The Role of Integrated Communication Strategies with Social Media in Creating and Nurturing Relationships with New Brands: A Consumer Behavior Perspective

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Abstract
Social Media has become integral to our daily lives in a hyper-connected world where the digital environment becomes an important part of the consumer's life. With the proliferation of new brands in the market, it has become essential for businesses to adopt effective communication strategies that integrate social media to build and maintain relationships with their customers. New brands face great challenges when it comes to establishing themselves in the market and building relationships with customers. Each brand must adapt to the target audience and communicate effectively with them in order to gain long-term loyalty. Understanding how the consumer connects with a new brand is the key to building an effective long-term communication strategy that will bring results from a marketing and business point of view. The purpose of our research is to understand consumer preferences when it comes to new brands on Social Media. We carried out quantitative research by using the survey method focusing on finding out what really matters to the consumer so that we can come to the aid of new brands thereby they can adapt their integrated communication strategies with Social Media. The research findings indicate that respondents place the utmost importance on the inclusion of genuine narratives and customer feedback from previous product or service users when considering the content that new brands should produce. Furthermore, an analysis of the data reveals discernible preferences based on the age demographics of the participants. The results show that irrespective of age, the presence of brands on social media platforms exerts a substantial influence on consumer loyalty and support.
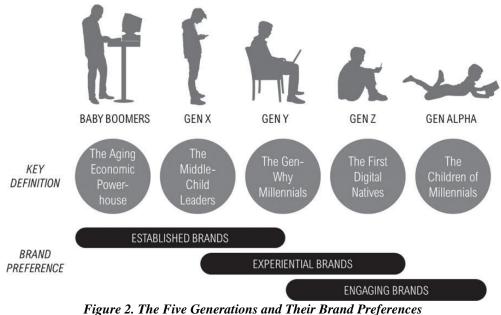
1. Introduction

Because of technological development, new brands no longer face the challenges faced by brands 20-30 years ago or even more. They have new communication channels, advanced

technologies to monitor their competition, and intelligent software that can measure the results of their Social Media activities and consumer behavior. It is important to know how much time consumers spent on their website or advertising, if they abandoned their shopping cart or if they like or dislike a certain type of content. These data are extremely important when implementing the marketing strategy (Chivu et al., 2022). But just as brands no longer face the challenges of 20-30 years ago or more, they continue to face consumers' changing behavior: there are consumers who adapt to changes and consumers who do not like changes at all. New brands must understand the consumer, be familiar with the consumer's preferences and offer what the consumer wants so that the brand's objectives are fulfilled (Barbu et al., 2018).

Figure 1. New Brands Strategy
Source: Author's Contribution

The generational cohort is one of the most popular ways of mass-market segmentation. The premise is that people who were born and grew up within the same period experienced the same significant events. Thus, they share same socio-cultural experiences and are more likely to possess similar sets of values, attitudes, and behaviors (Kotler et al, 2021).

Figure 2. The Five Generations and Their Brand Preferences
Source: Kotler, Kartajaya & Setiawan, 2021, p. 45.

Each generation is familiar with certain devices, has certain preferences when it comes to brands, and needs a certain type of communication to receive the signal sent by the brand. This is one of the reasons why social media content must be responsive and adapted for all devices: laptops/computers, tablets, and phones. Also, implementing an effective strategy directed to consumer needs and preferences is essential in creating and nurturing long-term relationships (Stoica et al., 2015).

2. Communication Strategies with Social Media

Integrated communication strategies on social media must be adapted to the behavior of the digital consumer, who is active and interconnected. Brands must provide relevant content, answer questions and create authentic interaction experiences to build lasting relationships with consumers (Anderson & Williams, 2018). The role of integrated communication is to ensure that all communication efforts work together harmoniously to convey a coherent and unified message to the audience. It aims to create a consistent brand image, enhance brand awareness, build strong relationships with customers, and ultimately achieve marketing and business objectives.

