

The Importance of Social Media Responsiveness for Unfamiliar Brands

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

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With 78% of Internet users conducting product research online, the Internet has become a leading source for businesses to establish early relationships with their targeted customer base (Kagan, 2011). This consumer reliance on Internet research has made it crucial for a brand to have an active online presence in today's business environment. Once a brand establishes an online presence via a company website or social media page, the company can then implement online strategies such as search engine optimization or social media posting to cultivate relationships with other businesses and consumers. Becoming one of the most widely used marketing communication channels worldwide, social media has proven to be an effective and low cost method for brands to create awareness and grow by attracting and retaining customers. Many of the benefits of social media marketing include: increased brand recognition, improved brand loyalty, prospect conversion, decreased marketing costs, and improved customer retention.

While the majority of marketers say that social media marketing is important for their business, most of today's marketers are using this tool ineffectively and struggle to understand even the basics such as what social media tactics are most effective and how to measure the return on social media marketing (Stelzner, 2015). Many marketing professionals are researching and implementing best practices to stave off the top social media marketing shortcomings. These issues that many social media marketers are facing include: failing to implement effective social media tactics, lacking engaged customers, tracking the return on social media marketing ineffectively, and missing the company's primary target audience (Stelzner, 2015). The need for

social media marketing has grown in recent years and it is increasingly important for today's marketers to master this communication tool and directly engage the brand's customers. In order to reap the full benefits of this communications channel and achieve optimal results, companies need to learn the best practices of social media and the impact that social media can have on the customer's initial and ongoing engagement with the brand.

This research explores one best practice: social media responsiveness (i.e., responding to customer posts and inquiries) and describes the customer's potential engagement behaviors when a company is responsive on social media and satisfies the need for customers to be heard and interacted with effectively. While social media responsiveness seems like an intuitive social media best practice, companies are still struggling with this concept. In fact, the need for customers to have interactions with a business is being ignored on social media (Cohen, 2012). This creates a service gap when a company lacks responsiveness and causes a negative impact on the customer's future engagement tendencies with the brand. Today's customers expect high responsiveness and superior service quality when engaging with a brand or they are inclined to seek out other options to satisfy their needs.

Using an experimental design, this research investigates how different levels of an unfamiliar brand's social media responsiveness impact: 17 different consumer engagement behaviors (e.g., liking, forwarding, and responding to brand posts; referring a friend; etc.), attitude toward the brand, perceived trustworthiness of the brand, perceived brand transparency, and purchase intention. Being highly responsive on social media has the greatest impact on word of mouth marketing, but also significantly increases the use of coupons, likes on social media, and visits to the company website or social media page. This research clearly demonstrates with strong evidence that for those companies who haven't allocated enough time or resources to be

highly responsive on social media that it is important to begin doing so. Otherwise they risk decreased customer engagement behaviors, customer perception of the brand, and customer purchase intention.

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