

A Debate on the Role of Social Media in Business Communication

Raluca CODREAN

Abstract: *People's interest in social networks has been increasing steadily in recent years, influencing people of all ages. In the era of technology, everyone is connected to these platforms, whether they are used for personal or professional needs. Instagram is one of the most popular social media platforms for people who want to market and promote their enterprises in this social environment. As a result, the platform on which I focused in my research is self-evident. Since 2016, when business accounts were launched, Instagram has provided the possibility of creating extremely effective online promotions, using modern and easy-to-use tools and technologies, in order to help a brand to become known to as many people as possible, to acquire and keep customers, as well as to increase sales. The purpose of this article is to highlight the importance and usefulness of the Instagram platform itself, as well as of all the tools that are available for users and that help them in identifying and achieving the biggest and finest advantages that can be obtained from a well-developed marketing strategy. In particular, the goal of this article is to highlight how crucial and easy it is to promote a business through Instagram.*

Keywords: *social media, online communication, marketing strategy, Instagram, entrepreneurship, promoting business, marketing tools.*

1. Introduction

Nowadays, social media plays a significant role in almost every aspect of people's lives. Whether you are looking for a career, running a business, keeping in touch with friends and family, seeking inspiration and motivation, learning new skills or developing others, social networks are there to help. They have changed people's daily lives and have boosted efficiency in communication, making it easier and faster than ever before. Then they added the additional features that have revolutionized social media and have transformed it into what we know and use today.

Several definitions have been assigned to social networks and to the concept of communication, with relevance to many domains, such as public relations and the media. In my opinion, those who have managed to highlight the importance of this concept and to define it as clearly as possible are Iacopo Casadei and Andrea Bilotto (2016), who argue that social networks "are a group of online applications that grow on the ideological and technological foundations of WEB 2.0 and allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content". Thus, today, "users turn from consumers to content creators."

The connection between social networks and promoting a business is very simple. As users of social platforms spend a lot of time watching and searching for online content (studies show that users spend an average of 2 hours and 24 minutes on social media), specialists and entrepreneurs running a business saw an opportunity to promote products and services through them. According to a Sherpa Marketing survey, more people follow businesses on social media than celebrities, with 80% of Instagram users following at least one business.

Therefore, e-commerce has recently become the largest online shopping platform, which helps not only shoppers to buy, but also sellers to sell their products and services. Businesses have grown thanks to online marketing and social networking sites, because people use them frequently and for long periods, as well as because they are constantly expanding - day by day, new features are added that can help

people in ways they have never imagined and, of course, because the information is "delivered" much faster and to a larger audience.

Instagram is the platform that introduced the business account option in 2016, with the goal of assisting businesses in making their products known to a large audience more quickly and easily, utilizing resources that this platform makes available to everyone. The platform has become efficient for online promotion in a very short period as it is appreciated by everyone and is easy to use, as well as because it can deliver noticeable results in a fairly short time. The studies published in existing specialist publications, as well as the research studies that I have conducted using two distinct methodological approaches, demonstrate the growing user preference for this application and the experience derived from following a brand. I was also able to obtain the perspective of an entrepreneur who promotes her business mostly through Instagram.

2. Research methods

Two research methods were used to determine the importance and effectiveness of Instagram in terms of promoting brands, products and services: a survey entitled "Expectations from brands promoted through Instagram" and an interview with a young entrepreneur who explained to me how Instagram had helped her expand her business through a rather difficult year (2020).

When it comes to gathering information and impressions from as many people as possible, the questionnaire is one of the greatest research approaches. Therefore, the survey was administered, using the Isondeje.ro platform, to 80 active Internet users aged between 18 and 33. According to their answers, most of them use Instagram as the main platform for communication, education and entertainment.

Some of the questions in the survey were taken from a similar study by Ahmadinejad, B. and Najafi Asli, H. (2017), entitled *E-business through social media: a Quantitative Survey (Case Study: Instagram)*, which

allowed me to compare their answers to mine in order to see how much people's perception of Instagram and its business side has changed.

Regarding the interview, I had the chance to talk to Ms. Adriana Popescu, who is the founder of a candle business called "Iz de poveste" (which translates as "the whiff of a story" in English). We talked about the strategies she uses to promote her business, what made her start this business, the risks that came with the launch, her daily tasks as a business owner, as well as about entrepreneurial abilities and her future goals.

3. Results

The findings derived from the two research methods used reveal the importance of Instagram to online promotion and users' appreciation of brands that employ this way of promotion.

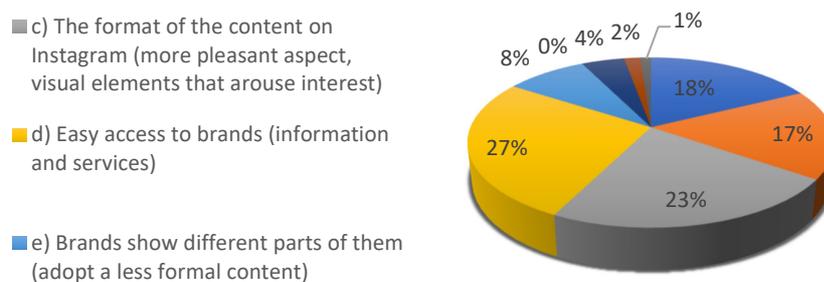
Thus, based on the results, the majority of the 80 people who took the survey are Instagram users, both for personal use (posting photos, communicating with friends) and for more advanced use - if we may call it like that (collecting information provided by specialists in innovative ways or even browsing product and service catalogues, which frequently leads to purchase). As shown in Figure 1, most respondents follow more than five Instagram pages of their favourite businesses in the fields of fashion, sports and entertainment; they follow and analyse their postings, participate in giveaways or leave feedback on the products purchased.

