Social Media Marketing: A New Trend For Lead Generation

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Abstract

The study aims to demonstrate the role that social media marketing plays in developing the lead generation process. To achieve this objective, a qualitative research method involves examining a series of research works on the studied subject, particularly those conceived within three research axes. The emphasis of our research results lies in the quality of leads rather than quantity. These findings underscore the necessity of integrating both marketing and sales activities into the lead generation process, ensuring that social media marketing practices support lead acquisition and management.

Keywords: *Social Media Marketing, Marketing, Sales, Sales Funnel, Lead Generation.*

Introduction

The environment undergoes constant evolution, these moments, both economically and technologically. Companies strive to implement the best managerial practices to confront the effects of an increasingly globalized competition. Faced with these challenges, an essential strategic vigilance, as practiced, involves the analysis of the competitive market to identify competitors. Subsequently, companies must distinguish themselves from competitors through its technology while also enhancing productivity, organizational efficiency, as well as its products and services.

Indeed, to confront rivalry, companies can employ effective marketing and sales techniques to gain considerable market shares. Thus, "lead generation" is a crucial approach to establishing a position and attracting new potential prospects. Furthermore, today's consumer utilizes multiple channels during the purchasing process, making it challenging for the company to be in the right place at the right time when the individual expresses a need for the company's products and services. However, the emergence of a new trend called "social media marketing" addresses this challenge.

In this context, social media marketing is a novel practice that, through the utilization of social networking sites, enables the management of a community around the brand, engaging with the audience in an often effective manner by ensuring awareness of the exact moment when the user makes a query for the company's products and services. In light of the preceding considerations,

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we deemed it valuable to pose the following research question: What role does social media marketing play as a novel approach for lead acquisition and management?

To provide a more comprehensive answer to our research question, we will examine and address the following axes:

1. Social Media Marketing: Concepts and Foundations

2. Lead Generation: Concepts and Theories

3. The Contribution of Social Media Marketing in Lead Generation:

1. Social Media Marketing: Concepts and Foundations

Definition of Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing is defined broadly as the set of marketing practices carried out through social networking sites. Similarly, a social network is also defined as "a platform that allows the creation of a profile to build relationships with other members, to form groups with common interests, and to exchange. It enables a dialogue or conversation within a controlled and organized framework, albeit free from the physical constraints of proximity and synchronicity" (Boursin & Puyfaucher, 2012). Today, social media platforms have become an essential means for launching marketing campaigns. Indeed, social media marketing is described as "a connection between brands and consumers by providing a personal channel and device for a network-centered and social interaction" (Haslinda & al, 2016).

In addition, Chaffey and Smith provide a functional definition, which focuses on the use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc., for marketing purposes by monitoring, facilitating, and encouraging social interactions, participation, and sharing on these digital channels. In this context, a marketer aims to enhance customer awareness and positive engagement to achieve sales and business value (Chaffey & Smith, 2017). Another definition, somewhat similar to the previous one but with a qualitative perspective, is provided by Murdock. He considers social media marketing as the set of marketing techniques conducted on social networks to promote products and services through two different forms: advertisements and content (Murdock, 2012).

All in all, social media marketing encompasses the practices and actions of the marketing carried out in a digital environment using social networks. These platforms provide the opportunity to engage and interact with the audience, allowing brands to build a relationship of trust and a space for sharing with their customers. Moreover, they enable brands to understand customer habits and behaviors in order to satisfy their needs.

These new marketing practices serve as an asset for brands to communicate in an innovative and relevant manner, ensuring a significant presence on the internet. They are also essential for enhancing the effectiveness of overall digital marketing actions.

Social Media Marketing Platforms

Here is an overview of the most used social media sites in marketing:

Facebook

Launched in 2004, Facebook is a social network for the distribution and sharing of various types of content. It has become the most popular social network in the world with over 1.8 billion users. Facebook provides a personal space where individuals can express themselves, publish content (photos, videos, texts, etc.), and share them with one or more people according to their preferences, including all their contacts. The optimal use of Facebook by brands is characterized by effective interaction with the audience, increased sales, successful prospecting for new customers, ongoing customer loyalty, a rich database, and a space for targeted advertising campaigns (Gayet & Marie, 2016).

