

How Instagram is Changing the Way Marketing Works?

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Abstract

Social network marketing has become a very important area for marketing for brands and people into business now-a-days. After the trend of social media which started in early 21st century and gained boom with Twitter and Facebook, Instagram came into picture in 2010 and provided a unique way for marketers to stay in touch with their customers using just pictures and their captions as a tool. Catching trend with its unique idea, Instagram quickly became a trend worldwide with a unique age target group and hence becomes a more favored place for marketers to stay connected with their customers and consumers. Facebook acquired Instagram later and converted it as a proper platform for companies to target and sell their products by reaching out to them directly, hence making it a significant platform for business communications. Through interactive media like Images, Videos and now stories with catchy captions, marketers and brands are able to reach to their audience and receive feedback in the form of likes and comments from their target group. In this paper, discussion on how Instagram is changing the way marketing is done by becoming an important tool in social media marketing will be done.

This research paper discussed that how Instagram has become a favorable platform for marketers to market a product or service. Instagram allows its users to upload photos, videos in form of new posts or stories, to like other users photos and videos and watch stories. Instagram also allows users to comment on other user's stories and to tag user's on some other posts as well. Through these likes and comments, marketers are able to reach their target audience; they can even communicate with their target audience who might be interested in their products or services.

Keywords

Instagram; Facebook; Marketing Tool; Social Network Marketing

I. Introduction

Social media marketing refers to techniques that target social networks and applications to spread brand awareness or promote particular products. Social media marketing campaigns usually center around: Establishing a social media presence on major platforms. Marketing is a well-improved method that frequently changes the rules based on the needs and demand of promoting and selling products and services (Lakshmi & Saravanakumar, 2012). Unlike before the advent of social media, the impact from advertisements on Television commercials, newspaper commercials and radio commercials have decreased significantly. People are more attracted to online medium now-a-days, due to increased significance of social media on our daily life. With the rollout of smartphones, we are in the time of mobile based social networking (Backman & Bergstrom, 2013). As technology has improved and with the advent of faster and better internet services, the number of users online has boomed. Due to rise in all such technologies like faster internet which is easily available and cheap, access to this fast internet on our LTE enabled handsets has not just only affected our lives but has opened new ways for

marketers to sell and promote their products amongst their target audience. Brands and businesses are making sure to make the most of this social media boom and Instagram is the core of it.

Social media as an online community whose target is to provide a space for people to communicate has now become a well-liked channel for brand marketing and customer engagement. Following after social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, Instagram came in 2010 and in the past 2 years itself the number of users on its platform have doubled to 700 million (Heath, 2017). To some entrepreneurs, social media marketing is the "next big thing," A temporary yet powerful fad that must be taken advantage of while it's still in the spotlight. To others, it's a buzzword with no practical advantages and a steep, complicated learning curve (DeMers, 2014). Social media in today's world is affecting marketing in ways beyond imagination.

In today's world Industries starting from automobile to music to fooding are advertising their product and services on social media. Social media marketing is free. It, however, requires some efforts to visit social media websites regularly and share useful content. With more than half of world's population present on social media websites and approximately 58 million users visiting different social media websites every day, SMM is an easy way to connect and communicate with large number of targeted audiences with less efforts and within less time (Jones, n.d.). Social Media has turned out to be one of the most favored and loved product and service marketing strategy used by people all around the world.

II. Social Network Marketing

A social networking site is the use of dedicated websites and applications to interact with other users, or to find people with similar interests to one's own on an online medium that is totally free of cost. Communication is important for any business but positive engagement with the customer base can really lead to improved reputation. Social allows brands and user to interact freely and quickly. The brand takes on a personal role and becomes a member of a conversation. Resulting exposure can develop a quality brand image. (Flekel, n.d.). Social media websites also help small businesses in providing service to their customers. These networks enable one-to-one interaction and acts as conversation channels and this help in communicating directly with visitors/customers and resolve their queries as soon as possible. Therefore, SMM is one of the effective ways of offering customer service to target audiences. 53% of small businesses are using social media websites as a two-way conversation tool and provide customer service to its customers (Jones, n.d.). Social media has not only opened the world for companies to directly engage with their customers, but has also opened up a window for customers to interact with other customers, which in turn helps them to buy better.

To devise a successful marketing strategy for social media, it is very important to understand the targeted customer base for the particular business and the product also. After getting to know

the target audience group, one can reach into a stage where he/she would be able to devise a perfect market strategy suitable for the product to be marketed. Social signals have become one of the major factors in ranking the website. Making presence on social media platforms and sharing educational and relevant content encourages customers to follow you or share your content with their family, friends, etc. This builds domain authority and improves organic search rankings (Jones, n.d.). Many businesses end up making a mistake, where they end up focusing on the quantity of followers rather than the quality of followers, who are actually interested in their business.

