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The rise of social media marketing: How an entire industry has transformed

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THE RISE OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING:
HOW AN ENTIRE INDUSTRY HAS TRANSFORMED

A Thesis Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Designation

University Honors

Ryan Steven Doser

University of Northern Iowa

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University Honors

_____   _____
Date   Matthew Wilson, Honors Thesis Advisor

_____   _____
Date   Dr. Jessica Moon, Director, University Honors Program

Purpose

With social media continuing to play an integral role in our daily lives, being a marketing major and interning for a digital marketing agency, I have real world experience with social media marketing and have expanded on that knowledge through thesis research. There are three main accomplishments I plan to take away from the thesis after completion. The first is to incorporate the social media marketing knowledge I have developed through this process into my future career. Secondly, providing this information and data for readers is important, as social media continues to evolve and become more prevalent in the business world. The final accomplishment to take away is to help separate myself from job competition in a competitive industry. Showcasing a thesis on my portfolio will be a beneficial project to show employers.

Introduction

This thesis focuses on social media from its initial roots to the massive impacts it has made on the advertising industry today. With that in mind, the main research question to explore is "how has the social media industry transformed over time?" In order to answer this, I evaluated key sources through online research and incorporated my own personal work experiences. The overall intent of this project is to evaluate three important central themes: the history of social media, today's dominant platforms & marketing practices, and future implications of social media marketing.

The research method used throughout this thesis project was analytical and foresightful. Extensive research has been focused on past and current social media marketing trends, in addition to future implications. Idea generation, utilizing credible resources, meeting deadlines, showcasing graphs/statistics, and making necessary revisions has all helped me work towards a

final product. When researching and continually generating ideas for my project, it has been

critical to find insightful and industry trusted sources to ensure success for my thesis.

Literature Review and Analysis

Social media plays an integral role in today's digital world, not only in the advertising

field, but in the midst of society. As seen in Figure One from Statista, "from 2008 to 2017 the

percentage of the U.S. population who currently uses any social media has increased by 57

percent, accounting for a total of 81 percent of the entire U.S. population. The number of

worldwide social media users has reached 2.34 billion, and is expected to hit 2.95 billion by

2020" ("Percentage of U.S. Population").
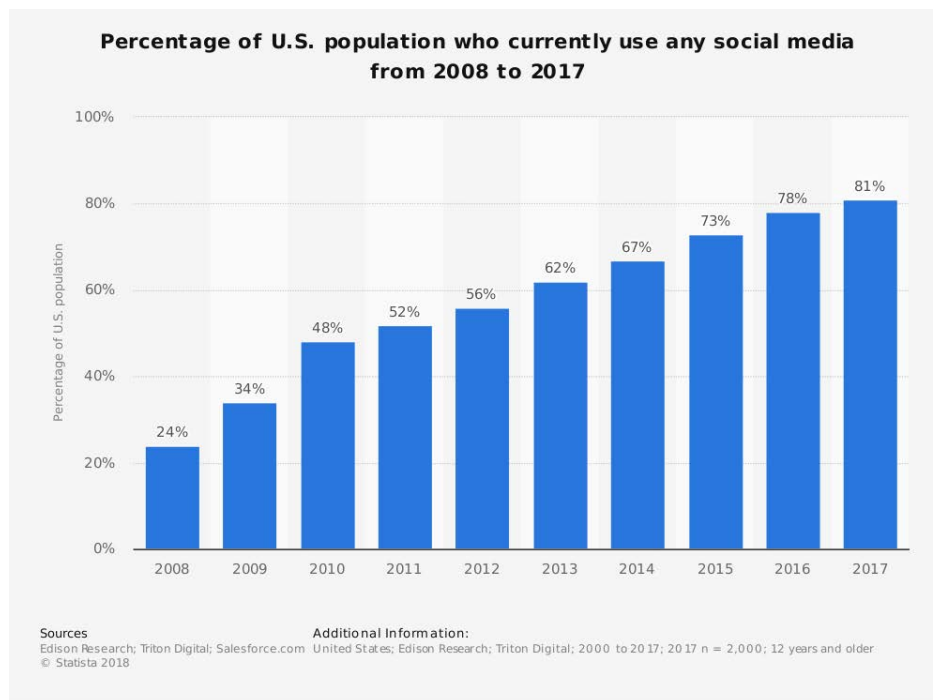
Figure One: "Percentage of U.S. Population with Social Media Profiles"

(Statista)

Because of its astronomical usage rate, there is plenty of useful, existing information

regarding social media. Utilizing credible sources like AdWeek, AdAge, MarketingLand, Business Insider, Digital Trends, Social News Daily, and even blog posts from respected influencers has provided me with industry trusted information to support the claims I will be making. Influencers in the field are typically individuals with experience in the social media marketing industry, which have proven themselves with their work. Although figures like Gary Vaynerchuk and Larry Kim are well known and considered influencers in the field, leaving them out of my research proved to be beneficial. Their content is usually geared towards promoting their own products and developed with baseless assertions with a lack of objectivity. Therefore, researching and utilizing works from influencers such as Lauren Johnson, Laura Collins, among others with less subjectivity and self-promotion ended up being the superior route.

