



Algerian Popular and Democratic Republic

Ministry of higher education and scientific research

Higher National School of Journalism and Information Sciences

Department : Information Sciences

**Interactive Communication in Online Stores' Marketing Strategy :
A Content Analysis of an Algerian Online Store's Instagram page
(Vintage Stuff Only/ Thrift Lover)
During the period from October 1st, 2023 to April 30th, 2024**

Thesis to obtain the Masters Degree in Journalism and Information Sciences

Major : Institutional Communication

Promotion of : 2019

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University Year :

2023/2024



الجمهورية الجزائرية الديمقراطية الشعبية
وزارة التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي
المدرسة الوطنية العليا للصحافة وعلوم الإعلام

قسم: علوم الإعلام

الاتصال التفاعلي في استراتيجية التسويق لمتاجر الإنترنت :
تحليل محتوى لصفحة إنستغرام لمتجر جزائري (Vintage Stuff Only/Thrift Lover)
للفترة الممتدة من 1 أكتوبر 2023 إلى 30 أبريل 2024

مشروع مذكرة الماستر في علوم الإعلام و الاتصال
التخصص: الاتصال المؤسساتي
الدفعة: 2019

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السنة الدراسية
2023/2024

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge and give my warmest thanks to my supervisor Dr. Karima Ghediri who made this work possible. Her guidance and advice carried me through all the stages of writing my project.

I would also like to give special thanks to my parents, my sisters and my friends for their continuous support and understanding when undertaking my research and writing my project. Your support was what sustained me this far.

Finally, I thank the school for giving me the opportunity to carry out my research project in an environment that made my goals that much more accessible.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my dear parents, Ahmed and Karima, who offered me support beyond my imagination every step of the way.

My sisters: Lyna, who offers everyone around her the sense of protection that allows you to be a child again.

Meriem, the sweetest girl on earth, who will ace her baccalaureate exam this year.

Ikram, who makes me laugh every single day, my little friend.

My friends, Kahina, Ikram, Wissam, Sarah, Chaima and Roumaissa, who not only supported me by offering precious advice, but also made me laugh throughout the journey.

I would also like to thank Meriem, the owner of the brand we worked on in our thesis, for giving me unlimited access to all the information I needed, and for helping me so generously along the way.

Thank you for the endless support you have given me.

Abstract:

Our research project investigates the transformation of interactive marketing techniques within the contemporary digital sphere. It examines the methods and technologies that companies employ to interact with consumers in a more engaging manner.

The background of this research includes six former studies with their respective findings, which were vital to the foundation of our research, where the main purpose is to understand interactive communications and how they can be employed in the marketing strategy of brands, mainly within the realm of social media.

Our analysis also encompasses a thorough review of existing literature, with the methodology of the research being qualitative and quantitative content analysis of an Algerian online store's Instagram platforms in order to further our understanding of interactive marketing, offering insights into successful marketing practices and emerging consumer behavior patterns. By assessing both empirical data and theoretical models, this research's findings provide a comprehensive understanding of how interactive marketing techniques are employed in social media marketing, by assessing the most used post formats, content themes, and their respective interactivity rates.

Key words: Interactive communications, social media marketing, Algerian online store, interactive features, Algeria

ملخص:

مشروع بحثنا يستكشف تحول تقنيات التسويق التفاعلي داخل المجال الرقمي المعاصر. يدرس الأساليب التي تستخدمها الشركات للتفاعل مع المستهلكين بطرق أكثر جاذبية، مع التركيز على التحول من التسويق المباشر التقليدي إلى تقنيات أكثر مشاركة.

خلفية هذا البحث تشمل ست دراسات سابقة، التي كانت أساسية لتأسيس بحثنا، حيث يهدف هذا البحث بشكل أساسي إلى فهم الاتصالات التفاعلية وكيفية توظيفها في استراتيجيات تسويق العلامات التجارية، خصوصاً ضمن وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي. كما يتضمن تحليلنا استعراضاً شاملاً للدراسات السابقة، حيث يعتمد منهج البحث على تحليل المحتوى النوعي والكمي لمنصات متجر إلكتروني جزائري على إنستغرام، بهدف تعزيز فهمنا للتسويق التفاعلي وتقديم نظرة على الممارسات الناجحة في التسويق وأنماط سلوك المستهلك الناشئة.

ومن خلال تقييم البيانات التجريبية والنماذج النظرية، توفر نتائج هذا البحث فهماً شاملاً لكيفية توظيف تقنيات التسويق التفاعلي في التسويق عبر وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، من خلال تقييم أكثر صيغ المنشورات استخداماً، وموضوعات المحتوى، ومعدلات التفاعل الخاصة بها.

الكلمات الرئيسية: التسويق التفاعلي، التسويق عبر وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، متجر إلكتروني جزائري، الميزات التفاعلية، الجزائر

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Chapter 2 : Interactive Communication Strategies in Online Stores

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Introduction

In the era of rapidly changing technology, communication and marketing have changed a lot. Digital platforms and new tools have transformed how businesses connect with their audiences. As we move through this new landscape, interactive communication has become a crucial part of modern marketing strategies. This method not only changes how brands and consumers communicate but also puts the customer at the center of the marketing process.

Interactive marketing, characterized by two-way communication, has shifted the norm from traditional, one-sided advertising to a more engaging and participatory model. This transformation is largely driven by the rise of social media and other digital platforms that facilitate real-time interactions between brands and consumers. Interactive communication tools, such as social media polls, quizzes, and user-generated content, enable businesses to foster deeper connections with their audience, encouraging active participation and engagement.

One of the most compelling advantages of interactive social media marketing is its cost-effectiveness. Compared to traditional marketing methods, social media offers a low-cost alternative that can reach a vast audience. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter provide businesses with affordable ways to promote their products and services while also allowing for targeted advertising and personalized interactions. The low barrier to entry makes it accessible for businesses of all sizes to leverage social media marketing.

Interactive social media content plays a crucial role in this new marketing approach. Content that encourages user interaction, such as live streams, interactive stories, and behind-the-scenes glimpses, not only boosts engagement but also helps in building a loyal community around the brand. This content strategy ensures that the customer feels valued and heard, fostering a sense of belonging and loyalty.

Central to the success of interactive marketing is the shift in focus towards the customer. In this model, the customer is no longer a passive recipient of marketing messages but an active participant in the brand's narrative. This customer-centric approach ensures that marketing efforts are aligned with the needs and preferences of the target audience, leading to more effective and meaningful interactions.

The benefits of this approach are numerous. Interactive communication enhances customer engagement, builds stronger relationships, and fosters brand loyalty. It also provides valuable insights into customer preferences and behaviors, allowing businesses to tailor their strategies more effectively. However, this approach is not without its challenges. Businesses must continuously innovate and adapt to keep up with the dynamic nature of digital platforms. Additionally, managing and moderating the high volume of interactions can be resource-intensive.

Despite the numerous advantages, businesses face several struggles when implementing interactive marketing strategies. One of the primary challenges is the need for constant innovation to keep content fresh and engaging. The rapidly changing digital landscape means

that what works today may not be effective tomorrow. Additionally, managing the sheer volume of interactions can be overwhelming, especially for smaller businesses with limited resources. Responding promptly and effectively to customer inquiries, comments, and feedback requires dedicated personnel and robust systems. There's also the risk of negative feedback and public relations crises, as dissatisfied customers can quickly share their grievances on social media, potentially harming the brand's reputation. Moreover, ensuring data privacy and security in interactive platforms is crucial, as breaches can lead to loss of trust and legal repercussions. Balancing personalization with privacy concerns is a delicate task, requiring businesses to navigate complex regulations and ethical considerations. These struggles highlight the need for strategic planning, continuous monitoring, and adaptability in executing successful interactive marketing campaigns.

Certain conditions are necessary for successful interactive marketing. Businesses need to have a deep understanding of their target audience and the platforms they use. They must also be equipped with the right tools and strategies to create engaging content and manage interactions effectively. Consistency in messaging and branding is crucial to maintain a cohesive and recognizable brand identity.

In the context of Algeria, social media marketing is gaining traction as more businesses recognize its potential. The increasing penetration of internet and smartphone usage has paved the way for a vibrant digital landscape. Algerian businesses, both large and small, are leveraging social media platforms to reach and engage with their audience. In our research, we used Vintage Stuff Only, an Algerian online store, to analyse and detect the use of interactive communication techniques on social media marketing. By analyzing the content and interactions on their Instagram page, we can gain insights into the specific strategies that resonate with the Algerian online community.

Therefore, is on this note that we pose the following problematic question: in conducting a content analysis of this online store's Instagram pages, **how are interactive communications implemented in the Algerian online store Vintage Stuff Only / Thrift Lover's marketing strategy via social media and the thematic patterns within the shared content?**

Methodological Part

1. Research Questions

1. What is Interactive Marketing and what is the term's definition?
2. What are the different interactive tools used in Social Media Marketing?
3. What are the most frequently used post formats on Vintage Stuff Only and Thrif Lover's Instagram platform?
4. What are the reoccurring themes within the brand's social media content?
5. How are customers interacting with the different posts on this page?

2. Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: The online store's Instagram page uses interactive communication and marketing strategies, such as polls and quizzes, to enhance user engagement and create a sense of community and belonging among Algerian consumers.

Hypothesis 2: There will be a diverse range of content types on VSO/Thrift Lover's Instagram, including product showcases, behind-the-scenes glimpses, customer testimonials, customer generated content, polls and quizzes and Q&A stories, displaying a multifaceted approach to interactive communications in marketing.

Hypothesis 3: Customers exhibit varying levels of interaction (likes, comments, shares, and direct messages) with different types of publications on the Instagram page, with interactive content such as polls, quizzes, and Q&A stories receiving higher engagement compared to static posts like product showcases and behind-the-scenes glimpses.

3. Motivations for choosing this topic:

- The role of social media in marketing and communication practices has sparked an interest in how it can be used as a main tool to build one's brand, hence the interest in making further research on the topic.
- The practical application of the research, given the fact that it focuses on an Algerian-owned online business which harbored a massive number of following over the course of nearly 4 years since it was founded in 2020, this focus grants us a real-world, more accurate context, due to the fact that it can offer insights directly applicable to the industry.
- This research topic may be applicable to future career, as we happen to lean towards a career in social media marketing; the research is in alignment with the career envisioned by the individual conducting it.
- Personal interest in Online Retail, as an individual who happens to follow a fair number of Online stores on Instagram, this has resulted in an interest in how a marketing strategy can be conducted efficiently while using a social media platform as the only tool to do so.

4. The Goals and Importance of the Research

1. **Exploring Interactive Communications strategies when implemented in Social Media Networks:** This research aims to highlight how Interactive Communications strategies can be used efficiently via social media platforms in manners that engage users with the brand and create a sense of belonging and loyalty, as well as polishing the brand's image.
2. **Evaluating User Engagement in direct proportion to the content:** By developing detailed criteria for the content analysis, our research aims to evaluate how certain contents gain more engagement in comparison to others.
3. **Understanding what makes a Social Business and a Brand Community:** The process of building a social business, as defined by Dave Evans, Susan Bratton and Jake Mckee in Social Media Marketing, is the application of social technologies as a formal component of business processes. It revolves around understanding how your customers or stakeholders connect to your business and how you reshape your business to understand, accept and innovate based on their involvements. Which is a practice that is achievable nowadays via Interactive Communications strategies on Social Media Networks.
4. **Contributions to Interactive Communications research :**
Given the fact that Interactive Communications is a relatively new category in comparison to more traditional marketing strategies, we hope that our research will be taken as a contribution to the academic discourse revolving around this theme.
5. **Methodological Insights :**
This research aims to provide an insight on the implementation of the content analysis tool to analyse Interactive Communications when implemented in the general Marketing Strategy, further offering guidance to future studies.
6. **Brand building and user engagement understanding:** This research will highlight the weight of understanding the role of brand building as well as engaging users with the brand in regards to the brand's wellness. By exploring what contents garner the most engagement and result in better brand visibility, we would be contributing to practical implications for Com-Marketers.

5. Methodology

1. Research design / Justification for research design :

- a. **Descriptive aspect:** We have opted for the descriptive aspect for our research in order to be able to provide a precise and objective account of the content shared via VSO's Instagram page, taking into accounts any relevant elements that may help us be as precise as possible in our results, including visual elements, captions, text boxes, and etcetera.
 - b. **Exploratory aspect:** We have opted for the exploratory aspect for our research in order to further explore the interactive communications strategies employed by the online store in question and its direct impact on user engagement and community building.
2. **Temporal scope:** The content analysis will be conducted by selecting contents beginning from October 2023 to April 2024.

3. Sampling approach :

- a. Developing a coding scheme by format, text, captions, engagement, platform feature.
- b. Setting in place criteria that will help us categorize any contents that are relevant or can be viewed as interactive marketing methods, the criteria is as follows :
 1. User-Generated Content
 2. Interactive Instagram Stories (Q and A stickers, Quizzes, Polls, etcetera)
 3. Surveys and Quizzes conducted via Stories or Feed Posts
 4. Interactive Posts/Reels (posts that are in the form of questions or have contents that encourage user engagement with the brand or requires a necessity for the latter to express a preference or opinion)
 5. Behind-The-Scene Posts/Stories
 6. Contests/Games/Giveaways

4. Data Collection Methods :

Content Analysis: The choice of content analysis as our research methodology approach is driven by the following purposes:

- a. **Gathering both quantitative and qualitative insights:** This approach permits us to delve into the two different scopes of quantitative and qualitative aspects of academic research, it is important to take into consideration the frequency in which a certain type of content is shared, the number of likes, comments, shares and different forms of engagement metrics. Whereas for qualitative aspects, it allows us to describe the different themes, storytelling techniques, tone and messaging employed by the brand in order to engage the customer.
- b. **Allows for an objective measurement and a proper examination of visual and textual content:** It permits us to analyze visual and textual contents shared by the

brand on Instagram in a systemic manner, which is in proper alignment with the multimedia nature of social media platforms.