Social network marketing uses social media, involving online communities to market. Communities over social media involve large sets of users with similar interests, unlike traditional form of marketing. The unique role social media can play is that, rather than blanketing the universe with sales pitches in the hopes of stumbling across a potential customer, you can create an online community to connect with individuals who have a need for you (Caffeine, n.d.). Social media isn't a fad or trend. It's an enduring reality of online existence. For marketers, it's indispensable (Patel N., n.d.). Companies now have started acknowledging that social network marketing is a potential marketing platform.

According to the Clutch 2017 Small Business Social Media Survey, 24% of small businesses have zero social media presence. That's just about one in four small business owners. Clutch found that only 41 percent of small businesses are on their social media sites multiple times a day. Another 23 percent are updating their social sites daily (Sophy, 2017). This shows that the social media as a marketing tool is very significant in front of business people. Social media marketing helps companies to reach their customers anytime. Social media can make a big difference for small businesses at a low marketing cost. According to Social Media Examiner's seventh annual Social Media Marketing Industry Report, 92% of marketers working with small businesses (between two and 10 employees) agree or strongly agree that social media is crucial to their marketing efforts. Within two years, more than 50 percent of small businesses agree social media helps them increase sales; within five years, 70 percent of small businesses see ROI from a social media presence (Olenski, 2015).

Social media users have free rein to post whatever they want. This means that satisfied customers can leave glowing reviews on your pages, but it also means that unhappy ones can leave angry rants about your business. Some of this negative feedback could come from within your own organization. Disgruntled employees have been known to vent on social media about work and their bosses, which makes the entire company look bad (WebpageFX, n.d.). Although social network marketing is a potential marketing strategy, there is still disadvantage for it. As the social networking sites will allow customers to comment about your brand – whether it is good or bad; often the comment of the customers are more influential and convincing (Jadhav & Kamble & Patil, n.d.). On the other hand, social network marketing does have advantages such as marketing can be done at almost zero cost, create huge exposure to businesses, increasing sales and rising the popularity of the brand (Neti, 2011).

III. Knowing Instagram

Instagram was founded in 2010 (Bergstrom & Backman, 2013). Instagram is a social networking app made for sharing photos

and videos from a smartphone. Similar to Facebook or Twitter, everyone who creates an Instagram account has a profile and news feed. When you post a photo or video on Instagram, it will be displayed on your profile. Other users who follow you will see your posts in their own feed. Likewise, you'll see posts from other users whom you choose to follow (Moreau, 2017). Rather than focusing on a lot of different features, Instagram has only one core feature, which makes it especially easy to share photos and see photos from your friends. Filters are another reason people like using Instagram. Whenever you take a photo in Instagram, you can quickly apply a filter to give the photo a unique look. Filters can help transform an ordinary photo into something worth sharing without much effort (GCF Learn Free, n.d.).

On July 16, 2010 Instagram founders Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger unleashed the photo-sharing platform that, though they didn't know it at the time, would soon become a selfie-filled, multi-billion-dollar beast used by 500 million people (Bruner, 2016). Development began in San Francisco. The developers wanted to focus on a photo sharing app after working on an HTML5 program called *Burbn*, and named it Instagram, as an ode to the words *Instant Camera*, and *Telegram*. They received funding from their partners on *Burbn*, as well (Klein, 2015). Within 2 years Instagram had become a sensation and in 2012, Facebook offered \$300m cash and 23 million of its shares to acquire Instagram and the deal was finalized very soon after the offer.

Instagram has become a very popular website today. Over half of all 18 to 29 year olds are on Instagram, Its 55% to be exact. If a brand is looking to connect with its customers, they need to be here. It has 400 million active monthly users and 700 million users in all. The number of users has doubled since 2012 (Curtin, 2017). As much as 32% teenagers consider Instagram to be the most important social media. Six in ten online adults have Instagram account. The number of females in comparison to males is more-38% v/s. 26% (Lister, 2017). We can, from the above data make out about the popularity about this app.

IV. Instagram as a Contributor to Social Network Marketing

Social media marketing is a powerful way for businesses of all sizes to reach prospects and customers. The customers are already interacting with brands through social media, and if the brands are not speaking directly to their audience through social platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest, they missing out! Great marketing on social media can bring remarkable success to any business, creating devoted brand advocates and even driving leads and sales (Wordstream, n.a.). Aside from having an account in Facebook and Twitter, new social media platform is coming in to provide another platform for many marketers. Lately, there are many businesses that starting to integrate their business with the Instagram experience (Tekulve & Kelly, 2013). Instagram is used by 48.8% of brands—a number that is expected to rise to 70.7% by 2017. Marketers are rapidly increasing their adoption of Instagram to promote everything from clothing to concerts. According to a forecast by eMarketer, 48.8 % of U.S. brands will use Instagram for social media marketing in 2016 (Parker, 2016).

Instagram can help a company to promote their products or services (Bevins, 2014). The point that makes Instagram different from other social media is that Instagram is applying a visual based strategy (Hird, 2013). Everything about Instagram is

about photograph (Linashcke, 2011). Instagram marketing is an effective way to advertise a product as it is said that a picture speaks a thousand words (Silva & de Melo & Almeida & Salles & Loureiro, 2013). Additionally, Instagram can help one in saving cost for brand designing. Every image taken for a product can be edited and filtered using the Instagram functions (Herman, 2014).

