THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL NETWORKS ON COMPANIES

L'IMPACT DES RÉSEAUX SOCIAUX SUR LES ENTREPRISES

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ABSTRACT

In the current era of technological evolution, social media is over time appreciated by companies worldwide, which explains the fact that the Internet is perceived as a demarcation to conduct their business. It offers a portal where companies have the opportunity to reach a large audience and dodge obstacles such as time, vacancy, accessibility and distance. The set of social networks, Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, LinkedIn and others, contribute greatly in the mode by which Internet users locate, explore and share information about new brands and products. Active social media users are much more likely to read reviews of products and services online and learn more about the product or service and get a clear picture of the reputation, awareness and track record of the company in question. A complementary use of social networks is to monitor the competitive position of companies by communicating important market information and statistics related to an industry. Social media also encourage the interactivity of knowledge and evaluation, thus intensifying the design and growth of new products in light of the suggestions and proposals of Internet users.

This article deals with the impact of social networks on companies, identifying the types of social networks most used by companies. It also discusses the strategic communication in social networks, its advantages and limitations. In this article we have also tried to clarify the advantage of using social networks by companies.

The current research is qualitative in nature, carried out through a documentary analysis.

Key words: WEB MARKETING, SOCIAL MEDIA, COMPANIES, ADVERTISING, SOCIAL NETWORK, INTERNET, STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION, ROI

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RESUME

A l'époque actuelle de l'évolution technologique les médias sociaux sont au fil de temps appréciés par les entreprises à l'échelle mondiale, ce qui explique le fait qu'Internet est perçu comme étant une démarcation pour mener à bien leurs affaires. il offre un portail où les entreprises ont la possibilité de toucher un grand public et esquiver des obstacles comme le temps, la vacance, l'accessibilité et la distance. L'ensemble des réseaux sociaux, Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, LinkedIn et d'autres, contribue grandement dans le mode par lequel les internautes repèrent, explorent et partagent des informations sur les marques et les produits nouveaux. Les utilisateurs actifs des médias sociaux sont beaucoup plus susceptibles de lire des critiques sur les produits et les services en ligne en d'apprendre davantage sur le produit ou service et avoir une idée claire sur la réputation, la notoriété et les annales de l'entreprise en question. Une utilisation complémentaire des réseaux sociaux s'agit de surveiller la position concurrentielle des entreprises en communiquant des informations et des statistiques importantes sur le marché relatives à un secteur. Les médias sociaux encouragent aussi l'interactivité de connaissances et d'évaluation, intensifiant de la sorte la conception et l'accroissement des nouveaux produits à la lumière des insinuations et des propositions des internautes.

Le présent article aborde le sujet de l'impact des réseaux sociaux sur les entreprises en identifiant ainsi les types des réseaux sociaux les plus utilisés par les entreprises. Il évoque aussi la communication stratégique dans les réseaux sociaux, ses avantages et ses limites. Dans cet article nous avons aussi essayé d'éclaircir l'avantage de l'utilisation des réseaux sociaux par les entreprises.

La recherche en vigueur est de nature qualitative, effectuée au travers une analyse documentaire.

MOTS CLES : WEB MARKETING, MEDIAS SOCIAUX, ENTREPRISES, PUBLICITE, RESEAU SOCIAL, INTERNET, COMMUNICATION STRATÉGIQUE, ROI

INTRODUCTION

The globalized consumption of the Internet has led to the digitalization of the economy, a phenomenon that presents a real springboard for businesses. Certainly, the total number of sectors is affected by the incursion of the Internet. This upheaval commands one main characteristic: speed.

The one with which the Internet has been accepted by the people of the world, the one with which social networks have undergone a mutation and have become the main use of the Web, the one through which smartphones have become the most important tool for entering the network, the one through which innovative habits and new behaviours are emerging.

With the digital revolution, consumers of the web now have the possibility to create, consult, publish, exchange, criticize, recommend or even share easily with the four corners of the world, generating in this sense a myriad of different contents on the same Web.

From now on, the reputation of a brand, person or company is no longer realized as before based solely on word of mouth, it is a reputation online.

In this sense, the application of social networks to its communication strategy is a recent phenomenon; the accessibility to quantifiable information is still limited. A social network is in its nature a gathering of people or organizations linking internet users to each other through exchanges. This gives them the advantage of communicating opinions, ideas and even content.