- c. **The method is in proper alignment with the research topic:** Due to the fact that this research aims to further explore the topic of Interactive Communications, content analysis allows us to properly explore how the online store in question engages its audience, encourages interaction and builds a sense of community through its Instagram content.

5. **Ethical Considerations :**

Due to the fact that VSO and Thrift Lover are public Instagram pages, explicit consent is not required in order to conduct a content analysis. This signifies that the research adheres to Instagram's terms of service, however, we've made sure to make contact with the owner of the brand in order to gain further private insights as well as have access to Instagram stories that are no longer available (they normally last 24 hours unless added to the Highlights folder)

7. Terminology : Defining the key concepts

1. Definition of Interactive Communications:

A. Terminology:

Don Schultz, a prominent figure in the field of communications, saw that it was vital to the process of promoting to incorporate the communications aspect into the strategy. His work defines it as a two-way communication, ensuring that various elements work together seamlessly to deliver a consistent message, and the creation of an interactive, two-way channel between the organization and its customers.¹

B. Dictionary definition:

Interaction: **interaction (between A and B) | interaction (of A) (with B)** the act of communicating with somebody, especially while you work, play or spend time with them.²

Communications: The activity of presenting, advertising and selling a company's products or services in the best possible way.³

C. Operational definition:

Following the framework of our research, we define Interactive Communications as a process that involves dynamic and two-way exchanges of information between parties. Participation is at the core of the process. We assess that this form of communication aims to achieve a sense of collaborative exchange.

In the context of our study, interactive communication utilizes interactive features within the realm of social media to facilitate the dialogue between a brand and a customer, further encouraging engagement and strengthening the bond between the parties involved.

2. Definition of Marketing Communications/MARCOM:

A. Terminology:

Marketing communications, more commonly referred to as marcom, is the messages and media that marketers employ in order to communicate with target markets and customers.

Philip Kotler, who is known as the father of modern marketing communication, views Marketing Communications as « ***A way of looking at the whole marketing process from the viewpoint of the customer.*** »

¹ Schultz, Don E., Stanley I. Tannenbaum, and Robert F. Lauterborn, *IMC, The Next Generation: Five Steps for Delivering Value and Measuring Returns Using Marketing Communication* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 15.

² Oxford dictionary, interaction (noun),

<https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/interactive> , accessed on 29/02/2024

³ Former reference, marketing (noun)

Chris Miles defines Marcom as a representative of the voice of the brand and are means by which it can establish a dialogue and build relationships with the customers.

In defining Marketing Communications, it is vital to understand that it is an *integrated* practice, it is essentially a bridge between old practices of both marketing and communications as individual sciences. Integrated marketing communications was born as a practice due to marketers moving from asking how can we get the customer to purchase more, to how can we get the customer to interact more. This leads marketers to focus more on the aspect of communication than that of sales. In Marketing Communications, the primary focus is creating a customer experience that implores them to interact with the brand further.⁴

This practice takes into account the impact of digital media and social media, evidently so as it morphs customer experiences and product development and distribution.⁵

B. Operational definition:

Through our theoretical framework of the term, we conclude that our operational definition of marketing communications is as follows: the term encompasses the more global spectrum of communication forms that relies on the interdisciplinary nature of both the latter, Communications, as well as Marketing.

Our operational definition of the term captures the inclusive nature of the practice, where it serves as the bridge between the practice of communication in order to foster a relationship between the parties, as well as the promotional aspects of the marketing practice.

3. Definition of Interactive Marketing Communications:

A. Terminology :

Luhmann defines Interaction as episodes of societal process. Beginning from this definition of interactivity as a broader term, we can begin to set the foundations of the definition of Interactive Marketing Communications.

Interactive Marketing, as set by Chris Miles in his book, *Interactive Marketing: Revolution or Rhetoric?* Is defined as follows: The construction of a discourse of Interactivity, which revolves around rhetorics of customer involvement, community-created content, and dialogue-creation. It is also rooted in the implementation of interactive, **feedback-driven systems in contemporary marketing and communication, and the application of interactivity to core marketing communication areas in networked media systems.**⁶

This new discipline is also referred to as Conversational Marketing Communications, as states Chris Miles, it means creating a dialogue with customers in which useful information is exchanged so that both parties benefit from the relationship.

⁴ Smith, P. R., & Zook, Z. E, *Marketing Communications: How Marketing Has Changed Forever*, 5th ed, Kogan Page, United States, (2011). P4

⁵ Former reference, P5

⁶ Miles, C. *Interactive Marketing: Revolution or Rhetoric?*, 1st ed, Routledge, London, (2010), p. 16.

B. Operational definition :

In the context of our research Interactive Marketing Communications is a term that encompasses the spectrum of strategies employed by businesses in order to **encourage two-way communication with their target customers**,

These strategies, if viewed from a more modern standpoint, can more often be detected in digital network channels such as social media platforms, which allow users to interact, provide feedback and become a more vital element to the brand's wellness and decision-making processes, as well as the fact that it allows the brand to build a loyal and consistent community.

4. Definition of Social Media Marketing:

A. Dictionary definition:

Social media: Websites and software programs used for social networking.⁷

B. Terminology:

In Philip Kotler's book 'Marketing 4.0 : Moving from Traditional to Digital', he explores the evolution of marketing in the digital age, integrating the element of Social Media platforms in order to delve into the importance of social media platforms and the mutation from traditional marcom tools to more two-way communication-focused ones.

When we discuss the practice of social media marketing, we are essentially describing the processes through which businesses devise strategies to ensure that their social media platforms are following the principles of marketing.

It is the practice of implementing basic marketing rules into the social media platforms of the brand, and this practice mainly focuses on enhancing the image of a business instead of just promoting its goods and services. Through social media, marketers work on image appeal instead of just product appeal.⁸

The main attraction of this practice is rooted in the aspect of interactivity, as opposed to classic marketing, this new age practice takes into account the customer's reactions to the brand, their needs, and their loyalty to the brand.

C. Operational definition:

Social Media Marketing is a form of digital marketing that leverages various social media platforms, it is efficient in fostering user engagement, community-building strategies,

⁷ Previous reference, social media (noun)

⁸ Fan, Xiruo. "Social Media Marketing Strategies." In Proceedings of the 2023 International Conference on Management Research and Economic Development. Eleanor Roosevelt College, United States, 2023, P60

influencing as well as predicting consumer behavior by forming a close relationship and acquiring honest feedback from the latter.

8. Previous Studies :

1. **Interactive Communication and Marketing Performance of Micro and Small Enterprises within Nyanza Region, Kenya (2023), Kenneth Kaunda, John Kuria Thuo, Evans Kwendo⁹**, this study explores the following :

Interactive marketing courtesy of interactive communication makes a real effort to reach customers and understand their needs and preferences leading to high levels of marketing performance. However, the use of collaborative technologies for interactive communication amongst Communication professionals in Kenya remains a challenge. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to establish the influence of interactive communication on the marketing performance of micro and small enterprises within Nyanza region, Kenya.

Objective: Establishing the influence of interactive communication on the marketing performance of micro and small enterprises within Nyanza region, Kenya.

Methodology: This research opted for a positivist research methodology as it provides the researcher with the ability to formulate hypotheses based on the specified objective and statistically evaluate it in order to draw findings that could be compared to theories already in existence.

Findings: The study found that interactive communication significantly predicts marketing performance in Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs) in Kenya's Nyanza region. It emphasizes the importance of regular and engaged customer communication for better marketing outcomes. Interactive communication is deemed essential for capitalizing on marketing performance, advocating for policy support to embed these communication characteristics among MSEs. Furthermore, it positively impacts sales and customer visits by meeting and exceeding customer expectations. The study underscores the need for MSEs to continually improve their use of interactive marketing communication to enhance their marketing effectiveness.

2. **Strategy in Direct and Interactive Marketing and Integrated Marketing Communications (2013), Adriana Csikosova, Maria J., Katarina Culkova¹⁰:**

⁹ Kaunda, Kenneth, John Kuria Thuo, and Evans Kwendo. "Interactive Communication and Marketing Performance of Micro and Small Enterprises within Nyanza Region, Kenya." *The African Journal of Empirical Research* 4, no. 1 (2023). Nairobi, Kenya

¹⁰ Csikosova, Adriana, Maria J., and Katarina Culkova. *Strategy in Direct and Interactive Marketing and Integrated Marketing Communications*. Slovakia, Elsevier Ltd, 2013.

Connection to our research: This study delves into how the continuing advances in communication technologies have greatly accelerated the ability of marketing to become more direct and increasingly interactive.

It details how professionals in interactive marketing have explored how we can explore this discipline while taking into account measured response.

The study also contains relevant Interactive Marketing concepts.

Objective: Making a solid foundation of terminologies for the practice of integrated marketing communications.

Findings: *“Direct and interactive marketing and integrated marketing communications efforts can best be orchestrated by a cross-functional team using a comprehensive promotional plan. Bringing this concept to the marketing, advertising or communications classroom is instrumental in graduating students with a holistic view of IMC via DIM. Since a primary goal of direct marketing education is to develop effective teaching strategies it is only reasonable to focus on how to best prepare students for a career in IMC.”*

3. **From Direct Marketing toward Interactive Marketing : the Evolving Interactive Marketing Tools (2023) Anne Moes, Marieke L. Fransen, Tibert Verhagen, Bob Fennis¹¹**, the abstract is as follows :

Interactivity has become a crucial aspect of marketing. It allows companies to connect with their customers, often resulting in positive outcomes. Based on a literature review, this chapter discusses ten of the most pioneering tools used in interactive marketing. First it will be explained how each tool relates to the three dimensions of interactivity (active control, two-way communication, synchronicity), and insights in what dimensions are the driving forces behind each interactive marketing tool are provided. Second, results showing that research on the ten interactive marketing tools generally finds positive effects on diverse outcome variables, such as enjoyment, urges, and behavioral intentions, are discussed together with conflicting outcomes (e.g., the effect on cognition) and the potential negative effects of the tools (e.g., privacy concerns and intrusiveness). It concludes with the recommendation for marketers and researchers to collaborate and actively try out (innovative) interactive marketing tools while closely monitoring their effects.

4. **Effect of interactive marketing on service quality of Retail Industry (2023), Harish Bapat**, the abstract of the study is as follows :

Marketing being dominantly focused most of its activities concentrates at reaching the markets and customers. The Companies understand-"Customer is ultimate Boss". The companies offered the goods and services to the customers in his drawing room. In order to succeed and stay successful, marketer needs continually to capitalise on the changes in the market. They must cope with the

¹¹ Moes A, Fransen ML, Verhagen T, Fennis BM. From Direct Marketing Towards Interactive Marketing: The Evolving Interactive Marketing Tools. In Handbook of interactive marketing. Palgrave MacMillan. 2023.

speed themselves. There is tremendous pressure for results and marketers have no choice but to become interactive. The interactive Marketing tell-service Quality depends heavily on the quality of the buyer-seller interaction during the service encounters.¹²

Methodology: Hypotheses have been formulated for verification of this study through empirical investigation.

Findings: The study suggests that interactive marketing significantly enhances service quality, fosters competitive advantage, and improves brand image. To achieve these benefits, firms must ensure effective training and motivation of customer-contact employees and supporting service staff, encouraging teamwork to deliver customer satisfaction. Employees should prioritize monitoring the quality of offerings and attentively listen to customer feedback, as service quality plays a pivotal role in retaining customers. Regular interaction with customers facilitates customization of offerings, further enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty.

5. Empowering Consumers in Interactive Marketing : Examining the Role of Perceived Control (2023), Xiaohan Hu :

The diffusion of innovative technologies in interactive marketing platforms has empowered consumers by providing a more active role in controlling their experience. As a result, consumers' perception of control has become a key factor to understand the psychological processing of marketing messages. This chapter addressed the changing role of consumers in the interactive marketing process from reactive to proactive in interactive marketing process, by providing a theoretical overview of perceived control and associated psychological processes in interactive marketing.¹³

Methodology: Hypotheses have been formulated for verification of this study through empirical investigation.

Findings: The study provides insights into the implications for marketing strategy. It suggests that brands need to adapt their marketing approaches to empower consumers and enhance their perception of control. This involves offering customizable experiences, providing interactive features, and fostering two-way communication channels to actively engage consumers in the marketing process.

¹²¹² Bapat, Harish, *Effect of Interactive Marketing on Service Quality of Retail Industry*. Avantika University, India, (2023)

¹³ Xiaohan Hu, *Empowering Consumers in Interactive Marketing : Examining the Role of Perceived Control*, Illinois, The Palgrave Handbook of Interactive Marketing, (2023)

Theoretical Part

CHAPTER 1

An Introduction to Social Media Marketing and Interactive Communication

Introduction to Chapter 1:

In this chapter, we take a deep dive into the concept of marketing in order to define this concept through the lenses of the field's giants.

The concept takes on many forms depending on the context, which is why we will attempt to divide it into two definitions that take into account both its social and managerial aspects.

This chapter also delves into the history of marketing, which we also will attempt to categorize into two different fields of study; History of marketing practice and History of Marketing thought.

This categorization will prove to be essential in properly understanding how the academic research around marketing was born, including social and philosophical thought. It will also highlight how marketing was born as a practice, and how it evolved in its methods and tactics.

As we advance, the second section of this chapter delves into the concept of interactive communication(s) by defining this concept as a form of marketing strategies. We will delve into how interactivity became a topic of discussion in the field of communication by referencing the very first transactional and interactive models of communication. We will then attempt to explain how this form of communication thrives in the era of social media, and how it completely altered how practitioners view marketing.

Furthermore, within the realm of social media marketing, we explore various strategies employed by businesses to navigate this digital terrain effectively. From leveraging celebrity endorsements to crafting compelling content that resonates with audiences, each strategy reflects the dynamic nature of social media marketing and its capacity to shape consumer perceptions and behaviors.

