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Zayna Qaissi

University of Louisville, zayna.qaissi@louisville.edu

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Social Media's Innate Features of Social Interaction and Engagement that are Utilized by the Marketing Industry

Zayna Qaissi¹

¹ The University of Louisville, Louisville, KY, USA

The term "social media" first emerged with the likes of Myspace in 2003 and Facebook in 2004 (Ortiz-Ospina, 2019). Today, there are at least 3.5 billion users that utilize social media platforms (Ortiz-Ospina, 2019). Along with the millions of people online, the amount of time spent on apps and websites has risen dramatically over the years. This, coupled with the accessibility of technology, easier communication, and formation of online websites in recent years, has created a perfect opportunity for marketers to focus on user engagement by moving their businesses online. The establishment of social media enabled many businesses and marketers to branch out and creatively use this space to their benefit by strategically focusing on socially engaged users. Social media provides unique opportunities for marketing firms by nature, more specifically, through social interaction and engagement provided by social media.

SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

Social media advertising is now transitioning into an attractive platform for enhancing communication across users. In a study conducted by Voorveld, Noort, Muntiga and Bronner (2018), they examined the effectiveness of advertising to better understand engagement across different social media platforms (p.39). The study was carried out using eight social media platforms: Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, Twitter, Google Plus, Instagram, Pinterest, and Snapchat. Participants of the study were 13 years and older and they all indicated they had used social media at least once a week. A total of 1,346 respondents who participated in the surveys used at least one of the social media platforms listed. Respondents were asked to rank which of these platforms were most commonly used by them and their time spent on the platform, what device used, and what specific days they used social media. This gave the researchers insight about media consumption for each respondent. Using the acquired data, researchers then asked about the engagement experiences respondents had with each platform, followed by questions about advertising seen on the social media platforms used. The researchers created a predetermined list of experiences that included 42 experience items deemed adequate to cover the realm of potential experiences individuals may engage with different platforms on social media. Researchers distributed the questionnaire that included the list of experience items and distributed it across social media platforms in order to analyze the results. Examples of experience items included: joyful, annoyed, enthusiastic, informed, etc. Thus, researchers quantitatively measured the number of people who

selected specific experience items across all social media platforms (Voorveld, et al., 2018).

ENGAGEMENT AND SOCIAL INTERACTION DEPENDENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM

The results of the study concluded that engagement was highly dependent on the specific platform used. Of the eight platforms observed, three of them, Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat, were found to have the finest functionalities and characteristics to allow for the best consumer interaction and experience with engaging content. However, Youtube, Facebook, and Twitter scored highest in advertisement. Of these platforms, it can be deduced that that these advertisements are unavoidable and ensure viewers are constantly exposed to them; all of which is in the marketer's best interest. For example, before every Youtube video, there is typically an advertisement encountered by a user. Another important conclusion from the study is that more popular platforms such as Facebook and Instagram will be able to facilitate a greater social engagement and interaction because of their popularity and easy accessibility. These results were drawn according to a categorization of the experiences under a variety of themes, including advertisement, engagement, informational, interactive, etc. (p. 46). Therefore, different social media platforms provide different levels of social interaction between the user and the content.

SOCIAL INTERACTION ON SOCIAL MEDIA THAT LENDS TO THE UPRISE OF A BRAND

Various social media platforms are important in eliciting social interaction between the user and a brand. This relationship is important for marketing firms to increase attraction and social interaction on social media, all of which translate to the rising popularity of a brand. A study conducted by Rahmadini and Halim (2018) focused on social media in the music industry, specifically focusing on the impact of social media on communication and promotion of events, engagement between fans and an artist, and lastly, the development of brand relationship quality. In their study, Rahmadini and Halim focused on music promotion by a popular social media artist in Indonesia by the name of Dari Hati Afgan. At that time, the artist had over 7.9 million followers on Twitter, 476,000 followers on Instagram, and 1.5 million followers/likes on Facebook.

