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Eight social media challenges for marketing managers



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Abstract Consumers increasingly use social media for a variety of consumption-related tasks such as complaining about a brand or sharing purchase experiences. Social media growth represents an opportunity for business based on information sharing, but also complicates the work of marketing managers who need to be ready to deal with current issues in this field. This article highlights eight areas within social media marketing that create difficult challenges for marketing practitioners. Based on practitioner reports and academic findings about online social networks, we preview emerging threats and opportunities derived from changes in consumers' behavior and from changes in business models as well. In addition to discussing each challenge, we pose research questions for marketing academics in order to inspire broader research and better understanding of this evolving field.

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PALABRAS CLAVE

Medios sociales;
Práctica del
Marketing;
Comportamiento del
cliente;
Compromiso

Ocho retos de los medios sociales para los Directores de Marketing

Resumen Los consumidores utilizan cada vez con más frecuencia los medios sociales para diversas tareas relativas al consumo, tales como las quejas acerca de una marca, o el intercambio de experiencias sobre compras. El crecimiento de los medios sociales representa una oportunidad de negocio basada en el intercambio de información, aunque también complica el trabajo a los Directores de Marketing, quienes necesitan estar preparados para manejar las cuestiones corrientes en este campo. Este artículo destaca ocho áreas pertenecientes al marketing de los medios sociales, que crean retos difíciles a las personas que se dedican al marketing. Basándonos en los informes de estos últimos, y en los hallazgos académicos en relación a las

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redes sociales online, prevemos amenazas y oportunidades emergentes derivadas de los cambios de los comportamientos de los consumidores y de los cambios de los modelos de negocio. Además de tratar cada reto, planteamos cuestiones sobre investigación a los académicos de marketing, a fin de inspirar un análisis más amplio y una mejor comprensión de este campo en evolución. © 2016 ESIC & AEMARK. Publicado por Elsevier España, S.L.U. Este es un artículo Open Access bajo la licencia CC BY-NC-ND (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Social media remain in continuous growth and by some accounts have become the main channel for costumers to experience and interact with the world. To help attain their goals, people join general or more specialized networks and search, share, participate, consume and play (Bolton et al., 2013).

The social media phenomenon could be approached from several perspectives. First, from sociology or anthropology, networks favor interaction between people all around the world. Facebook and YouTube reached more than 1000 million users, as presented in Fig. 1. That means that more than one third of all Internet users in the world, and more than one sixth of the global population, are active members of such networks. Second, from an economic approach, social media have an important value for the firms that own them, although often users do not pay for these services. The recent acquisition of LinkedIn by Microsoft for 26,200 million US\$ (more than 102 US\$ per user), is an example of the potential value and high rivalry in the social media domain. Corporation's strategic mergers and acquisitions to gather clients, such as Facebook purchase of Instagram and WhatsApp, reveal how important is for companies to lead this digital evolution.

Third, from a marketing approach, social media function as a marketplace in which both buyers and sellers exist (Yadav, De Valck, Hennig-Thurau, Hoffman, & Spann, 2013), along with various exchange facilitators (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), all interacting with each other in complex ways (Hennig-Thurau, Hofacker, & Bloching, 2013). The growth of social media and its information and technology base are thought to represent a great opportunity – and threat – for companies. Currently, firms have the chance to generate innovative business models and to extend customer relationships through social media. However, the rise

of social media has also generated a number of difficult challenges for marketing managers.

Previous research has outlined some of these challenges. In an important article, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) presented a classification of social media based on the level of social media richness (from static blogs to virtual social worlds or games such as Second Life) and self-disclosure (from anonymous content collaborative projects such as Wikipedia to personal presentations in social networking sites such as Facebook). They also suggested that companies choose their social media platforms carefully, develop their own applications when necessary, involve employees, and integrate or align their online activity. They recommended that companies be active, interesting, humble, unprofessional and honest in their social media activity (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

From an internal focus, qualitative research has been often employed to describe social media use in organizations as a balance between openness, strategy and management (e.g. Macnamara & Zeffass, 2012). Focusing on managers' use of social media, Rydén, Ringberg, and Wilke (2015) interviewed managers and identified four kinds of mental models (1) business to customers with a transactional focus to promote and sell, (2) business from customers with an informational focus to listen and learn, (3) business with customers with a relational focus to connect and collaborate, and (4) business for customers with a communal focus to empower and engage customers.

Focusing on Spanish retailers, Lorenzo Romero, Constantinides, and Alarcón del Amo (2013) found that firms demand greater employee abilities to manage online interactive tools. Social media use highly depends on firms' size, with large companies using social primarily for branding and small companies using it for customer service (Lorenzo Romero et al., 2013).

Taking a broader perspective, in this article we discuss a set of eight social media challenges for marketing managers. These eight challenges are connected to previous research but extend and update the literature by considering the latest academic findings and current marketing practice in industry. A related goal is to provide new research questions for marketing theorists. In this way to we hope to advance the understanding and management of marketing in social media.

Challenge 1: The liquification of the economy

Much of the value produced by the world economy shifted from agriculture to manufacturing in the 19th century, from manufacturing to service in the 20th century, and from

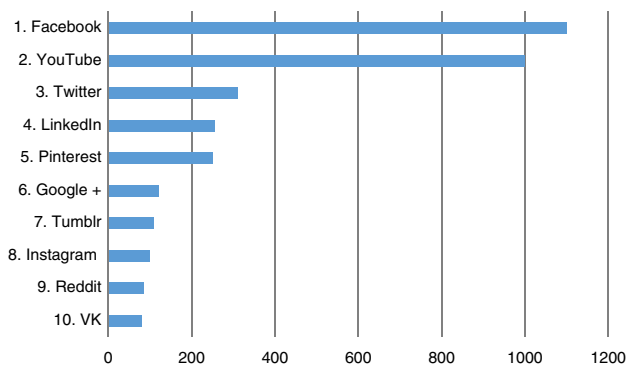


Figure 1 Top 10 social network sites in million users.

Source: Own elaboration based on data from eBiz MBA (2016).

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