CHAPTER 1 : An Introduction to Social Media Marketing

1. Types of Social Media Platforms

Social media, as the soil for SMM practices, has and continues to mutate throughout the years as it consists of many types of networks for people who engage in a variety of different interests¹⁴. Marketing and advertising on social media are economical and effective. If we pay close attention to the realm in question, we can detect several categories that social media platforms fall under, and several categorizations have been established throughout the years. We can consider, however, the categorization per usage as the most beneficial to our theoretical framework in our research.

Table 1

A. Types of Social Media Platforms Based on Usage

Traditional Social Networks	Media-Sharing Networks	Discussion Networks	Social Blogging Networks	Review Networks
- Facebook - LinkedIn - X (formerly Twitter)	- Instagram - Pinterest - TikTok	- Discord, - Reddit - Quora	- Medium - Tumblr - Blog Meets Brand	- Yelp, - Glassdoor - Google Business Profile - Trip Advisor

Source : Searchengine.com, 2022

¹⁴ Indeed editorial team, Indeed.com, What Are The Different Types Of Social Media? 10 Key Types, <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/types-of-social-media> , accessed 15/03/2023, 14:25

Notes on Table 1 :

The rationale behind this categorization by Ingrid Adames is as follows, Facebook and LinkedIn are categorized as traditional due to the fact that they are considered classic staples in the social media world. It's notable that for example, people resort to LinkedIn and Facebook in order to make long posts, as well as the fact that X added a threads option, which permits the users to leave a series of tweets connected to each other, essentially forming a long post in the form of interlinked tweets.¹⁵

While LinkedIn is already notorious for its professional networking, Facebook has recently gained a more professional aspect with the addition of Facebook Marketplace.

The second categorization is the Media-sharing Networks, which include Instagram, Pinterest and TikTok. This isn't to say that other platforms do not have media-sharing features, it's a categorization based on the *main purpose* of these platforms. Instagram has several media-sharing features, ranging from simple image posts, temporary 24h stories with the ability to add music, stickers, videos, images as well as polls and surveys. It also has the feature of Reels and IGTV videos.

Similarly, Pinterest is a famous application for photosharing. TikTok has these features as well, with the exception of stories and simple picture posts, as TikTok usually sticks to video formats, so if users want to post images only, it still appears as a video of a still image with background music usually.

Thirdly, Discussion Networks, such as Reddit and Discord are great spaces for discourses and to connect with communities of similar interests. Users often resort to Reddit for advice or for simply striking up a discussion on a certain topic.

Fourthly, Social Blogging – although it reached its peak around 2014-2016, remains a form of social media that is prominent. In the context of marketing, Starbucks is a brand that found a great deal of success on Tumblr during its peak, where it became a sort of micro-trend to post images holding a Starbucks cup.

Lastly, review networks, which remain a staple through the changing trends of social media due to the fact that they remain a necessity. Once again, in the context of marketing, implementing interactive communication and responding to one's brand's negative reviews on these review sites goes a long way in terms of trust and community-building.

¹⁵ Adames, Ingrid. "5 Types of Social Media Networks and the Benefits of Each One."

<https://www.searchenginejournal.com/social-media-networks-types/463203/> Accessed October 2, 2024, 09:00

B. Social Media Benchmarks

We have opted for the use of social media benchmarks in order to categorize the types of social media platforms by levels of engagement, to put it simply, it's a process of comparing the engagement rates between platforms in order to categorize them fairly.

Table 2 : Social Media Platforms Benchmarks

	Video View Rate	Engagement Rate	Growth Rate
Facebook	47.23%	Public Rate : 0.51% Private Rate : 1.59%	1.47%
Instagram	106.28%	Public Rate : 0.85% Private Rate : 5.22%	1.62%
YouTube	8.45%	0.20%	0.03%
LinkedIn	12.82%	5.14%	2.15%
X (Twitter)	/	0.10%	0.75% ¹⁶

Source : Socialstatus.io

Notes on Table 2

In comparison to February of 2023, Facebook had a video view rate of 52.55%, whereas in January 2024 it has a rate of 47.23%, which is a notable drop. These view rates often fluctuate, however, Instagram's video view rate increased by a lot in comparison to February of 2023 where it garnered a total of 41.03 (which is close to Facebook's VVR of January 2024), whereas in January 2024, Instagram has a VVR of 106.28%.

¹⁶ "Social Media Benchmarks." Socialstatuts, www.socialstatus.io/insights/social-media-benchmarks. Accessed January 3, 2024, 10:23

LinkedIn garners a stable 12 per cent, also maintaining a close rate from February 2023 to January 2024, whereas YouTube comes in last with an immense decrease in VVR, from a strong 60.78% in February 2023, to 8.45% in January of 2024.

As there are conflicting methods of measuring the engagement rates on Facebook and Instagram, we've opted for a division between private and public engagement rates, as it is inaccurate to a certain degree to only take public interactions into account, such as comments, reactions and shares. It is also important to consider the other factors such as photo views, link clicks, video views, etcetera.

With this, the comparison between the two platforms leaves Instagram, once again, at the top. However LinkedIn does come in first with a 5.14%, and X comes in last, we can only assume that in terms of engagement, perhaps the audience fluctuates more towards Meta platforms for daily use, and LinkedIn for professional use.

As for Growth Rate, Facebook's seems to have augmented from 0.75% to 1.47%, as well as Instagram's from 1.36% to 1.62%. Youtube maintains the same rate of 0.03% consistently

2. Adapting Marketing to new Digital Landscapes : Social Media Marketing

A. Social Media Marketing :

Social Media Marketing, also known as SMM, is the employment of social media platforms in the process of promoting one's products or services. We often hear the term e-commerce to describe the use of internet services for advertising, however, the term SMM has become more prominent in academic research due to the fact that e-commerce encompasses all sorts of advertising done online, whereas social media marketing is more exclusive to promoting on social media platforms.¹⁷

The usability of the platforms is one of their main attractions, while on classic brand websites the brand would have to dedicate a special team or program to track engagement rates, sales and growth, social media platforms have built-in analytics tools, which instantly facilitates the process.

While mastering SMM might have been a luxury or an addition in the past, it certainly is no longer the case. Nowadays, one of the very first actions consumers take when they learn of a brand is to look them up on Social Media, irrespective of their services or products, their social media presence makes the first impression.¹⁸

Which is why businesses of all sorts have formed strategies to augment the quality of their marketing on social media, and these strategies come in different ways.

B. Social Media Marketing Strategies

1. Celebrity endorsements:

A very popular strategy is celebrity or micro-celebrity endorsements, in the case of Algeria, it is very common to have a certain sitcom actor or an influencer with a considerable number of followers become the face of the brand in an unspoken manner. This, of course, is related to the fact that certain individuals with certain levels of notoriety have a sort of influence on the users who follow them, and their appearances on the brand's social media pages adds a certain effect of trust, in the sense that if the celebrity endorses these products, then they must be worth the hype.

2. Corporate Advertising :

¹⁷ Felix, R., Rauschnapel, P. A., & Hinsch, C, *Elements of Strategic Social Media Marketing: A Holistic Framework*. Journal of Business Research, Amsterdam, 2016, P118-126.

¹⁸ 1 in 3 Consumers use Social Media to Discover New Products and Brands, Porchgroupmedia, <https://porchgroupmedia.com/blog/1-in-3-consumers-use-social-media-to-discover-new-products-and-brands/>, accessed on 01/03/2024, 10:15

Another form of social media marketing strategies is what we know as corporate advertising, which is defined as *creating a positive image through the organization itself, rather than its products or services. The scope of corporate advertising includes advertising concerning corporate image, financial image and advertising.*

A popular marketing trend on Instagram is promoting the brand's existence instead of its catalog, which creates a sense of curiosity in the audience to find out more about the business and what it offers.

3. Image Appeal

Johansson and Hiltula bring the concept of image appeal into play, which is the interest that a picture generates when viewed by observers, basically, it serves as the most effective strategy for advertising one's products or services, as it encourage cognitive engagement. The latter evokes certain emotions in the consumer; it also increases the imagery that the consumer associates with the brand. Image appeal on social media comes in different forms, for example using a photograph of a celebrity can be categorized as Popularity or Status Appeal. Each category, though, aims to form a connection with the audience on a subconscious level.

A very good example of Image Appeal is the Safe at Home advertisement, It is done by a non-profit foundation called The Joe Torre Safe at Home Foundation, focusing on empathy appeal, this advertisement is set to shed the light on the negative impact on children that exposure to domestic abuse at home can create.

4. Content Marketing

Content Marketing is a highly used SMM strategy, it comprises of creating high quality content in tune with the brand, as Pulizzi defines it: Content Marketing is a form of marketing focused on creating, publishing, and distributing content for a targeted audience online.¹⁹

This form of marketing has roots outside of SMM, contrary to popular belief, it can be traced back to (and even further) 1904. When Jell-O sales clerks would use the door-to-door method, but instead of *selling* any goods, they offered their cookbooks for free, promoting the dessert in a pro-bono manner which resulted in an augmentation in sales that surpassed 1 million dollars.²⁰

A very popular recent example is Spotify's content marketing, which was heavily based on User-Generated Content, the company designed a feature called Spotify Wrapped, which is a feature that shows the application's users a yearly recap of data-based listening habits of theirs, it includes a list of their top songs, their top artist and genres. It also auto-generates a top songs playlist based on each individual's data, as well as 2023's 'artist messages', which is

¹⁹ Pulizzi, Joe, & Barrett, Newt, *Get Content Get Customers: Turn Prospects into Buyers with Content Marketing*, NSB Management Review, New York, (2010), P98-100.

²⁰ "A timeline set in Jell-O." Deseret News. June 28th, 2006, <https://www.deseret.com/2006/6/28/19960798/a-timeline-set-in-jell-o>. Accessed February 3, 2024, 9:30

a feature where the users receive somewhat personalized messages from their top artists, based on the category of listeners that they fall under. This falls under the category of content marketing due to the fact that this feature was designed to be shareable on social media, and not only by screenshotting the results, but by Spotify adding a feature that instantly makes it shareable to the user's Instagram Story. This also aligns perfectly with human being's desires to appear as unique.

A study by SproutSocial showed that the volume of Tweets (on X) about Spotify increased by 461% between 2020 and 2021 and a total of 425.000.000 Tweets about Spotify Wrapped in the first three days after it launched. ²¹

Why content marketing works in SMM even more so than just general digital marketing (on the brand's website for example), is the fact that Social Media Platforms are accessed daily by the majority of their users, as opposed to brand websites which are only accessed occasionally, a sample survey showed that 61.4% of consumers assess content on social media compared to 38.6% on the internet.

C. The Benefits of Social Media Marketing

As mentioned previously, SMM permits businesses to promote their catalog on a podium with a massive audience, where the use of the platform is free, this includes signing up.

It also completely broadens the scope of the target audience, where traditional marketing cannot reach, SMM surely can. As previously stated, Social Media has undeniably become an integrated part of our lives, it is simply undeniable that the vast majority utilize social media every single day and multiple times a day, which makes the content much more likely to be received and consumed by the target audience. For example, an advertisement on a website designed specifically for the brand is going to be viewed *only when* the users willingly click on the brand's website with the intention of checking out their catalogs. Whereas on Social Media, the algorithm recommends certain posts by brands on the user's explore page, even if they have never interacted with said brand simply by guessing the type of content they may be interested in based on the content they interact with previously (source on algorithms babe)

As stated by Arca 2012, social media marketing bridges the gap between the business and potential customers, helps them reach their intended traffic, generate leads, gain insights on the market and competitors, improve PR and HR, and get customer feedback and increase brand exposure and awareness.

Customer feedback has been a matter of discussion very often when it comes to SMM practices, this aspect offers businesses the chance to actually hear from their customers and understand exactly what their demands are and be able to mold their upcoming releases to the customer's likings, basically setting everyone up for success.

²¹ Katie Woods, Spotify Wrapped : What marketers can learn from the viral campaign, 07/12/2022, <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/spotify-wrapped/>, accessed on 24/02/2024, 21:00

A good example of a product being remodeled after customers gave feedback on social media is Tesla in August of 2017. Where a user tweeted at Elon Musk asking for an alteration in the programming of his car Tesla to give it the ability to move back the seat and raise the steering wheel, Elon Musk responded thirty minutes later stating «Good point. We will add that to all cars in one of the upcoming software releases. »

Social Media Marketing also has a set of tools and well-designed algorithms that are suitable for the process of increasing brand awareness and visibility, this is especially true for online brands, such as stores that simply only exist online.

A very new wave that has been popularized by social media marketing in retail in Algeria is thrifting, given the capacity of buying for a good portion of the population, thrifting was popularized by small online stores promoting sustainable fashion.

On this note, an example that connects between Social Media Marketing, Content Marketing, Celebrity endorsements and UGC in Algerian brands is actress Nourhane Zghid sharing an image wearing a thrifted outfit from an algerian online store's page, which instantly increased interest in the brand's products as well as brand notoriety.

3. The New Consumer Behaviors and Dynamics

A. How SMM Altered Consumer Behaviors :

As explored prior, Social Media Marketing employs different strategies that are rapidly evolving and changing, mainly drawing their focus on influence and interaction.

Therefore in understanding the new consumer behaviors that were born with this shift, we must take into account these two aspects. Interactive advertising, for instance, involves creating engaging and participatory content that encourages audience interaction.²²

This, in itself, creates a new behavioral pattern and dynamic between the business and the consumer. Prior to social media marketing, consumer engagement wasn't as prevalent as we see it today, it was, if anything, only relevant to a certain extent.

When we discuss the matter of interactive communication and how it impacts consumer behaviors, we are not only discussing the impact their feedbacks have on the production of future products, but also the fact that they are directly or indirectly participating in the brand's marketing strategy.²³

This sort of behavior had its foundations laid in 2010 in the book Social Media Marketing, when the concept was still fairly new. The authors discuss what they called 'the engagement process', where they explained that engagement is central to the use of social technology and the creation of social businesses.

