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SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF PROMOTION OF SMALL BUSINESS IN THE DIGITAL SPACE

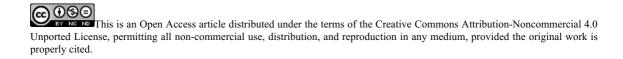O. Kulikova (a)*, O. Kolosova (b)
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Abstract

The article is about the growing importance of social networks in the development of small businesses. The purpose of the study is to develop recommendations for the small business based on the study of the social networking opportunities and the target audience. The majority of respondents considered social media marketing very important for their business. The main reason that prompted entrepreneurs to start marketing on social networks was to create a platform to increase brand awareness, because small businesses would be difficult to advertise their product using other expensive and paid promotion channels, with limited resources. The main components of the development of the social media marketing communications include: community development strategy, brand platform (this is the total set of all social media communities in which a company or brand communicates with potential customers), development of unique content, attracting a target audience, communication management, targeted advertising. The best way to increase the effectiveness of your social media marketing is to track how well you are doing your job. Track the day, time, and type of message. By tracking, you can see that some messages work better at certain times of the day and better on some days than others. The type of message also matters, and you'll probably see that messages with images work better than videos, or vice versa. When you have this information, you can post more of what works best.

Keywords: The internet, social networks, small business, a target audience, communication management, targeted advertising.

1. Introduction

The Internet is developing every day, if not every minute. Recently, the Internet was a big toy for intellectuals, but soon turned into a full-fledged source of obtaining and distributing information. The development of IT technologies is very dynamic, but society is not yet fully using all their capabilities. Just a few years ago, humanity considered the Internet only as a world library. At the moment, the main task of the Internet is to find people and organize communication with them. The results of hundreds of studies have shown that IT technologies can bring real significant profits and reduce costs to business owners (Ivankina et al., 2017).

The Internet has become as necessary as a mobile phone or Fax. Regardless of the type of activity, any organization exists within an environment that includes its Board of Directors, its investors, partners, competitors, agents, and clients. And it can be both people and organizations from other cities or countries.

In this regard, there is no doubt that the use of Internet technologies by organizations becomes simply vital if they want to survive in a competitive environment and develop further.

It is simply impossible to develop and run a small business in modern conditions without the use of new technologies. Now is the time for small businesses to start using all the opportunities provided by the Internet in order to grow with even greater speed. The main task of small businesses is to ensure a constant flow of new customers. It is necessary to ensure the maximum possible awareness of the desired target audience, in order to turn a certain number of people from this group into their customers. It is awareness of the company, its products and products that is the main reason for purchases made by people.

There are dozens of ways and channels to distribute information about their products, but it is in our time that Internet promotion is gaining special popularity, and especially promotion in social networks due to the fact that other advertising channels, such as advertising on television or in the media, are simply not affordable for most entrepreneurs. Internet technologies have made a real revolution in the field of conducting and developing business around the world. And everything has changed not only for the organizations themselves, but also for their partners and customers.

2. Problem Statement

The model of communication between the firm and the outside world has changed in general. With each year of the development of the Internet there were various new business models which earlier simply did not exist, and already existing. These changes were fundamental (Starovoit, 2015).

As we understand it, one of the best ways for any company to show itself to potential customers is to directly demonstrate their products and services. You will no longer be interested in potential customers, just by placing ads or creating a multi-page site. Although just a few years ago it worked and worked effectively. Now the trend of the small business promotion is the promotion in the social networks. The relevance of the topic is confirmed by the fact that the budgets of advertisers in 2019 spent on Internet promotion for the first time exceeded the budgets spent on advertising on television. Moreover, the audience of social networks already exceeds the audience of the largest TV channels.

3. Research Questions

Research Questions:

- To explore the model of promotion of the small business in the social networks;
- Conduct a socio-psychological analysis of the small business promotion on the Internet;
- Analyze the usage of the small business promotion in the social networks.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to develop recommendations for the small business based on the study of the social networking opportunities and the target audience.

- Learn how small business owners feel about social media promotion;
- Learn what social networks they use in their work;
- Examine how they measure the performance of advertising campaigns in the social media.