2.1. Message

Brand messages on social media channels must be tailored to the preferences and needs of the target audience. Personalized and relevant communication creates a strong emotional connection and generates engagement from consumers (Davis & Williams, 2021). The messages must be formulated effectively so that they remain in the consumer's mind to make a direct connection between the message and the brand.

When it comes to the structure and content of the message within integrated communication on social media channels, there are a few key considerations to keep in mind. Brevity is essential due to the limited attention span of social media users. Messages should be clear and succinct. Including compelling visuals help such as images, videos, infographics, and emojis grab attention and convey information more effectively. Also, incorporating a call to action (CTA) is crucial to encourage audience engagement and drive desired actions. A well-crafted CTA can prompt users to like, comment, share, visit a website, make a purchase, or participate in a campaign or contest.

2.2. Content

The quality of social media content plays an important role in shaping users' perception and attitude towards brands. Well-structured, informative, and creative content is more likely to positively influence users' perception and purchase intentions (Li & Cheng, 2019). Also, the content must be adapted according to the target audience, the brand's communication strategy, and the communication channel. Thus, some platforms allow exclusively video content, others allow both video and image, while on other platforms it is advisable to communicate by text. Depending on the platform the content must be changed and adapted. Content marketing is also considered to be another form of brand journalism and brand publishing that creates deeper connections between brands and customers. (Kotler, Kartajaya & Setiawan, 2017).

2.3. Social Media Channels

At this moment there are a lot of social media platforms with tens, hundreds, and millions of users from all over the world. Also, the content on it differs depending on the capabilities of the platform. We have platforms with photo, video, and even text-only content. Each media has a distinct way of influencing perceptions and motivating behavior. Each source has a unique approach for delivering a brand message (Juska, 2018). Out of all the existing Social

Media platforms, five of them are the most used and popular among users: Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Youtube, and Linkedin.

Instagram is a Social Platform in which video, photo, and audio content can be found when it is added to those mentioned before. When it comes to audience age group according to Datareportal.com most Instagram users are between the ages of "18 to 24 which means 32.0% of Instagram's total ad audience" and "25 to 34 - 29.6% of Instagram's total ad audience." Statistics show us that as the age range increases, the use of this platform decreases significantly.

Facebook is the social platform that appeared before Instagram and which is part of the same group, Meta Inc. Here we observe the fact that with the increase in age, there is relative maintenance of the number of users, they do not suddenly decrease as it happened on the previous platform. According to Orzan et al., (2021) Creating a Facebook Business Manager, companies could create complex marketing campaigns, being able to improve it all the time.

TikTok, the platform where the content is exclusively video, has fewer users than the other two platforms. Also, with increasing age, the number of users becomes smaller. Youtube, a video content platform has the most users in the age ranges between 18 years old and 44. Linkedin, is a totally different platform compared to the others mentioned above because it is directed towards the professional and business area. This is the reason why the professionally active age groups represent a high percentage and it decreases significantly with age.

Table 1. The percentage of total ad audience on each Social Media Platform based on the results found on datareportal.com related to the data reported in April 2023

AGE GROUP	13-17	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65 AND ABOVE
The percentage represents % of total ad audience on each Social Media Platform							
Instagram	8.1% 131.1 million users	32.0% 517.7 million users	29.6% 488.7 million users	15.3% 246.3 million users	8.2% 132.2 million users	4.2% 68.2 million users	2.6% 41.5 million users
Facebook	4.9% 109.4 million users	22.6% 508.2 million users	29.6% 668.5 million users	19.0% 425.4 million users	11.3% 253.3 million users	7.1% 158.7 million users	5.6% 123.3 million users
TikTok	-	38.5% 419.9 million users	32.5% 354.8 million users	15.6% 170.0 million users	8.0% 87.3 million users	5.5% 60.1 million users	
Youtube	-	15.0% 379.7 million users	20.7% 522.5 million users	16.7% 422.0 million users	12.0% 303.0 million users	8.8% 222.2 million users	9.0% 227.7 million users
Linkedin	-	21.1% 200.0 million users	55.8% 520.0 million users	20.1% 170.0 million users		2.9% 23.0 million users	