Social technologies, according to the research, push toward collaboration rather than impression.

The emergence of UGC/User-Generated Content is considered a wave that immensely altered consumer behavior. The main attraction of UGC is the fact that other users may find it much more reliable and can serve as an advertisement as well as a testimonial to the quality of the product or service offered by the brand.

The authenticity of User-Generated Content also increases the brand's authenticity and contributes to trust and community building.

As discussed prior, endorsements by known individuals serves the same purpose as word-of-mouth marketing, where remarks made by influencers can either make or break the brand's reputation. At the time, while bad rep was very possible due to celebrity's disapproval of a brand pre-social media, it was still a very manageable sort of bad buzz.

Whereas on Social Media, news travels fast, and with the overflow of options nowadays, consumers quickly fluctuate towards a different brand once one garners a bad reputation.

²² Lanjing Yin, The changing landscape of media communication : an analysis of the impact of new media marketing on news consumption and consumer behavior, Vol 11, Number 3, Indonesia, (2023), P2

²³ Brown, K. and Jones, P, The evolution of media : a historical perspective. Media History Journal, Vol 15, Number 4, United states, (2017), P567

Section 2: Understanding Interactive Communication

Generalities :

1. Definition of Interactive Communication :

Luhmann's definition of interaction is as follows: Interaction is episodes of a societal process; its aspect of temporality characterizes it. He uses the differentiation between a discussion between two individuals at a supermarket and a television broadcast where the communication leaves no room for engagement on the other end due to the fact that the technology (at the time) was simply interpositioned between the two parties in a matter that didn't leave space for feedback.²⁴

Based on Wilbur Schramm's Interactive Model of Communication, this concept can be defined as a process in which the different parties of the communication process constantly switch spots between sending and receiving the messages, this form of communication is rooted in its focus on feedback, engagement and interaction.²⁵

Interactive Communication functions as a bi-directional arrow which symbolizes a two-way street for the communication process, as opposed to the classic one-way arrow, which implies the presence of one designated and unchangeable sender as well as a fixed receiver, this model incorporates the aspect of feedback.

This form of communication is in fact more interested in the quality of the interaction between the different participants than the message in itself. Interactive Communication as a concept viewed from the lens of constructivists is all about the common ground found by the different parties

Another defining aspect of interactive communication is namely its interest in the psychological context of the interaction, while both parties are decoding and encoding messages to each other, there are also many underlying psychological factors that should be taken into account during these exchanges, such as emotions, social context, etcetera.

In the context of marketing, Philip Kotler discusses the elements of interactive communication, he finds that the party that initiates the conversation, the 'first sender' must have a decent idea about what the recipient expects, likes and dislikes. As well as an approximate prediction of their response to the message and what the reaction they hope to receive is, beginning from this basis, they should develop feedback channels.²⁶

Interactive Communication models flourished in the era of Web 2.0 technologies, where interactivity became the sole basis of internet usage. With this came what scholars call the engagement process, which is central to the use of social technology, unlike the pre-web 2.0

²⁴ Luhmann, Niklas. Social Systems. Stanford University Press, Stanford, (1995). p. 407

²⁵ Barnuld, D.C, A transactional model of communication in K.K Sereno and C.D Mortenson. Foundations of Communication theory, NY : Harper and Row, New York, (1970), Pages 83-92

²⁶ Philip Kotler, Kevin Lane Keller, 12th edition, Pearson Prentice Hall, (2006), P539

form of communication, the new interactive manner of communicating is one that prioritizes the notion of collaboration rather than impression.

This process of engagement revolves around collaborative activity, as mentioned prior, and in the case of using interactive communication in the context of marketing, it is about connecting the business with its customers and cultivating a sense of involvement as well as a sense of belonging to the brand.

On this note, it is important to highlight the difference between interactive and social communication, as explained by Gaurav Mishra, interactive communication in the context of marketing aims to create a connection between customers and brands, whereas communication focused on the social aspect aims to connect customers with each other.

2. Interactive Communication on Social Media

Social media, according to Tuten, refers to : *online communities that are participatory, controversial, and fluid. These communities enable members to produce, publish, control, critique, rank and **interact with online content**. The term can encompass any online community that promotes the individual while also emphasizing an individual's relationship to the community, **the rights of the members to collaborate and be heard within a protective space**, which welcomes the opinions and contributions of participants.*²⁷

Social media has opened the door to real-time discussions, fully erasing the obstacles of time and physical distance, therefore allowing it's users to openly interact with each other, this promises an increased online interactive communication, allows a relationship to be developed and sustained.²⁸

However, in order to unlock the many pros that social media communication has to offer to businesses. In this case, it is extremely important to understand what constitutes the multifaceted concept of interactivity in the virtual environment one must fully grasp how social media enables interactive communication and how the latter enables the customer to become loyal and involved with the brand.

An interactive form of communication normally results in a positive association with the party that encourages it. As Heeter declares, the more the technologically mediated communication resembles interpersonal communication, the more interactive the communication is. To put it simply, we as human beings are more sympathetic and trusting towards other human beings, resorting to a form of communication for your brand that resembles discussions we have with people on a daily basis makes it easier for the customer to associate your brand

²⁷ Tracy L. Tuten Advertising 2.0 : *Social Media Marketing in a Web 2.0 World*, Bloomsbury Academic, United Kingdom, (2008), P20

²⁸ Jeremy Harris Lipschultz, *Social Media Communication : Concepts, practices, data, law, and ethics*, Routledge, London, (2023) P6

with the positive feeling of trust. It also has a humanizing effect on the brand, therefore bridging the gap between the business and its customer.²⁹

Sundar, Kalyanaraman and Brown offer a categorization of two types for technology-mediated interactivity, in other words, interactive communication on social media.

1. **A functional interactivity** : This type rests on the capacity to begin a discourse between participants and the owner of the page, focusing on functions such as e-mail links, calendars to set reminders for events, hosting polls and user surveys, and practically any function on social media platforms that implores the users to actively engage with the web-hosting organization are considered as vital to the construction of a dialogue loop, which in itself results in interactivity.
2. **A contingency Interactivity** : *A process involving users, media and messages in which communication roles are interchangeable for full interactivity to occur. Contingency means that messages in an interactive process of communication are contingent upon previous messages.*

The more users respond to each other, and the more intertwined and cumulative, the more interactive the communication is.

In a study conducted in 2015 by Chrystal B. Zhang and Yi Hsin Li in Swinburne University on multiple airlines' social media posts in order to measure the performance of interactive communication of the sampled airlines. It was found that during the data collection period, the airlines sampled in the study had shared 1875 posts on their respective pages, in comparison to their users' 2990 posts.

A table was shared in the research paper's results section, in which they show in detail the type of posts shared by the airlines as well as their users, to quote the paper directly : « KLM authored more than one third of the posts followed by Jetsar Airways, Ryanair was the least active airline generating zero posts while Tigerair Singapore was the second least active carrier. »³⁰

Interestingly enough, the findings of this study, despite having been conducted in 2015, show that interactive communication on social media was heavily present in the context of brand and community-building.³¹

Zhang states that of the 1875 messages posted by the airline, around 91.7 per cent is interactive communication, with only one per cent of these messages falling under the functional interactivity, as in posts that implored the users to take part in polls and votings.

²⁹ Former reference, P89

³⁰ Chrystal B. Zhang, Yi Hsin Lin, The Service Industries Journal, Exploring Interactive Communication using social Media, United Kingdom, 2015 P678

³¹ Former Reference, P679

Ninety-nine per cent of these messages fall under the contingent interactivity category, such as discussions and exchanges between the sampled airlines and their Facebook users.

This study, although conducted in 2015 when Facebook had yet to add the interactivity encouraging functions it now possesses, the researchers noted that the majority of the sampled airlines took user-engagement seriously and encouraged it by authoring posts that call for a response or a reaction. As well as *responding* to said reactions, for example, the airline Swiss International Airlines participated in a process of interactive communication by responding to a user's comment on lost luggage as follows:

User X : Two days without luggage in Muscat and no body of Swiss Air doesn't know where my luggage is. Is it normal?

Swiss International Air Lines: Dear (User X), the handling agent for SWISS lost luggage in Muscat is OMAN AIR S.A.O.C with phone number (number). Have you tried to give them a call? Also, you can purchase necessities, but please keep your receipts and claim via customer service once back home and you will be reimbursed for the essentials. I do hope your luggage is found soon. Kind regards, (airline representative)

This form of interactive communication serves the purpose of facilitating the process for User X to find their luggage as well as be reimbursed for the necessities they needed to purchase due to the inconvenience. This sort of message easily harbors a sense of trust and respect towards the users of the airline's page, as well as give the page (and consequently, the airline) a humanizing effect, further instilling feelings of empathy and loyalty to the airline.

Interactive communication on social media, as dynamic and enriching as it is, is no longer optional in the world of business, it has the most potential to completely alter a business' image and reputation as well as the manner in which it operates by making the customers a part of the equation.

3. Online stores in the era of Web 2.0 and their Marketing Strategies

A. A Brief Introduction to Online Stores in the Era of Web 2.0

Online stores can be defined in multiple ways depending on the platform on which they perform, but a general definition would be an e-commerce business that functions on an online application or a website where the customers are presented with a virtual catalog of the services and products that the business in question has to offer.³²

³² Optimizely, What is an online store? March 11, 2022, <https://www.optimizely.com/insights/blog/what-is-an-online->

Typically, the purchase process also occurs online, in Algeria, for example, most online stores require CCP payment or via EDDAHABIA card. A popular form of online stores is retail stores, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, where a study in 2021 estimated an augmentation of 20 per cent of global online retail sales.

Previously, online or virtual stores signified a website or an application designed by a physical store in order to facilitate the shopping process, the payment process or to simply show off the store's catalog. A great example of this would be Jennyfer's website, the paradigm shifted recently though, and nowadays when we think 'online store' we think a virtual store on social media, offering online payment and shipment. There's been a radical shift in the management and conduction of businesses with the emergence of social media, (taxonomical review p2) one can easily notice how social media has become incorporated in our day-to-day lives, as members of society as well as consumers.

This development is in fact a very profitable one for retailers, as it offers them a platform to promote their goods pro bono. Keep in mind that in the context of social media based online stores, people *already* use these platforms every single day, according to Stacy Jo Dixon, a study shared on February 2nd, 2024 shows that Facebook has a total of 3 Billion monthly users, Instagram garners a good 2 Billion and TikTok about 1.5 Billion. This already sets the groundwork for sharing the brand's products or services in a space that has a very consistently active audience, the potential is undeniable.³³

As Tuten and Solomon put it, *the presence of so many users that enables multidirectional communication and that is dominated by polyphony makes social media marketing activities possible, as the immense amounts of data created by these user scan be both influential and processes, and the platform can be used at almost no cost.*³⁴

B. The Purchasing Process in Online Stores

Since our thesis is mainly focused on Instagram, we will analyse the purchasing process in online stores by relying on studies conducted on Instagram-based online stores.

The purchasing process when it comes to Instagram was not as well investigated as Facebook, therefore it makes the field of study relatively fresh, and several studies have noted multiple factors that influence the customers' purchase process, namely:

1. The Role of Trust
2. Safety Concerns
3. Platform Usability

1. Trust and Peer endorsement

[store/#:~:text=An%20online%20store%20is%20a%20website%20or%20app%20where%20buyers,only%20an%20electronic%20payment%20method](#) , Accessed 15/02/2024, 8:45

³³ Stacy Jo Dixon, January 10, 2024, Instagram – Statistics and Facts, [statista.com/topics/1882/instagram](https://www.statista.com/topics/1882/instagram/), accessed 16/02/2024, 22:05

³⁴ Tracy L. Tuten and Michael R. Solomon, *Social Media Marketing*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, (2018), P56

However, a major factor of influence is what is traditionally known as word-of-mouth, in a virtual context, it's called peer endorsement, basically, other users rely on the approval of the individuals they follow to a certain extent. To simplify the matter:

Let's say that user A and user B both interact with each other on social media and have somewhat of a relationship (virtually or both virtually and personally), if user A expresses positive feedback towards Brand X on their social media platform, it augments the possibility of user B interacting with and possibly purchasing the brand's products or services.

A study on traditional marketing in 2009 concluded that peer customer endorsement heavily influences the purchase process and therefore should be highly regarded as a trust-building marketing strategy.³⁵

The study did note, however, that the results cannot be generalized and it is advised to take into consideration the fact that different customers have different cultural characteristics, which can have an impact on the degree to which their peers' approval may or may not influence their purchase process.

Many studies however, do agree that trust greatly affects the purchase intention, customers are normally more likely to purchase the products or services of a brand which they trust to a certain degree, for example, promising and delivering a good product increases the levels of trust. P14

Remaining consistent with the delivery of the promises made by the brand is also key, as it is unlikely that a customer will purchase again from a brand that fails to live up to the expectations it promises, even if the disappointment occurs after several successful exchanges.

2. Safety Concerns and Perceived Security :

Interestingly enough, the discussion around safety concerns and perceived security is one that varies in results, for example, in a study conducted in 2010 on online retail stores in the forms of websites, it was found that perceived security does not have any impact on the customer's trust when it comes to Instagram stores, it was also concluded that *existing* security normally reduce the perceived risk and affect the *intention* of purchase in online stores. (Schaupp et al 2010)

This means that while giving the customer a sense of security may affect the brand's image, it does not actually serve as a very influential factor when it comes to the purchase process.

However, on the other hand, Ray et al conducted a study in 2011 that found that perceived security actually is *decisive and significant*. This gap in results may have been a result of the difference in the age groups of the individuals sampled for the study, where the older age

³⁵ Sia, Choon Ling, Kai H. Lim, Kwok Kee Wei, and Hock-Hai Teo. "Web 2.0 Applications in Government Web Sites: Prevalence, Use, and Correlations with Website Quality." *Online Information Review* 33, no. 5 (2009): 831-843.

group sampled in the 2010 study found perceived security ineffective, whereas the 2011 group found it effective, and although the study had not been conducted on Instagram stores, it can be concluded that the safer bet is the 2011 results, as most Instagram users happen to be from a young age group.