In addition to articles from media sources, I have found gaining information from blog posts to be very valuable. There are millions of blogs published on the Internet regarding social media marketing, so it is important to decipher the trusted information from the click bait. The best social media marketing blogs I came across through research were from both influence bloggers and digital marketing agencies. Although media articles are valuable, implementing blog posts and other direct outlets allow the thesis to sound more authoritative and realistic.

Central Theme #1: Background and History of Social Media

Where did the "social media" concept evolve from and when did it all begin? What would Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other platforms look like today without the ideas from the original social networking sites from the 1990s and early 2000s? What were the main implications of the first social networking sites created? These are just a few critical questions that must be addressed when evaluating the history of social media and its impact on the industry

we know of today.

Although through research I discovered information about organizations like the Bulletin Board System (BBS), CompuServe, and AOL, most credible sources do not consider these programs to be the first legitimate social networks. According to an article from Digital Trends, "in 1997 a site called SixDegrees.com sprung up being the very first to allow users to create profiles, invite friends, organize groups, and surf other user profiles. At its peak it had an estimated 3.5 million registered members" (Shah). SixDegrees was eventually bought out in 1999, and the next notable social giant that followed was Friendster in 2002. It is well known that Friendster used similar concepts to SixDegrees, yet what qualified them to be next in line as the major social giant? Shah points out that "Friendster focused on a routine dubbed the "Circle of Friends," and promoted the idea that a popular online community can only exist between people who truly have common bonds. Friendster's user base peaked over 115 million members by 2011" (Shah). Therefore, it is evident that Friendster capitalized off of SixDegrees, yet what led to their complete demise in 2015?

Friendster's foundation paved the way for numerous social networking giants to follow. Although LinkedIn technically launched in 2003, their popularity did not take off until around 2010. Other notable networks that followed Friendster were Tribe.net in 2003 and Orkut in 2004. Tribe.net was a social network focusing on "users being able to establish tribes, which enabled them to elaborate on a computerized social network with thousands of tribe members. In other words, the tribes resembled topical forums" (Ruberg). The popularity of tribe.net never really took off compared to other networks, as they encountered a content policy controversy along with strong competition in the industry. Similar to tribe.net, Orkut was a social networking website that lasted a bit longer and experienced worldwide user exposure. An engineer from

Google originally founded the network, and Google took ultimate control until Orkut's departure in 2014. Alexa describes Orkut as a "service designed to help users meet new and old friends while maintaining existing relationships. The features changed significantly over time and popularity of the network quickly shifted from the U.S. to Brazil and India users" (Alexa). Moreover, Orkut's American user base quickly died off due to an influx of fake profiles, hate groups, and censorship issues. The platform was ultimately inept when it came to adapting to maintain engaged members.

The social network that became the next major player in the industry after Friendster in 2003 was MySpace. MySpace was huge during the mid 2000s and according to Mashable was "the most visited site in 2006, as MySpace surpassed Google" (Cashmore). The platform was best known for their emphasis on music, pop culture, and having a young generation of users. Digital Trends credits MySpace's initial success as being "attractive to the young adult demographic with music, videos, and a funky, feature filled environment. It felt hipper than Friendster from the start and that drew users to switch to MySpace" (Shah). Therefore, MySpace at its peak was untouchable, as their user base continued to exponentially grow throughout the mid 2000s. Like their social networking predecessors, MySpace eventually fell around 2011. Who was the next social media player to take over?

Founded in 2004 by Harvard University students, Facebook originated as a "Harvard only exercise and campus-oriented site" for two years prior to opening to the general public (Shah). Facebook was launched to the public domain in 2006 and quickly captured the attention of millions who were eager to switch to the social network. The social network was already classified as "big business" by multiple investors. So much so that in 2009, "Silicon Valley bigwigs such as Paypal founder and billionaire Peter Theil invested tens of millions of dollars

into the platform" (Shah). It was not a surprise to many that Facebook quickly took off in the

mid 2000s and began to capture a massive market share of the social networking world.

What were some primary factors then behind Facebook's mid 2000s success and

generating initial growth? Articles from the Business Insider and Mashable point out multiple

reasons why Facebook won the 2000s social networking battle. Facebook's simplicity is one of

the success factors the article points out mentioning that "the first version of thefacebook.com

was simple, Zuckerberg did not get entranced with feature build outs initially to ensure the

service was easy to use" (Blodget). Another prominent factor with Facebook's growth was

extensive market research and competitor analysis. It was critical for Facebook to determine why

other networks were falling and what opportunities their competitors were missing out on. The

article claims that "Friendster and other networks committed suicide by having a weak back-end

infrastructure that was unable to support the heavy demand of users" (Blodget). A third and

extremely important factor Facebook mastered early on was the establishment of an advertising

model. Facebook developed a highly targeted advertising model, which "initially offered two

different banner ads that were called Facebook Flyers. This let marketers buy ads targeted to all

users with a specific school's .edu email address" (Fiegerman). Therefore, Facebook quickly

caught on to the paid social media advertising trend, which would ultimately set them up to

become the social giant that we know of today. Figure Two shows Facebook's exponential

