

Review Article

AN ANALYSIS OF GROWTH AND USAGE PATTERNS OF INSTAGRAM USERS FOR EFFECTIVE BRAND ENGAGEMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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Abstract:

Many shoppers are spending more and more of time on Social Media and now Instagram is targeted by Brands to market to Millennials and the younger consumers. This research is to study the Instagram in the Middle East and to point the growing number of consumers on Instagram. Hence a clear understanding of Instagram usage and preferences are required for brands to be successful in this segment.

Keywords: Growth, Social Media, Millennials, Instagram.

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INTRODUCTION: THE POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Market and its trends are in a constant evolutionary phase due to the advent of new technologies. To be at par from their competitors, companies need to focus on their marketing and branding activities. A decade before, companies only relied on traditional marketing strategies to promote their services and products through television, radio, newspaper and billboard advertisement. However, with the emergence of internet technology, companies are now provided with powerful communication and marketing tools. In this era, a company can succeed or fail as per its internet marketing and branding strategies. Products and services can be marketed around the world at a minimal cost and achieve a better ROI through the use of online platforms. One can reach a wider audience and maintain a global business at a cost that can be afforded even by SMEs and

freelancers. The online advertising industry is huge with very high competition among several sites which subsequently reduces the cost of internet marketing as compared to traditional marketing where the cost is too high. As said, a company can rise, for example, Amazon or fall, for example, Forever 21 due to the internet and the way it is used. Online Marketing is more about being a part of the Social Media sites. These sites are the hotspots where any marketer can market their brand/product in the presence of millions of users across the globe. Social media allows companies to share a better relationship with the customers, thus leading to a good client engagement. As per an infographic released by Ambassador. Seventy-one percent of customers are more likely to suggest a brand to others if they have a good experience with it on social media.

Activity	Medium	Response Time	Percentage of Respondents
Customer Complaints	Twitter	Within 1 Hour	42%
Find Product Review/ Usage Solutions	YouTube	Immediate	71%
Brands having Positive Social Media Approach to Customer	Any	Lifetime Customer Satisfaction and repeat purchases	70%

THE BIRTH AND GROWTH OF INSTAGRAM

One such site that brought a revolution in the world of social media marketing is Instagram.

Instagram, now owned by Facebook Inc is an American photo and video sharing social networking site was founded by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger in October 2010.

From the day of its launch, it succeeded in having over 1 million users registered on its site thus gaining popularity in a very short span of time. As of May 2019, this social media platform has crossed over 1 billion users. Instagram encompasses everyone and everything, from fashion freaks, and celebrities to the common citizen and giant businesses.

INTERNET USAGE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The below given table shows the percentage of internet users in different countries of the Middle East region, their total population and the number of Facebook users. Also, the statistics are compared to find the rise in internet users from December 2000 to June 2019.

As per the study, Iran has the highest population having 35.70% internet users whereas Kuwait and Qatar are at 2.40% and 1.60% respectively. The Facebook statistics show that the majority of its users in the Middle East are from Iran. Another densely populated country, Iraq has shown a tremendous rise in the number of internet users from 12500 in the year 2000 to 19,947,510 in 2019. UAE with a population of 9,682,088 has a penetration rate of

98.50% and 5.40% of internet users. The country with the lowest number of internet users is Bahrain at 0.90%

Facebook users is 116,482,942. A rapid increase in internet users in between the year 2000 and 2019 has been observed along with the growth of Facebook in the middle eastern countries.

The total population of the Middle East is 258,356,867 with 67.90% of total internet users in which the total number of

Middle East Internet Users, Population and Facebook Statistics 2019						
MIDDLE EAST	Population (2019 Est.)	Users, in Dec-00	Internet Usage 30-Jun-19	% Population (Penetration)	Internet % users	Facebook 31-Dec-18
Bahrain	1,637,896	40,000	1,615,620	98.60%	0.90%	1,100,000
Iran	82,503,583	250,000	62,702,731	76.00%	35.70%	40,000,000
Iraq	40,412,299	12,500	19,947,510	49.40%	11.40%	17,000,000
Israel	8,583,916	1,270,000	7,002,759	81.60%	4.00%	5,800,000
Jordan	10,069,794	127,300	8,700,000	86.40%	5.00%	5,300,000
Kuwait	4,248,974	150,000	4,231,978	99.60%	2.40%	3,100,000
Lebanon	6,065,922	300,000	5,546,494	91.40%	3.20%	3,600,000
Oman	5,001,875	90,000	4,011,004	80.20%	2.30%	2,630,000
Palestine (State of)	5,186,790	35,000	3,381,787	65.20%	1.90%	1,700,000
Qatar	2,743,901	30,000	2,734,297	99.60%	1.60%	2,300,000
Saudi Arabia	34,140,662	200,000	31,856,652	93.30%	18.20%	18,000,000
Syria	18,499,181	30,000	6,335,969	34.20%	3.60%	4,900,000
United Arab Emirates	9,682,088	735,000	9,532,016	98.50%	5.40%	8,700,000
Yemen	29,579,986	15,000	7,903,772	26.70%	4.50%	2,352,942
TOTAL Midd	258,356,867	3,284,800	175,502,589	67.90%	100.00%	116,482,942

INSTAGRAM FOR BUSINESS

Over the years, Instagram has become massive and is still growing. From being a favorite of travelers posting their vacation pictures, the photo-sharing app has come a long way and is now attracting all kinds of bloggers, influencers, advertisers and labels.