5. Research Methods

Research methods:

- Theoretical (analysis and synthesis of literary sources on the studied problem);
- Empirical (survey method, focus group method);
- Statistical processing of the results of an empirical study.

The focus group was attended by 13 people, small business owners from different industries. Questions of the main text of the questionnaire were compiled, based on their responses, which made it possible to obtain more representative data.

A survey methodology was developed for the study. The collection of the information for the study was made with its help. The survey was created on an online platform. This allows you to quickly get tables and charts for the further analysis. In total, 150 entrepreneurs took part in the study.

6. Findings

6.1. The main characteristics of the model of the promotion of the small business in the social networks

The development of information technology and society leads to the emergence of a large number of goods and services. Small business owners have to use new technologies, marketing tools and non-standard approaches to mass communications to increase their results of the commercial activity.

Recently, social networks have become a new platform for advertising activities, with the help of which you can achieve certain goals, for example, to attract a target audience, create a platform for customer feedback, etc.

However, at the moment, many companies feel a lack of theoretical material, analysis of practical experience in this field. Today, the social media market has thousands of sites, but all social networks can be classified by their purpose:

- Mass social networks - designed for any Internet user, where there is communication on any topic, for example: Vkontakte, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.;
- Theme social networks - have a certain directionality of communication among users with the same interests, professions, etc. (Professionali.ru, Linkedin, etc.);
- Photo hosting, video hosting, social networks with geo-positioning function-designed for communication through commenting photos, videos, location, etc. (YouTube, Instaqram, Foursquare, etc.).

However, all social networks share some common features that distinguish them from other means of network communication (blogs, forums, chats). These specific features are important for identifying opportunities to use social networks as a tool for marketing communications.

In the social media, any company has the opportunity to explore the target audience, make friends with them, answer any questions, consult, and, with the right approach, eliminate the negative.

This leads to an increase in the number of the loyal customers. Promotion itself is a process that targets advertising by creating specific communities to which target consumers subscribe.

Promotion in the social networks allows you to put forward a new product, goods or service to the market, express its key features, and increase brand awareness.

The main components of the development of the social media marketing communications include: community development strategy, brand platform (this is the total set of all social media communities in which a company or brand communicates with potential customers), development of unique content, attracting a target audience, communication management, targeted advertising.

6.2. The results from the focus group

Respondents were asked whether they use social networks for business. 8 out of 13 answered "Yes". In the future, this question will be included in the main questionnaire of the study. We asked the respondents which social networks they mostly spend their time on. Most of them said that they use mainly Facebook and Vkontakte in their work. In this case, the question was asked, do they answer their clients ' questions asked by them in comments or messages? The focus group participants noted that they always try to respond as much as possible. In addition, some participants noted that they are skeptical about running social media advertising campaigns for their business, believing that this marketing channel does not fit their industry. So, with the help of a focus group, we were able to find out how and what social networks are used by small business owners and establish their attitude to the promotion in the social networks.

6.3. Analysis and interpretation of the results of an empirical study of small business promotion in the digital space on the example of social networks

Table 01. Use of the social networks by the business owners

Use of the social networks by the business owners		Number of respondents	Percent
Options	yes	57	38%
	no	93	62%
	in total	150	100%

Source: authors.

Among the 150 online respondents, 57 do not use social media for business, and 93 use social media for their organizations (Table 01).

Table 02. Types of businesses that use social networks

Business type		Number of respondents	Percent
Options	Client business	72	44
	Distributorship	12	12
	Production	15	10
	Retail	51	34
	in total	150	100%

Source: authors.

The results of the survey show that among 150 respondents, 72 belong to the client type of business, 51 - to retail, etc. These data indicate that the use of social networks is the maximum in the service sector and the minimum in distribution (Table 02).

Table 03. The use of the tools of engagement

№	Social network	Yes	No	In total
1	Facebook	86	7	93
2	Twitter	48	45	93
3	Youtube	31	62	93
4	Vkontakte	45	48	93
5	Classmates	31	62	93
6	Others	22	71	93

Source: authors.