growth since its arrival in 2004.
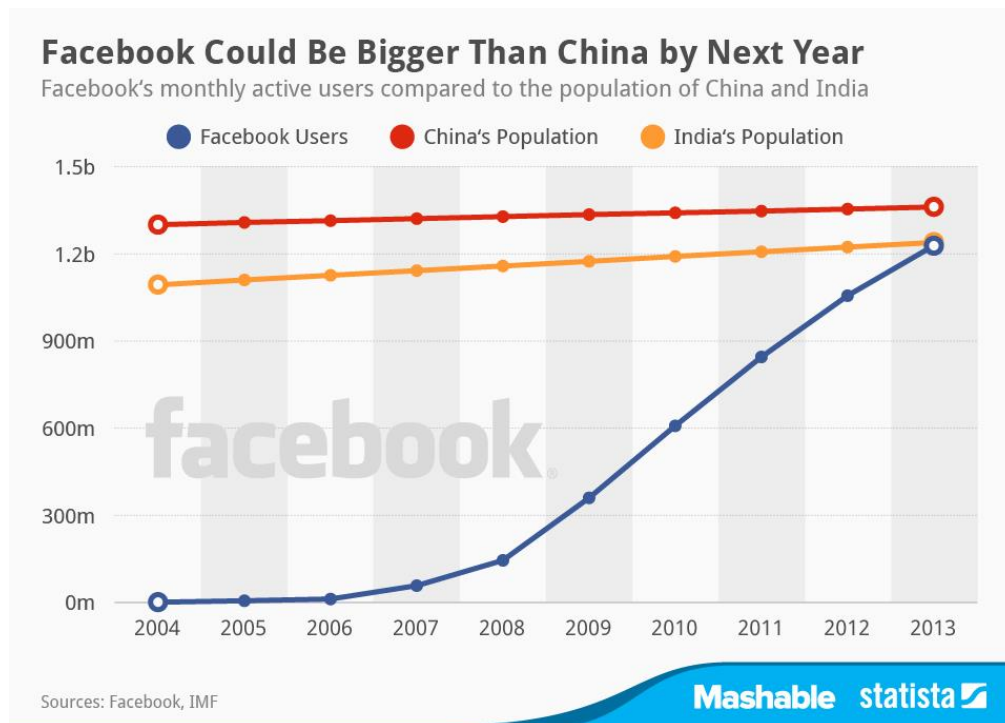
Figure Two: "Facebook's Remarkable Growth of Monthly Active Users"

(Statista)

Ultimately, it is critical to analyze the history of social media and discover the reasons why certain social networks fell through and others flourished. Researching the history behind social media left me with one major question from the perspective of an advertiser: What was the major factor that led to the death of some social networks like Friendster, Orkut, and MySpace, but made others like Facebook succeed? That is where the transition to social media marketing comes into play. The original social networks such as SixDegrees, Friendster and MySpace were too caught up with attracting a large user base, and lost focus on how to best monetize their organizations in the future. Facebook along with other current successful social networks have capitalized on constructing lucrative advertising models that appeal to both brands and consumers. This has shaped the social media realm that we are familiar with today.

Central Theme #2: Dominant Platforms & Practices in Today's Social Media Marketing

Researching and analyzing the history of social media has provided the foundation for social media marketers today and the effective practices in today's industry. Although I am excluding some mediums, the biggest players in the social media marketing sphere today are Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, SnapChat, and Google My Business. For the purpose of this study, Twitter, Pinterest, Reddit, and Google Plus were excluded due to their declination of usage rates and marketing capabilities compared to the powerhouses previously listed. Each platform provides marketers with a unique way to reach target audiences, pin point key performance indicators (KPIs), display call to actions, and ultimately present distinct messages. It is important to note that I will be mentioning both organic and paid strategies that today's social media marketers use in their campaigns. In addition to elaborating on the social media giants of today, this section will also address takeaways from the past along with the importance of social media management/automation programs.

Before diving into the particular mediums and their unique marketing techniques, it was extremely important to research social media practices from the previous years and find quintessential takeaways. There was a very insightful article I came across from AdWeek written by Lauren Johnson, which pointed out numerous social media takeaways from the past year in 2017. One overarching takeaway involved Facebook's usage rate remaining massive. Facebook announced that "17 billion video chats were sent via messenger in 2017, which doubles the number in 2016. There were also an average of 1.7 billion emojis sent on a daily basis in 2017" (Johnson). Moreover, Facebook is dominating the modern day social media industry in many aspects and this trend will most likely continue in the future. A second takeaway touched on the

importance of Instagram and its popularity with millennial usage. A survey from Bustle

consisting of found that "81 percent of millennials claim that Instagram is the best way for

brands to reach them" (Johnson). Instagram made major strides in 2017, and based on their

increasing number of users do not be surprised if the social giant further increases their market

share this year. An additional takeaway the article mentioned deals with Snapchat and their mind

boggling usage statistics from the previous year. According to the AdWeek article, "there were

over 1 trillion photos taken in 2017 on the app, which equates to 31,720 snaps every second"

(Johnson). It will be addressed in the third central theme later on, yet it is critical to note that

Snapchat has also incorporated the use of augment reality this previous year. This has allowed

users and brands to create their own animated figures and filters, which gives Snapchat a major

advantage in the future with how popular augmented reality is projected to become. Essentially,

researching these social media marketing takeaways from the past year has provided me with a

solid background when leading into further explanation of today's major social networks.

