives users to follow, like, and share content (Whiting & Williams, 2013).

As previously determined and illustrated in figure 13, there are five broad categories associated with the uses and gratifications theory. These categories are affective needs, cognitive needs, social integrative needs, personal integrative needs, and tension free needs. These categories and their relationship with social media are elaborated on in the following paragraphs.

Affective needs refer to people's emotional needs. People desire content that makes them feel emotionally connected, ultimately becoming a source of entertainment. What was once considered a job for movies and television, can now be fulfilled through social media. Because of the integration capabilities of social media, people are exposed to several different types of media in one location. YouTube videos, news articles, graphics, user posts and more have the ability to meet users' affective needs ("Uses and Gratifications Theory", 2010).

Cognitive needs pertain to users mental and intellectual needs. Prior to social media, users watched the news, documentaries, utilized teaching programs, and more to meet these needs. According to the Pew Research Center, 62 percent of America's adults get news from social

media in 2016 (see figure 14). This percentage is up from a similar study conducted in 2013, suggesting more people will rely on social media in the future for news. Social media gives people access to news right at their fingertips as well as the ability to contribute to the conversation.

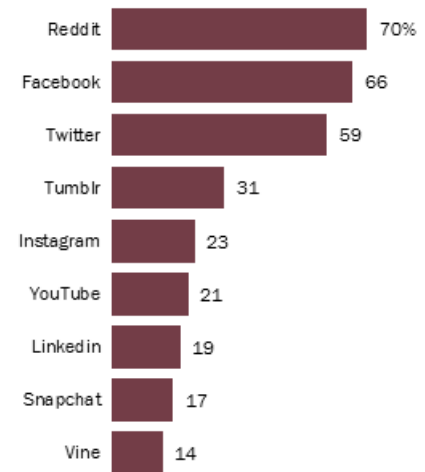
Through social media, people's social integrative needs are met within seconds.

Digital media has changed social integrative needs in the sense that users are connected at all times with other people through smartphones and social mediums. The human desire to feel socially connected attributes to social media's success and utilization rates ("Uses and Gratifications Theory", 2010).

Personal integrative needs pertain to self-esteem. People often use media to reassure their status and gain credibility. They also utilize media to improve their status by staying up to date on the latest trends and information. Through social media, people are able to post accomplishments, updates, etc. that draw feedback from other users, ultimately reassuring their status and credibility. Users are also able to

Reddit, Facebook and Twitter users most likely to get news on each site

% of each social networking sites' users who get news on the site



Source: Survey conducted Jan. 12-Feb. 8, 2016.
"News Use Across Social Media Platforms 2016"

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Figure 14

monitor other users' activities which can also aid in meeting personal integrative needs ("Uses and Gratifications Theory", 2010).

The final category associated with the uses and gratifications theory is tension-free needs, or escapism. Media allows people to escape from the realities of everyday life, whether it be from school, work, relationships, or similar situations ("Uses and Gratifications Theory", 2010).

Social mediums especially meet this need because of the availability and minimal effort required. Users can access social media from anywhere at any time. In fact, some people may argue social media is too distracting, as cell phones are banned in places like movie theaters, classrooms, and some places of business even have social media rules for the workplace.

UGT Application

Based on the uses and gratifications theory and the evidence provided, psychological factors do impact social media users. In order to reap the benefits of social media, it is essential for businesses to understand and create content that relates to their audiences. By understanding the gratifications obtained from using social media, businesses enable social media to be an important component of their marketing strategy.

Chapter 5: Social Media Marketing and its Benefits

Based on the evidence provided within this paper, social media plays a vital role in marketing for businesses. In fact, Gartner Research, the world’s leading information technology research and advisory company, released a report in January of 2016 stating that social media

is recognized by marketing leaders as one of the most effective channels across the customer buying journey (Sarner & Wilson, 2016). The top ways business professionals worldwide have utilized social media in 2016 so far are illustrated in figure 15.