According to Barnes (2014) as cited in (Dennis, 2014) Instagram has provided a function known as “hash tags” (#) for the convenience of indicating the relevant photos and videos pertaining to the product of any business. Dennis (2014) also mention that by clicking the hash tags, it allow the Instagram users to view pictures and videos that is relevant to the hash tag. Therefore, many fashion companies are now having an Instagram account to promote their products. Moreover, social media also provide the marketers an easier way to understand their customers. In the case of Instagram, leaving comments and receiving comments on the photo posts can gain more feedback from the customers on the product. Followers are often interested to see the interaction between the organization and the users, so being attentive to the comments would help in improving the relationship with customers (Dennis, 2014).

Furthermore, Instagram has included a function known as direct messaging. This function could give the VIP customers another way to communicate and interact with the organization (Herman, 2014). Herman (2014) has stated that the direct message function allows the user to send message that only receiver can view and each message can send out to 15 users each time.

V. Instagram Terms, Conditions and Policies

Just like the other social networking sites, Instagram also faces privacy issue. In late 2012, months after Facebook has taken over Instagram, Instagram has changed its terms of use and privacy policy. The changes made have received many negative responses from the users, as users were not satisfied with their decision. BBC News also reported that there are people who claimed that the new changes were “Instagram’s suicide note”.

The terms of “Instagram may share users’ information with organizations that are related to them” and “Instagram may use the photos and videos uploaded by the users for business use or advertising without any pay back or notice to the users” were updated on the privacy policy of Instagram (Babb & Nelson, 2013). However, due to the difficult wording used, it was difficult to understand what the terms are meant; therefore, there are many users still using Instagram without knowing the changes to the terms and condition (Nelis, 2013).

Users who are aware about the changes have shown disappointment and some decided to quit Instagram. As a result to it, Instagram co-founder has released a statement to clear the dissatisfaction by mentioning that they do not intend to apply the terms like that and they will remove the language that confused the users (Gross, 2012). Following the strong negative responses, Instagram has changes back the terms to the original version that had been launched in 2010 (Geron, 2012).

VI. Discussion

As there has been a change in the marketing strategy from traditional marketing to social media marketing, companies are making sure that they do not miss out on this, and have started promoting company’s product and services through various social

networking sites. In this modern era, where everyone is busy, visual advertisements like pictures and videos seem to affect to the target customer base than just words. Therefore, the social networking website that fits best in this category is none other than Instagram. The increasing user base and large active user base suggest that the popularity of Instagram is rising day by day. Not only is Instagram well known amongst young people who are active on social media, but it is also very popular in business industry where people use Instagram as a new platform to market their product and services. Hence the functions of Instagram do not only attract the attention of social media users like you and me but also the marketers who are always in search of getting connected with their consumer base.

This method also helps the marketers to gain feedback from the customers. These benefits given by Instagram to the marketers have make Instagram in becoming one of the strong tool in the social network marketing strategy.

Although every social networking website does face privacy issues from time to time. In the case of Instagram, after it got acquired by Facebook, they went through a controversy in 2012 on the changing of terms and conditions. Instagram updated their policy to make it easier to share information with a Facebook which resulted in lot of negative responses from the users. Due to such massive negative responses received, Instagram had to pull back to the original terms and conditions.

Nevertheless Instagram has shown to be a very useful marketing tool in the new era, there still are various disadvantages, when it is used as a marketing tool. Firstly, the customer’s information is not fully protected. Secondly, the interaction between the customer and marketer is through a media platform, it becomes hard for the marketer to know, who their customers are, because fake identity may be created for online business.

VII. Conclusion

Instagram is one of the most popular social networking site used both on the mobile as well as web platform, which is getting people to interact along with each other nationally and globally. Instagram has gathered people from all round the world, both who are interested in photography and once which are not, pre-present filters which can be used. These filters were already present in many applications and web portals for editing images, but Instagram used this and created a mode to share pictures online and interact in a form of social media. Instagram, from a simple picture sharing and social tool, transformed into a new marketing tool in social media marketing. Online marketing is actually not a very new term in the industry and social media marketing is widely being used by both small and big businesses world-wide due to its vast and targeted reach. A lot of companies worldwide are using Instagram as a platform to advertise and sell its services and products. Among the social networking sites which are popular and currently being used, Instagram is a very major player and is widely used through mobile devices as an application. It has given marketers a unique platform to interact with their customers. In addition to all these, Instagram is actually free and can be used free of charge. Instagram has been continuously used as a tool which has made itself different from other social networking website by continuously evolving itself, hence providing a better visual platform and has made it convenient for people to interact with each other.

Yet, it is always a risk when one is using a platform owned and maintained by a certain other third party, so it clearly important to understand the set of terms and conditions of the particular site before engaging in any business activities where-in promoting sales and advertising products on online platforms.

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