The most iconic and dominant social media platform in the advertising industry today is

Facebook, and this is not a close second. A statistic from Statista points out that "as of the fourth

quarter of 2017, Facebook had 2.2 billion monthly active users" ("Facebook's Remarkable

Growth"). From an advertising perspective, Facebook provides marketers with intriguing

opportunities both organic and paid to reach target audiences. From the paid aspect, Facebook's

astounding number of users, targeting capabilities, and cost effectiveness for return on

investment (ROI) is unmatchable. These are a few of the reasons that make Facebook advertising

the powerhouse it has become today. Notice Figure Three from Statista that displays Facebook's

total advertising revenue that has been generated since 2009.
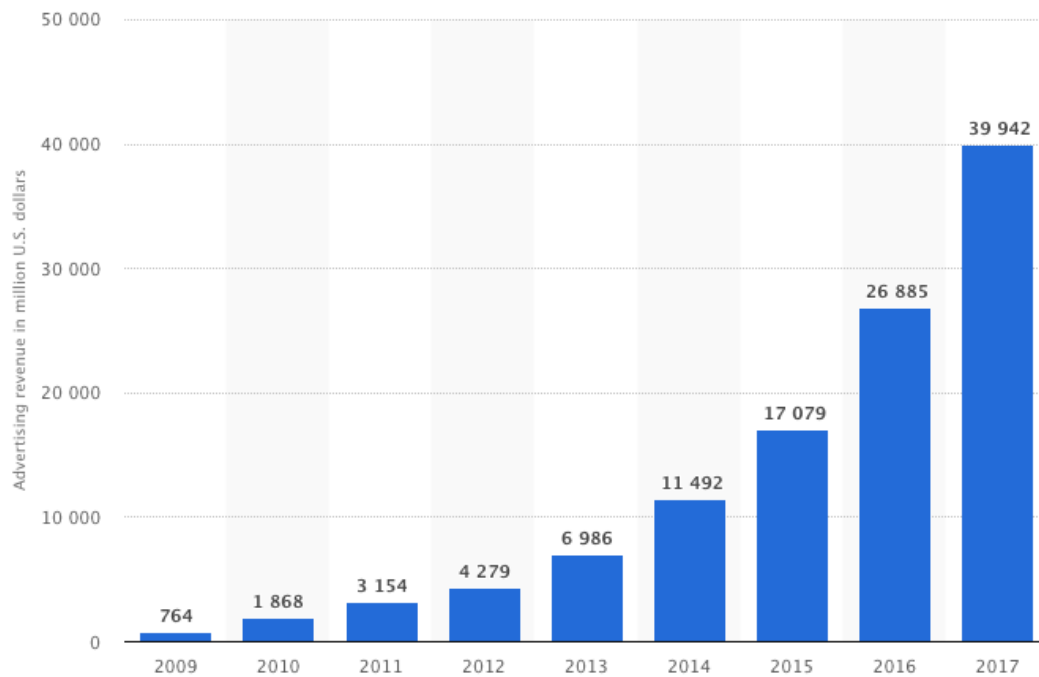
Figure Three: "Facebook's Advertising Revenue Worldwide from 2009-2017"
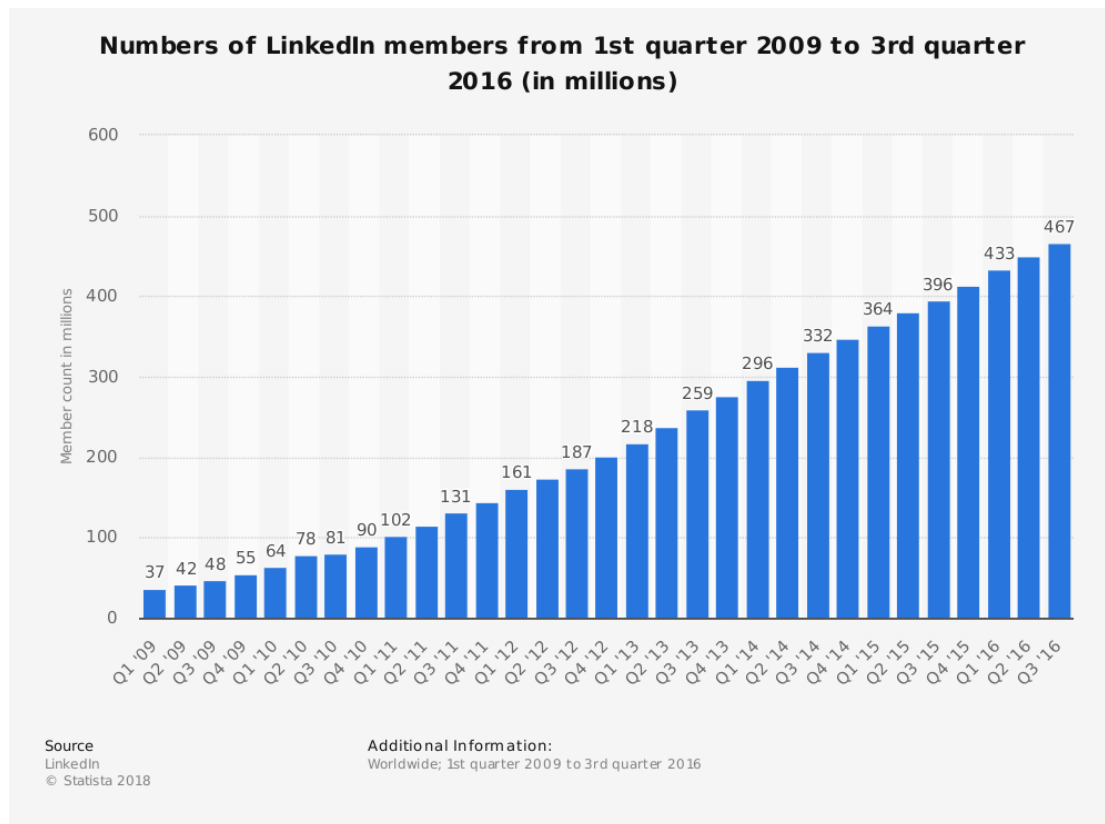
(Statista)