Table 04. Initial investment in SMM

Initial investment		Number of respondents	Percent
Options	0-5 thousand rubles	58	62.4%
	5-20 thousand rubles	9	9.7%
	20-50 thousand rubles	6	6.4%
	starting from 50 thousand rubles	20	21.5%
	in total	93	100%

Source: authors.

The results of the survey show that 58 respondents made initial investments in the amount of 0 to 5 thousand rubles, and 20 respondents invested from 50 thousand rubles (Table 03, 04).

Table 05. The reasons for using social networks

The reasons for using social networks		Number of respondents	Percent
Options	Brand building	3	3.2%
	Customer service	9	9.7%
	Generating leads	10	10.8%
	Delivering company news to customers	64	68.8%
	Research	7	7.5%
	in total	93	100%

Source: authors.

The survey results show that 64 respondents use social networks for branding and 10 respondents for generating leads (Table 05).

Table 06. The use of other channels of the Internet marketing in addition to social networking

The use of other channels		Number of respondents	Percent
Options	No	45	48.4%
	Yes	48	51.6%
	in total	93	100%

Source: authors.

The survey results show that 45 out of 64 respondents do not use other media, and 48 out of 64 use other media that complement social networks, which shows that almost 50% of respondents use traditional media together with social media (Table 06).

Table 07. Using social networks for advertising campaigns

Advertising campaigns in social network		Number of respondents	Percent
Options	No	48	51.6%
	Yes	45	48.4%
	in total	93	100%

Source: authors.

The results of the survey show that about 52% of respondents did not use social networks as a platform for advertising campaigns (Table 07).

Table 08. Frequency of publications in social networks

Update frequency		Number of respondents	Percent
Options	1 post in 1-2 days	33	35.5%
	1 post per day	41	44.1%
	2-3 posts per day	9	9.7%
	more than 3 posts per day	10	10.7%
	in total	93	100%

Source: authors.

The results of the survey show that 41 respondents post updates every day, and about 33 respondents post them for 1-2 days, indicating that people regularly connect to social networks to learn more about the community audience, to respond to comments and messages (Table 08).

Table 09. Revenue growth due to the use of social networks

Revenue growth		Number of respondents	Percent
Options	Not notice	36	38.7%
	On 10%	26	27.9%
	Above 25%	25	26.9%
	Above 50%	6	6.5%
	in total	93	100%

Source: authors.

The survey results show that 36 respondents did not notice an increase in revenue, and 25 respondents noted that business revenue increased by 25%, indicating that it is not possible to say that social networks are guaranteed to lead to an increase in revenue or profits (Table 09).

Table 10. Benefits of using social networks for small businesses

Benefits of using social networks for small businesses		Number of respondents	Percent
Options	May be	32	34.4%
	No	6	6.4%
	Yes	55	59.2%
	In total	93	100%

Source: authors.

The survey results show that 55 people found social media useful, and only 6 respondents denied it, indicating that the majority believe that social media benefits their business, although the actual reasons are difficult to assess (Table 10).

Table 11. Measuring success in SMM

Measuring success		Number of respondents	Percent
Options	Brand visibility	13	14%
	Improving the reputation	3	3.3%
	Generating leads	7	7.5%
	Sales	36	38.7%
	Likes, reposts, comments	34	36.5%
	in total	93	100%

Source: authors.

The above Table 11 shows that 36 respondents consider increasing sales as a measure of success in social media marketing. 34 respondents speak about likes and comments.

Social media has reached such a stage of development that marketers no longer ask whether it should be part of their marketing plan or not. Many companies simply start creating accounts and releasing content without a specific goal or plan, instead of exploring the best ways to engage in social media and / or reach out to an experienced person in the marketplace.

