



Contemporary Trends in the Use of Social Media in Marketing and Branding

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ABSTRACT

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Modern companies exist in a highly competitive environment and are forced to look for new tools to promote their products and expand their audience. Companies, along with the mass media, use social communities as media resources to share their content with people they consider their audience. Initially, it was all about driving traffic to their websites, hoping to increase sales. But very quickly, social media went far beyond being just a place to share content. Today, social networks have become a full-fledged platform for promoting goods and services. And the formation and implementation of SMM strategies (social media promotion strategies) is becoming perhaps the most important link in the formation of the marketing system. Given the relevance of the research topic, its purpose is to summarise theoretical aspects and develop practical recommendations on the use of social media to promote products and create a positive company image. As a result of the study, the author analyses the dynamics of growth of social media users, identifies the benefits of forming a marketing campaign in social media, and develops recommendations on creating and implementing an SMM strategy for an enterprise.

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Introduction

With social media's active development, new business promotion tools have emerged, and even a new type of marketing has been formed - Social Media Marketing. This type of marketing is one of the fastest-growing (Li et al., 2021; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020).

This is due to the constant transformation of algorithms, interfaces, and the expansion of social media functionality. It is becoming obvious that this area requires continuous study, as the tools and methods of their use are rapidly becoming obsolete.

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There is a significant number of social networks today. It seems impractical for marketers to study each of them because they do not have a sufficient audience to use them as a business promotion tool. Therefore, social media experts focus on the most popular social networks among users.

A social network is an online platform that provides its users with the ability to communicate, share information, and engage in other forms of social interaction. In the early years, when social networks first appeared, they were seen as a communication medium for people with common interests. However, as their popularity grew and the number of users increased, social networks began to attract more and more attention from businesses as an effective tool for communicating with consumers.

Social media is a powerful tool for marketing campaigns and attracting new customers. They are now an integral part of business, and many companies use social media to attract new customers and retain existing ones.

One of the main opportunities of social media is the ability to create and distribute content to draw attention to their products and services. Advertising companies can use social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter to increase awareness of their products and services through a wide audience (Lucato et al., 2019; Saura et al., 2021).

Another way to use social media is to create customer communities around a company's brand (Petrescu et al., 2021; Sapiński, 2022). Online communities provide a company with the opportunity to connect with customers and receive feedback, which helps in developing more effective marketing strategies. Finally, it is worth mentioning social media as a tool for sales and direct communication with customers. Many companies offer their products and services on social media platforms such as Facebook Marketplace and Instagram Shop. This allows companies to simplify the buying process, increase the convenience and attractiveness of the service for customers. In addition, the use of social media is an opportunity for companies to create and expand their market presence, improve their image, and reduce the cost of promoting their products and services.

Given the relevance of the issue of analysing the place and role of social media in modern marketing, the aim of the article is to summarise current trends in the use of social media in company marketing and the formation of a positive brand image.

Literature review

Social media allows you to communicate directly with your target audience. They can be used to share news and product updates. Social media sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, help increase brand awareness and attract new customers (Li et al., 2021; Yasmin et al., 2015). Embedding advertising through social media pays off in increased sales and brand awareness.

For marketers, it is a versatile, multi-purpose tool. Social media allows you to communicate with your target audience in a more direct way and take up more space in their daily lives. It allows you to share news about product and service updates, upcoming events, company and industry news, success stories, tips, tricks, and much more. Depending on your advertising and business goals, you can develop your existing marketing promotion potential. Social media allows you to reach your audience at all stages. They can be used to make a brand statement and position a company as relevant and modern. Moreover, the better developed social media are, the better a company will appear in Google search results.

Social media marketing includes several stages, which are described in detail in Table 1.

Table 1.

The sequence of stages in creating a marketing plan for promoting a company through social media

Stage	Specifics of implementation
Create a profile	The first step is to create a company profile on social media. To do this, you need to select the appropriate platforms and register an account. Companies usually choose several social media platforms to promote their brand, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn
Content development	The next step is to develop content to be published on social media. Content can be in different formats, for example, texts, photos, video, or audio. The content should be interesting for the audience and consistent with the company's image
Publishing content	After creating content, you need to publish it to your company's social media profile. It is recommended that you set up a publication schedule so that content is published regularly and not intrusively. It is important to remember that the content should be relevant and interesting to the audience
Interaction with the audience	Social networks provide an opportunity to interact with the company's audience. This can include responding to questions, comments, or feedback, as well as conducting polls or contests. Interaction with the audience helps to strengthen customer relations and improve the company's image
Attracting new customers	One of the main goals of social media marketing is to attract new customers. To do this, you can use various tools, such as targeted advertising, collaboration with bloggers or partners, and promotions and discounts

Compiled by the author based on (Abbasi et al., 2021; Bala & Verma, 2018; Girchenko & Ovsiannikova, 2016; Ihnatenko, 2022)

Social media marketing (SMM) is based on the use of social networks in product promotion.