Some examples of paid Facebook advertising campaign practices that today's social media marketers use are post/event boosting, reach campaigns, traffic campaigns, lead generation tools, and many others. Boosting posts and reach campaigns coincide with brand awareness and trying to increase overall reach. Traffic campaigns and lead generation tools on the other hand are typically geared towards driving visitors to a landing page, compiling qualified leads, and ultimately increase conversions. Facebook continues to innovate with their campaign types in order to acquire more organizations and advertisers to spend ad dollar on their platform.

Purchased by Facebook in 2012, Instagram has made significant progress in terms of user growth, engagement, and marketing capabilities. A report from CNBC found that Instagram hit "800 million monthly active users in September of 2017. 500 of those users are active on a daily

basis, and the numbers continue to increase" (Everson). This presents massive opportunities for social media marketers looking to make an impact on the growing network. Like Facebook, advertising on Instagram with both organic and paid content is strategic for numerous organizations. From an organic standpoint, Instagram has a huge advantage in terms of engagement over other mediums due to their focus on image and video content. According to a study from Kissmetrics, "social content with relevant images or videos receive 94 percent more views than content without relevant media" (Joyce). This demonstrates the importance of Instagram's organic impact and how marketers can capitalize on engagement opportunities. The use of hashtags has also become an important organic component to Instagram as of late. In fact, "adding even one hashtag can increase a post's engagement by an average of 12.6 percent" (Heine). From the paid perspective, advertising on Instagram is actually an ad set option within the Facebook Ad Manager. Therefore, the targeting options, ad copy, budgeting, and campaign types are all similar. The only unique difference with advertising on Instagram is the selection of ad placements such as the news feed, stories, or discover section. Paid advertising on Instagram tends to work best with brand awareness based campaigns, and lacks on the conversion based side. As the channel continues to grow, it will be interesting to see if Facebook eventually develops an entirely unique paid advertising platform for Instagram.

LinkedIn has experienced massive growth as of late, and has become a significant platform since entering the social media industry. Their business-focused model of appealing to the business professional niche has proven to be a success. According to an article from Fortune, "LinkedIn has claimed 500 million users from more than 200 countries as of April, 2017. 252 million of these users are active monthly" (Darrow). Figure Four better illustrates LinkedIn's steady growth from Q1 of 2009 to Q3 of 2016. LinkedIn's growth can be heavily attributed to

personalized news feeds, job postings, networking opportunities, the ability for marketers to

reach distinct audiences, and most importantly their lead generation capabilities. It is especially

favored by business to business (B2B) marketers trying to develop qualified leads. A report from

Foundation found that "80 percent of all online B2B leads come from LinkedIn compared to 7

percent on Facebook" (Gallant). From the organic aspect, posting on LinkedIn has the potential

to reach more users than many other social networks. Connections liking or commenting on

posts will display your content in front of individuals you are not connected with. This then leads

to more impressions, clicks, and overall engagement that posts on other social networks will not

provide. In the end, LinkedIn has proven itself to be a major player in the social media marketing

game, and their user activity continues to grow as a result.

Figure Four: "Number of LinkedIn Members"

(Statista)

The newest medium out of the social giants, Snapchat has already made a huge impact in the social media marketing field. According to internal data from Snapchat, "there are over 166 million daily active users watching 10 billion videos per day" (Snapchat). A large audience this engaged is simply too important for marketers to ignore. Related to Instagram, Snapchat is a media based social platform that enables users to share images and videos. However, unlike Instagram a news feed does not exist within Snapchat's interface and the media becomes inaccessible after a set amount of time. This is a particularly important channel for marketers and brands trying to reach Snapchat's core demographic. A study from Statista found that "60 percent of all users are under the age of 25, while the next 24 percent are between the age of 25-34" ("Snapchat User Demographics"). Moreover, Snapchat presents an intriguing opportunity for marketers focused on a younger demographic. The paid advertising features that Snapchat offers are extremely unique compared to competing social networks. Snap ads, sponsored lenses, and geofilters are the primary paid advertising options utilized by marketers. All three of these features are a key strategy to generate brand awareness. Not only are users engaged with a brand, the effect of social sharing across a user's friend list can drastically increase organic reach. The use of geofilters is especially beneficial for local businesses trying to drive foot traffic. According to an article from Hootsuite, "on average, Snapchatters view 1 billion filters every day" (Newberry). Geofilters can be extremely cost effective and have the potential to reach more individuals in your target audience than expected. Ultimately, Snapchat is a unique social network that presents marketers with an incredible opportunity to generate brand awareness and reach a distinctly younger demographic.