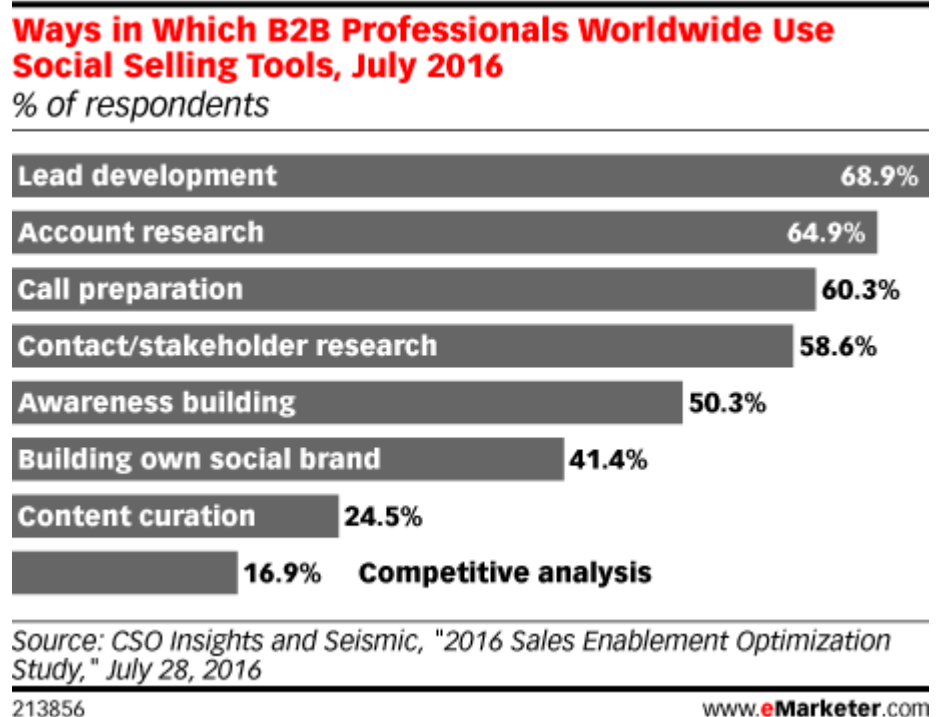


Figure 15

By understanding which social mediums to use, how and when to use them, what gratifications are sought by social media users, and determining marketing priorities, businesses have the potential to implement social media as a powerful marketing tactic resulting in

countless competitive advantages. A few of the most recognized advantages are highlighted in the following paragraphs.

Brand Recognition

Branding plays a significant role in an organization's success as it implies an organization's products and services are well communicated and distinguished from other businesses (Rosendale, 2015). Social media makes businesses more accessible to current and prospective customers while establishing a trustworthy brand for existing customers (DeMers, 2014). As such, one of the most recognized benefits of social media is increased exposure, with 89 percent of marketers indicating an increase in exposure due to social media utilization (Stelzner, 2016).

Because social networks are used by more than half of all adult internet users worldwide, social media is one of the most cost-efficient methods available to syndicate content and increase business visibility ("10 Advantages of Social Media Marketing for Your Business.", 2016). For millennials, social media is one of the top ways to discover new products, while over 30 percent of consumers credit social networks for the discovery of new brands, products, and services (eMarketer).

Stakeholder Interaction & Involvement

Referenced to several times throughout this paper, social media is one of the most promising communication tools for reaching and interacting with stakeholders. Engaging stakeholders through social

media creates a psychological bond between the customer and the brand. This bond gives stakeholders a sense of ownership and pride in the brand itself. Allowing customers to engage in the brand-building process creates a positive atmosphere, creating a longer-lasting loyalty to the brand (Rosendale, 2015).

The real value within an online stakeholder community is the ability to have a two-way conversation. Interactions with stakeholders can take many forms across a full spectrum of engagement levels. These engagement levels include listening to and understanding stakeholders, distributing information and promoting ideas and education, crowdsourcing ideas, discussing solutions interactively, consulting and collecting qualitative and quantitative data, co-creating and collaborating to deliver solutions, and more. These engagement levels help businesses relate directly to thousands of their stakeholders at a time across multiple platforms. In today's business environment, engaging with stakeholders on their terms is no longer optional, it is a requirement (Heismann, 2014).

Customer Insights

Social media generates a large amount of valuable data about current and future clients in real time. In a typical day, over 500 million tweets, 4.5 billion likes on Facebook, and 95 million photos and videos are uploaded to Instagram, all containing a wealth of knowledge about

who customers are, what they like, their pain points, and how they feel about businesses (Copp, 2016).

Through active engagement, social listening, and social media monitoring, businesses are able to gather advantageous customer data that enable smarter business decisions. Social listening is the process of finding and assessing information regarding a company, topic, or brand. Social listening can provide significant information on competitors, feedback on how businesses are perceived and their performance, as well as actionable data for designing and tailoring marketing campaigns (Fontein, 2016). These same tactics also enable businesses to analyze and track competitors (Standberry, 2015).