SMM is a marketing strategy that uses social media, online forums, blogs, and other online platforms to promote products, services, websites, or brands (Pan et al., 2022). SMM is one of the most effective marketing tools nowadays, as most people spend most of their time on social media. Therefore, the use of SMM helps businesses promote themselves in the online space and attract more potential customers. In this article, we'll take a closer look at what SMM is, how it can help businesses, and how to use it in your marketing strategies. There are many business benefits to using SMM, which are detailed in Table 2.

Overall, the use of SMM can help businesses improve their image, attract new customers, and strengthen relationships with existing ones. This makes SMM one of the most important marketing tools today.

Proper SMM promotion, together with a properly organised and filled website, allows you to create a reliable stream of loyal customers. If you constantly create high-quality content and present a product that people are interested in, the flow of potential customers will turn into active buyers. Even if traffic is low, it is important to take behavioural factors into account. The right strategy will ensure a high response rate - only newsletters get a higher percentage. You can attract users' attention not only to your account but also to your YouTube channel or company website. Many people like to buy products on social media because they can read reviews from other users, read comments, see photos, and ask questions directly to the brand creator. If you carefully manage your account, you can notice criticism and customer feedback in time, find out the reason for their dissatisfaction, eliminate the negative or, on the contrary,

thank them for a positive comment. People really like personal attention, and this raises the brand even higher in their eyes.

Table 2.

Advantages of using SMM for business development

Advantages of using SMM for business development	Characteristics
Increase visibility	SMM allows you to increase the number of content views and attract new customers. Thanks to the presence in social networks, businesses can reach a wide audience and popularise their brand
Customer loyalty	Using SMM can help strengthen customer relationships, increase customer loyalty and brand commitment. Businesses can use social media to run contests, promotions and prize draws to engage their customers and increase engagement
Improving communication with customers	SMM provides an opportunity for businesses to communicate with customers and receive feedback from them. It helps businesses better understand their customers' needs and wants and improve their products or services based on this feedback
Economic benefits	Using social media for marketing is more accessible and cheaper than traditional forms of advertising. Businesses can create a free social media account and distribute content for free or use advertising tools more effectively
Ability to analyse the results	SMM allows businesses to analyse the results of their marketing campaigns and improve them based on this data. Businesses can track metrics such as engagement rates, conversions, and traffic statistics on their social media pages to better evaluate the effectiveness of their SMM efforts

Compiled by the author based on (Afonasova et al., 2019; Arora et al., 2019; Arora et al., 2022; Lima et al., 2020; Redjeki & Affandi, 2021).

If the company has not previously promoted its product, it is worth considering which platform is best for this. For example, if the company is small and the product range is not too detailed, a simple account on one of the social media platforms will be enough for the first time. If the company has been around for a long time, has a large assortment of products, and regular customers, you should consider creating your own website and using it as a platform for promotion. This will also allow the firm to strengthen its status and reputation in the eyes of clients.

Moreover, both methods can be combined. You don't have to limit yourself to your own website or social media, if the company has the resources to do so, you can use two marketing strategies: combine classic marketing and SMM. When combining two platforms, one of them will be the main one, and the other will be a way to attract customers through the publication of advertising, targeted advertising, interaction with other platforms, etc.

Thus, the use of social media to promote a company and create a positive image is becoming an excellent tool for developing a business marketing strategy.

Method

The research is focused on analysing the opportunities offered using social media for modern companies in the context of product promotion and building a positive image of a brand that is entering the market or has been present there for a long time.

The research was based on the scientific works of leading Ukrainian and foreign scholars, in particular, the literature of the last 5 years was analysed to provide an up-to-date view of the issues under development.

Attention is also paid to the analysis of statistical material on the use of social networks in the modern world. Based on the generalisation of scientific literature and the author's own conclusions, recommendations on the formation and implementation of an SMM strategy for promoting products through social networks are formulated.

Data analysis and results

In today's digital environment, where distance has become meaningless and borders are disappearing, social media is a very powerful tool that can easily reduce the space and time between people. Social media allows us to stay in touch with friends, family, and colleagues, regardless of distance and time zones. Thanks to this virtual platform, we can enjoy engaging conversations, share interesting photos and videos, talk about the latest news and events, and receive valuable feedback and comments from a wide range of users. Social media transforms communication into an easy and fast exchange of ideas that brings us closer together, creating virtual connections across borders and connecting us into a global network.