Instagram

Founded in 2010, Instagram is a social network for sharing photos and videos with the option to add filters. The platform has experienced rapid growth and boasts over 1 billion users worldwide. Instagram allows users to create accounts for free, and individuals can share their photos and videos with their list of followers. Users can engage with their network of friends through various features, including liking, commenting, tagging, and sending specific publications. Additionally, the social network provides a messaging option for users to communicate with each other, along with dozens of other free features.

Simultaneously, Instagram enables brands to use it effectively by creating a virtual community to showcase their products and services, share customer experiences, provide social customer service, engage and interact with the audience, and demonstrate the creativity of the company (Bladier, 2015).

YouTube

Established in 2005, YouTube is a social network and video-sharing service, deemed a search engine by more than 1.9 billion monthly users on average. YouTube allows connected users to create channels, upload videos, leave comments, and rate shared videos, among numerous free features.

YouTube enables brands to launch channels, invite the audience to subscribe, and share video content to a potentially large audience due to the popularity of this search engine. Additionally, it ensures effective search engine optimization for brands on the Google search engine (Poncier, 2011).

LinkedIn

Launched in 2013, LinkedIn is a professionally oriented social network, and its growth is confirmed

with over 500 million users, both professional and individual. LinkedIn provides connected users with functionalities similar to those of previous social networks but also offers the opportunity to apply for job openings posted by companies. Additionally, LinkedIn provides premium subscriptions for users to access certain features, such as additional information on job offers and access to on-demand learning videos.

Brands active on LinkedIn can benefit from several advantages. They gain access to hundreds of collaborators by simply posting a job opening, they also have the opportunity to form partnerships with other connected businesses and express their business themes, professional life, and interact with their network of contacts (March, 2011).

Twitter

Founded in 2006, Twitter is a social network for sharing news with posts that are short compared to Facebook. Twitter is also intended for individuals and brands like other social networks and has quickly become popular, boasting over 300 million connected users per month. The social network offers various features to its users, including subscription, tweeting and retweeting, direct messages (limited to 280 characters), verified accounts, and many other uses. Brands that use and connect on Twitter can have certified accounts, the ability to customize their audience, and communicate with their customers to create a close relationship and build a community (Hossler, Murat, & Jouanne, 2014).

Advantages and Disadvantages of Social Media

The following table illustrates the advantages and disadvantages of social media sites.

Social network	Advantages	Disadvantage
Facebook	▪ Gain insight into user habits and behavior. ▪ Customer retention. ▪ Relevant interaction with customers ▪ Creation of a real community of consumers.	▪ Time for reflection and creativity. ▪ A daily presence on the page. ▪ A dedicated budget. ▪ Constant monitoring to find out about the best sharing sites.
Instagram	▪ Vitality ▪ Engaging customer content ▪ Use of keywords. ▪ Sponsor content	▪ Only on mobile. ▪ Time-consuming for a variable impact depending on the brand.
YouTube	▪ Essential service for hosted videos. ▪ Free referencing on the Google engine. ▪ Easy streaming of the video to other sites. ▪ Sponsored videos.	▪ Fall of competitors and detractors ▪ Requires more resources (thought, time, achievement) ▪ Risk of negative feedback.
LinkedIn	▪ Differentiation and	▪ Management becomes more

	attention that is easy to achieve. ▪ Easy segmentation. ▪ Effective website SEO. ▪ Increases the number of recommendations.	complex when the number of members increases. ▪ A considerable amount of time must be dedicated.
Twitter	▪ Show the company's effort and culture. ▪ Rapid engagement from Internet users. ▪ Better brand visibility.	▪ Difficult adaptation of the content to the medium ▪ May degrade the message. ▪ Requires more resources

Source: (Jacque, 2014) (Pommeray, 2016) (Nathalie & al, 2015) (Gayet & Marie, op.cit, 2016) (Jacque, op.cit, 2014) (With adaptation).

Lead Generation: Concepts and Theories

Today, the sales force has become a resource that is too expensive for companies. Faced with this challenge, businesses have turned to new practices and implemented a lead generation strategy to make the sales team more cost-effective.

Definition and Characteristics of a Qualified Lead

Lead generation is a set of marketing practices primarily aimed at engaging customers to create a worthy customer base. It helps companies enhance brand awareness, maintain customer relationships, and attract a large number of potential clients to boost their sales pipelines (Stevens, 2011).