In this new digital age, digital channels proliferate and their usefulness is growing. Social tools have become inevitable tools of communication.

Increased brand visibility, news sharing, customer and employee loyalty, recruitment, etc. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn … have multiple benefits for the company.

With this in mind, companies quickly realized the advantage of using social networks to financial goals and encouraging the management of their e-reputation. Other companies have preferred to use them for professional purposes, to involve their employees and even their

customers in the daily life of the company in order to weave with them a solid relationship other than that of the sale.

In addition to their fundamental role in computing, social networks have a sociological scope. Even before the trend of social networks, the notion of network had a great success story in the social sciences that has been expanding for a decade.

As Mercklé mentions in his book "The pioneering work of Jacob Moreno, Stanley Milgram, anthropologists from the Manchester School (John Barnes, Elizabeth Bott, 1950) and sociologists from the Harvard Group (Harrison White, 1995c; Mark Granovetter, 1985) has brought out a whole set of concepts, empirical models and research, constitutive of this «sociology of social networks»: this consists in taking as objects of study not the characteristics of individuals (their age, their gender, their profession, etc.), but the relationships between individuals and the regularities they present, to describe them, to account for their training, and analyze their effects on behaviour."

Hence, through this article, we want to analyze and shed light on the usefulness and importance of the adoption of social networks in the communication strategy of companies given the opportunities and threats it represents.

1. THE EMERGENCE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS

The first appearance of social networks was in the United States in 1997, the first social network that brought together all the basic categories is Sivdgrees.com. However, due to a financial problem the site had to close.

From 1997 to 2001 several platforms were created:

- AsianAvennue (made up exclusively of the Asian community)

- BlackPlanet (comprised exclusively of the African-American community)

- MiGente (consisting exclusively of the Latin community)

In 2001, Ryze.com was born, but it did not succeed. Shortly thereafter, in 2002, in California, United States, LinkedIn was born, and is evolving rapidly to become a very active professional network. In November 2015, the network counted more than 400 million members from 170 sectors with different activities in more than 200 countries and territories.

From 2003, the increase in real terms of new social networks gave rise to an English expression 'YASN' which means 'Yet Another Social Networking'.

Soon in 2004 Mark Zuckerberg created Facebook while he was still a student at Harvard. At the start of Facebook, it was essential to have an academic email address including «Harvard.edu» to register. This says that when Facebook left, it was a closed social network. In 2007, Facebook grew dramatically.

Social networks have a phenomenal reputation; they are now hitting all people, consumers and businesses (Rutledge, 2008; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) whether for personal or professional use.

It is essential for specialized companies to communicate on specialized social networks. However, one must keep in mind that the community itself makes the decision whether to publish commercial messages on its site or not.

Social networks have evolved into tools for disseminating information that have altered our relationship to information and how we identify and distribute it. All users of social networks are now producers and disseminators of information.

2. THE DEFINITION OF SOCIAL NETWORKS

The term "social network" was first introduced in 1954 by John A.Barnes, a member of the Department of Social Anthology at the University of Manchester.

As Pierre Mercklé, (2004) shows, "Barnes's goal is to account for the social organization of a small community, through the analysis of all the relationships its members have with each other."

According to Wasserman & Faust, (1994) "A social network is a set of relationships between social entities. Contacts between individuals are an example of friendship or collaboration. These relationships can be both formal and informal, material and intangible."

3. THE TYPES OF SOCIAL NETWORKS

A social network is a set of actors (individuals, groups or organizations) connected by social interactions. These social interactions can take many forms: family, sentimental or more distant.

A contemporary definition of a social network emerged in 2004 as "a set of relationships between a set of actors". This set can be structured whether it is a business or not, or whether it is friends and these relationships can naturally be several, expert or not, fair or not. It is all a question of an intangible factor that determines the interdependence between elements or persons belonging to the same group.

For Danah Boyd & Nicole Ellison (2007), social networking services are defined as Internet services that offer their users the chance to:

- Build public power within a delimited system;

- Organize a list of users with whom they share different relationships;

- View and cross-reference your relationship lists as well as those of other users in the system.