The researchers conducted the study by collecting data through questionnaires and forms posted online directly through Afgan's social media in a single cross sectional time frame after the participants attended Afgan's concert. Each of the 160 respondents had attended at least one of the musician's concerts and followed him on at least one of his social media accounts. These forms were individually posted to assess the potential engagement between the artist and the user and the impact it has on brand quality. For engagement analysis, the survey specifically included identified emotional labels, including: "affectionate, friendly, loved, peaceful, passionate, delightful, captivated, connected, bored and attached" based on the attendees' responses to the interaction they had with the artist online (p. 5). Additionally, to analyze the brand's relationship quality with the concert attendees, 16 items based on respondent's willingness to recommend musicians to friends and family were ranked by respondents to assess the relationship between the concert attendee and the musician. Both engagement and brand relationship quality were assessed using a six-point Likert type of scale for both forums. This scale offers options for levels of satisfaction that represent the respondent's opinion about the level of interaction of their brand-relationship quality (Rahmadini and Halim, 2018).

Based on the data collected, Rahmadini and Halim (2018) focused on the five-hypothesis model that centered on how the higher the level of social interaction will potentially influence emotional attachment, brand relationship quality, and word of mouth. To assess the data accumulated from the six-point Likert type of scale for both forums, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was implemented to test the five-hypothesis model, using the forms employed on Afgan's social media. The results of the study indicate that social media interaction leads to emotional attachment. Once the emotional attachment has been identified by the participants, it leads to the

development of a brand relationship quality. As the artist creates a connection with the users through the innate feature of socializing through social media, it allows for not only a simple exchange of information but allows for updated news about their favorite musician, daily activities, schedule and so on. Therefore, social media serves as a communication medium between the artist and users as they socially interact, which overall contributes to the upbringing of the artist.

SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT AND CONSUMER LOYALTY: SYW APP

With the marketing industry becoming more competitive, many brands recognize the importance of retaining current customers and incorporating certain activities to ensure customer loyalty based on social interaction. He, Tian, Feng-Kwei, and Wang (2019) conducted a study that focused on social media features that are centered on engaging consumers, specifically utilizing an app, called *SYW: Sears' increasingly popular loyalty program*, provided by the brand that gives customers the opportunity to scan and earn points for every purchase. The accumulated points can then be redeemed for later purchases of merchandise. In addition, other incentives are embedded within the app, such as inviting family and friends through Facebook and email; the more active the customer is, the more points will be rewarded to that customer. The analysis of SYW was carried out through Twitter. Almost 19,000 posts were collected and assessed using *Text Mining*. This technique analyzes the content of each post and categorizes them into certain themes. The researchers were able to identify all three levels of consumer engagement, including cognitive, emotional, and behavioral from their forum posts and tweets.

Based on the results of the study, the customers who were most engaged with the online platform increased their desire to continue to participate in the program and had the highest level of engagement. The active engagement through this social media app, SYW, has shifted novice users to loyal customers (He, et.al, 2019). People that were actively engaged felt rewarded from a cognitive and emotional standpoint, after the accumulation of points has taken place. Thus, with increasing consumer interaction marketers have unlocked an important feature that can ensure constant engagement with their brand and further enhance their emotional appeal by eliciting feelings of reward, joy, happiness, and increased customer devotion to the brand.

LIKE BUTTON OF SOCIAL MEDIA FACILITATES ENGAGEMENT IN A COGNITIVE AND BEHAVIORAL MANNER

A ubiquitous characteristic seen across all social media platforms assessed by Sherman, Hernandez, Greenfield,

& Dapretto (2018) is the “like” button feature in relation to neural responses and emotional attachment (p. 699). This feature and other synonymous alternatives are most infamously used through the most common social media apps including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Youtube, and more. In the study by Sherman, et al. (2018), they investigated the correlation between neural responses and viewing or receiving likes. The study aims to identify the brain regions that promote reward as well those that increase visual attention and have a neuropsychological impact on the user, specifically when engaging with Instagram, a popular social media app.

