SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGIES FOR ORGANIZATIONS USING INFLUENCERS' POWER

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Abstract
        Social media is a big part of our life nowadays and organizations' managers should use this fact in order to bring their products and services closer to potential customers via online social networks. Social media represents an almost free tool to simulate the word of mouth discussion on a brand, in this way the information getting to customers that would be hard to get to in other ways. The objective of this paper is to analyze the influence certain people can have in social networks and how these social network influence ranks are calculated. Social media is more than just counting likes and shares; it is about taking into consideration all components that might increase the conversion rate. In this paper, there are presented some techniques that might be used to increase the awareness for the brand, creating a powerful community around the brand's page, raise the interest of potential customers so that in the end, the sales will grow as well. Another important aspect of the influence in social networks, which is analyzed in this paper, refers to the trust that some influencers might use to promote certain brands. This trust was built usually in several years and the influencer has a considerable number of fans on the personal page, so using social media, this large amount of potential customers might be informed about some products or services, considering that with the trust the fans have in the influencer, the conversion rate will be high. The results and conclusions presented in the paper show why managers should take into consideration persons with high social networks influence ranks when planning a marketing campaign for their brands and how online influence might transform into positive business outcome.

Keywords: Social networks, influence marketing, social media management, entrepreneurship

Social media represents a great opportunity for managers to grow their customer number almost for free using the influence power of the opinion leaders. The paper presents the two-step flow of communication that fits perfectly online social media communication and shows how Cialdini's principles of influence can be applied in social networks as well.

The importance of social media has increased dramatically in the last years. In Romania it made the difference in the presidential elections and got the second favorite to convince three millions and a half citizens to vote for him, only through social media campaigns. So with almost half of the Romanian population having a Facebook account, the engagement and the conversion rate of social campaigns is higher than ever. These figures should not be ignore by managers who should realize that if they don't tread seriously their online presence on social networks and their online branding, not only that competitors will attract their customers, but they risk to become invisible for potential customers who look mostly online for information when they want to buy something.

The two-step flow of communication

Ideas and messages from mass-media are taken by influencers and transmitted forward to the population. The two-step flow of communication developed by Lazarsfeld considers that in its way to the public, the message is filtered by the influencer, which plays an intermediary role. The influencer explains the message transmitted in order to make sure will be understood by its community. The influencer is at same time innovator, because transmits in his group new information, and conservatory factor, because he is filtering the information, transmitting forward only what is needed in his group.

The two-step flow of communication has two steps in transmitting the information. The first step represents the information transmission from mass-media to the opinion leaders or to those persons that pay more attention to mass-media communications and then indirectly, from the opinion leaders to the persons that follow less the messages sent by mass-media. Usually, the opinion leaders do not just transmit the information forward, but they offer explanations for the members in their group. So, the personal influence comes between the message originally transmitted by mass-media and the reactions to that message. The personal influence can be encountered when dealing with buying a new product or service, as the opinion of close friends and family and of the opinion leaders make the difference when choosing between several companies offering similar quality. This process is defined best when talking about the adoption of innovation, when influencers are hired to recommend to their followers to try a particular product or technology.

So, with the two-step flow of communication, the messages are not transmitted directly, they are filtered by the opinion leaders, mass-media influence becoming an indirect one, passing through interpersonal relations. (DeFleur, 1999)

The main characteristics of opinion leaders are:

- Credibility- represented by the positive capital image
- Being active in relation with other groups and in his own group
- Great exposure in mass-media due to previous success

When choosing the influencer who will promote their brand in social networks managers should take into consideration the credibility of the influencer and then analyze the conversion rates off previous campaigns developed on his social network page.

Cialdini's influence principles application is social networks

Cialdini's principles can be used as starting point for marketing strategies in online social networks as influence is an important part in any marketing campaign. The six principles of persuasion mentioned by Cialdini, reciprocity, consistency, social proof, authority, scarcity and liking, if used correctly are boosting conversions in online marketing.

- Reciprocity

After a company offers quality content on a web-site or on the Facebook page, it is more likely that the follower that found useful that content to feel obligated to acquire a product or a service from that web-site or will become members of the online community (by following the Facebook page, for example) just to receive useful information later.

The conversion rate usually grows if there is quality content offered. In Inbound Marketing there are many companies offering at the beginning free quality content and then informing their clients that if they want more detailed reports they can collaborate.

Companies like Klout and HubSpot find their customers on social media among those managers who want to develop successful online marketing strategies, by choosing the influencer that best fits their needs as all these companies calculate the power of influence of different opinion leaders in a certain community.

- Consistency

This principle is encountered in online marketing as offering for free a course in PDF form and if the customer is satisfied with the quality of that free course sample will contract the services of the company. The e-mail address of a potential customer is the most valuable for the company, so it is willing to offer free samples or prizes just to obtain the contact details of interested customers.

- Social proof

The social proof principle in online social media can be proved by the number of fans/ followers in networks like Facebook or Twitter, by the number of visualization of YouTube videos or simply, by the number of likes and shares of posts.

Another way in which this principle is used is by informing potential customers about best sold products, which might convince the customers to make a decision based on the number of other customers that made the same decision in the past.

- Authority

Cialdini explains that people follow the advice of those with authority and expertise in a certain area. This is why even is a person with a high capital image tends to create more conversion, in the field they are expert in. For example, a singer can represent very well in social media platforms the interests of a Fashion Store, because the fans of that singer might want to copy its style.

- Liking

As people tend to trust more the ones who are similar to them, by giving enough details about the brand history and the team that is behind the brand, can make potential customers identify with them and grow the conversion rate.

Liking principle can be found in social networks by uploading appealing video content or by having an attracting design of the web-site.

- Scarcity

This principle is meant to show customers that offers posted on Facebook for example are valid only for a limited amount of time and that the quantity is also limited.

Department stores use this principle when promoting Black Friday offers, making customers desire to catch some product sold only in few pieces.

Conclusion

Managers should be aware of how Cialdini's persuasion principles can be applied successfully in social media marketing campaigns and of how influencers can help grow brand awareness and increase conversion rate.

The personal brand, as well as the online brand is essential when talking about influence. Online influence has three components: trust, brand and expertise. It is possible to built a brand by interacting only in one social networks but it is recommended to be active in several networks to acquire influence. Many scholars consider influence to be synonym with power, so if a power increases its influence using the principles mentioned above, automatically will have more power to attract clients towards the brand, to raise sales or share market.

This study is part of a larger PhD study and will be developed in the future.

Acknowledgment

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