3. Platform Usability

The level of ease with which a platform functions is highly influential on the purchase process, while it may not completely push the customer towards not purchasing the goods, it does result in a good effect on the purchase intention.

Purchasing a product on a platform that is laggy, glitches and makes it difficult to find information will negatively affect the process, which is why Instagram's usability makes it a very attractive platform for e-commerce. Options like suggestions based on saved posts and likes make it easy for the brand to attract an already interested customer, as well as facilitate the process of finding a store suitable for the customer, it is a classic win-win situation. To make a connection between the first factor of trust and peer endorsement and the factor of platform usability, Instagram also recommends pages followed by people you follow. You can also view which posts authored by the brand that your friends liked by simply scrolling through the page's posts, which immediately draws the customer's attention to these posts and the products listed in them.

Conclusion to Chapter 2:

When exploring social media and how it affects marketing today, it's clear things have changed a lot. Different social media sites serve different purposes for businesses. Some, like Facebook and LinkedIn, are good for communication and making professional connections. Others, like Instagram, Pinterest, and TikTok, are great for sharing pictures and making fun content. By analyzing social media benchmarks, we were able to identify platforms with the highest engagement rates and tailor their marketing strategies accordingly. The changes in social media marketing strategies reflect how people today prefer to engage with brands. Companies are trying different methods like using famous people to promote their products, advertising directly, and creating interesting content to connect with their intended audience and make them aware of their brand. Now, communication isn't just one-way; it's interactive. People contribute their own content, which helps build communities and encourages conversations. Social media marketing has several advantages, like making the brand more visible, reaching a wider audience, and understanding what consumers like. By using social media platforms effectively, businesses can keep up with changes in how people use digital tools and understand what customers want. The connection between social media marketing strategies and consumer behavior highlights how important it is for businesses to be flexible and creative in today's competitive market.

Throughout the second section of this chapter, we come to understand the process through which the concept of interactive communication revolutionizes traditional models by focusing on the main aspects the concept is based on, feedback, engagement, and the process of communicational exchange. Scholars like Luhmann and Schramm, whose works are staples in the field of communication studies, delineate its dynamic nature, where communication evolves through ongoing dialogue rather than one-way transmission. This swift change in norms in the field thrives in the era of Web 2.0, especially with the ever-evolving social media platforms like Facebook and, the focus of our study, Instagram, where real-time interactions find fertile ground.

Chapter 3

Interactive Communication Strategies in Online Stores

Introduction to Chapter 3:

In the final chapter of the theoretical segment of our thesis, we will attempt to analyse how user-engagement campaigns work. We will first define customer engagement, to understand how this concept is relevant to interactive communication campaigns on social media.

We then delve into the different forms of engagement campaigns, namely: rewarding engagement, requesting feedback, and social media campaigns, ending this section with a comparison between traditional and engagement-based marketing.

In the second section, we will analyse the different formats of interactive content on social media, including Polling, UGC, Interactive stories and feed posts, and behind-the-scenes content.

The last section of the chapter focuses on community building for online brands, where we will discuss the two concepts of customer advocacy and brand ambassadorship, and finally, we end the chapter by highlighting the challenges of community building in online stores.

Chapter 3 : Interactive Communication Strategies in Online Stores

Section 1 : User Engagement Campaigns

1. Analysing the Tactics of User Engagement Campaigns

A. Definition of Customer Engagement :

Customer engagement is the process of including one's customers in the process of brand building and marketing strategy. It is harbored through interactive communication and invitation of open-ended feedback.

This process encourages trust, implores the customers to repeat their purchases and augments the customer's sense of belonging and loyalty to the brand, increasing customer satisfaction.³⁶

B. The Tactics of User Engagement :

1. Rewarding Engagement :

This tactic is a very prominent one, we often notice that brands encourage engagement through implementing a sort of reward system for participation. The simplest methods include resharing customers' UGC and granting them some visibility on their platform, and the method that usually garners an immense amount of engagement is contests, discounts, giveaways, etcetera.

While it encourages the users to promote the brand through entering these contests, it also offers a possible reward for doing so.

2. Requesting Feedback :

This tactic, in fact, serves as a data collection tool. It provides one's business with direct insights on what the customers expect or demand from the brand, while also working as a tool to augment engagement.

We notice this tactic very prominently if we look closely. It's a prevalent trend among brands to pose questions on their social media platforms asking customers for their opinions on certain products, their habits and their general feedback on the brand.

This tactic can be found commonly on Instagram post captions such as : Which one of these do you prefer ? What do you use in your nightly skincare routine ?

3. Social Media Campaign :

A social media campaign should be structured in a manner that encourages discussions and participation. Brands often create hashtags for this purpose in order to encourage users to partake in the campaign automatically (without the brand's social media managers having to

³⁶ Hollebeek, L.D, Exploring Customer Brand Engagement : Definition and Themes. Journal of Strategic Marketing, California, (2011), 19

share the UGC), a hashtag on social media automatically makes users posts for that campaign appear under the same page, essentially categorizing them for the event.

These campaigns are done very often, one that took place recently and successfully not only increased brand engagement but also increased brand trust due to the fact that it played on the capital of sympathy is the RAREREMINDER campaign executed by Rare Beauty in April of 2023, where the description reads as follows « Here's your reminder that you are welcome here and you always are enough, regardless of age, race, or gender...please join us in making social media a kinder place. »

4. Engagement through Personalization

Personalization is a marketing strategy that aims to gather as many insights on the brand's customers as possible in order to make their experience with the brand more individualistic, as mentioned prior, this taps into the customer's need to feel unique.³⁷

It entails tailoring part of the marketing mix such as promotions, price, and product recommendations to the consumer.

The notion of personalization was not born with social media marketing, as it is apparent in older marketing practices where, for example, store clerks would greet customers differently based on the way they present themselves. Sending e-communication with personalized introductory messages.

Personalization can be found in many forms such as :

- Demographic personalization : Using data relative to age, gender, location, and income to customize the user's experience.
- Behavioral personalization : Using data relative to browsing history, purchase history, and platform interactions.
- Contextual personalization : Using data relative to location, time, and device.
- AI-Powered personalization : Using machine learning to analyse customer data.

A good example for this tactic in general e-commerce would be Amazon's *Because You Shopped For* section, where it suggests a variety of products tailored to the user's tastes based on their purchase or browsing history. This includes 'products you'd like' as well as 'Most People Bought'.

The integration of personalization may be tricky on social media platforms, however, an example of Personalization in Social Media Marketing well executed is Expedia.

³⁷ Chris Hilton, 26 October 2023, What is Customer Engagement Marketing ? The complete guide, Banzai.io/blog/what-is-customer-engagement-marketing , accessed 12/04/2024, 10:25

The business shared a post on Facebook showcasing Last Minute Deals, and users who clicked on the advertisement and browsed the website were then retargeted with a follow-up advertisement.

2. A Brief Comparison between Traditional and Interactive Communication-based Marketing

In comparing between traditional marketing and Interactive Communications or Engagement-based Marketing, it is essential to pinpoint the fact that marketing has shifted entirely in the way it did not only due to promotional platforms changing, but also due to consumer changing.

The consumers previously weren't a constant target for advertisement as they are today, which made them far less competitive and loyal in comparison to today's consumers. Today's consumers have a much more elaborate purchase processes and properly analyse and make thorough research before making any purchase decisions.

This new characteristic in consumers is referred to as 'Smart Shoppers' in the marketing world, indicating that while consumers in the past may have impulsively purchased products based on a television or newspaper advertisement, today's consumers, overwhelmed with options, reviews and hyper aware of the old marketing tactics, are spending a bigger portion of their time gathering information.³⁸

In order to properly compare between traditional Marketing and Interactive Marketing, we must first determine the principles of Marketing, the 4Ps :

- Product
- Price
- Place
- Promotion

³⁸ Peter Schafer, *Interactive Marketing : The Next Dimension in Corporate Communications*, Journal for Communication Studies in Africa, Vol. 10, No. 1, California, (1991), P6

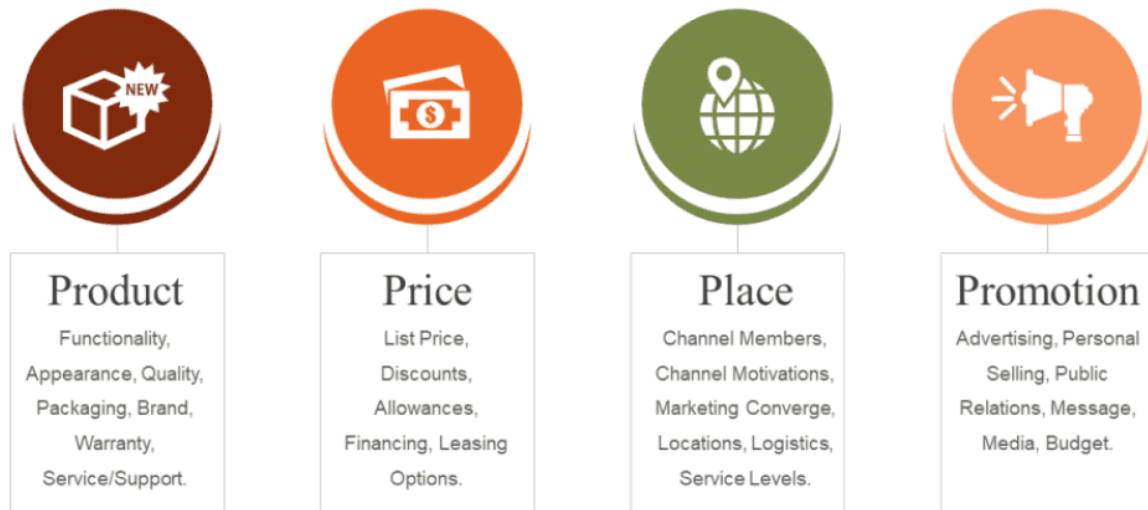


Illustration 1 : The 4PS of Marketing.³⁹

Source: 12manage.com

A. The 4 Ps in Traditional Marketing :

1. Product

Product is the physical goods that a business offers to the customer, the marketer in traditional marketing is usually tasked with defining the products, the characteristics of the products in question, and present them to the customer.

McCarthy's concept of the product in the 4 Ps included product design, product assortment, branding, packaging, services, guarantees and warranties, return and management of the life cycle.

2. Price

In Kotler's proposal of the 4 Ps of Marketing, Price is defined as the prediction of the amount of money which customers would find fitting for the product or service, basically guessing the estimate they are willing to pay while also taking into account additional fees of production and quality of the components of the product or service.

McCarthy's definition aligns with Kotler's, as it also rests on the point of predicting the customer's expectations and perceived value. McCarthy thus includes price strategy, tactics, price-setting, allowances, discounts, and payment methods.

3. Place

Place in this context is the total of procedures relative to distribution, such as retail locations, stores, door-to-door methods, etcetera.

³⁹ 12 manage, https://www.12manage.com/methods_marketing_mix_fr.html , Visited on 13/02/2024, 12:25

McCarthy, however, defines it as granting access to the customer as well as convenience, this encompasses strategies, franchising, market coverage, location decisions, transport, etcetera.

For example, in the Cosmetics Market in the United States, many brands design strategies to be able to gain a spot in the Sephora Makeup Stores, which is a location that strategically grants them exposure and broadens their horizons. Similarly with gourmet and food we can pinpoint stores like Walmart and previously Pricesmart.

4. Promotion

Promotion indicates the process of communication about the products or services that the business provides, it is very tricky to define promotion as it encompasses several practices, however according to McCarthy, it is Marketing Communications or MarCom for short.

It includes advertising, Public Relations, message strategy, and media strategy.⁴⁰

Now, in order to highlight the differences in traditional and modern marketing, we will now apply these principles in a reimagined manner to the characteristics of modern marketing or interactive communication as a marketing strategy :

B. The 4 Ps in Interactive Communication-based Marketing :

1. Product :

While prior to social media, product (or service) had specific characteristics and came individually, today businesses focus on the 'it is not what you sell, it's what you stand for' principle. Meaning, it includes the brand identity, social media presence and social media content it creates among other things.

Nowadays, the product is accompanied by the business' relationship with the customer, social responsibility and generally granting the customer a sense of control as well as a sense of belonging.

We notice that with the overwhelming amount of offers, social media marketing aims to sell the brand – not the product. Therefore essentially, the main focus is image and collaboration with the customer.

A common practice nowadays is literally taking customer feedback and creating a product based on the latter, for example, brands now incorporated feedback into their social media strategy in very direct manners. Such as asking the customers to name the brand's mascot, to help with the storytelling of the mascot's backstory, to suggest catch phrases for the upcoming media campaign, etcetera.

⁴⁰ Alexandra Twin, February 28, 2024, The 4 Ps of Marketing, What they are and How to use them successfully, investopedia.com/terms/f/four/ps.asp, accessed 13/04/2024, 18:23

2. Price

While detecting customer expectations on the price range of a product or service was a much more elaborate process, as well as it required direct surveys or benchmarking, which also required more resources as the availability of rival businesses revenue wasn't as public as it is nowadays.

In the Interactive Communication marketing strategy, insights can be detected through comments, reactions, online discussions on the brand and many more, and can be utilized as data analytics tools to predict what customers are willing to spend on the product or service.

In terms of changing the pricing landscape, it has become possible to utilize leaner margins to cut the costs of the production process, techniques such as Dropshipping, which is defined by Amazon as a Business Model that allows you to sell products online without having to own or operate the physical location where those products are stored and processed.

3. Place

Place in this context no longer only encompasses a geographical spot of distribution, but a virtual one as well. It includes any platform on which the catalog of a business is accessible, including interactive polls on the brand's Instagram story on which they list 4 of their upcoming products, for example, and ask the customers to vote for which one would they like to be available for distribution next. Then, we often see brands include a story or a post with a link to the most voted product and *where to purchase it*.