Brand Equity

At its core, social media is a communication channel. Unlike any other form of advertising, social media allows businesses to interact with consumers, facilitating the humanization element. Each customer interaction on social media is an opportunity to publicly demonstrate customer service as well as positively impact customer retention (DeMers 2014; Copp, 2016). The more engaged customers are, the more likely they are to recommend the business to friends, family, and colleagues, which is the most trusted form of advertising (Stanberry, 2015).

In today's social media phenomenon, people turn to social media to leave feedback, ask questions, and gain insight about businesses and

services. When users post about businesses, they are creating user-generated content that promotes brand awareness and makes the business appear more credible and trustworthy (DeMers, 2014).

The humanization element also plays a significant role in conversion rates for businesses, as people prefer to interact with other people opposed to a general idea. Studies have shown that social media have a 100 percent higher lead-to-close rate than outbound marketing, and 53 percent of Americans that follow brands on social media are more loyal to those companies (Copp, 2016).

Increased Transparency

With social media users more involved than ever through user-generated content and feedback, companies must accept they are no longer in complete command of their brand. Social media is the perfect tool for organizations to provide transparency into their brand which can result in closer brand relationships among consumers and increased brand preference (Rosendale, 2015).

Providing brand transparency through social media enables consumers to better recognize and empathize with the personalities behind their favorite brands. This insight into the business makes consumers feel more connected to the brand (Rosendale, 2015).

Campaign Targeting

As discussed in chapter three, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and

Instagram provide advanced targeting options to distribute content to the appropriate audiences. Through these targeting options, businesses are able to reach audiences based on specific data such as demographics, job titles, industries, and even offline activity. These options enable businesses to reach audiences with a sincere interest in their brand. These efforts can be tracked and measured in real time, allowing businesses to modify specifications and alter future campaigns (Stanberry, 2015).

Lead Generation

Through regular interaction and timely customer service, social media increases sales and customer retention. Utilizing social media for lead generation is simple, fast, and cost-effective. As such, 75 percent of American internet users indicated that social media influence their shopping behavior and enhances their brand loyalty (Roesler, 2014).

In a study conducted by MHI global, world-class companies rated social media as the most effective way to identify key decision makers and new business opportunities. Statistics also suggest that nearly 75 percent of companies that engaged in selling on social media reported an increase in sales in 12 months (Copp, 2016).

Customer Service & Feedback

Companies that are not on social media are at a serious disadvantage as over 67 percent of consumers now turn to social media

for customer service. As such, Facebook Business Pages now include response analytics, informing consumers of the businesses' response rate and the average response time. Customers expect quick service with 24/7 support, and social mediums provide this. A study conducted by the Aberdeen Group, a research and analysis company, indicated that companies engaging in customer service via social media see bigger financial gains (7.5 percent year over year growth) versus those that do not (2.9 percent) (Copp, 2016).

Social media also provide a forum for unbiased ratings and reviews, which can be utilized for client testimonials. Out of the social mediums analyzed within this paper, Facebook in particular has a dedicated area to reviews that can provide insight into a business' strength and weaknesses. Even if a company has not created a Facebook profile for themselves, an unmanaged page is generated based on people's geographical check-ins to represent the location. Companies that do not pay attention to customer reviews on social media are jeopardizing their company's reputation and growth opportunities (Standberry, 2015).

Improved Website Traffic

One of the biggest and most cited benefits of social media marketing is the increase in website traffic and improved search engine rankings, with 58 percent of marketers attributing their search rankings

growth to social media (Statista). Without social media, a business' inbound website traffic is limited to people already familiar with the brand and individuals searching for keywords that the business rank for. Each social media profile links back to a company's website, and every piece of content syndicated on social media is an opportunity for new website visits. An increase in inbound traffic can result in more leads and conversions (DeMers, 2014).

Without utilizing social media marketing, businesses face the competitive disadvantage of not being able to reach anyone outside of their loyal customer base ("10 Advantages of Social Media Marketing for Your Business.", 2016).

Improved Search Engine Rankings

Search engine optimization, or SEO, is the most efficient way to capture relevant traffic from search engines, but the requirements for success are always changing. What was once as simple as regular blog updates and optimizing title tags and meta descriptions, Google and other search engines now include social media to calculate their rankings. Businesses that are active on social media create brand signal, signifying to search engines that they are legitimate, credible and trustworthy. Having a strong social media presence is mandatory for businesses that want to rank for a given set of keywords (DeMers, 2014). In fact, according to Social Media Examiner, more than 58 percent

of marketers that have been utilizing social media for a year or longer have experienced improved search engine rankings ("10 Advantages of Social Media Marketing for Your Business.", 2016).

