

THE RISE OF INSTAGRAM – EVOLUTION, STATISTICS, ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

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Abstract

The current paper, which is mostly a literature review paper, aims to underline the concept of social media, the evolution of the Instagram platform, several important statistics related to this visual platform (number of users, profile of the users, age groups, time spent online etc.), as well as some important advantages and disadvantages for the companies when using this platform for doing business or for when they develop their own online strategies. We are also presenting the types of posts that the Instagram users are appreciating, as well as several important aspects related to when to post on Instagram in connection to a certain industry or field of activity.

Keywords: *Marketing, Social Media, Instagram, Brand*

JEL classification: *M30, M31, M39*

1. Introduction

Social media platforms have had a meteoric rise in usage and in their involvement in the every day life of a great number of individuals and companies. In the last three decades we have witnessed the increasing usage of the Internet as a means of communication and that of doing business, but this has been surpassed in rapid growth by the new internet-based communication platforms like social media platforms.

Such social media platforms as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Snapchat and Instagram have become, in the last decade, some the new methods for individuals to communicate with each other, for companies to communicate

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with their customers and even for politicians to communicate with their electorate.

According to Keitzmann, Hermekens, McCarthy and Silvestre (2011), the rise of social media platforms, interaction and sharing has become an essential part of the online interaction for the individuals and for the 21st century companies. And of course, this leads to the consumers that are increasingly using social media to gather information on which to base their decisions (Casalo et. al., 2018).

In this context we as individuals and as potential consumers find ourselves today, when we are flooded with instant information, with tweets, with social media posts, with videos and pictures. If at the beginning of the 21st Century the social media platform *Facebook* has and still is the largest online social network, another is coming strong form behind: Instagram.

2. Social media and the rise of Instagram

Online social media platforms have emerged as online communication tools in the first half of the year 2000, although some authors state that social media platforms or online social networks as some call them have emerged in the last years of the 20th Century.

Before going deeper into defining social media platforms, we should state that the concept of social media is based on the concept of traditional social interactions that occur within the society, but only that in our case the online offers the advantages of practicality and online interaction anytime and anywhere.

Traditional social networks are basically all the friends, families, colleagues, business partners that one interacts with on o personal and/or a business level, individuals with which you have common personal and institutional interest (Acatrinei and Nictor, 2012; Cachia et.al., 2007; Garton et. al, 1997).

Starting from this, the development of online social media has become the next natural step, especially considering the strong development of Internet based communication of the first decade of the 20th Century. In the last decade or so, online social media platforms have gathered millions upon millions of users or followers, some of these platforms reaching in to the billions of users.

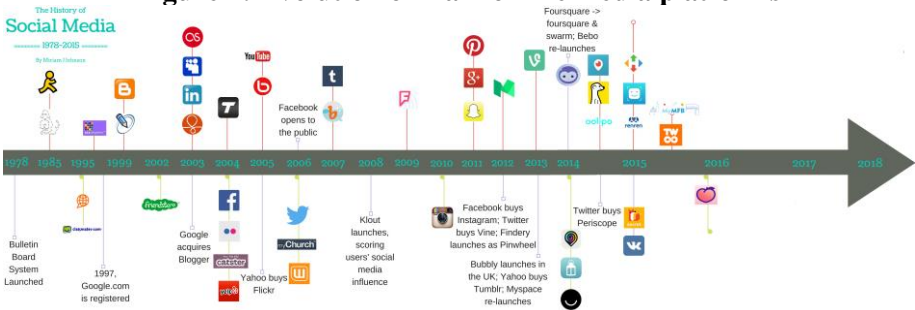
The first recognised definition of the concept of online social networks was that of Boyd and Ellison (2007), which stated that: “*as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or*

semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system”.

Philip Kotler (Kotler and Keller, 2019), define social media platforms as: “*social media a means for consumers to share text, images, audio, and video information with each other and with companies and vice versa.*” Zarella (2010) defines online social networks / social media as: “*websites trough which individuals connect with friends / acquaintances, either through people that they know from outside the virtual environment, either through those that they know only form the online environment and with which they have common interests or activities”.*

Of course, the evolution of online social media is also important for the companies. Like stated before, the evolution of these platforms has been meteoric. In figure 1, we can see the evolution of the main social media platforms up to 2018.

Figure 1: Evolution of main online media platforms



Source: (<https://keymediasolutions.com/news/social-media/evolution-of-social-media-platforms/>, accessed in December 2019).