Even if the presence on all social media platforms is important, new brands should take into account at least a few when they want to address a target audience according to age. As Fig. 2 shows us the type of preferred brand according to the generation to which the consumer belongs, Table 1 aims to reveal the audience of each Social Media platform mentioned according to age. These data could be a reference for new brands when choosing to address their target audience by choosing the right platforms to do that.

3. Methodology

The aim of the research entitled "The Role of integrated communication strategies with Social Media in Creating and nurturing relationships with new brands: A Consumer Behavior Perspective" is to explore and understand how integrated communication strategies that incorporate Social Media platforms can effectively contribute to the creation and nurturing of relationships between new brands and consumers. The research seeks to investigate the impact of such strategies on consumer behavior, including their attitudes, perceptions, and actions toward new brands. By adopting a consumer behavior perspective, the study aims to shed light on the mechanisms through which integrated communication strategies with social media influence consumer-brand relationships, brand awareness, and customer loyalty.

We carried out exploratory research in the first part of the study, which helped to establish a general framework for the problem investigated using primary data sources. After that, we made quantitative research by using the survey method: a questionnaire with a total number of 18 questions was created, which was administered through the Google Forms platform to a number of 100 respondents between 20 May and 29 May 2023.

The main objectives of this research are the following:

Objective 1: Determine what kind of content on Social Media platforms is more attractive to consumers when it comes to new brands.

Objective 2: Discover if a brand's active presence on Social Media platforms influences consumers' decision to be loyal and support that brand

Objective 3: Determine how important it is for the consumer to communicate with brands on Social Media platforms

Objective 4: Discover through what other methods offered by Social Media platforms consumers interact with brands.

Objective 5: Discover what attracts the consumer to a new brand

Objective 6: To determine whether consumers are making purchases following the discovery of a new brand on social media.

4. Findings

After centralizing the data, we can observe the preferences according to the age category of the respondents. For the question "What attracts you to a new brand?" the age group of 18-24, respectively the youngest of the respondents are most attracted to the type of product/service. The second preference is the brand message and communication, and then if a celebrity or famous person is the image of the brand. They are the least interested if the brand involves in social and environmental causes. According to the results obtained, for this age group, brands should direct their products or services to their needs, using a communication method that is as relevant as possible.

What attracts you to a new brand?	Age	COUNTA from Age
If a celebrity/famous person is the image of that brand	18-24	8
	25-34	1
	35-44	6
	45-54	1
Total pentru If a celebrity/famous person is the image of that brand		16
The brand message and communication	18-24	16
	25-34	11
	35-44	5
	45-54	3
Total pentru The brand message and communication		35
The involvement of the brand in social and environmental causes	18-24	2
	25-34	1
	35-44	2
	45-54	1
Total pentru The involvement of the brand in social and environmental causes		6
The type of product/service	18-24	29
	25-34	5
	35-44	5
	45-54	2
	55-64	2
Total pentru The type of product/service		43
Total general		**100**

Figure 3. What attracts consumers to new brands according to age.
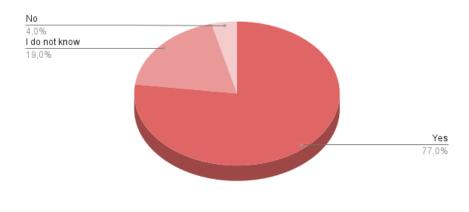

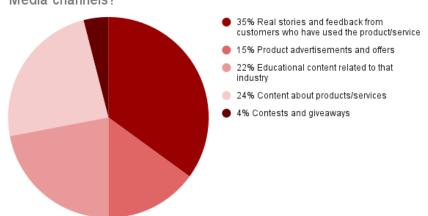*Figure 4. Brand presence on Social Media impact.*

Based on the results, the most important for the 25-34 age group is the brand message and communication. After that, the type of product or service and they are equally the least interested in the involvement of the brand in social and environmental causes and if a celebrity is the image of the brand. The results provided by this group are similar to those of the previous group. Thus, brands could expand the age of their target audience and adapt to their demand.