Is Google My Business technically considered a social network? Well according to many

respected advertisers in the field, it is much more than that. Google My Business (GMB) is a unique platform that provides businesses with an opportunity to appear in Google search and map results to essentially increase overall online visibility. The importance of Google My Business is often times overlooked, as many companies allocate more time posting to their general social media accounts (Facebook, Twitter, etc.). Yet, the organic presence that GMB can provide is unmatched compared to other networks. As seen in Figure Five, a client at my company reached over "150,000 total searches in Q1 of 2018" through its Google My Business listing alone. **(**Onimod Global).
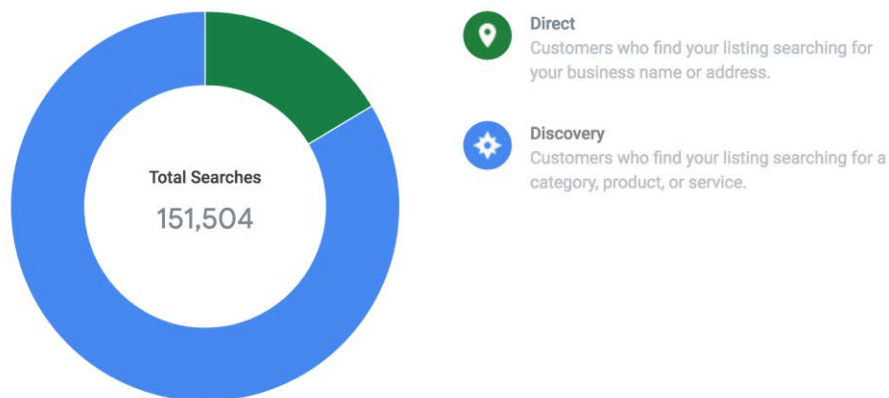

Figure Five: "Google My Businesses Insights"

(Onimod Global)

GMB serves as the forefront of any organization, and marketers have recently been utilizing the new posting feature that originally launched two years ago to increase organic traffic. Search Engine Land mentions that "Google Posts first launched in January 2016 under "Candidate Cards," but were only available for political candidates to post content" (Schwartz). This posting function has now become available for all businesses with GMB listings. GMB

posting enables organizations to develop posts displayed under their business listing, which presents a huge opportunity for brands. Posting has now allowed businesses to share daily specials, promote events, showcase top products, and provide more options to connect with consumers directly. Therefore, because of Google My Business's capability to develop content and reach target audiences, it is considered a social network by many industry professionals.

After evaluating the various social networks, a huge area that often gets overlooked is the use of social media management/automation systems. Hootsuite and Pardot (SalesForce) are examples of social media management programs that dominate the industry. This allows advertisers to monitor and manage numerous social media channels. With various social networks for organizations to handle, social media management tools are heavily relied upon by many. According to a survey conducted by Pingdom, it was discovered that "20 percent of all companies use Hootsuite to manage their social media efforts" (Gray). Some key benefits of social media management tools include customer service management, cross-platform capabilities, posting consistency, sticking to a schedule, and the overall ability to monitor multiple social networks in a single interface. Social media management systems like Hootsuite and Pardot assist with social media marketing efforts because of their ability to help advertisers stay organized and stick to a consistent schedule.

Central Theme #3: Future Implications of Social Media Marketing

Being in the midst of a digital environment, the dynamic of social media marketing is constantly changing. Some platforms thrive while others become obsolete, artificial intelligence (AI) is on the horizon, search algorithms update, mobile usage is increasing, and the internet of things (IoT) will start to take over. This section will address some of these topics, industry

predictions, and how future implications for social media marketing will impact careers in the field.

There have already been significant updates thus far in 2018, and there will most likely be many changes still to come. An insightful article from Marketing Land discussed the future of social media marketing and provided industry predictions. Laura Collins is an industry professional that was interviewed for the article and she explains her rationale behind future predictions. One prediction was about Instagram and their projected dominance in years to come. Collins explains Instagram's recent incorporation of hashtags. According to Collins, "advertisers can now pay to target followers of particular hashtags, or perhaps appear in the top posts section for those relevant to their business" (Collins). This hashtag integration could ultimately take the platform to new heights if utilized correctly and just like last year, 2018 could be another big year for Instagram.

A second prediction involves Snapchat and their plans to redesign the entire platform. The article points out how Snapchat is learning from their mistakes and they "recently released a pixel to address accusations of a lack of transparency or ability to measure ROI." Collins predicts a "total redesign of the app may happen as a response to older users reportedly struggling navigating the interface" (Collins). Therefore, the prediction being made is that Snapchat's redesign will become more flexible for their users and advertisers, and then see ad revenue growth from a more diverse group as a result. Twitter on the other hand has been struggling in recent years and is expected to make some major moves in the near future regarding their advertising structure. Collins predicts that 2018 is "sink or swim" for Twitter's future. She states that "Twitter's new pre-roll and mid-roll ads will offer advertisers with high visibility standards and a chance to target people who are highly engaged" (Collins). In other words, Collins

predicted that if Twitter fails to be innovative soon they will fall behind. And in the adaptive

social media world, falling behind has historically led to the complete demise of networks.