Stevens emphasizes the qualitative aspect of lead generation, noting that it does not focus on a broad reach of attracted individuals and high volume but on the high quality of leads to increase profit. Thus, this practice tends to be effective in the field, aids sales, generates practical results, and increases the company's revenue.

Identifying potential customers and determining their likelihood of acquiring a product before making a purchase is the essential characteristic of lead generation. This process can often be explained in a straightforward manner, such as individuals expressing their agreement by "raising their hand" and admitting their interest in acquiring or learning about a product or service. The author also distinguishes the prospect as someone who has identified themselves as a potential candidate that could potentially be converted into a customer, with their nature varying based on where they are in the purchase funnel (Lukowski & Świeczak, 2016).

Based on the aforementioned definitions, lead generation can be defined as a marketing concept that encompasses marketing operations facilitating the creation of contacts with prospects to who have expressed significant interest in the products and services of the company. The company hopes to convert these prospects into potential customers.

For the lead generation process to be profitable, it is essential that the lead is qualified and possesses

specific characteristics. BANT (Budget, Authority, Need, and Time) is the acronym that designates the particularities of a qualified prospect (Schultz & Doerr, 2016). According to Schultz and Doerr, BANT is explained as follows:

- Budget: It is a straightforward evaluation of the prospect's ability to spend money on the offered product or service.

- Authority: It defines the individual's power to decide on allocating the budget for spending on the product or service.

- Need: The prospect must perceive the need for the product or service for them to make a purchase.

- Time: The prospect must set a timeframe for purchasing the product or service.

However, the author emphasizes the time horizon due to its significant importance. Indeed, prospects can be categorized based on the timeframe they have set for acquiring the product. Short-term prospects are those with a determined timeframe to make a purchase in the near future. If the timeframe is not specified, prospects are classified as long-term.

Furthermore, it is possible for a specific prospect to possess BANT characteristics, but if the product offerings do not meet their needs, a mismatch can lead to poor relationships, low margins, and dissatisfied customers.

Sales Funnel: A Mechanism for Lead Generation

Lead generation involves an approach to creating a relationship that supports the consumer's buying journey with relevant information until they are deemed ready to be converted into potential customers. To achieve the goal of lead generation, it is necessary for companies to provide the right content at the right time and on the right platform. Thus, content marketing varies from one company to another based on various criteria such as the industry, types of products, etc.

The concept of the sales funnel is widely recognized both academically and professionally. However, its exact form and the order of the phases it encompasses may vary from one study to another. The sales funnel is also defined in a simpler way as the design of a process that guides a prospect to become a potential customer who ultimately makes a purchase.

Moreover, the sales funnel consists of four successive stages by dividing the actors into: suspect, prospect, lead, and customer (D'Haen & Van den Poel, 2013). Other studies draw inspiration from this model but include existing customers as they represent potential targets for repurchase and upselling. Here is an overview of the presented model.

Structure of the sales tunnel
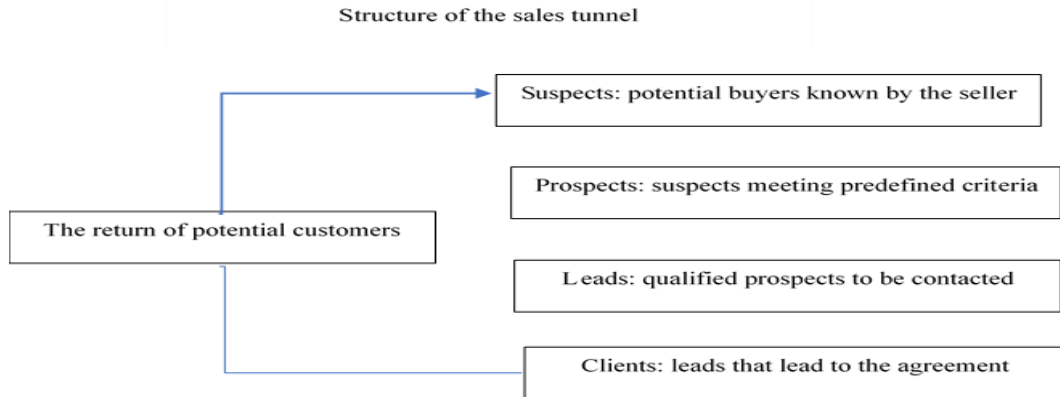
Source: (D'Haen & Van den Poel, 2013) (With adaptation)

In practice, it is often challenging to determine which prospects are most likely to convert into potential customers for the company. This challenge can be attributed to the skills and efforts employed by sales representatives. The first challenge lies in the characteristics of a prospect, which vary from one company to another. The second challenge is that information about the quality of prospects is rarely available to the seller before they make contact with the customer.