Through increased search-engine results, businesses have the ability to broaden their brand presence. The more a brand appears on social media, the more likely it will rise to the top of search engines. With social media interactions such as likes, retweets, favorites, and shares factoring into online search results, social media can extend its brand presence geographically and demographically based on its new search engine ranking (Rosendale, 2015).

Accessibility

Social media enable businesses to share content and information in the fastest time possible, proving beneficial with breaking news, responding to crises, and addressing customer service concerns. From mobile applications, to scheduled posts, to automated marketing tools, social media marketing is available 24/7 within seconds.

In 2014, Forrester Research confirmed that consumers research more products online and on the go. In fact, 64 percent of US online consumers conducted online research before making a purchase, with over 54 percent completing the research on their mobile phone. With the convenience of social media, consumers are able to access businesses' reviews and promotional updates within seconds, ultimately securing or

ending a sale for an organization. This accessibility is a benefit to businesses as well as it allows them to be more responsive to customer demands, resulting in a competitive business advantage (Rosendale, 2015).

Campaign Costs

Getting started with a business profile on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and Instagram is completely free. Paid advertising through these mediums is relatively inexpensive with customizable campaign budgets, some starting as low as \$0.05. As the number one driver of all website referral traffic, social media increases profit margins. In fact, recent research indicates that social media advertising can be more than 10 times cheaper than bidding on keywords through Google advertising. Compared to traditional marketing strategies, social media marketing is one of the only tactics that can expose businesses to a highly targeted audience of over 1,000 for less than \$3 (Standberry, 2015).

The low cost associated with social media promotion is closely aligned with word-of-mouth. Social media has replaced the need for face to face conversations regarding experiences with a business or brand. Covered in chapter two, user-generated content is the most believable and influential form of brand promotion available (Rosendale, 2015).

Thought Leadership

In January of 2016, over half of marketers identified established thought leadership as a benefit of their social media marketing efforts (Statista). Posting insightful and well-written content on social media is one of the best ways to become an established expert and leader in a businesses' corresponding field ("10 Advantages of Social Media Marketing for Your Business.", 2016). Thought leaders are considered trustworthy authorities among industry colleagues, as they entail the innate ability to contribute to conversations occurring in the present while being able to speculate on what will happen in the future (Taylor, 2016).

Being recognized as an industry leader does not occur through a single article or social media post. It requires consistent engagement through several platforms. Sharing content, interacting with other social media users, and connecting with target audiences promote and establish business authority. When a business's social media campaign is aligned with other marketing tactics, their skills will be highlighted and looked up to. Social mediums allow businesses to directly connect with their customers, creating a valuable relationship that will allow the business to become a notable influencer in their field ("10 Advantages of Social Media Marketing for Your Business.", 2016).

Conclusion and Recommendations

What initially began as an entertainment tool has evolved into a revolutionary communications and marketing tool. With the primary purpose of connecting people, social media now plays an influential role in connecting businesses with their clients and potential customers. In just a decade and a half, social media has become a staple in more than 2 billion people's lives. Studies show that the average user spends 118 minutes on social media per day (Statista).

Based on current utilization statistics and future forecasts, social media will continue to play an integral role in businesses' marketing strategies. Despite the emphasis of social media marketing as one of the most effective channels for businesses, there are still challenges in measuring the results. Typical return of investment drivers such as revenue, cost savings, and risk mitigation are especially difficult to correlate with social media activity.

While these gaps spark concerns for businesses, research focused organizations, like Gartner, are determined to provide research that solidify social media marketing efforts while justifying social networking investments. Until proven ineffective, it is the author's opinion that organizations should continue to make social media utilization a priority within their marketing strategy.

Applicable Coursework

Out of the 12 courses taken by the author to complete a Master of Arts degree in communications management from Webster University's online communications program, 11 of the courses contributed to the completion of this thesis. The twelfth course focused on managing human resources, which was not applicable in this instance as this paper did not cover social media's impact in the workplace. The courses applicable to this project are summarized below.

MEDC 5000: Media Communications

Media Communications is an introduction to the graduate program that assisted with establishing expectations with research methodologies utilized throughout the program and the academic preparation required for Seminar in Media Communications. As such, MLA style and instruction on how to conduct and cite academic research about media-related issues were a staple in the course. This course gave a fundamental knowledge of media theories and how media impacts consumers today. The information gained through this course has been instrumental in helping the author prove the premise of this project as well as fulfill the technical requirements of the thesis.