As we can see from the above presented figure the biggest evolution in the history of online social media platforms has happened in little over a 10-year span (2002 – 2015). Currently Facebook is the biggest online social media platform with more than 60% of Internet users that have a Facebook account, in the middle of 2019, there were, according to Mark Zuckerberg, more than 2,7 billion Facebook users,

with more than 2,1 billion people that are using this social media platform daily and 96% of all Facebook users are accessing the platform via a mobile device (smartphone / tablet / laptop).

Figure 2: Current map of world-wide online social networks



Source: (<https://vincos.it/world-map-of-social-networks/>, accessed in December 2019)

If we talk about the profile of the average Facebook user, he is a young adult (65% of all platform users) that is younger than 35 years old. There are over 80 million SMEs that use Facebook, the average time spent on Facebook is around 1 hour / day, and 81% of the companies prefer to use Facebook to share their video content (Mohsin, 2019).

In accordance to the number of social media users, the second biggest online social media platform is Instagram. The American photo and video sharing platform was launched in the year 2010 by two US computer specialists (Kevin Systorm and Mike Krieger).

The evolution of the Instagram platform has gained the interest of technology and communication giants like Apple and Android which released Instagram Apps in 2010 and 2012, respectively. The year 2012 has meant a great evolution for the Instagram name, when it was bought by Facebook for 1 billion US Dollars (Forbes.com, 2012).

3. Some Instagram related statistics

As stated before, Instagram is the second largest online social media platform in the world and is the biggest photo and video sharing platform. Currently there are more than 1 billion Instagram users and more than 500 million daily users (Instagram-press.com, 2019).

According to several statistics, on Instagram, there are (Newberry, 2019, Gotter, 2019):

- 63% login on the platform daily;
- Average time spent per day on Instagram is 28 minutes;
- Almost 900 million users can be used as target groups for marketing advertising campaigns.
- More than 33% of the stories that are viewed are linked to a business or a brand of some kind.
- More than 200 million Instagram users visit at least one business / brand profile in a day.
- The gender distribution of the Internet users is: 52% female and 48% male.

Of course, these general statistics are not enough to develop a marketing, or a communication campaign based on Instagram. Much more information is needed in order to prepare such a marketing action. Among the most important aspects related to creating a successful marketing campaign one must consider the age group the interests of the Instagram users and the average time spent online.

At this time there are an average of 53 million Instagram users aged between 13 and 17 years old. At the same time 14% of the of the young adults over 13 years old can be a potential target group for Instagram marketing campaigns. In the last 2 or 3 years the Instagram video and photo sharing platform has created a new type of advertiser “the influencer”.

The US companies, which are currently the most developed business environment system that uses Instagram, spend up to 70% of their Instagram budgets is on influencers and 30% off their advertising budgets on Instagram stories. According to Newberry (2019) more than 73% off young adults’ state that Instagram is probably the best method for the current brands to reach them about new products, services or offers.

Another important aspect related to developing an Instagram based marketing campaign, is to know exactly when to release online specific posts or advertisements. According to Gotter (2019), there are several moments

within a day or a week when it's best to post on Instagram, in accordance to the field of activity of one's company:

- Tourism industry Fridays between 9:00 AM and 1:00 PM
- Media and entertainment Tuesdays and Thursdays between 12:00 PM and 3:00 PM
- Food and beverage: Fridays at noon
- Retail industry: Tuesdays Thursdays and Fridays at 12:00 PM
- Non-profit organizations: Tuesdays at 4:00 PM or 8:00 AM
- Healthcare and pharma: Wednesday and Sunday at 9:00 AM
- Technology: Monday and Tuesday at 2:00 PM
- Education: Tuesday at 4:00 PM or 5:00 PM.

Of course, these timelines and moments of the day may not be the same for every business or industry, or even for the above-mentioned industries. The companies should or better said test the impact of their posts in order to identify the best time of day, when said posts will have the maximum efficiency from a marketing point of view and maximum coverage from the Instagram users.

4. Advantages and disadvantages of using Instagram

Of course, the usage of Instagram for one's company or organisation has its challenges, but at the same time, the marketing specialists must be aware of the main advantages or disadvantages. One of the most important aspects related to creating the biggest possible Instagram engagement is to be active and to post on a regular basis. The main Instagram activity should be based on two important online tools: The Company's social media accounts and the company's website (Safko, 2012).

Before delving into the advantages and disadvantages of using Instagram for marketing purposes, there are several important types of engagements that are particularly liked by the Instagram followers (Hemley, 2013):

- a) *Customer centric posts* - you must show the added value that the product or service will bring the consumers life.
- b) *Employee centric posts* - alongside the consumer the employee is extremely important for the company, therefore companies should treat their employees extremely well and show the world this.