Lead Generation Tactics

The objective of implementing a lead generation strategy is to achieve a significant return on investment. To achieve this goal in a more productive manner, companies employ various tactics to create an effective model that adapts to the target industry. Here is a summary of some acquisition tactics that generate the most leads:

Table 2: Digital and Traditional Tactics for Lead Generation.

Tactics for Lead Generation	
Digital	Marketing via email and newsletters; The Display; SEO (SEO and SEA); Content marketing; Affiliate marketing.
Traditional	Advertising; Events; TV channels; Phone calls.

Source: (MarketingAdvocate, 2014) (Holliman & Rowley, 2014) (With adaptation)

The choice of lead generation tactics has become a major challenge for marketers. Some proposals advocate selecting media with the potential for the widest possible audience, while others encourage the use of channels that create the highest engagement (Holliman & Rowley, 2014).

However, lead acquisition tactics not only vary from one company to another but also within the same company from one moment to another. Therefore, companies must carefully determine the tactics that yield the most leads and are cost-effective to execute or combine multiple tactics for better conversion of prospects into potential customers.

To achieve a good return on investment, it is essential to analyze the results of implemented tactics, assess the channels used, and regularly adjust the strategy. Exceptional results in terms of lead generation stem from efforts to implement different tactics and combine them across multiple channels (Fulham, 2016). Moreover, the success of this strategy should also be measured by quality, traffic, interactions, and connections with the audience, as lead acquisition and management should be understood as a long-term strategy (Kesler, 2015).

The Contribution of Social Media Marketing in Lead Generation

Marketing and Sales: Two Different Functions

Marketing and sales are two often crucial functions in a business, as they effectively share the same objective, which is to generate profits for the company. The difference between the two activities has been a debated topic among researchers and marketers for years. When the two functions work together, they don't always see eye to eye, especially when the company fails to achieve the desired results. This poses a problem as each function may attribute the failure to the other.

The different orientations between the marketing and sales departments have a final impact, whether positive or negative, on the company's performance in the market. Different orientations regarding the customer directly have a positive effect on profitability, as do different orientations regarding the product. Furthermore, differences in product knowledge, interpersonal skills, and competencies negatively impact market performance (Homburg & Jensen, 2007).

Furthermore, the function of marketing, as practiced in the company, varies based on numerous criteria, including the market, industry sector, nature of the product, product life cycle, and company size. Thus, marketing missions change each time the company adjusts its strategy, which often requires significant funding. In contrast, the missions of salespeople do not change, and the objective remains the increase in the company's revenue. Similarly, the relationship between the two functions also changes according to the following typology: (Kotler & Keller, 2006).

• Undefined Relationship: Each department is occupied with its own tasks and is unaware of what the other department is working on. As a result, meetings in the company aim to resolve conflicts rather than proactive cooperation.

• Defined Relationship: The departments start to communicate and build a common language. They know the tasks to be done and essentially stick to their own tasks. They also collaborate during events.

• Aligned Relationship: Both departments are flexible and participate in planning and training

together, although there are still boundaries between them.

• Integrated Relationship: The boundaries are blurred, and both departments share the same structures, systems, rewards, and metrics. They begin to focus on tasks of a strategic nature and turn towards the future.

The integration of marketing and sales, coupled with the use of social media, significantly enhances the efficiency and performance of the company. The marketing function can transfer qualified leads to sales without manual input, enabling a quicker attraction of prospects. In summary, lead generation should be a shared responsibility between marketing and sales to boost revenue and understand the roles of each department. Improved collaboration will lead to better results (Carroll, 2018).