The term "artificial intelligence" or "AI" gets thrown around quite often, yet what exactly

does it mean and how does it apply to social media marketing? Oktopost Technologies defines

artificial intelligence as "the ability of computers to understand certain aspects of the world, and

use that understanding to complete tasks that normally require human intellect and effort"

(Kushner). Artificial Intelligence is a reality in the twenty first Century and has made significant

impacts in the world of social media marketing. Figure Six projects how much money is going to

be invested into artificial intelligence based on recent data. It is predicted, "Over $3.5 billion will

be invested into content distribution on social media alone over the next ten years" (Armstrong).

Customer service is one major area that artificial intelligence has already entered. According to a

blog post from Rocks Digital, "42 percent of customers who complain in social media platforms

expect an answer from brands within 60 minutes" (McGrath). Therefore, because of this issue

many organizations have started to implement AI integrations into their social media accounts

that deliver automatic responses. Text mining and marketing automation is an area that AI can be

credited for creating. Rocks Digital describes text mining as the "analysis of structured and

unstructured data across various social media platforms to discover buyer preferences, which

helps predict customer behavior" (McGrath). This means that businesses are now able to develop

personalized social media marketing strategies because of the important information text mining

can derive. Ultimately, although artificial intelligence has its drawbacks, it is evident that the

integration of AI and social media marketing can help brands reach new heights that were once

unheard of.

The Future Of A.I.

Forecasted cumulative global artificial intelligence revenue 2016-2025, by use case (U.S. dollars)

Static image recognition, classification, and tagging	$8,097.9m
Algorithmic trading strategy performance improvement	$7,540.5m
Efficient, scalable processing of patient data	$7,366.4m
Predictive maintenance	$4,680.3m
Object identification, detection, classification, tracking*	$4,201.0m
Text query of images	$3,714.1m
Automated geophysical feature detection	$3,655.5m
Content distribution on social media	$3,566.6m
Object detection and classification - avoidance, navigation	$3,169.8m
Prevention against cybersecurity threats	$2,472.6m

* From geospatial images
@StatistaCharts Source: Tractica

statista

Figure Six: "The Future of A.I."

(Statista)

The Internet of Things (IoT) is another relevant concept to address when discussing what is in store for the future of social media marketing. According to the Social News Daily, the Internet of Things is refereed by industry experts as the "New Industrial Revolution, or next Economic Revolution" ("How The Internet of Things"). This then leads to the question of what exactly is the Internet of Things? Andrew Meola from the Business Insider describes IoT as the "rapidly growing network of connected objects that can collect and exchange data using embedded sensors" (Meola). In other words, the IoT is the expanding network of objects, devices, or "things" becoming interconnected with the Internet. This is critical to understand because many modern, everyday products used by society can already be categorized as part of

the IoT. Examples of this include cell phones, smart homes (Amazon Echo), wearables (Apple Watch), connected automobiles, the advancement of smart cities, and any other "thing" connected to the Internet. How is the IoT then impacting the future of social media marketing? The first point to establish is that the IoT essentially gives individuals open access to social media anywhere and everywhere. The advancements and increasing users of smartphones, watches, wrist bands, and other wearables for instance provide accessibility that was originally unheard of. It is predicted by 2020 there will be "411 million wrist bands, shoes, glasses, watches, socks, and other accessory items connected to the Internet" ("How the Internet of Things"). Therefore, with the increase of items being connected to the Internet, brands will now be able to communicate with followers in more ways than before. As a result, this allows the sharing, interaction, and management of social media content to expand due to the increasing levels of Internet connectivity. Overall, with the advancements of artificial intelligence, the Internet of things, and how adaptive the industry has become the future of social media marketing leaves plenty of unanswered questions. From the perspective of an advertiser, the future appears to bring a combination of excitement, fear, and uncertainty.

Results

Towards the completion of my thesis there are plenty of aspects my work has accomplished. Unlike other projects where results are based off of quantitative analysis or testing a hypothesis, my end goal is to provide readers with a better understanding of social media marketing while obtaining insightful information myself. From a general standpoint, utilizing credible publications like Search Engine Land, AdWeek, and the Business Insider along with influencers such as Lauren Johnson and Laura Collins has helped me gather strong research for

this project. Implementing graphs from resources like Statista, the company I work for, and even my personal Google Analytics data coincides well with the content and provides helpful visuals. As a result of insightful research, my original question of "how has the social media industry changed over time?" was thoroughly answered. As stated in my purpose, the main accomplishment I wanted to take away from this thesis was to be able to generate enough social media marketing knowledge that could be incorporated into my future career. Developing this thesis has done just that. In other words, the scope of social media marketing is always changing and this project has not only enhanced my knowledge as a student, but has ensured that I am more prepared for a career in the advertising field post graduation.

