THE IMPORTANCE OF POSITIVE INFLUENCING IN SMM

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This paper deals with the term SMM, describes its origin and development. The focus is made on the analysis of the connection between the usage of influencing in SMM strategies and audience's reaction.

The debut of SMM

The attempt to form a digitized society with new means of communication as well as values and points of view was made in the 1990s when the first social media platforms were launched. The Palace – the prototype of modern Zoom – was introduced in 1994 and allowed users to interact with one another on a graphical chat room server. The first true social networking website Six Degrees was launched in 1997 and allowed users to create profiles and add "friends". Moveon.org was opened in the following year and in contrast to others it was designed to promote internet activism like fundraising. Blogging sites began to appear just before the start of the twenty-first century. The appearing of LiveJournal in 1999 built a space where users could create large groups, promote and share opinions. Even though the first social media platforms closed relatively soon after their release and the whole industry seemed unpromising, technology development has brought a huge change.

The history of creation of advertisement-financed social networking platforms started with the website LunarStorm which was launched in 2000. In the beginning, the company was financed by clickable banners and other advertising on the website and soon evolved to include more of pay-by-SMS services. Through the years the Swedish social site grew to 1,2 millions of users 70% of which were teenagers aged between 12 and 17 [1]. This impressing fact reflected a new tendency to that time: the social network has gained enormous popularity as a new means of communication among youngsters. LunarStorm disappeared in 2007 but its contribution to market development couldn't be neglected.

New digital platforms adopted LunarStorm's strategy and took it to the next level. New era of social networking started to thrive as different ad-financed social applications like Linkedin, WordPress, Youtube, Facebook appeared in the years 2003-2005. Social media platforms were used not only to generate traffic but to conduct researches with the help of built-in data analytics tools, enabling marketers to track the progress of ad campaigns in order to apply changes to boost their effectiveness. Social media platforms have also been used as communicating channels targeting very specific audiences with influencers as effective customer engagement tools. Today's professional social media marketing can cost up to $20 thousand per month depending on the experience level of the social media management agency you hire, the size of your business, the channels you use, the objectives you have, etc. [2] Given that new social media platforms continue to appear (TikTok, Likee, Clubhouse), SMM is a great business which cannot exist without advertisements.

SMM in action

More than 4 billion people use social media every day. According to Hootsuite, 52% of online brand discovery happens on social platforms, but this couldn't be possible without different tools they provide. For instance, Instagram Stories are actively used for advertising. To put things in perspective, let's take a look at some impressive statistics by 2022 [3]:

500 million accounts use Instagram Stories daily.

Ad reach of the total population 13+ for Instagram – 25,6%.

58% of users say they're more interested in a brand after seeing it in a Story.

Share of Instagram's advertising female audience of total female audience – 48%.

Instagram Stories generate a quarter of the platform's ad revenues and almost $16 billion in global net ad revenues.

But what makes advertising in Stories so effective? The answer is the influencers. According to the dictionary, an influencer exerts influence; a person who inspires or guides the actions of others. In terms of marketing, an influencer is someone who is able to generate interest in something by posting about it in

social media. According to Edelman's 2019 Trust Barometer Special Report [4], respondents trusted influencers over brands, rating relatability twice as important as popularity as a quality that attracted them to influencers. In particular, younger consumers – millennials and generation z – are interested in authenticity. In Russia, about 53% of consumers trust what influencers say about brands much more than what brands say about themselves in their advertising [5]. Influencer marketing has already got brands shifting their focus from working with macro-influencers – those with hundreds of thousands to millions of followers and who charge vast fees – to micro-influencers with 10,000 to 100,000 followers in the search for authenticity and "person like you" word-of-mouth seal of approval. The basics of people trusting people like them is still powerful. Companies and brands that thoughtfully integrate citizen-influencers in their marketing activity and care about societal causes by taking action will gain trust and do well.

Need for positive impact of influencing

Everyone's an influencer, no matter how big or small the number of followers is reached, and this concept was successfully adopted and used by Dove in its recent advertising campaign. Dove used real people and its loyal customers for the commercials and this tactic received a positive response from the audience. Taking this into account, Dove's marketers came up with the idea of a new campaign. It was called «Beauty without filters» (rus. "За красоту без фильтров") and it included a marathon on Instagram. Everyone had a chance to participate and stand against filters in a simple form of a publication. Another selfie with the hashtag of a campaign seems to be useless but actually it is a voice of sobriety among digital intoxication. The objective was to make an attempt to break the beauty stereotypes that are portrayed in the media and to create a more inclusive version of beauty which is displayed on people's screens.

There is an increased amount of people who due to their status of icons or influencers speak out messages in order to take advantage of the gullible followers. Modern consumers are often facing brands' so-called trust washing – all talk and no action. On that, 56% said they felt that too many brands use societal issues as a marketing ploy to sell more of their products [4]. Notorious example of famous brand that used trust washing as a strategy to raise its popularity is Victoria Secret. Its marketing chief made controversial comments about transgender and plus-sized models. His comments sparked an outcry online, and critics called for his resignation. As the scandal was heating up, Victoria Secret started to lose people's approval and financial support. In response to that brand turned completely around and hired such models. People assumed this action hypocritical and didn't fall for this ploy. Brand reputation was lost.

These examples reflect a new trend: consumers are starting to vote with their wallets by walking away from brands that do not promote their values. Some consumers across all markets, ages, and income brackets expect to be able to trust the brand to do what is right, saying it is a key factor in their purchase decision.

Creating win-win relationships

Companies have a moral and ethical obligation to do good for society and in the communities they operate in. Progressive ones have made Corporate Shared Value and Social Responsibility a strategic focus, and successful business leaders know it enhances the competitive position of their company and advances the society in which they operate. This strategy helps to establish long-lasting win-win relationships between all market participants: businesses, consumers, investors, employees and employers, etc.

Consumers nowadays prefer the companies that support the beliefs they care about. Consumer activism is gaining popularity; consumers use social media to voice their opinions, boycott brands with irresponsible business practices, and encourage others to do so.

Investors are worried about sustainability and social issues; they are more concerned with how their investments are being put to use these days. Companies with strong social and environmental protection values are likely to have a high degree of transparency; those that don't are considered poor investments and more likely to be left behind, and as a result perform poorly.

Employees perform better on the job when they are also engaged in social causes on behalf of their employer. It boosts morale and loyalty, drives better engagement, and improves employee retention – all critical factors that enhance a company's business efficiency.

In conclusion, social media marketing is a global digitized process of advertising that doesn't exist only on screens but actually it's in people's minds too. The potential to encourage positive action in others is far more powerful than just promoting a product or service. This is because when people encourage positive action – to promote healthy, social, or environmentally friendly behavior in others – it comes from a good place, with good intentions, and can be felt by the audience.

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