At this point, all your viewers and your rivals are likely to use Instagram. Advertisers are curious about how they are supposed to be on Instagram as their target customers might be present on their feed.

It comes as no surprise that with a billion active monthly users, Instagram ranks second in engagement as compared to other

social media networks (Emarketer, 2018). 37.4% of internet users access Instagram at least once a month. 71 percent of Instagram's billion active monthly users are under 35 years of age (Statista, 2019). The most common age range is between 25-34 years of age, followed by users between 18-24 years of age.

Knowing the dynamics of social media can help determine which channels are most effective for the brand. For example, Instagram is the right place if the target market is young adults. When a brand is aware of this, they can start producing the correct type of Instagram content that fits the needs of the users.

USAGE STATISTICS OF INSTAGRAM

Time Spent Online on Social Networks	Network Name
53 minutes	Instagram
58 minutes	Facebook

The time that people spend on Instagram is significant because the more time they are active on the site, the more Ad campaigns they see and subsequently the chances of brand recognition increases. Instagram also announced that the functionality of Instagram Story made people spend more time on the platform every day.

Thus, brands need to use different Instagram features to retain their users and also increase engagement. One more example of this is IGTV. Video is one of the most useful and efficient content formats when it comes to social media marketing. As per a report by Cisco, we can observe 80% of internet traffic by the year 2019

in the form of videos. Instagram Stories' popularity is an indication of how simple it is to create and produce video content and achieve a good traffic. With a youtube like feature, Instagram stepped into the video content domain and businesses got an opportunity to devise new marketing strategies and use this feature for their benefit. IGTV is an app that can be used with Instagram or alone.

Users can create their own channel on IGTV and share up to an hour of video content. The user/brand can create specific channel related content or share already posted videos on Instagram on their IGTV channel. Many influencers were able to create a brand with the help of IGTV. Companies that are product based post demonstration and usage video of their products to garner more attention. For example, Vogue US posted a podcast called "Beauty Secrets," featuring famous influencers testing various makeup products to attract more users while educational awareness video could garner more than a million views.

CREATING BUSINESS IMPACT WITH INSTAGRAM

As Instagram is becoming more and more popular, it is estimated that 71% of US corporations are using Instagram for their businesses (Mention, 2018). The same research also shows that, on Instagram, 7 out of 10 hashtags are related to brands. More than 80 percent of companies see Instagram as the most important metric of engagement. The potential advertising reach of Instagram is approximately 849.3M. For many brands, engagement with Instagram may be one of the most critical KPIs, but calculating it is not a simple activity. With the rapidly evolving Instagram site, keeping up with the new updates and features and what to calculate is challenging.

Businesses can use Instagram for social media marketing. It's not only a huge market but has fascinated users that one can target without spending large amounts of money.

83% of users report discovering new products on Instagram (Facebook 2019). Which means Instagram is used as an influencing channel. The study also shows that brands can make a positive impact on potential buyers simply by being on Instagram.

Instagram not only plays a part as a product exploration engine but now bridges the gap between consumers and sellers, offering solutions such as Instagram shopping and the newly launched Instagram checkout.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT MARKETING STRATEGY ON INSTAGRAM

The impact of using Instagram as a marketing platform has been showing better results on the overall branding and sales target. At every stage of the purchasing process, Instagram can possibly play a major role. Buyers are spending more time researching products on Instagram before purchasing it. In all these steps of branding and advertising on Instagram, social media marketers can influence users through various strategies.

50 percent of users on Instagram follow at least one brand (Mention, 2018) which indicates that businesses can use Instagram as a medium to increase their reach. Be it a local brand or MNC, by using Instagram, companies have the potential to improve their market presence, reach and also increase online as well as retail sales. Brands can add additional contact information with an Instagram Business Profile. It requires an email and a company telephone number. You also have access to Instagram analytics, which can provide information about views, reach and demographics per post if you have an Instagram business profile. This can help you understand what content is best suited to your audience. User engagement for brands on Instagram is on the rise. It can generate over 4 times more user interaction as compared to Facebook. Between October 2017 and May 2018, the user engagement increased by 29 percent (Socialbakers, 2018). The

platform helps 80% of its users decide whether to buy a product/service. This has led to the use of influencer marketing where brands employ Instagram influencers with millions of followers to market or promote their products.

Thus, the importance of Instagram can't be neglected. The platform helps you market your brand, reach worldwide internet users and maintain good sales.

INSTAGRAM IN UAE

The use of social media has propagated throughout the world, creating a need in every walk of life. UAE is not far behind as its internet users spend around 2.56 hours on various social media platforms daily. The total population of UAE is 9.61 million having 9.52 million active social media users. Instagram, the third largest and engaged social media platform has a monthly population of more than 3.30 million with 62 percent of men and 38 percent of females in the UAE. This analysis reveals that in the UAE, Instagram has 35% user-engagement.

Instagram's Emirati users preferred their content to be published in English. Most of them have been using Android phones and the most interactive topics in the UAE were shopping, fashion and food.

CONCLUSION

The penetration of Instagram among social media users is high in UAE, so you have a good opportunity to reach the target audience of your company using this platform if you showcase products and services visually. In fact, in the UAE, there are over 3 million active users that can be targeted for branding/marketing or selling purposes. Instagram Advertising is great for your company if you are a restaurant owner or director, florist or e-commerce platform. Local businesses are now more involved on Instagram after the availability of Arabic language. As Khaleej Times puts it, 50% of people would follow a brand if communication is in local language.

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