- c) *Instagram contest photos* - a competition or appointment Instagram rises the engagement of the followers. From time to time companies should start an Instagram competition, especially in those periods of time when sales are going down or they are stagnating.
- d) *Product photos, Services photos, photos of different places* - being a visual social media platform, Instagram focuses on pictures, on colours and on high quality photos.

Among the most important advantages of using Instagram for company or for building up the brand (Herman, 2019), we underline:

- *Instagram has a high presence in the online world* - it has become the 2nd largest social media platform and has a global reach that is continuously rising.
- *Instagram posts lead to viral marketing* - the visual content posted on Instagram or similar platforms like Pinterest are increasingly gaining popularity. A single picture can reach thousands, hundreds of thousands and even millions of followers in a matter of hours.
- *High visibility of posts* - due to the large number of users the posts can be extremely visible among users. The usage of keywords, hashtags can significantly increase the visibility and exposure of your posts and can lead, most of the time, to likes or comments.
- *High levels of engagement* - the visual aspect and nature of Instagram usually leads to a larger level of engagement from the users. The combination of colours movement and sounds, leads to likes, comments and re-posting from the great majority of Instagram users.
- *Targeted audience* - like any other social media platform, Instagram allows you to target your own customers and potential customers. While targeting is a bit more difficult on Instagram, then it is on Facebook, and building a community of loyal brand advocates is more difficult, Instagram allows you to interact better, faster and in a more visual and satisfying manner with the clients or potential clients.
- *Emotional connection* - usually pictures and videos, especially quality ones, lead to the development of an emotional connection

between the user and the brand or the company or the service that you are promoting.

At the same time, the marketing and online specialists should, like for any other online social media platform, consider several disadvantages or drawbacks of using this platform for developing your business (Barot, 2019):

- *Technological limitations* - due to the evolution of mobile technology, Instagram has been designed to work especially with Android and IOS systems. Therefore, those companies that wish to use Instagram, must design their online posts considering this important technical aspect.
- *Copyright issues* - the marketing specialists and online should always be aware of the limitations and legal aspects of the Copyright law. One cannot post indiscriminately about everything and everyone, but at the same time the company should allow Copyright infringement, in order for the consumers to copy or present or even forward these pictures on their personal accounts.
- *Existence of fake accounts* - like any other social media platform there is the possibility of fake accounts. Therefore, the consumers and at the same time the company, should be aware of the presence of online con artists. The best way to limit this disadvantage is to develop a permanent connection/link between your official website and your official social media accounts.
- *Social media addiction* - one of the biggest issues today is the development online addictions to games, social media, web chats and even Internet as a whole. The issue of addiction is starting to be analysed by scientists and medical professionals in order to reduce the negative impact of said addiction for the new online communication and information technologies.

5. Conclusions

The development of social media has changed the way individuals interact and communicate with one another. In the last two decades the increasing number of new technologies that help develop the communication between individuals and between individuals and companies has created a new environment in which the two sides can meet and interact. Over 2.7 billion

people are today connected to the largest social media platform and more than a billion are connected to the second largest social media platform.

From the current paper we have seen the evolution off the concept of social network and the evolution of the online social networking sites. We have witnessed the influence that these platforms have on the individuals and on the consumers, on the way they buy products or services, and on the manner in which they interact with one another.

At the same time social media has become a part of the everyday life of a company, of a political party, of a candidate to an elected office, and they have become part of many other fields of activity. But no activity has been influenced as much as the business world, where millions upon millions of companies have created social media accounts and are interacting in an active manner with their current and future clients.

In the current paper, we have shown several important statistics related to the usage of the social media platform known as Instagram, we have shown the importance of using this platform in an efficient way and we have underlined several important advantages and disadvantages of using said platform.

We have presented the importance of proper profiling and the profile of Instagram users, we have pointed out several important moments of the day and days of the week that are, according to some authors, the most efficient ones for having the most effective response two ones' posts. We have also pointed out several key elements that the Instagram users appreciate when they are looking at the posts.

Of course, this paper shows only a fraction of the potential that Instagram has for the business world and the author has and is continuing the research started in previous years on the evolution and influence of social media on consumers.

The next step of this study should be to assess the influence of individuals / famous people that have large numbers of followers (hundreds of thousands or millions), on the brands or on the products and services that they are endorsing or presenting to the general public using this online platform. It is interesting to see if these influencers are leading to an increase in the number of products sold or not, and if so, how large is this influence on the revenue / income of the company.

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