This not only guides the customers in an easy and interactive manner towards where to purchase the product, but the engagement builds anticipation, excitement, and makes the customer feel involved with the production process and branding.

4. Promotion

Promotion in interactive communication-based marketing is a very large sphere, it comprises of the traditional marketing strategies with a revolutionary, engagement-forward twist.

Social media has granted marketers access to an entire new set of tools for promotional activities, in a manner that gives the brand the visibility it requires while simultaneously allowing it to foster lasting relationships with its customers.

Optimizing the brand's promotional tools, utilizing social media interactions for data collection and insights, and leveraging UGC is extremely cost-effective and crucial to community-building.

A key aspect in social media marketing is Organic Reach, which is the number of users who view and access your content without paid promotion or advertisements, which is often increased through engagement with customers and high quality content.⁴¹

⁴¹ MTC News Desk, November 20, 2023 6 :30 PM, Adapting the 4Ps of Marketing to the Digital Age, www.martechcube.com/4ps-of-marketing/ , accessed 24/02/2024, 8:12

Section 2 : Interactive Content Formats

1. Examining the use of Polls

A Poll or a Survey, also referred to as an Opinion Poll, is a method of data collection in human research sciences, emerging in the Raleigh Star as a method of predicting the results of the 1824 presidential elections in the United States, this method has been repurposed several times on television, newspapers, electronic websites and more.⁴²

It has also been adopted by Social Media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and X (Twitter).

Polls on Social Media serve different purposes depending on the nature of the account utilizing them. However, in the context of business, polls can be highly beneficial.

The nature of polls in itself is already encouraging in the sense that it requires feedback but provides very low-effort ways of giving it, being given options to pick out from makes it much more likely for a busy customer to grant you answers as opposed to having to type an answer out.

Social Media Polls' can be used for :

1. Gathering Feedback on existing products or services.
2. Conducting Market Research.
3. Asking for Preferences.

A. X (Twitter) :

City of Doncaster Council tweeted in 2017 a series of polls asking their followers to vote for names for their two new Gritting Lorries, adding a humoristic twist to their polls, they presented their followers with 6 potential names to vote on : Spready Mercury, Gritsy Bitsy, Teeny Weeny, Yellow anti-slip Machinery, Basil Salty and David Plowie.

The voting process ended up garnering a lot of attention, with old followers of the page interacting with it, came the new scope of engagement from new followers as well who became more familiar with the brand as the engagement with it's users humanized it in a sense.

Eventually, each poll received an estimate of 20.000 votes, and the tweet in which they announced the most voted for names received 4.600 retweets and 11.000 likes.⁴³

⁴² Dietrich, Bryce J. « Crossley, Archibald (1896-1985). Encyclopedia of Survey Research Methods, Thousand Oaks : SAGE Publications, Inc., California, (2008), pages 170-171

⁴³ Martin Belam, 17/11/2017, David Plowie or Basil Salty ? Doncaster asks public to name gritters., The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/nov/17/david-plowie-or-basil-salty-doncaster-asks-public-to-name-gritters> , accessed 28/04/2024, 9:36

B. Instagram :

Instagram Polls for customers are usually created in the form of interactive stickers on Instagram's Story feature, as well in post comments recently.

Instagram Stories are where people and businesses share short format, vertical images and videos that disappear after 24 hours. They're designed to be fast, memorable, and fun. This feature is useful in the communications field as its format covers the full screen, making it less likely for the user to get distracted by alternative content. It offers a swipe-up feature that leads right to the brand's website, a product-tagging feature and very importantly, a Polls option.

The Polls feature is found under the category of stickers, and it was found very effective for businesses trying to increase organic reach and interactive communication.

Polling Stickers on Instagram increased 3 second video views in 9 out of 10 beta campaigns.

A good example of Polls being cost-effective is Dunkin' Donuts utilizing the latter to lower their cost-per-view by 20%.

Doritos and Instagram Polling :

Doritos often share interactive communication polls on their instagram stories imploring the users to select their preferred chips flavors. In the example shown below, the options are Taco versus Nacho.

Doritos' polling is also more appealing due to the fact that their social media team puts together aesthetically appealing images containing the brand's logo, graphic chart, and packaging.

Thrift Lover and Instagram Polling :

Thrift Lover often communicates with their audience via interactive Polls, it often is in one of two occasions :

- An Upcoming Drop : The brand showcases teasers of the upcoming clothing items that will soon be available, and poses the question of « What would you like to see first ? », as stated prior, this increases engagement as well as anticipation.
- Feedback on what to bring in future drops : The brand in these cases shares a poll on their Instagram Story, including several options of general clothing categories (or current micro-trends), asking the audience what they would like to purchase in the

near future. This method grants the brand an idea on what the customers are willing to purchase, therefore setting it up for success for the next product release.

2. UGC/User-Generated Content

A. Defining User-Generated Content

User-Generated content can be defined as a user's interpretation of brand meaning, and this often translates into content contributions. UGC appears in different formats, such as text, images, audio content, video, and film content.

It demands creativity and public distribution through Web 2.0 channels, mainly. It is voluntarily created by non-marketers, publicly accessible, and enabled by multimedia technology.⁴⁴

B. The Emergence of User-Generated Content

In the participatory world of Web 2.0, millions of common people have started publishing their own brand-related content, such amateur pieces may achieve significant reach and thus represent serious brand touch points to consumers, with or without the consent of brand-owning company.

User-Generated Branding, a method of branding that utilizes UGC has emerged in the early 2010s as brand management began finding itself on one of two poles : Loss of Brand Authenticity and Consumer Empowerment.

Consumer and Brand dynamics have completely changed with the emergence of Web 2.0, a BBDO consumer study on a German sample population estimated a loss of authenticity for businesses as 62% of respondents answered that they could no longer distinguish between brands. A GfK study also estimated a loss of 43% of their primary customers.

This resulted in a decrease in loyalty, and fast-paced customers who quickly jumped ships from one brand to the other due to increased offer.

With this new crisis in brand identity, consumers began to comprehend their power, driven by interactive media. This enabled consumers to initiate and partly influence brand-related communication processes and information flows.

Consumers began partaking in the brand communication process itself, contributing to it through creation of content that is relevant to the brand and distributing it, legally, there is nothing stopping them from doing so. Therefore brands were faced with the two options : Fighting it and likely losing, or embracing it and utilizing it to their favor.

C. Examples of UGC tactics within Thrift Lover and Vintage Stuff Only's Instagram Pages

⁴⁴ Krumm, John. Davies, Nigel. Narayansawami Chandra 'User-Generated Content'. IEEE Pervasive Computing Vol 7, issue 4, California, (2008), Pages 4-11

D. UGC as an Interactive Communication SMM Strategy :

The discipline of interactive communication strategies in marketing is based on the notion that it actively aims to engage customers in the discussion surrounding the brand through social media platforms.

This engagement in creating a discourse can come in different forms of contribution, UGC being a very prominent one, as it prioritizes consumer-driven communication, creating a sense of perceived control over the brand's communication as well as being an active participant in the brand's community.

E. How User-Generated Content is Applied

UGC content is often analysed in brands' Research and Development phases, in which two tactics are usually leveraged:

- Natural Brand-related UGC
- Stimulated Brand-related UGC

Natural UGC is normally unprompted content that revolves around the brand, it is usually closely-monitored on Social Media as the brand has little leverage in this case.

Stimulated UGC may be stimulated in certain ways, one of which is sponsoring. This aims to commercialize the product while maintaining customer loyalty and involvement.

4. Interactive Stories, Posts and Reels on Instagram

A. Interactive Instagram Stories :

Instagram is a platform that contains two image-sharing methods, main feed and Story. Each of these spheres may be used in Interactive Communication strategies, with respect to the unique features each sphere offers.

It is safe to assume, based on this, that the two features should be distinguishable in academic research on the employment of Instagram as a platform for marketing purposes. Though with few exceptions, most academic research usually categorizes both of these features together. Which is why we hope to offer a differentiation through our research.

Instagram stories contribute to the addition of traffic to the brand's profile, it's an option that emerged from adapting Snapchat, a platform on which user can share content that disappears in 24 hours.

This feature allows the brand to include video, audio and image content, it offers the Polling/Quizz option as well as a This-or-That feature. It also permits the brand to add Question Stickers, which appear in the form of a white box with a customizable caption (the default reads 'Ask Me a Question'), brands often use this as a method of interacting with their customers through various ways.

For example, a brand can use the Question Sticker to ask followers about what they would like to see next.

Vintage Stuff Only often uses this feature to gather insights on what the customers are eyeing in terms of retail before preparing for the next drop⁴⁵.

Instagram Stories should be as utilized as Main Feed Posts due to the fact that they feel more personal and like an intimate form of communication with the brand's community, due to the fact that they only appear on users' feed if they follow the brand account, unlike feed posts which may appear on non-followers' explore pages.

It is also notable that a recent study on self-presentational differences between main feed and story on Instagram in April of 2023 found that the participants' posting frequency on the main feed is a maximum of 10 times a month, whereas on the story section it is an average of 60 times per month.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Gulnur Yenilmez Kacar, Instagram as one tool, two stages : self-presentational differences between main feed and story on Instagram, Atlantic Journal of Communication, doi.org/10.1080/15456870.2023.2202401, United Kingdom, (2023), P6

⁴⁶ Former Reference, P7

When analysed further, the study found that Instagram posting practices also follow a sort of 'social norms', where users find it irritating when an account posts excessively on the main feed, as 'followers can get bored'.

One of the respondents stated : When you are to share a post on Instagram, you take dozens of photos. You share the best of them on the main feed. You cannot share 15-20 photos there as others will get sick of them and do not click the 'like' button. It is the story section where you can share as many as you want.

We can conclude through this that while interactivity with customers is very much welcome on the main feed, an excessive manner of posting on the feed, no matter how interactive, may come off as spam and wind up irritating the customer. Or worse yet, the customer may grow accustomed to the brand posting on their feed so often that they quit noticing or paying attention to the posts.

Which is why many brands resort to posting several times a day on their stories to keep their customers engaged, while also maintaining a good rate of posting on the main feed.

2. Interactive Posts :

Instagram Feed is a mobile-first destination where users share photos and videos, connect with their community, and explore the things they care about.

For Businesses, feed is where you can visually tell your brand story, showcase products, and inspire people to connect more deeply with what you offer.

A. Instagram Feed Features include :

- Visual Engagement via photos or videos
- Creating interactive shopping experiences via product tags
- Boosting a post by sponsoring it in order to gain more interactivity
- Collection Advertisements
- Carousel Advertisements
- Interacting with UGC by directly reposting their posts relative to the brand on your page through the collaborative post option.⁴⁷

B. Common Types of Interactive Instagram Posts :

1. Challenges and Games :

An example of interactive challenges designed intelligently for the brand's target audience is TeRi Park's game series which includes several fun challenges to which customers can respond in the comments of the post. Including games of guessing the color that results when mixing two colors together, asking followers to guess the score of the game between Algeria Versus

⁴⁷ Meta, 2024, Feed : Connect with your customers at the center of culture, community and creativity, business.instagram.com/instagram-feed , accessed 28/02/2024, 19:02

Monetary Prize	Non - Monetary Prize
Value of the prize : - Relative - Absolute Format of the prize : - Money-based Giveaway - Product-based Giveaway	Personal Prize : - Meet and Greet - Personal Message - Video Call Non-personal Prize : - Story Inclusion - Reciprocal Engagement⁴⁹

Source : Skedsocial.com

Notes on Table 3 :

Giveaways are divided into two types, the first category is the Monetary Prize, and the second one is the Non-Monetary Prize.

In the first category, brands must take into account two main factors : the Value of the prize and the Format of the prize. In terms of value, there are absolute values, which are prizes that are permanent, as for relative, they are prizes that are subject to change based on circumstances. For example, year-long discounts, trials or holiday discounts.

The second factor is the format of the prize, which come in two forms : Money-based giveaway, where the winner is awarded a sum of money for entering the contest. And product-based giveaway where the winner is awarded one or more products from the brand. (fairy clothing example)

In the second category, brands consider two important factors, Personal Prizes such as meet and greets, personal messages, and video calls. And Non-Personal Prizes such as Story inclusions and reciprocal engagement.

3. Product Presentation/Teaser Posts

This is namely the most common type of posts in any brand's website, it is a regular feed post in which they visually present their product or services, preferably in a manner that taps into

⁴⁹ Kevin Schwehm, Jana-Kristin Prigge, Give it away and get it back ? on the role and nature of giveaway campaigns by social media influencers, Research Paper, AIS Electronic Library, , Romania, (2022), P4

storytelling or cognitive responses through color schemes, careful word choice and text placement.

A common way to encourage interaction is by asking questions relative to the product, such as, for example a Makeup brand can ask : Which of these shades would you wear for Eid day number 1 ?

C. Instagram Reels

Reel content tends to garner attention from the audience, whether the attention comes in the form of likes, comments, saves, or shares from followers of the brand, or non-followers.

Instagram launched the Reel feature, adapting the format popularized by TikTok. Content shared in the form of Reels always appears in users' explore pages, irrespective of whether or not they follow the brand's account. The Reels algorithm is designed in a way that is very effective for engagement-based marketing, it is designed to give non-followers a chance to take a glance at what the brand has to offer without even following it.

