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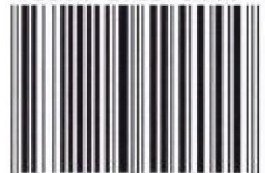
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THE ROLES OF SOCIAL MEDIA AS A PLATFORM FOR CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

The introduction of social media has changed the world and its whole way of working by bringing the world and its people closer together. Social media may not look like a new phenomenon but it continues to evolve. There is a constant rise in social networking and therefore, the impact of social network is becoming stronger day by day, into each kind of business. Social media is often used as a source of information and a spread of knowledge in changing people's views and opinions. It is among important business marketing tactics which helps to create new business opportunities, develops a stronger market position or modifies consumer's behaviour.

Over the last decade, social media has become an effective marketing tool for our community, not only creating a new marketing layer, but also providing marketers with many opportunities to raise consumer awareness of products. Through social media, consumers are participating in variety of activities, from consuming content to sharing knowledge, experiences, opinions, and involved in discussion with other consumers online. Today, with the growth of Internet, online social networks have become important communication channels and also virtual communities have emerged (Ayuni, 2020).

SOCIAL MEDIA AND CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

Customer engagement is the degree and depth of brand focused interactions a customer chooses to perform or get involved. It is a kind of the emotional connection between a customer and a brand of product or service. Highly engaged customers buy more, promote more, and demonstrate more loyalty towards that particular brand. It is the ongoing interactions between a company and a customer and may also be a cycle involving processes over time (Sashi, Brynildsen & Bilgihan, 2019).

Customer engagement in social media can take on many forms and could be defined as any online action a customer makes in relation to a business. Online engagement can be subscriptions, purchases, likes, shares, comments and others. Social media enables potential customers to easily engage with businesses and give more publicity. Social media offers real time response mechanism which gives a big impact on the success of businesses according to a report or feedback from customers. Whether it is through social media comments or email messages, the business target audience is instantly connected through various social media platforms (Das & Lall, 2016).

For business today, the internet has made it difficult to stand out based solely on the quality of products or services as consumers have easy access to any products or services they wish to search for. Consumers seek communication with businesses and are more willing to participate in two way interactions. With the introduction of the internet, today's customers have more power. Social media allows not only firms to share information with their customers but also

customers to share information with each other (Sashi, 2012). They can share their opinions with the world in a second, potentially destroying a business or making it a success. Social media has developed customer engagement. It has made it easier to advertise brands, reach masses of potential customers in an instance as well as measure more easily what works and what does not. The successful deployment of social media to foster long term customer engagement with brands requires an innovation, continuous learning and the most important is customer focus (Rather, 2020).

According to Guttman (2018), organizations can engage in many different social media platforms to capture customer attention and build awareness with the aim of increasing revenue or customer loyalty. Facebook's users, YouTube's users and the millions or billions of users of other popular internet platforms are a powerful incentive for companies to actively engage with social media as a part of their customer outreach. The simplest function of social media customer engagement is when an individual pays a visit to a company's webpage. Companies need to focus on driving traffic to their webpages and more importantly, keeping the customer on the website for longer time. This factor brings power back to the firm because it provides with an opportunity to respond to negative publicity as well as take advantage of the positive discussions. With social media, businesses provide their customers with a platform to contact them directly so that they can provide immediate and efficient responses to any questions customers have. Firms can connect easily with their customers on a more personal level through social media.

CONCLUSION

In short, social media platforms offer a high level of engagement and interaction. They offer a two way communication between a company and its customers. Marketers need to shift their mentality from only focusing selling products or services to making relationships with their customers through customer engagement. Moreover, today's young generations are social media connected, requiring companies to be reachable in every major social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok and other different popular platforms. Customer engagement has become the most valuable thing for growing an organization and coming up with strategies.

Furthermore, the current COVID-19 pandemic requires customers to stay at home and limits their outdoor shopping. Alternatively, social media becomes the important platform for customers to get the information, feedback and even engagement before making online shopping. Therefore, many companies shift to online business during this pandemic in order to withstand the changes forced on them by the environment. They need to communicate and connect with their customers. Thus, social media provides companies with better customer engagement platform, and new opportunities to develop businesses and brand loyalty. Through social media, customer engagement will also determine whether or not a business can win in this new socially connected world.

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