Personal Experience in the Industry

At this point in the thesis, readers may be wondering about my connection to social media marketing and the real world experiences I have within the industry. I am currently a digital marketing intern at an agency called Onimod Global, in which I have executed multiple social media campaigns for our clients. One particular example is the constant social media marketing work I perform for a client of ours that is a sports bar in downtown Chicago. As you can imagine the competition within the bar/restaurant industry in downtown Chicago is cut throat, and being able to stand out from competitors is essential to success. Therefore, that is where my social media marketing experience comes into play. Marketing campaigns on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat are all utilized to maximize visibility and drive traffic to the storefront. I am consistently creating 5-10 paid social campaigns on a weekly basis through Facebook and Instagram in particular. Sporting events, trivia nights, wine Wednesday, happy hour, and daily specials are all examples of promotions I utilize social media advertising for. Implementing

Reach and Traffic campaign types are my typical strategies for these promotions. Reach campaigns create a ton of visibility and are best for brand awareness and driving foot traffic to the venue. Traffic campaigns on the other hand are best used for drawing potential customers to landing pages on the website for conversions (reservations). All of this is accomplished through extensive targeting with demographics, interests, behaviors, geotargeting, and ad placement to create visibility to the right target audiences. In essence, my internship has provided me with amazing exposure to social media marketing and continually learning how practices are changing.

From the educational side, the Digital Advertising course I took last spring with Professor Wilson was an excellent experience with social media marketing. This class presented me with the opportunity to develop my own blog, and essentially build my personal brand. The entire semester revolved around a social media project with the main purpose of driving as much traffic as possible. Figures Seven represents my blog's Google Analytics data (Jan 1 - May 1, 2017) that demonstrate the import role social media marketing played regarding site traffic. As illustrated in the pie chart, 65.7 percent of all website traffic to my blog during that 4 month span can be attributed to social media marketing. Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn were the three primary social media channels that ended up generating the most site traffic. Overall, in addition to my internship experience this Digital Advertising course taught by Professor Wilson expanded my social media marketing knowledge of today's industry.

Top Channels
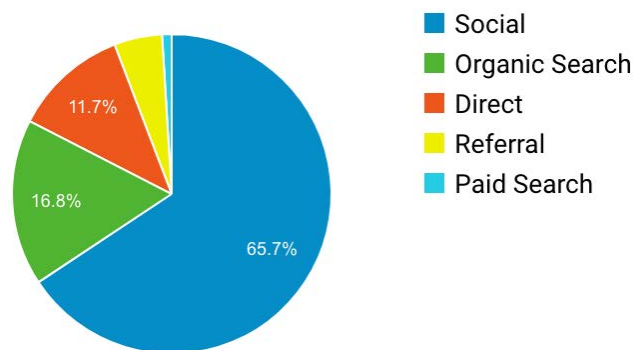
Figure Seven: Google Analytics Site Acquisition Data

Limitations & Suggestions for Future Research

Developing a thesis and conducting research on the topic of social media marketing brought up some limitations and suggestions for further research. One clear limitation that frequently came up during the research process was the lack of scholarly literature available for my specific topic. Although there are many insightful journal articles out there about social media marketing, the main issue is the broadness of my topic. Almost all of the scholarly articles I came across were narrowly focused, and sometimes outdated as the industry continues to change at a rapid pace. The sheer volume of articles being very focused and not readily available to the general survey of social media marketing made research difficult at times. Therefore, if a more focused topic or question was addressed early on, academic research had the potential to provide value.

Broadness may not be a limitation to some, but I consider this a limitation because having a narrower topic would have allowed me to dive deeper into one specific area. I found social media marketing to be a much broader topic than anticipated, and looking back I would have

narrowed my topic to an area still in that field. For example, after a recent meeting with my advisor later in the semester, some topics he suggested for further research included: "What challenges exist for social networks who wish to successfully implement an advertising model that is both profitable and non-problematic for its users?" and "What kinds of businesses/organizations are best positioned for successful social media marketing?" Working with narrower research questions like these would have been interesting and enabled myself to fully explore a specific topic.

Regarding other suggestions for future research in social media marketing, there are numerous areas to analyze. The recent Facebook scandal alone involving Cambridge Analytica brings awareness to the issue of social media privacy and the security of our profile information. Another interesting research topic would be how businesses calculate return on investment (ROI) from organic social media marketing efforts. The majority of today's businesses, especially local, understand the importance of an organic social media presence, yet how to figure out the ROI remains the hard part. Although this was mentioned in my third central theme section, an additional area to explore is a deeper analysis on artificial intelligence (AI) and its connection to social media marketing. AI has become a huge topic of discussion in social media, and focusing on this area in particular would have allowed me to dig deeper on potential benefits and drawbacks to expect in the future. The increasing presence of AI in social media also raises the question of full automation. In other words, will humans even be needed five, ten, or twenty years from now to manage and market social media accounts? Ultimately, because social media marketing is a topic that continually changes, there proved to be many limitations, yet numerous opportunities for further research.

Conclusion

Overall, diving into the adapting, yet interesting topic of social media marketing has helped me grow as an advertiser. Analyzing the background, current practices, and the future of this industry has given me the opportunity to obtain far more knowledge regarding social media than expected. To reiterate, the main purpose behind choosing this topic and constructing the Thesis was to provide myself with a better understanding of social media marketing and what to prepare for in the near future. This is significant for several reasons. First, social media marketing has become a competitive playing field and developing a Thesis is something that will help set myself apart from others. Second, it was mentioned frequently throughout the paper, but being able to prepare myself for industry changes is also huge. In the end however, the entire Honors Thesis process of putting in multiple hours researching, generating ideas, seeking advice, attending meetings, and revisions has been one of the most beneficial experiences I can take away throughout my time in academia.

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