MEDC 5300: Strategic Communications

This course focused on the strategic role of communications from a top-management perspective. Strategic Communications focused on all aspects of communications functions, including direct and indirect communications requirements for internal, external, and intermediary audiences. The audiences covered in Strategic Communications ranged from customers, suppliers, distributors employees, shareholders, competitors, politicians, analysts journalists and lobbyists. Each of these audiences can be reached through a strategic social media campaign. In addition, understanding the functional areas of marketing communications, media relations, and corporate branding was imperative for the success of this thesis and social media as a whole.

MEDC 5310: Media and Culture

This course played an integral part in this thesis. Media and Culture focused on the impact of mass media in society and the effect on the individual. This course supplied the idea for the application of the uses and gratifications theory with social media. Media and Culture also focused on traditional vs. “new” media, while assessing social media’s ability to serve as a digital platform that enables print, sound, photo, video, and conversation in real-time.

MEDC 5350: Media Organization and Regulations

Media Organization and Regulations is imperative for any business as it focuses on the legal structure of the media communications industry. While the topic is not directly discussed within the contents of this paper, organizations that utilize social media need to be aware of media law and regulations. Some areas of concern for businesses should be legal implications of employee social media use, the review policies of sites such as Glassdoor, complying with Section 5 of the FTC Act, copyright issues, and other laws impacting social media contests and sweepstakes.

MEDC 5400: Media Production Management

Media Production Management had a large emphasis in the completion of this thesis. Perhaps the most important lesson of Media Production Management is the idea that corporate communications such as public relations, internal communications, advertising and marketing all work together to achieve a business' objectives. As such, Media Production Management focused on the strategic campaign planning process including research, budgeting, planning, writing, and evaluation, which are vital parts of any successful social media campaign.

MEDC 5360: International Communications

This course is applicable to this thesis because of social media's impact on the way the entire world communicates. As such, this course aided students in understanding the role of media and freedom of press in different areas of the world, while focusing on the development of the new world order based on new mediums. Based on statistics and graphics within this paper, there are certain areas around the world with higher social media utilization than Americans, and more businesses are relying on social mediums as a way to reach markets globally.

MRKT 5000: Marketing

The information gained from this course was imperative to the foundation of this paper. The author relied heavily on the assigned textbook to establish the first chapter of this project, *The Growth of Digital Media*, which sets the tone for the entire paper. Thoroughly documented throughout this paper, social media's potential reach makes it an invaluable marketing tool. As such, a key component of marketing is being able to identify and reach target markets. Understanding and reaching target markets is critical for any social media campaign, even more so for businesses that utilize the advanced targeting options.

PBRL 5323: Organizational Communications

This course focused on the relationship of an organizational mission, employee values, organizational cultures, and motivation. While this course appears to focus on the internal aspect of business communication, it applied to the appropriate use of media as a communication tool with employees or volunteers. As such, portions of this thesis emphasize the idea of including employees in social media campaigns, as they can increase exposure and enhance the organization's brand through the businesses' social mediums.

PBRL 5322: Public Relations

With a Bachelor's degree in public relations, the author had previous knowledge regarding the importance of social media and public relations. This course reiterated the importance of integrating communication strategies with organizational mission statements, demonstrating stakeholder and issue management techniques, and considering ethical dilemmas. Social media is a valuable tool for public relations professionals, as it gives them the ability to share content from press kits such as press releases, aid in campaign creations, assist with crisis communications, and engage with current and potential customers by offering a business' expertise. Social media aids public relations in its attempt to learn effective strategic

and tactical answers to public perception problems and opportunities faced by businesses every day.

PBRL 5465: Crisis Management Communications

Briefly mentioned in the application of the Public Relations course, social media can be a vital tool in crisis management and constitutes as an effective use of social media in this paper. The course itself focuses on the relationship of the organization and its culture to the external environment in times of crisis. As referenced several times throughout this paper, social media's powerful reach is imperative in crisis situations, and is often included in most crisis communication plans. Most public relations professionals will confirm that businesses must act swiftly in addressing a crisis, and because of social media's accessibility and reach, it is the perfect tool.

MEDC 6000: Seminar in Media Communications

This course provided the process of synthesizing 11 graduate level communications and public relations classes into one topic. The topic of social media and its impact on businesses was fortified through secondary research and skills acquired through personal and professional settings. This paper adds to the body of knowledge relating to social media as an important marketing and communications tool for businesses, and the benefits and competitive advantages of using them effectively.

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