It works better than the notion of the explore feed, essentially, due to the nature of its content that is addictive and easily digested. To elaborate, Reels show up on a designated spot on the explore page and as you scroll, more reels appear. Due to their short format, it doesn't require a large attention span, and brands intelligently take advantage of this feature to maximize interactivity.⁵⁰

According to statista.com, below is a graph showcasing the study findings on average Reels interactivity rates in 2023 :

Instagram Reels Statistics show that Reels have 2.35 Billion monthly active users. Reels, according to the study, achieve a percentage of 22% more interaction than the regular video posts, with an age group of 25 to 34, it is predicted that the numbers will augment to 2.5

Table 4 : Interactivity Rate for Instagram Reels by Follower Count

Follower Count	Average Engagement Rate
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⁵⁰ Muhammad Fijar Sulisty, Dimas Zainuddin Sukmajatnika and Riczky Syaptura, Using Instagram Reels as a Media for Government Public Service Information, ojs.uma.ac.id/index.php/perspeksi, Indonesia, (2024), P217

Below 5.000	3.81%
5.000 to 10.000	3.74%
10.000 to 50.000	2.24%
50.000 to 100.000	1.51%
Above 100.000	1.38%

Source : Demandsage.com

Notes on Table 4 :

It is noticeable that surprisingly, the highest engagement rates are held by accounts with fewer than 5.000 followers, with an estimated average of 3.79%, which only affirms the point we've made prior in our research, that the Reels algorithm is designed to give brands visibility irrespective of whether or not they follow the brand account.

A study conducted by Demandsage concluded that Instagram Reels Advertisements have the potential to reach an average of 675.3 Million users.

It was also concluded that although Reels were adapted from TikTok's video formats, Instagram Reels outperform TikTok videos in large numbers. Instagram's Reels interactions reach a total of 60%, whereas TikTok falls short with a level of about 38%.⁵¹

⁵¹ Rohit Shewale, January 15, 2024, Instagram Reels Statistics in 2024 (engagement and trends), demandsage.com/instagram-reel-statistics/ accessed 29/04/2024, 8:22

4. Behind-The-Scenes Content

Behind-the-Scenes content can allow brands to create authentic, easy-to-make content that result in an augmentation in interactivity and loyalty to the brand. Traditional marketing strategies often give the impression of there being a gap between the brand and the customer, and give their interactions, if any, a very serious and impersonal tone.

Forbes reported that customers are increasingly interested in the stories behind the products or services they consume. When people get a glimpse into the behind-the-scenes operations of a small business, it can humanize the brand.

Behind-the-Scenes is a fairly new social media marketing strategy, which is why academic research is lacking in this area. However, we will attempt to highlight the characteristics of this strategy via conduction of analysis on brands/companies who have employed this strategy.

To define the concept of BTS in communication and marketing (sproutsocial), it is a content that grants the customer access to brand's inner workings through demonstrating the process in which their products and services are made.

This practice flourished with social media marketing, as it makes the perfect platform to get personal and close with the customers. Through sharing teasers of products in the making, products to come, how services come to life, etcetera.

A real-life example to demonstrate this strategy is SproutSpecial's series in which their engineering and product team members are shown reading customer reviews, essentially interacting with the customers while also giving a human face to the business.

Another form of BTS Content is sharing photos of the office or store, an example which properly demonstrates this is Warby Parker showcases their working space, parodying 90s sitcom theme songs to give the content a humoristic sense.

However, a prominent one in social media communication strategies for online stores is sharing workflows and day-to-day tasks, walking the customer through the process of purchasing essentials for the store. In the case of thrift stores, it's common to share images of 'goods finds' in the forms of teasers, but they also serve the purpose of letting the customer in on what goes on behind the scenes with the brand and how the choosing process is constructed.

Section 3 : Community Building in Online Brands

1. Community Building Strategies through Interactive Communications

A. Definition of Brand Community

Brand Community as a concept was proposed by practitioners Muniz and O'Guin in 2001 :
« Brand Community is a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structure set of social relations among admirers of a brand. »

In other words, the brand's identity, products, or services draw together a group of individuals who have their admiration for the brand in common. This community is not representable by a geographical spot but more so a social structure between these individuals.

This concept is achievable based on the question of whether or not the brand is able to construct brand trust among its customers, which is the concept of desire on the customer's end to rely on the brand they purchase goods from in spite of perceived risks, because the trust created by the brand makes the customers expect positive results.

B. Community Engagement

Brand Community engagement is rooted in the collaboration between the brand with the customer, as well as the customers with one another. This concept is amplified by the frequency in which these collaborations take place, which then proceed to form a strong network that is built on trust and loyalty.

There are three factors with which a brand can assess the success of its engagement strategy :

1. The formation of relationships with targeted community groups
2. The creation of trust from the community
3. The development of common issues/Taking collective action

In order to be certain that these conditions are all present, brands must design a very precise strategy. The brand must work towards comprehending the issues faced by the customers through interacting with them in an active manner, and following up on the interaction by taking action to mend the issues raised.

C. Online Brand Communities

Brand Communities in the Web 2.0 era, although they maintain their core characteristics, face a deal of mutations due to the changing context. While traditionally, brand communities signified face-to-face engagement with fellow admirers of the brand or the brand itself, today, when we talk about online brand communities, we are essentially talking about a virtual connection. The ease and speed of the interaction process nowadays facilitates the process of participation for the customer, and as a result, the latter become much more present and active in the brand's community.⁵²

⁵² Ewing, M. T., Wagstaff, P. E. and Powell, I. H. Brand Rivalry and Community Conflict. Journal of Business Research Vol 66 Issue 1, United states, (2013), P4

The definition of the concept of a brand community practically holds the same core values, except for the fact that online brand communities interact via online media. Based in Social Media Platforms such as Instagram, these interactions occur in a far less passive manner in comparison to traditional media, due to the features of SM platforms that allow the generation and dissemination of content and information much more freely.⁵³

The factors which offer a clear distinction between conventional brand communities and online communities are namely the elimination of time and space, augmentations in amounts of social interactivities, and a far more augmented reach rate for businesses.

D. The Criteria for Online Brand Communities

1. Shared Consciousness of a Kind

This criterion signifies that the opinions of the members of the community must share the same set of feelings and opinions in regards to the brand, creating the sense of belonging to a team, this leans into social identification, and the human need to feel included, which successfully creates brand loyalty.

2. Shared Rituals and Tradition

Muniz identifies this criterion as reproduced social processes surrounding the brand, which allows for the distribution of the brand's meaning inside and outside the community. Shared rituals and traditions heavily rely on the shared consumption experiences with the brand.

3. A Sense of Moral Responsibility

The members of the online brand community must all harbor a sense of moral responsibility to the community in question, which enables them to interact among themselves and take collective action on brand-related matters.

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E. A Study On Online Brand Community Building and Interactive Communication

A study conducted in 2020 and published in 2021 questioned respondents (on Facebook) via survey in order to understand the correlation between Online Brand Communities, Interactive Communication, and Customers.

The study findings affirmed that a large proportion of businesses' marketing budgets is dedicated to the management of the brand's social media pages. As Brand communities are quickly shifting their spots from conventional methods to online platforms, the findings of the study highlight the necessity for brands to take steps into encouraging consumers to engage

⁵³Mardhiyah, Futuwah, Hilmi, Rosidi, and Zain, Journal of Theoretical and Applied Management, Vol 16 No.3, Indonesia, (2023), P475

⁵⁴ Dessart, Laurence Consumer Engagement in Online Brand Communities, PhD Thesis, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, (2015), P19

with the brand, and to make the former feel included and heard. This can be achieved through promoting subscription to their online brand's pages.

2. Customer Advocacy and Brand Ambassadorship

A. Customer Advocacy :

Customer advocacy is defined as the willingness of a brand to collaborate with their customers with the anticipation that satisfied customers will relay their positive partnership with the brand to their peers.

The main objective of customer advocacy is to form profound connections between the brand and its customers, this is achieved through building trust and loyalty by remaining transparent towards the customers, encouraging communication, collaboration and interaction with the customers.⁵⁵

Another manner of defining advocacy is the extent to which customers support a company, spread positive WOM (word of mouth), promote the company to new customers, and defend the company from others' critiques.

Brands nowadays possess a set of skills when it comes to social media marketing, and said skills are implemented in influencing customers through various engagement processes. Basically, the entire purpose of fostering profound connections with customers is to create strong advocates for the brand, these advocates' willingness to interact with the brand and brand-related social media content makes them co-creators of perceived value.

According to various studies on what makes a successful trust building process as well as achieves satisfaction, word-of-mouth/WOM is the most significant factor. While WOM has always been an existing factor even in traditional communication practices, this factor only flourished in the Web 2.0 era. This point was made in our research in the segment on peer and celebrity endorsements, WOM falls under that very category.⁵⁶

Today's interactive communication practices no longer measure the value of customer interactivity through the rate of purchase intention, but also take into account the rate at which the brand influences the customer's habits, and to what extent this engagement process takes the customers of the brand out of the passive recipients category and into the active participants one.

⁵⁵ Ying-Pin Yeh, The impact of customer advocacy on customer perceived value, Journal of Business and Retail Management Research vol.8 issue 1, United Kingdom, October 2013, P91

⁵⁶ Verma, V., Sharma D. and Sheh, J, « Does relationship marketing matter in online retailing ? A meta-analytic approach », Journal of the academy of marketing science, Vol. 44 No.2, United States, (2015), P206

B. Brand Ambassadorship

1. Definition of Brand Ambassadorship

Brand ambassadorship is a concept where ambassadors engaged by the business function as spokespersons for the brand in order to represent it positively.⁵⁷

Using brand ambassadors is a very cost effective communication strategy, but due to the sense of authenticity that it harbors, it is a very effective strategy, often outdoing other forms of advertising.⁵⁸

Brand ambassadors are categorized as opinion leaders, which is a title given to individuals who are able to influence other individuals' opinions and behaviors.⁵⁹ Which is why these individuals are leveraged as mediators between internal and external brand management and greatly influence the perceived value of the brand's products and services, as well as the customers' perception of the brand's identity and **brand image**, which is what modern communications and marketing rely on : brand marketing, where the customer purchases not only the service or the product, but also the values and principles of the business they purchase it from.

2. Brand Image and Electronic Word-of-Mouth

Brand image is the perception of the brand's identity from the point of view of its customers. It takes up a very large portion of modern marketing's focus, with the market growing and competition quickly increasing, brands are faced with the issue of their products not being too distinguishable from other brands' products, which then creates the problem of lack of loyalty in customers. Which is where brand ambassadorship lays the groundwork in order to make it stand out.

With opinion leaders publicly expressing their positive emotions and opinions around the brand, customers tend to flow in, not only due to their trust in the ambassador, which is already a huge factor, but also the fact that these individuals who are influenced by the ambassadors also associate their own identities with them.

A very good example of this would be Cristiano Ronaldo's fans purchasing Head and Shoulders products for the mere reason that he was featured in their advertisements, or Johnny Depp admirers purchasing the perfume Sauvage.

This, however, is an old practice of directly making the celebrity the face of a brand. Nowadays, we are discussing the birth of a brand ambassadorship that may or may not be monetarily transactional, and takes place on social media platform, which is now defined as EWOM or Electronic Word-of-Mouth.

⁵⁷ « Brand Ambassadors give your business a boost. » Business Courier. February 10, 2013.

⁵⁸ Andersson, M. and Ekman, Ambassador Networks and place branding. Journal of Place Management and Development, United Kingdom, (2009), P2

⁵⁹ Rehmet, J and Dinnie, K. Citizen brand ambassadors : motivations and perceived effects. Journal of Destination Marketing and Management, United Kingdom, (2013), P2

Since social media is now considered a staple in communications, it makes sense for WOM to take on a new form in order to adapt to this new stage.

Electronic word of mouth is defined as consumers' all informal communication through the internet-based technology in the field of application of features of certain service or goods or their customers.⁶⁰

Table 5 : Types of Brand Ambassadors

Employee Ambassador	An individual already employed by the business who also functions as an advocate for the brand.
Existing Customers	Customers who contribute to the brand's communication strategy by sharing UGC on social media platforms.
Event Ambassador	Individuals who work as representatives of the brand at events or brand campaigns.
Strong Audience Ambassador	These are a category of what is known as micro-influencer, an individual with a loyal audience with a well-structured and admired identity who endorses the brand.
Field Authority Experts	Experts in their field who serve as ambassadors, such as a musician promoting a music streaming platform.
Student Ambassador	Student ambassadors are usually young adult students who endorse the brand and recommend it to their peers.

Source : Emplifi.io

⁶⁰ Yuan, R., Liu, M. J., Luo, J. and Yen, D.A, Reciprocal Transfer of Brand Identity and image associations arising from higher education brand extensions. Journal of Business Research, N69, United Kingdom, (2016), P3069

3. The Challenges of Community Building for Online Brands

Schmallegger and Carson propose the following distinction between traditional communication and marketing platforms and Web 2.0-based platforms is in the nature of their content. The fact that it is objectively more spontaneous in comparison and does not always stem from the brand it discusses.

One of the main challenges for Community building for online brands is consumers becoming the creators of the content that either makes or breaks the brand's communication strategy.

Brand communities can also emerge with the brand constantly integrating more members, however, these members may become very difficult to control, especially once the discourse around the brand is mainly led by these individuals.⁶¹

Besides the glaring issue with community members potentially becoming uncooperative, below are challenges raised by years of research on brand communities online :

- **Anti-Brand Comments and Anti-Brand Communities**

Oftentimes, people on social media bond over their love for a product or service, which then translates into admiration for the brand responsible for it over time. However, in certain situations, people also come together to express their hatred for a brand.

With the popularization of cancel culture and 'unpopular opinion' posts on social media that garner the more attention the more scandalous they are, hate campaigns are only growing in popularity. This is what brands who cultivate brand communities must look out for: oppository communities.

- **Negative Associations**

Negative associations from the brand can vary in forms ; the brand can have a community that is not very well-moderated online that it gains a negative reputation, and passes that reputation down to the brand as a result.

On another hand though, negative associations can be related to brand ambassadors. If a brand is endorsed by a certain individual who has a certain degree of popularity, they indirectly become associated with the brand, and in case that individual gains a negative reputation online, it can also impact the brand negatively.