The 35-44 age group prefers if a celebrity is the image of the brand. The following are equally important for them: the brand message and the type of product. Also, only 2 respondents from this category said that they are attracted to a new brand of involvement in social and environmental causes, which ranks this aspect last in preferences. Brands whose target audience is this age segment could choose a representative and famous person to be their image and a good way to communicate their message through it.

Even if this age group had a smaller number of respondents, the top of their preferences is the following: the brand message and communication, the type of product or service, and the least important for them are if a famous person is the image of the brand and the involvement

of the brand in environmental and social causes. According to the results, the preferences of this category are very much alike to those of 25-34. Brands could come up with a message similar to both categories.

For the majority of respondents (77.0%) the presence of the brand on Social Media platforms influences their decision to be loyal and support the brand. This may be because Social Media platforms are the environment in which brands can speak directly to consumers and take this aspect into account. The share of negative answers is very small and this may mean that brands should take into account their presence on Social Media channels in order to achieve their goals.

Figure 5. Type of content that engages new brands with consumers on Social Media.

In consideration of the findings, the most significant for respondents when it comes to the content that new brands should make is real stories and feedback from customers who have used the product or service. Brands could do this by introducing a series of video or photo testimonials on their Social Media channels or a feedback page on their company website. Brands could continue this activity with content about their products or services introducing in these testimonials many information about them. 22% of respondents consider that educational content related to that industry is essential to them. A smaller part of them, 15% of respondents consider that product advertisements and offers are the type of content that they engage the most with. Based on the small percentage of the respondents which is 4%, contests and giveaways are not of interest at all.

The analysis of the data reveals distinct preferences based on the age categories of the respondents. Across all age groups, the presence of brands on social media platforms has a significant impact on consumer loyalty and support. Furthermore, consumers highly value real stories and customer feedback as engaging content, suggesting that brands should incorporate testimonials and educational content to connect with their audience effectively, while contests and giveaways have limited appeal.

7. Conclusions, future directions and research limits

This research has successfully fulfilled its objectives through the analysis of data collected from the respondents by identifying and examining the effectiveness of integrated communication strategies incorporating social media platforms in fostering and maintaining connections between new brands and consumers.

The main limit of this research was that the sample size was not big enough so it was not satisfactory for statistical measurements. However, the findings aim to serve as a guide for businesses leveraging social media and integrating communication strategies to build and maintain strong relationships with their customers. The findings emphasize the significance of incorporating social media platforms into communication strategies to effectively connect with consumers.

Technological advancements have provided new brands with various tools and channels to overcome challenges faced by brands in the past. Understanding consumer preferences and effectively communicating with them through personalized messages and high-quality content is essential for building lasting relationships. Social media platforms play a crucial role in brand communication, with each platform requiring tailored strategies to engage the target audience effectively. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, and LinkedIn offer unique opportunities for brands to connect with different age groups, and understanding the user demographics of each platform can help brands choose the most suitable channels for their marketing efforts. Adapting strategies to different social media platforms is essential for brands to leverage the full potential of integrated communication strategies and maximize their impact on consumer behavior.

Social media has a significant influence on marketing decisions related to new brands, compelling companies to adjust their strategies and utilize these platforms for brand promotion and customer engagement. Moving forward, it is crucial for companies to prioritize areas such as data analytics provided by the Social Media platforms, customer segmentation, and staying updated on emerging trends. By doing so, they can strengthen their marketing policies and successfully meet evolving consumer expectations in the dynamic digital landscape.

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