

SOCIAL MEDIA AND TOURISM

SOCIAL MEDIA - AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE PROMOTIONAL MIX

Ciprian Pavel

***Abstract:** The 21st century is witnessing an explosion of Internet-based messages transmitted through these media. They have become a major factor in influencing various aspects of consumer behavior including awareness, opinions, information acquisition, attitudes, purchase behavior, and post-purchase communication and evaluation.*

The emergence of Internet-based social media has made it possible for one person to communicate with hundreds or even thousands of other people about products and the companies that provide the products. Thus, the impact of consumer-to-consumer communications has been greatly magnified in the marketplace. So, the social media marketing has become an important part of the promotional mix of any company.

***Key words:** communication, consumer behaviour, promotional mix, social media*

Introduction

Social media marketing refers to the process of gaining website traffic or attention through social media sites.

Social media marketing programs usually center on efforts to create content that attracts attention and encourages readers to share it with their social networks. A corporate message spreads from user to user and presumably resonates because it appears to come from a trusted, third-party source, as opposed to the brand or company itself. Hence, this form of marketing is driven by word-of-mouth, meaning it results in earned media rather than paid media.

Social media is a platform that is easily accessible to anyone with internet access. Increased communication for organizations fosters brand awareness and often, improved customer service. Additionally, social media serves as a relatively inexpensive platform for organizations to implement marketing campaigns.

The Cambridge Business English Dictionary refers to social media marketing as it follows: “Methods for advertising products, services, or brands using the internet, by attracting the interest of groups of people who discuss them, make suggestions about them, etc”¹.

¹ www.dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/business-english/social-media-marketing

The “Social Web” represents the awesome “power of the collective” and we can observe the following very obvious facts regarding the social media marketing:

- “Social Media” marketing can create vast word-of-mouth advertising – the biggest
- benefit for marketers.
- Unlike traditional marketing, promoting your products and services online via social
- media does not involve interrupting – or irritating – an audience.
- You cannot control how people communicate back and forth about your products,
- service or firm, but you can influence it.
- How you present your online content is more important than what it offers.
- Effective social media marketing campaigns have firm business objectives and
- quantitative achievement metrics.
- Companies often imitate each others’ successful social media marketing strategies.
- To use the social Web, listen to your customers, competitors and other commentators.

Social networking in the world, an opportunity for marketers

To capture the level of influence that social media marketing can have, we can have a look about the figures showing how present is social networking in our lives.

According to Statistic Brain, the social network statistics on the year 2013 are²:

² www.statisticbrain.com/social-networking-statistics

Social network statistics	Data
Total number of Facebook users worldwide	1.4 Billion
Total percentage of 18-24 year olds who already use social media	98%
Total percentage of people on Earth who use Facebook	11%
Total amount of minutes people spend on Facebook every month	700 billion
Average amount of time a person uses Facebook per month	15 hours 33 minutes
Total amount of people who access Facebook with phone	250 million
Total amount of websites that have integrated with Facebook	2.5 million
Total pieces of content shared on Facebook each month	70 billion
Total amount of unique YouTube users per month	490 million
Total amount of YouTube page views per month	92 billion
Total amount hours spent on YouTube per month	2.9 billion
Average pictures uploaded to Flickr per minute	3,000
Average amount of tweets per day	190 million
Percent of teenagers who log on to Facebook over 10 times per day	22%
Percent of Facebook users under the age of 10	25%
Top ten most engaged countries for social networking	Average Hours Per Month
Israel	11.1
Argentina	10.7
Russia	10.4
Turkey	10.2
Chile	9.8
The Philippines	8.7
Colombia	8.5
Peru	8.3
Venezuela	7.9
Canada	7.7
United States	7.6

(Source: www.statisticbrain.com/social-networking-statistics)

There has been a lot of growth in social media websites lately. Many observers are following this growth quite keenly for various reasons. Some of them are looking to invest in companies. Others are looking to build a better brand awareness. In any case, here we present the five most surprising social media statistics from the year 2013.

For example the number of Facebook users is nearly three times the population of the United States³. This shows the extent of globalization that has occurred in the internet age. This also shows that companies can expand their reach and presence in international markets quite effectively by using social media. Today internet is easily accessible in most parts of the world. These new markets can be tapped by social media marketers who can directly reach out to their customers through the internet.