The virtual world of social media offers unique opportunities to reconnect with old friends, meet new ones, and expand your social circle. These digital platforms are not only a means of communication, but also a powerful tool for establishing new social connections. They provide a virtual space in which we can communicate with people from all over the world, transcending time and geography. In addition, social media helps us maintain existing relationships, especially when there is a physical distance between us and our loved ones. Social media allows us to delve into their lives, share their joys and challenges, and maintain an emotional connection that allows us to feel close to each other even when we are geographically separated. Social media is a digital bridge that bridges the barriers of time and space to create and maintain emotional and friendly connections.

Today, there are about 4.2 billion social media users in the world. In the first 12 months of 2021, their number increased by 490 million people, which is more than 13% year-on-year growth. In 2021, 53.6% of the world's population used social media.

One of the current trends in social media is its growing popularity as a source of information about brands, their products, and services. Among Ukrainian users, this figure is 42% (Shahid et al., 2022; Vitsentzatou et al., 2022).

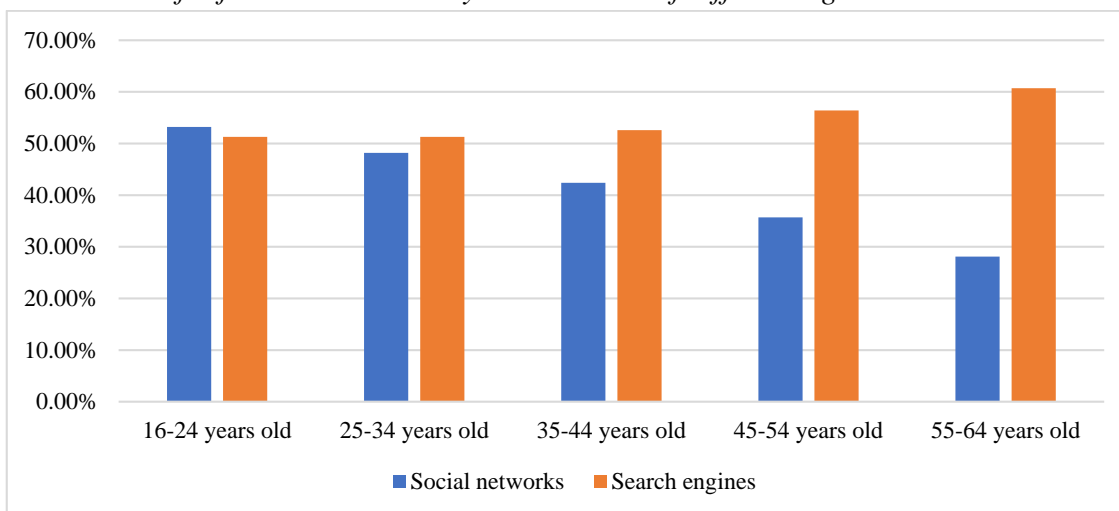
Respondents aged 16-24 use social media information as a priority source, preferring it to search engines (Figure 1).

Accordingly, based on the data in Fig. 1, it can be argued that the main users of social networks are young people under the age of 44.

Most people use social media to communicate with family and friends (47%). 35.4% simply seek to fill their free time, 34.6% read news and stories, 30% are looking for specific content, and 28.7% are trying to understand what is happening in the world. Another 27% of users look for inspiration and new ideas for implementation or purchase on social media, and 26.2% look for and buy various goods (Levchenko et al., 2022). Facebook is the most popular social network in the world: 2.9 billion users. It is followed by YouTube and WhatsApp with 2.5 billion and 2 billion users respectively. Instagram (1.4 billion users) and WeChat (1.3 billion users) rounded out the top five. TikTok, Facebook Messenger, Telegram, Chinese Douyin, Kuaishou, Sina Weibo, and many others are also on the list of the most popular apps.

Figure 1.

Main channels of information search by the audience of different ages



Source: author's development

Statistics show that a huge number of people use social media, and for many companies, it is becoming a place where they can showcase their products and services and build their own consumer audience.

Table 3 shows the length of time users spend on a social network per session and the number of pages viewed per visit.

Table 3.