Fig. 1 How many brand pages do you follow on your personal Instagram account?



A quite interesting question in the survey (provided in Figure 2) concerns the things people perceive as the best about following a brand on Instagram. The results shown in Figure 2 reveal that, from the several answer options, the one that ranks first is the ease of access to information and services, everything being a click away. Next comes the appearance of the posts, the visual elements that arouse interest and curiosity, followed by the friendliness of the brand.

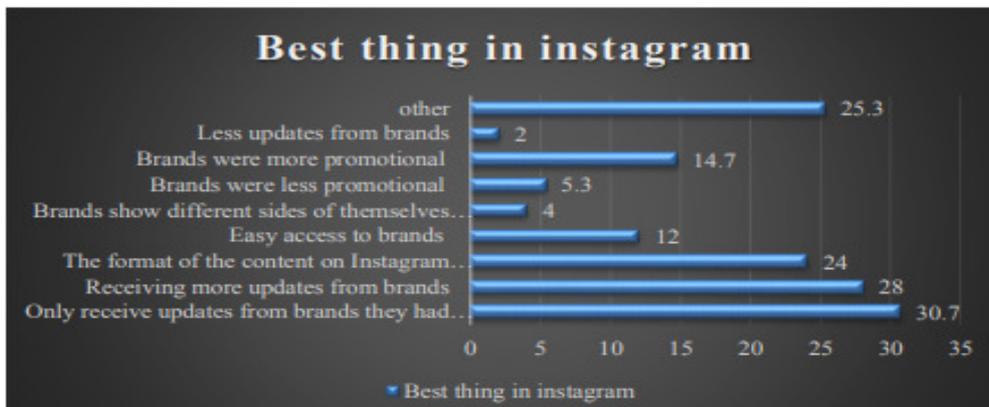
Fig. 2 What do you think are the best things about following a brand on Instagram?



With all these factors, a strong bond may be formed between the customer and the brand, which can enhance brand loyalty.

Figure 3 illustrates the findings of the 2017 study conducted by Ahmadinejad and Najafi Asli, which differ slightly from the results of my 2021 survey. The best thing about following a brand on Instagram in 2017 was that users only got information from the brands they chose to follow (now, users get ads from brands similar to those they already follow), followed by the constant updates (which still happens today, because there is a strategy concerning posts, which companies must follow to expand the business and get sales), and by maintaining a visually appealing format (which is also essential today). Let us not forget that Instagram first appeared as a photo-sharing network, where users could post photos and experiment with the filters provided by the platform so as to create unique and aesthetically appealing content.

Fig. 3 What do you think are the best things about following a brand on Instagram?
(2017)



Turning our attention to the interview with Adriana, she confessed that she launched her business in 2020, during the pandemic, out of the desire to share her passion with people and to help them feel more relaxed during these stressful times. Several topics were discussed throughout the interview, but those in the field of social media served to highlight the major points of this research. Having over 7 years of experience in influencer marketing, Adriana told me that promoting her business by involving the target audience and by making use of secrets is the best approach for her to expand her brand. Thanks to her seven-year experience, she knows which influencers are excellent to cooperate with in order to reach the target audience and enhance sales. The influencers she collaborates with include Ioana Grama, Laura Giurcanu, Alina Gologan, Ramona Olaru and Cudeea.

Adriana never ceases to promote the products she creates. She uses Instagram as the main promotion tool, but also Facebook, where she relies on both organic and paid social media marketing to increase the number of page visits, and hence, the number of users who can turn into potential clients. Analyzing her business profile, I have noticed that she follows all the necessary steps emphasized in specialized studies on how to promote a brand on Instagram: attention to details, establishing a theme, consistent posts, posting when traffic on the platform is quite

high, using her brand hashtag as well as defining Instagram's "store" section. All these points, followed rigorously, contribute to Adriana's success and open up new marketing opportunities, such as a stand at Carturesti Bookshop and at Alist Designers Boutique, as well as participating in Romanian handmade craft fairs.

Conclusion

By writing this article and doing this research, I was able to understand how important it is to use Instagram (an extremely popular platform, especially among young people) in promoting businesses online, as well as why all business owners should turn to this simple and effective method of promoting their products and services. I was also able to observe how much social media influences the way in which people purchase, as well as how their purchase habits might be impacted.

Based on the present study, I can say that Instagram has successfully combined personal life with brand marketing on an unprecedented scale. Businesses can have many benefits from using this platform, which is why its implementation has become part of business practice.

In terms of doing business on Instagram, this area is continually expanding, and I would not be surprised to see that every single business will have an Instagram account in the future.

The world is changing, and so is technology. Everything is in a constant state of evolution and development, which I am eager to witness.

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