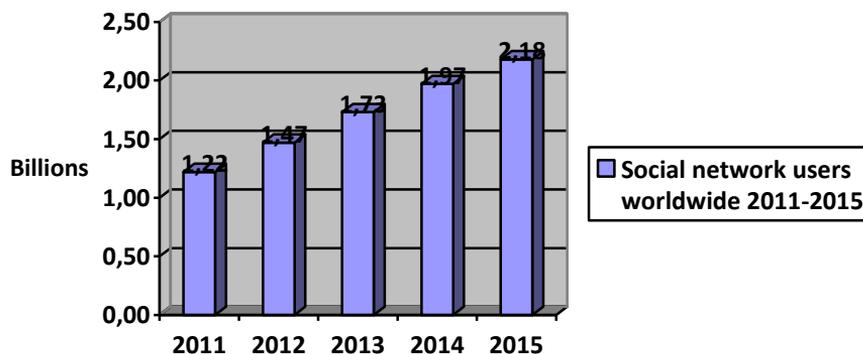
³ www.socialmediatoday.com

Over 5 million Facebook users are under the age of ten. This is a stunningly large number, which shows that young children have easy access to social media. This is a new demographic that can be tapped by social media marketers. Companies can offer discounts and prizes that are directly targeted at a young demographic. Using social media in these cases can be more effective than other media such as television or radio.

At a young age, brand loyalty is yet to be formed therefore it is the right time for marketers to target young children with their brands and promotions.

Social networking reaches nearly one in four around the world

According to a new eMarketer report, “Worldwide Social Network Users: 2013 Forecast and Comparative Estimates,” nearly one in four people worldwide will use social networks in 2013. The number of social network users around the world will rise from 1.47 billion in 2012 to 1.73 billion this year, an 18% increase. By 2015, the global social network audience will total 2.18 billion⁴.



(Source: www.emarketer.com)

According to the study the rapidly expanding social network audiences in the emerging markets of Asia-Pacific and the Middle East and Africa will be huge drivers of social user growth. Though Asia-Pacific will have the largest social network population worldwide through 2017 and the Middle East and Africa will have the second-largest audience starting next year, their population penetration rates are among the lowest.

⁴ www.emarketer.com

Through 2015, the more advanced social network markets of North America, Western Europe and Central and Eastern Europe will have the highest penetration rates worldwide. Beginning in 2016, Latin America will pass Western Europe in social network user penetration. Throughout the forecast period, Asia-Pacific's and the Middle East and Africa's penetration rates will be lower than the global figure.

Social media's role in the promotion mix

It has long been acknowledged in marketing management circles that successful IMC (Integrated Marketing Communication) strategies clearly reflect the values articulated in an organization's mission statement and contribute to the fulfillment of the organization's performance goals.

To accomplish these objectives, the elements of the promotion mix are carefully coordinated so the information transmitted to the marketplace through these elements consistently communicates a unified message that broadly reflects the organization's fundamental values⁵.

The first role of social media is consistent with the use of traditional IMC tools. That is, companies can use social media to talk to their customers through such platforms as blogs, as well as Facebook and MySpace group.

The second promotion-related role of social media is unique: customers can use it to communicate with one another. This second role of social media is enabling customers to talk to one another is an extension of traditional word-of-mouth communication.

Consumers' ability to communicate with one another limits the amount of control companies have over the content and dissemination of information.

As Christopher Vollmer and Geoffrey Precour said in their book *Always on: Advertising, Marketing and Media in an Era of Consumer Control*, "consumers are in control; they have greater access to information and greater command over media consumption than ever before"⁶.

Contemporary marketers cannot ignore the phenomenon of social media because it has rapidly become very important and very present in consumers life who are disseminating information on products and service.

⁵ Paul Gillin, *The new influencers: A marketer's guide to the new social media*, 2009.

⁶ Christopher Vollmer, Geoffrey Precour, *Always on: Advertising, Marketing and Media in an Era of Consumer Control*, 2008.

Conclusions

The new communications “issue”, requires several important changes in management’s attitudes and assumptions about IMC strategy formulation.

First, marketing managers must accept the reality that a vast amount of information about their products and services is being communicated by individual consumers to other consumers via social media forums.

Second, consumers are responding to this information in ways that directly influence all aspects of consumer behavior, from information acquisition to post-purchase expressions of satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

Third, consumers are turning away from the traditional elements of the promotion mix; in particular, they are reducing their reliance on advertising as a source of information to guide their purchase decision-making.

Finally, managers who are accustomed to exerting a high level of control over company-to-consumer messages must learn to talk with their customers, as opposed to talking at them, therefore influencing the discussions taking place in the social media space.

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NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

CIPRIAN PAVEL is lecturer at the Faculty of Management in Tourism and Commerce, Dimitrie Cantemir Christian University Timișoara. He holds a PhD. in Marketing since 2010, with a thesis entitled *Contribuții cu privire la politica de comunicare în marketingul produselor și serviciilor bancare*. He is author or coauthor of various books and articles: *Politica de comunicare în marketingul produselor și serviciilor bancare*, Editura Universității de Vest, Timișoara, 2013, *Bazele marketingului*, Editura Eurobit, Timișoara, 2011. He is a member in AGER and American Marketing Association.