The duration of users' stay in social networks per session and the number of pages visited by consumers of the most popular social networks

Rank	Website	Avg. Visit Duration	Pages / Visit	Bounce Rate
1	facebook.com	00:10:35	9.03	31.27%
2	instagram.com	00:08:14	11.31	35.19%
3	twitter.com	00:10:52	10.09	31.91%
4	whatsapp.com	00:19:48	1.72	40.19%
5	tiktok.com	00:03:37	7.24	36.69%
6	reddit.com	00:08:16	6.18	40.05%
7	linkedin.com	00:07:33	7.73	24.87%
8	vk.com	00:12:03	14.42	27.75%
9	pinterest.com	00:05:47	6.05	41.33%
10	discord.com	00:06:37	6.98	50.47%

Compiled by the author based on (Hrynychshyn, 2021)

According to the data presented in Table 3, the duration of one user session on social media is not very long and ranges from 8 to 12 minutes on average. Accordingly, if a company plans to use social media to promote its products, it needs to create content in such a way that it is vivid, quickly attracts attention, and does not require long viewing. This is also true in the modern world, where events change frequently, and the world is extremely dynamic.

Since social media attracts so many users, it makes perfect sense to build a marketing strategy based on SMM and social media promotion. From a business perspective, an internet marketing strategy is a tool that allows you to reduce the cost of inefficient marketing activities

and increase revenues by allocating free funds to financially successful marketing tools (Akter & Sultana, 2020; Arslanalp et al., 2019; Gobble, 2018). When developing a marketing strategy, it is mandatory to include a clause with a forecast of results for each channel and tool, as well as to fix the conditions and criteria for evaluating marketing channels based on the success or failure of the strategy.

This allows you to respond to failures in time and reduce budgets for unsuccessful tools, as well as reduces the risks of making decisions based on expectations from the marketing strategy and forces participants in the process to operate with numbers rather than emotions”.

From the point of view of an Internet marketer, an Internet marketing strategy allows you to focus your company's limited resources on the tools with the highest potential for achieving your targets. Preparing for the development of a social media strategy involves several important steps and aspects that need to be followed to get a positive result for the effective development of the company. Figure 2 shows some of the main steps and recommendations:

Based on Fig. 2, it is important to realise that the development and implementation of an SMM strategy is an ongoing process, and it is important to remain flexible and respond to changes in the social environment.

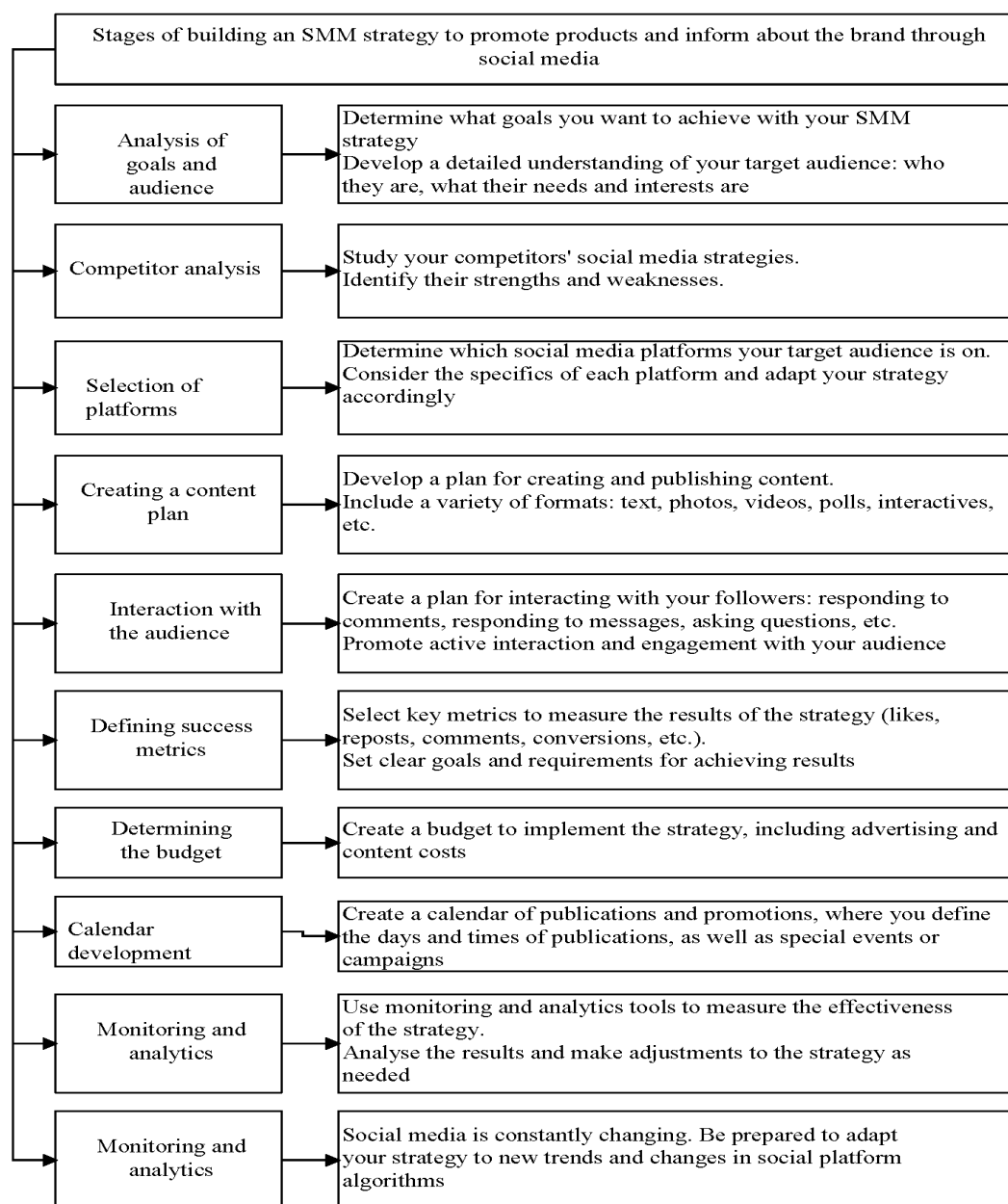
When developing and implementing an SMM strategy, you should work with the most effective tools, including the following:

1. Targeted advertising. Targeted advertising is often an ad that consists of text and visuals. Such ads are seen only by a specific audience, which is selected based on location, age, gender, and other criteria. It is recommended to trust a specialist to set up targeted advertising. A beginner is unlikely to cope with this task, as they are likely to set up an advertising campaign in such a way that the planned budget will be spent inefficiently.
2. Work with opinion leaders. To increase the number of subscribers, a company can turn to opinion leaders: bloggers, well-known media personalities. To find an opinion leader, you use special catalogues, study hashtags on the topic, geolocation, and the quality of the account itself. If the blogger has few real subscribers, it is better not to approach such an opinion leader for advertising, as the feedback will be insignificant.
3. Advertising in popular publics. You can also place advertising posts in popular communities. Such a promotion tool allows you to attract a large number of potential customers and subscribers. The idea is that marketers tell the audience about their brand or product in a popular thematic public.
4. Holding contests and sweepstakes. Contests and sweepstakes can help to attract the audience. The conditions may vary, but the basic rule is that when a subscriber mentions a brand, the information becomes available to friends, which means that the number of interested people who want to take part in the draw increases. And real winnings make the audience even more interested. You can combine contests with other promotion methods, for example, run ads on a contest post or organise a joint draw with a blogger or other publicist.

To summarise, social media is the best environment to build trust with your target audience, find potential customers, build brand awareness, and expand your audience. Users will receive useful and interesting content, and the company will be able to interact with them using SMM tools. Also, social media is suitable for the promotion of both small and large companies.

Figure 2.

The sequence of stages in the preparation and implementation of an SMM strategy for promoting goods and informing about the company's brand



Compiled by the author based on (Ardito et al., 2021; Ashraf et al., 2020; Dey et al., 2020; Kovalenko, 2019; Stahl et al., 2020; Tobal & Menna, 2020)

Conclusion

Promotion on social media allows you to effectively develop your business and attract new customers. SMM promotion can be done on your own or with the help of specialists.

As the research has shown, SMM marketing is a set of activities aimed at interacting with potential customers through social media and messengers. For promotion, different types of content are created and distributed by users through social channels. This method allows you to gain the trust of the audience because the source of information is a recommendation from a familiar person.

As social media is attracting more and more users, which has been proven by analysing statistical material, when a company joins social media, it should, of course, be aware of why it is doing so and what it wants to achieve as a result. Therefore, before starting, a company needs a social media presence strategy. It should include a detailed description of the goals and sequence of actions to implement SMM strategies. The paper details the sequence of stages of preparation and implementation of an SMM strategy for promoting goods and informing about the company's brand and also focuses on the most effective tools for promoting the company and its products through social networks. It is established that the following tools can be most effective: targeted advertising, work with opinion leaders, advertising in popular publics, holding contests and sweepstakes. The combination of the recommendations obtained during the study will allow companies to effectively use social media to promote their products and build a positive image and brand awareness.

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