Esther Dyson, 2006 defines social networks as "Social networks provide tools that facilitate the process of connecting around a common focus of interest and enable online contact." This will make us think of a categorization of social networks according to several standards:

- Sharing platform networks: platforms help communicate generally multimedia content to Internet users: YouTube, Dailymotion …

- Personal and generalist networks: they are intended to be used for the benefit of the common interest, with the aim of sharing their passion with the rest of the community: Skyblog, Mayspace …

- Personal and thematic networks: they focus on a problem, a topic or a theme: Boompa …

- Professional networks: they offer the opportunity to bring users together and share their information (company information, contact information, etc.): LinkedIn, etc.

4. THE COMPANIES AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

Social networks offer all companies, regardless of their activity or size, new methods of work organization. Project-team or network work gradually predominate the company linking people from different entities of the company and even customers.

A social network of the company consolidates its activity and helps to recognize the qualifications of its staff. Tools such as social networks develop communication modes within the company.

The use of social networks is beneficial and is essential to share the knowledge of employees internally, and transmit a favorable image of the company within professional hubs.

It seems that social networks are a means of promoting brands through e-commerce, which allows the brand to expand its online store outside its own site. The promotion of the brand is done through the consumers themselves, this means that an internet user will recommend a brand to his entourage through the net. In this sense, the promotion of the product will be done automatically, thus making the Internet user «the ambassador of the brand»: the consumer himself becomes the seller of the brand. It is a significant advertisement for the brand: it is discovered without spending on advertising.

There are several advantages to the integration of an internal social network at the organizational level.

- A discovery of experts and new talents;

- A binding of employees scattered all over the world;

- An archiving of knowledge;

- Improved communication with leaders;

- Increased employee participation;

5. THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY ON SOCIAL NETWORKS

According to Dupin (2010), "the company must therefore think about its actions online before acting and take into account its environment and its own specificities." By changing the advertising communication practices, the Social Web seems to have reshaped the rules of traditional marketing.

o The 4Ps of social marketing:

With the emergence of social networks on the Internet, the fundamental principles of marketing have evolved. We are talking about social marketing. For this reason, Cavazza (2009) suggests the following definition: Social marketing refers to the tools and practices for identifying and analyze conversations and participate and initiate social interactions within communities."

The traditional marketing mix based on price, product, advertising and place values, the orientation of social media has defined a new 4P logic (Dupin, 2010). In a Forrester report, Bradner (2009) insinuates redefining the 4Ps of social marketing:

- Permission

- Proximity

- Perception

- Participation

6. THE OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS OF COMMUNICATION IN SOCIAL NETWORKS

Table N°1: The opportunities and threats of communication in social networks

Opportunities	Threats
Communicate around your company: There are many reasons that force the company to communicate on social networks: o A significant audience that makes it a complete media (Balagué & Fayon, 2010). o According to Miller & al. (2010), social media is a force for the propagation of information and encourages word-of-mouth among individuals. According to McKinsey, positive or negative word-of-mouth can each cause a brand's market share to increase by 10% or decrease by 20% over a period of up to two years (Jouffroy & al. 2011). o An opportunity for free promotion. The various tools presented by these social networks are significantly less expensive than traditional media, specifically television (Balagué & Fayon 2010).	**Risk of skidding or negative buzz :** Deciding to communicate in social networks means giving the community a share of control that the company had over the brand. Given that "brands will no longer be the only ones to decide when, how and to whom to address their message. Today, it is the consumer who decides which brand and which information should be taken into consideration" (Meadows-Klue, 2011). From this perspective, it is common to find a few brands still hesitant to discuss on social networks, "who see it as a loss of control over their image, their discourse, a financial deficit, potential legal attacks, or the leakage of sensitive or secret information" (Dupin, 2010, p.126). However, the risk of not answering them is also to risk witnessing the growth of a smear campaign whose results would be much more harmful. (Jouffroy & al.2011) According to (Deniaud, 2009) "bad buzz can quickly become difficult to control and then necessarily plays on the memory (brand capital) that the Internet user has of a brand (even if a buzz quickly replaces another one and that for some brands, it is more a question of accumulation that can destroy a brand image) and on its online reputation (referencing...)".
Create your own brand community:	**A ROI not easy to analyze:**

The wager for brands wanting to produce a wealthy relationship with their consumers will be to succeed in bringing them together and uniting them.

- o According to several marketing researches, companies have an interest in building brand communities that will give them the opportunity to design and analyze new products and have brand ambassadors.

- o According to Dupin (2010, p.128), "creating and animating a community engages satisfied members to get involved in the development of the company, its products or services and thereby defend their values with third parties (friends, family, colleagues)".