An important part of an effective marketing plan to promote small businesses in social networks is to resolve the following issues:

1. The message of a brand recognized on the Internet;

2. Positioning and detaching from competitors;

3. Integrate social media into other marketing campaign (Yang, Huang, Li, Liu, & Hu, 2017).

The following ideas can help you achieve your desired success:

1. Due to the fact that the share of mobile traffic is ahead of desktops, it is necessary to provide mobile layout of the company's website;

2. Micro and small business owners need to understand their needs or seek help from expertise to better improve business results, to save time and help achieve online success - it all starts with a small budget;

3. Micro and small businesses must provide some additional services, such as online shopping, booking, or electronic invoicing, and lead to e-Commerce;

4. Presence on Facebook and other social networks, such as Vkontakte, Twitter, etc., is highly recommended for micro and small businesses to raise awareness of potential customers, create and consolidation personal relationships with current and potential customers (Sidyak, 2015);

5. The effect will increase if other forms of Internet marketing are used in addition to social media marketing;

6. The most important thing in social networks is that you are not alone here! Social media is not a monologue in which you tell the world about the rewards you have received, or about special offers for your products and services. This is an opportunity for you to make meaningful connections with people who have helped you and supported you in business (Syrkina, 2015);

7. Planning your actions in social networks will allow you to publish regularly and get high results;

8. Attention is not so easy to get on social networks, so be sure to add photos and videos to your social content. This will increase interest and is ideal for companies that can boast of products. If you work in the service industry, post a photo with words or a photo that supplementing your text. And don't forget about visually-oriented platforms like Instagram and Pinterest (Stokes, 2017);

9. You don't need to be an experienced marketer to make your advertising campaign successful on social networks. If you don't have a team managing your social ads, or you can't spend a lot of time experimenting with free promotion methods, you may end up spending a lot of money on paid advertising. You use organic posts to determine which ads you should spend money on. The best part is that you can target specific users in many of the social platform's ad managers. For example, let's say your goal is traffic to your site, and you've identified the most effective entry. You can create an audience that is likely to also like this post. This may be a similar audience that is similar to your site visitors. Or maybe it's an audience that has shown interest in your competitors. It can also be an audience based on demographic data such as location, age, or mobile device type. You can then exclude traffic to your site to exclude people who are already familiar with your brand (Sharma, 2019);

10. Be yourself. Think for a second about the brands you follow on social media ... What makes them special? What makes you follow them? There's probably something special about the content they post, or the way they post it. They have an identity, not just brand robots that distribute content;

11. Social media is about spreading value, like any other type of content marketing. Make sure that you provide valuable content to your audience at least 3-4 times a week and change the type of content you publish. Entertainment: post things that your audience finds interesting or fun. These posts are designed to connect with your audience and keep them interested. Special offers: publish information about discounts and coupons that you make available only to your subscribers. Events and news: keep your subscribers up to date with what's happening with your business. Did they write an article about you? Write a post about it. Did you get a reward? Let your subscribers know! (Sernovitz, 2016);

12. Consistency is key when it comes to the social media. The more often you post quality content, the more likely you are to continue to expand your audience and keep it interested;

13. The best way to increase the effectiveness of your social media marketing is to track how well you are doing your job. Track the day, time, and type of message. By tracking, you can see that some messages work better at certain times of the day and better on some days than others. The type of message also matters, and you'll probably see that messages with images work better than videos, or vice versa. When you have this information, you can post more of what works best (Whitaker, Stevelink, & Fear, 2017);

14. Every social networking site is a great place to share information about your business. But here's the secret - you're not the only one who talks about you. Other people, too. Take some time to track the reputation of your business, while studying various social sites. Look for what people say about you. If the feedback is positive, take the time to Express your gratitude for what people are saying and promise to continue working in the same spirit. If the feedback is negative, listen to constructive criticism and try to solve the client's problem (Pourkhania, Abdipoura, Bahera, & Moslehpoura, 2019).

7. Conclusion

1. The level of social media awareness is certainly very high among small business owners. As it turned out, almost 70% of respondents use social networks for their business;

2. On the other hand, almost 30% of respondents still do not use social networks and, consequently, miss a great opportunity to attract potential customers;

3. Many respondents believe that their customer base does not use social networks or is not suitable for their type of business. In fact, this view was supported by 30% of respondents in a recent survey that mostly included distributors and manufacturers;

4. The majority of respondents considered social media marketing very important for their business;

5. The main reason that prompted entrepreneurs to start marketing on social networks was to create a platform to increase brand awareness, because small businesses would be difficult to advertise their product using other expensive and paid promotion channels, with limited resources;

6. Most respondents said they did not measure changes in income levels after they started using social media as a marketing tool.

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