Lead Acquisition: A Major Goal of Social Media Marketing

Social media has been a part of our daily lives for a long time. Companies are increasingly using social media in their marketing strategies, and for it to be effective on social networks, it must be accompanied by well-defined objectives.

Social media marketing enables companies to acquire and guide prospects, understanding their behavior and movement through the sales funnel. Therefore, companies must publish high-quality and engaging content to encourage customers to purchase products and services. The use of digital channels, particularly social media platforms, as tools for promotion, interaction, and information gathering about prospects, allows the company to build a significant database on customers to support the sales force in enhancing commercial value (Bodnar & Cohen, 2012).

Moreover, some companies find it challenging to integrate social media into their sales activities, as marketing managers often perceive it as difficult to make optimal decisions through marketing and social media. On the other hand, other companies have reported that implementing social media marketing activities alongside sales functions can acquire more leads by generating traffic from social media sites to the company's website (Karjaluoto, Hänninen, & Ulkuniemi, 2015).

Inbound Marketing

It is the practice of creating and sharing various types of content at the right time and on the most suitable platforms, enabling the company to promote its products and services and instill the brand in the hearts and minds of prospects, clients, and others (Hawlk, 2018). As current and potential customers actively seek brands offering engaging and relevant content such as videos, animations, and multimedia that are interesting, useful, and tailored to their needs, companies must adopt a more customer-centric perspective rather than explicit sales and brand-centered approaches (Halligan & Shah, 2009).

Automation

It is a technique that involves automating marketing activities using specific software to facilitate

control and measurement of marketing tactics, optimizing task execution, and achieving a good return on investment. Marketing automation provides companies with effective tools for managing the database of current and potential customers, creating segmented lists, and lead acquisition through the classification of qualified contact lists. (Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016)

Employee Advocacy

Employee advocacy is a mechanism practiced by the company to empower employees as brand ambassadors in their daily lives, using social media and their personal profiles to showcase the human aspect of the company, its goals, and values.

The advantage of an employee engagement program for the company is to enhance brand visibility, promote products and services, as well as acquire prospects. This is achieved through compelling content shared by employees who are knowledgeable about the latest market trends and the right time to engage with social media users. Furthermore, employee advocacy can boost lead generation by delivering relevant content to the right audience, helping to showcase the company's culture.

Social Selling

Social selling is an approach that involves using social media platforms throughout the sales process. The social selling method is a means of researching and interacting with prospects and potential clients to create opportunities and enhance commercial value.

Social media platforms serve as digital channels that enable sales teams to engage with the target audience at the optimal time and help them better understand consumer behavior and needs. Therefore, social selling is a lead generation technique used in all phases of the sales process, particularly in prospecting, aiming to effectively convert qualified leads into potential customers. (Fidelman, 2013)

Sponsored Content

Sponsored content is a new marketing technique that involves offering content and financing it to achieve better interaction with the audience and expand its reach. The goal of the paid content strategy is to target social media users based on various categories to enhance sales and increase the brand's revenue.

Nowadays, the use of sponsored posts is mandatory for brands because social media platforms have gradually reduced the visibility of organic posts. Thus, sponsored content has become a crucial pull lever to encourage prospects to make purchases through relevant engagement, incorporating more steps into the lead generation process. (Vidor & al., 2019)

Conclusion

The research study aims to demonstrate the contribution of marketing practices using social media platforms in acquiring and managing qualified leads for the company's sales department. The study

is based on theoretical work, presenting three research axes.

The research indicates that marketing methods using social media platforms play a crucial role in acquiring prospects and converting them into potential customers. Certain techniques directly support the sales force in creating awareness around the company's products and services among the target audience.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes the integration of marketing and sales within the company to achieve market performance and fulfill the objectives of both functions and the brand. It is essential for both departments to work together to automate data processing, ensure transparency, and traceability in the lead management process, facilitating the conversion of marketing prospects into actual purchases.

The passage emphasizes lead generation as a major objective of social media marketing and its support for the sales team. Additionally, improving brand visibility effectively leads to the generation of sales leads due to increased awareness and understanding of the target audience regarding the products and services offered by the company.

Regarding the reflections and observations presented in the research work, it is evident that social media marketing practices focus on lead quality rather than quantity. Moreover, the emphasis on quality leads aims to target potential customers who are already more advanced in their buying processes.

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