- o Facebook and Twitter are among the most popular social networks, they offer companies the opportunity to create groups or pages on which the members can express themselves as fans of the brand. Balagué & Fayon (2010, p79) claim that: "one of the challenges for companies with the creation of groups on Facebook or Twitter around a brand remains innovation in the discourse, regular updating of information, originality, in order to build a real competitive advantage".

It should be noted that a company's work on social networks is essentially based on its size.

Compared to traditional media, advertisers still find it difficult to assess their ROI because of the difficulties in finding a financial purpose.

The difficulty lies in the way in which a human exchange is quantified by trying to have a credible and quick indicator, offering them the possibility to evaluate the relevance of their actions. (Dupin, 2010)

Currently, the majority of social networks are based on the sale of advertising space.

According to (Balagué & Fayon, 2010), several tools are offered by its networks to try to measure the effectiveness of actions carried out on their platform such as the number of displays or click rates.

Source: Reproduced by the author

7. THE MEASUREMENT OF ROI

The nature of social networks is to create a positive image of the brand through its content and its interactions with Internet users. With this in mind, their ROI is evaluated by focusing on the general atmosphere and positivity towards the brand. In the world of social networks,

judgments are formed quickly, so reputation management is essential to avoid negative comments.

• The professional social networks:

A professional social network makes it possible to get in touch with people who have common interests on a professional level. Like any other network, friends of friends become friends of friends, and as a result, you can have quick contact with an employer or a person who can give advice on a job and/or training topic.

A professional social network is no substitute for a CV. A study made in 2010 on "recruitment 2.0" assigned to HR says that: "traditional channels (spontaneous applications, job sites, print media ...) are still relevant. Social networks do not replace any of these but rather complement the current range of tools available".

• Listening to social media:

Listening to and analyzing social media (Social Media Intelligence), through powerful tools, gives brands the possibility to gather insights on social networks, to study them and to use them to direct the different steps of their marketing strategy, be it for market analysis, execution or evaluation. At the level of an Insight Driven Marketing approach, listening to and analyzing social media is a strong pedal to stay competitive with competitors. Insight-driven companies have a development at least 8 times stronger than the GDP, because they properly exploit insights to test their products, services and operations. Each company's clients use its Social Media Intelligence tools to fuel their marketing strategy and increase their market share in their sector. In particular, a theme TV channel can only hope to achieve the position of a world leader in television production in its sector. It uses social media listening and analysis to steer it towards this goal by enabling it to assess its reputation in all the geographic areas that are growing rapidly for the TV group.

The channel examines its brand image and those of its direct competitors around the world. It examines the progression of voice shares, the perception of competitors, its own digital

notoriety as well as the most designated themes to guide the marketing strategy. It uses Google bigdata to get a general vision of its e-reputation and not fail any potential insights.

• The social media optimization SMO:

Social Media Optimization is a set of techniques applied to optimize the number of visitors on a web page. The SMO rule aims to go recruit new visitors on social media or networks. It can be expressed as the word-of-mouth of the web in the sense that it is based on the propagation of content through virtual networks to increase the notoriety of a website.

In practice, the SMO benefits from the popularity of social networks (Facebook) and other similar platforms (Youtube ...) to spread content. Social networks or social media are then used to broadcast information. SMO is an additional system to SEO to improve the popularity of a website and its positioning in search engine results pages.

CONCLUSION

In these times, a digital culture tending towards the harmonization of the different existing systems that are expected is mandatory. The competences of the 21st century are based on the double control of a robust professional culture and actions thought and improved relentlessly.

It is undeniable that social networks have disrupted our lifestyles, they have changed the way men communicate with each other and with businesses. This reversal of structure in the environment and in the company is in fact a source of opportunities. In this way, the Internet user is the winner on several levels, whether in sources of information, individualized help, etc.

The company, on the other hand, has direct access to its customers and prospects and can convert this advantage into significant commercial and social profits the brand can target its customers, Reach new segments of the population using socialization tools. It must not let this opportunity slip away and must adjust to these new media. It is obliged to have a communication strategy involving social media included in its overall strategy.

On the other hand, social networks are potentially an important element in overcoming a crisis. If it was planned and an approach to be followed, the application of social networks reduces or at least facilitates the dialogue between the brand and unfulfilled customers.

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