To conduct the study, researchers gathered a sample of 34 female and 24 male participants between the ages of 13 to 21. To gain insight, they asked the participants to submit their own photographs from Instagram to create an internal social network. In reality, these photographs were collected to show other participants and have the participants decide whether or not they choose to like the photo. Moreover, the main focus of the study was to determine the amount of influence the number of likes have on an individual; each photo was randomly assigned a specific number of likes to evaluate the impact this could have on an individual liking the photo. Furthermore, this process was simulated under the functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) machine to determine the parts of the brain that are activated when encountering and liking different types of images. In total, each participant was shown 148 unique photos that were categorized as three types: neutral images that portrayed stereotypical Instagram photos such as food and friends, risk taking behaviors such as alcohol and drugs, and lastly, pictures submitted by the participants themselves. Data regarding the numbers of likes was collected while a participant was in the MRI machine (p. 701)

The results of the study indicated that 64.1% of participants selected liked an image that depicted objects, such as food and possessions, rather than faces. The participants' feedback indicated that objects were more visually appealing. 12.8% of individuals that liked photos indicated that it was similar to the content they engage with on social media (p. 702). The rest of the participants that liked an image were for other reasons, such as that the images were humorously appealing, or that the images portrayed activities that pertained to their personal interests and enjoyment. Furthermore, liking the Instagram photo and sharing information with others elicits responses in the ventral striatum and ventral tegmental area (VTA) in the brain, which makeup the neural reward center (Sherman et al., 2016). When individuals were liking pictures, feelings of pleasure, happiness, and interest were stimulated. This was indicated by the activation seen in the fMRI scans as individuals were giving likes (Sherman, et al, 2018).

Developing a connection through a form of social engagement, such as the “like” button, reflects the users interests on a cognitive and neuropsychological level as well.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Another study carried out by Giorgi Bagaturia and Margaret Johnson (2014) examined the impact social media has on brand loyalty by consumers, specifically focusing on the options that provided, such that individuals can use to freely express their opinions and feelings about certain brands and purchases. The researchers created a structured questionnaire that was given to 310 people from the state of Georgia who were all social media users. All of these users qualified because they met certain criteria created by Bagaturia and Johnson (2014), which required the individual to use social media at least once a week and to follow at least one established brand. The sample contained both males and females ranging from the ages 20 to 60. Questionnaires were administered that included questions that aimed to measure marketing, advertisement, and consumerism from a social media perspective of the user. Other elements measured under brand loyalty included trust with the brand, interaction with the brand online, and more. Questions focused on the effectivity of social media effective for marketers; content portrayed on social media; and preferences on social media (p. 6). Further questions elaborated on the major ideas observed in the questions listed above.

MARKETING METHODS

The two common marketing strategies commonly used are the *Push and Pull Methods* that appeal to consumers using different logic that fortifies the relationship between the business and the potential consumer (Corniani, 2008). The first strategy is the Pull Method, which requires marketers to establish processes that coincide with the demand requests and “pulls” it out of the company (Corniani, 2008). Thus, as marketers establish connections with their customers through social media by actively interacting with them using social features like commenting, likes, subscriptions, surveys, and polling through different media outlets, these connections provide companies a unique opportunity to engage with potential buyers online. Another marketing strategy is the Push Method, which involves originating marketing messages from the company toward the market, specifically through advertising (Corniani, 2008, pg. 45). Through social media, marketers are able to pose different ways of advertising their products by appealing to consumers’ emotions, provoking interest in a product.

From the study, researchers found that 95% of individuals that took the survey preferred interaction with a brand

through social media. However, even with positive interaction, brands are still at risk of negative reviews. Approximately 80% of individuals said they would leave negative reviews if necessary. In addition, 85% of consumers reported that they looked at the reviews first before going through with purchases or interaction with a brand (Bagaturia and Johnson, 2014). From this, it can be concluded that social media can be of great benefit to a brand if the brand's social media presence is positive and strong. However, seeing as how 85% of people look at reviews before purchasing or trusting a brand, they are more likely to see negative reviews over positive ones, even if this does not represent the overall truth behind a brand. Because of this, social media can portray the negative bias of a brand over a positive bias due to a company's lack of power in reviews and in the social interaction feature that all social media platforms provide users; marketers are not able to control these conversations. On the other hand, a brand must focus on amending their advertising to help lessen the amount of negativity on a brand's page. Still, marketers can sway opinion to continue a positive social media presence through advertisements that appeal to what their consumer base wants based on the comments posted. This allows for consumers to be heard through surveys, polls, and assessments of user preferences to understand how to better appeal to the viewer's interests.

MARKETING USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FEATURES

The innate features of social media allow for engagement and social interaction to take place between the brand and the user. This has great benefit for those in the marketing industry to further explore the potential of social interaction and engagement through social media platforms. Based on the study conducted by Voorveld et.al, (2018), different social media platforms provide different levels of social interaction between the user and the content. Specifically, Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat have the best functionalities to facilitate consumer interaction, while Youtube, Facebook, and Twitter measured best for advertisement. Marketers should decide which platform to use based on the content that is intended to be relayed to the user, such as Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, or others.

Furthermore, the study by Rahmadini and Halim (2018) concluded that the uprise of a brand is associated with engagement between the company and the user via social media. Applying this basis to the marketing firms, marketers can share content with their users to strengthen their engagement online and form a connection. Additionally, social media also provides many features such as commenting, liking, sharing; these different components further enhance the interaction between the

marketers and users online. Marketers are capable of using the same attributes to facilitate this engagement with their potential viewers, swaying engagement of users with their brands, just as the musicians have done with their concert attendees. The social interaction and engagement further enhance the brand's development by increasing customer devotion, as observed in the study by He, Tian, Feng-Kwei, and Wang (2019), with SYW app. The more engaged the users were through the app, the more it swayed consumer devotion to the brand. Thus, the innate feature of social interaction and engagement elicits financial gain and boosts brand popularity, all of which align with the marketer's goal of enhancing business.

Specifically, one of the most common features across all social media apps is the "like" button. (insert name of study) concluded that the majority of participants favored visually appealing and materialistic objects rather than faces when liking pictures (Sherman, et al., 2018). As participants were liking content, the neural reward circuitry was activated. With this knowledge, marketers can find ways to analyze the amount of likes they receive from posts based on what their viewers and users find interesting and appealing. They can then use this information to present content that displays materialistic items, such as food and possessions, to sway user opinion about the brand in a positive manner. In addition, they can create a connection through a form of social engagement, such as the "like" button, to explore what interests the user. The company can then adhere to these interests, providing more content that will elicit positive responses and further stimulate the reward center in the viewer, eventually gaining more attraction to the company.

Although social media use may result in negative consequences, social media allows individuals to freely express their opinion, as indicated by the study Bagaturia and Johnson (2014). 80% of individuals in this study reported that they would leave negative reviews if necessary. Marketers are still able to combat this issue by using negative feedback to understand their consumer base more thoroughly and create better social media content by maximizing the use of the critiques using the components of engagement and social interaction.

CONCLUSION

The studies introduced emphasize the potential of different social media platforms, the importance of engagement across social media in the uprise of a brand, specific features that facilitate social interaction, and the neuropsychological means behind this behavior of liking content. Since social media provides many features that impact people on a social and neuropsychological level, marketers can utilize these features embedded within social media through the strategic marketing methods to

increase brand popularity and sway consumer opinion based on the realm of engagement and social interaction.

RECOMMENDATION FOR MARKETERS

The information presented within this paper describes the value of social media for marketers and plays an important role in enhancing engagement and social interaction. In addition, to improve marketing companies' methods of employing content to their users, marketing firms can utilize information about the importance of constantly engaging users by interacting with them on a social level. This can be achieved by a brand posting content that appeals to the user, using social media features such as "liking," or other innate features that facilitate engagement and interaction online. All of these methods allow for a connection between the brand and the user. In recent years, businesses have moved away from traditional advertising mechanisms and have shifted into a platform that can be utilized by any passionate potential business owner. Overall, this shift has allowed social media to transition from an entertainment platform to a business of its own. Thus, many potential marketers can utilize the many features presented through social media to sway them into developing an interest for a product and establishing a loyal connection to the brand. With social media constantly evolving and more brands coming to fruition, further research can be conducted to determine how to better align the content that is being advertised with the specific platform utilized and the different features of each platform that will provide the maximum engagement with the user and the brand.

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