- **Allocating Resources**

⁶¹ Anne-Marie Hede, Pamm Kellett, Building Online Brand Communities : Exploring the Benefits, Challenges and Risks in the Australian Event Sector, Journal of Vacation Marketing 18(3) 239-250, United Kingdom, (2012), P241

Quality is a deciding factor of success for online brand communities, and as our research mentioned before, the brand does not have complete autonomy over what is posted. Therefore, well-intentioned UGC of bad quality may result in bad buzz online.

- **Engaging Consumers**

Keeping customers highly engaged and interactive may pose a challenge in the era of Web 2.0, where not only has it been scientifically proven that the average attention span has decreased in the recent years, but distractions have also augmented immensely.

Which is why it is important to not only make the customers feel included, as if they belong to the brand's community, but to also grant them a sense of perceived control over the brand, in a co-ownership manner.⁶²

⁶² RumbleTalk, May 6th 2016, *online brand communities : advantages and challenges*, rumbletalk.com/blog/index.php/2016/03/06/online-brand-communities-advantages-challenges/ , Accessed on 02/03/2023, 8:25

Conclusion to Chapter 3:

This chapter was a deep dive into interactive communications and the manner in which online stores employ them. We understood the tactics of user engagement, selecting three prominent tactics, which are polling or surveying, User-generated content, interactive stories/feed posts, and Behind-the-scenes content.

In comparing between traditional and engagement-based marketing, we have opted for an analysis of the original four Ps of marketing, and through reimagining those four concepts in the context of social media marketing. We were able to draw a conclusion on where the differences lie between the two practices.

In this chapter, we considered statistics in our analysis, such as interactivity rates per follower count for instagram. We also divided engagement campaign tactics into several segments, then we analysed these micro-tactics separately.

We took into account the different types of contests and giveaways and the different types of brand ambassadors.

Lastly, through this chapter, we were able to understand the criteria for building an online brand community, how interactive communication is implemented, as well as the main challenges that brands need to acknowledge while building an OBC.

Practical Part

Data Presentation:

Presenting Vintage Stuff Only :

Founded in January of 2020, Vintage Stuff Only is an exclusively online store, with a total of 117K followers, the store is categorized as a retail and shopping brand. While the store currently maintains an exclusively online presence, the owner is based in Algiers, however the store offers delivery services to all states of Algeria.

The brand began as a streetwear and sportswear reselling service, sourcing vintage and rare pieces, often discontinued or rarely found in physical stores. It then expanded its services to clothing products of all sorts of styles and sources, introducing a sub-store, Thrift Lover, in October of 2021, garnering a total of 25.4K followers.

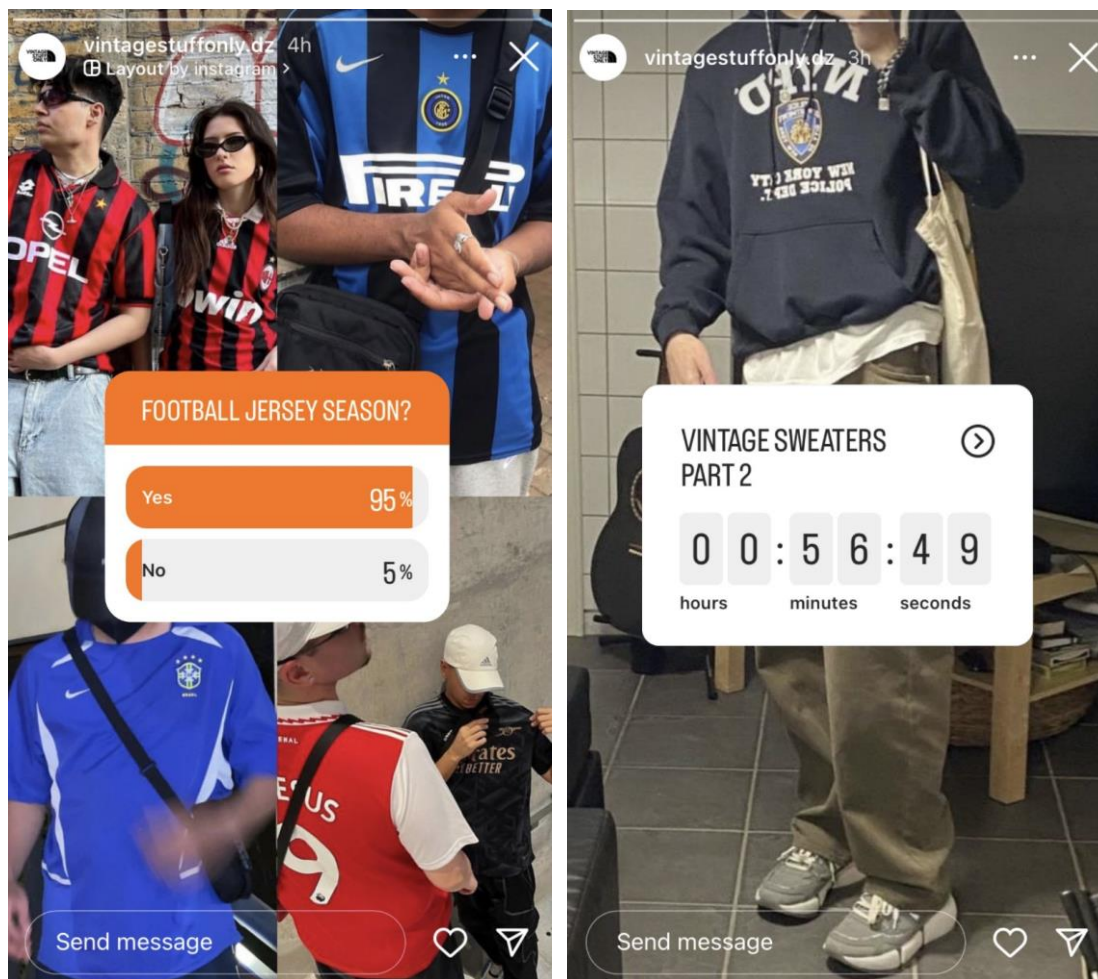
The brand caters to an eco-friendly purpose, by promoting the use of vintage and thrifted clothing, the store hopes to contribute to the decrease of harmful gas emissions caused by textile industries that push fast fashion and therefore exhaust natural resources, while also leaving a giant waste of unpurchased products in landfills.

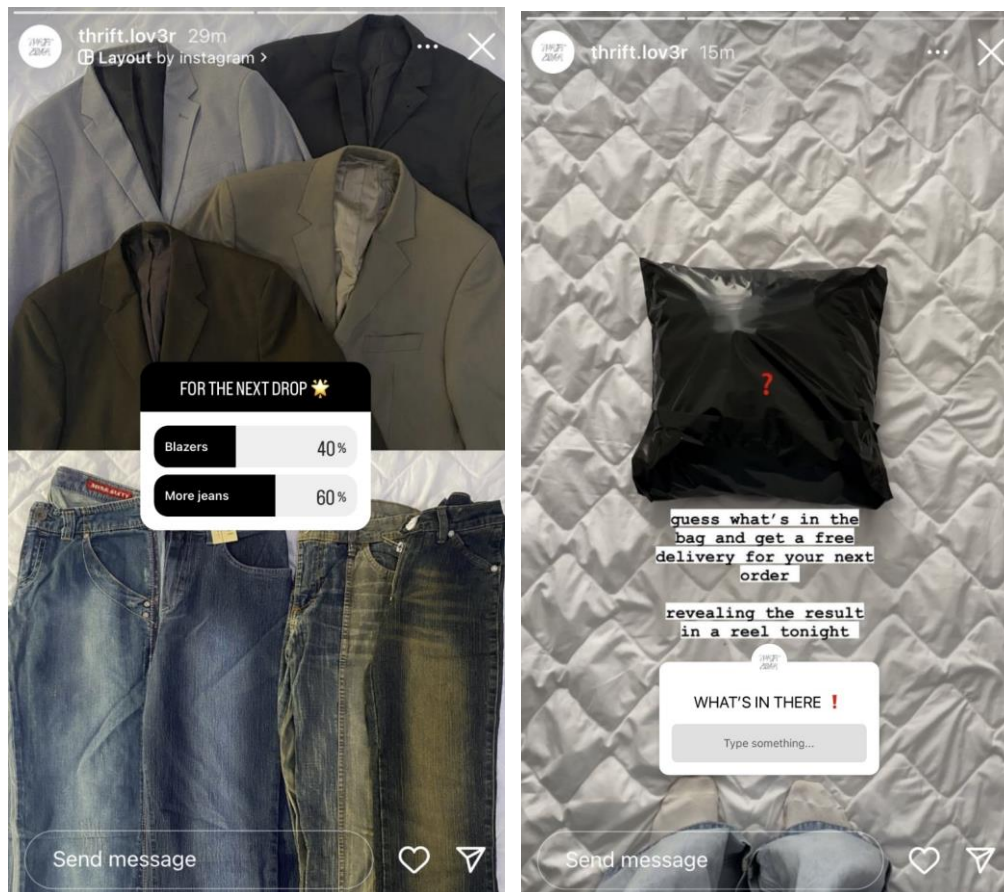


Figure 1 : Vintage Stuff Only's logo.⁶³

⁶³ www.instagram.com/vintagestuffonly.dz, visited on 27/04/2024

Examples of the collected data :





The Content Analysis process of the brand Thrift Lover/Vintage Stuff Only's brand's Instagram:

In conducting our content analysis, we began the process of data collection beginning from October 2023. We have gathered a total of 180 units eligible for analysis, containing posts which are still available on the brand's platforms, as well as story posts which are no longer available after 24 hours. In doing so, we hope to be able to assess the level of interactive marketing techniques employed by the business in question.

In order to comprehensively evaluate the scope of interactive communication as a marketing technique, particularly within the realm of social media marketing, a set of criteria has been meticulously curated to delineate the various components that contribute to this dynamic approach. These criteria serve as fundamental pillars that encompass a wide array of interactive features and strategies aimed at engaging and involving the audience in brand communication.

First and foremost, User-generated content (UGC) emerges as a cornerstone of interactive communication, where brands leverage content created by their own customers or followers to foster authenticity, trust, and community engagement. By encouraging users to share their experiences, testimonials, and creative expressions related to the brand, UGC not only amplifies brand visibility but also cultivates a sense of belonging and ownership among the audience.

Additionally, the Repost feature plays a pivotal role in interactive communication by enabling brands to reshare user-generated content, thereby amplifying user voices and fostering a sense of reciprocity and appreciation. Reposts not only showcase user contributions but also serve as

a catalyst for community interaction and peer validation, as users feel valued and acknowledged for their contributions to the brand's narrative.

Furthermore, the integration of Polls features within social media platforms empowers brands to actively solicit feedback, opinions, and preferences from their audience, thereby facilitating two-way communication and audience participation. By leveraging Polls, brands can gather valuable insights, gauge audience sentiment, and tailor their marketing strategies to better align with customer needs and preferences.

Similarly, Question/Suggestion Box features offer a direct channel for audience engagement and input, allowing followers to pose questions, share suggestions, or provide feedback in a transparent and accessible manner. This interactive element fosters a sense of inclusivity, transparency, and customer-centricity, as brands actively listen to and respond to customer inquiries and suggestions.

Moreover, Behind-the-scenes content provides a glimpse into the inner workings of the brand, offering audiences exclusive access to the brand's processes, people, and culture. By showcasing behind-the-scenes moments, brands humanize their identity, deepen customer connections, and foster authenticity and trust, as audiences gain insight into the brand's values, craftsmanship, and ethos.

In addition, Contests/Games serve as engaging and interactive marketing tools, where brands incentivize audience participation through gamified experiences, challenges, or competitions. By tapping into the inherent desire for competition, achievement, and reward, contests and games not only drive engagement and excitement but also facilitate brand awareness, virality, and customer acquisition.

Lastly, Timers/Countdowns features create a sense of urgency and anticipation among the audience, prompting immediate action and engagement. Whether used to countdown to product launches, flash sales, or exclusive events, timers and countdowns evoke a fear of missing out (FOMO) and stimulate audience anticipation and excitement, driving engagement and amplifying brand visibility.

Overall, these criteria collectively encompass the multifaceted nature of interactive communication as a marketing technique, providing brands with a comprehensive toolkit to engage, interact, and connect with their audience on social media platforms. By leveraging these interactive features and strategies, brands can cultivate meaningful relationships, foster brand loyalty, and drive business growth in an increasingly digital and interconnected landscape.

These content analysis categories were approved by:

Dr. FENDOUCI Hamza

Dr. GHEDIRI Karima

Percent Agreement:

Number of agreements (observed agreement): 36

Total number of observations: 37

Percent agreement = Number of agreements/Total number of observations ×100

Percent agreement = $36/37 \times 100$

Percent agreement = $3600/37$

So, the percent agreement is approximately 97.30%.

Percent Agreement ≈ 97.56%

Form Categories:

The form categories encompass a diverse array of content formats utilized across the Instagram platform, each serving distinct purposes and engaging audiences in unique ways.

Post format:

1. **Feed Posts** represent the standard public posts comprising one or more images accompanied by captions, visible within users' feeds. These posts serve as the primary means for brands and individuals to share visual content and narratives with their followers, fostering engagement and interaction.
2. **Story Posts** offer a more ephemeral form of communication, featuring images, texts, and videos that are visible for only 24 hours. Despite their temporary nature, Story Posts provide a dynamic platform for real-time updates, announcements, and behind-the-scenes glimpses, fostering a sense of immediacy and authenticity among followers. Moreover, the inclusion of interactive features such as Feed Polls and Story Polls within these posts enables brands to solicit feedback, opinions, and preferences directly from their audience, facilitating two-way communication and audience engagement.
3. **Story Question Sticker** empowers users to pose questions or suggestions to the account, fostering a sense of inclusivity and dialogue within the community. This interactive feature enables brands to crowdsource ideas, gather feedback, and address customer inquiries transparently, thereby strengthening brand-consumer relationships and enhancing user experience.
4. **Reels** have gained widespread popularity for their resemblance to TikTok's video format. Reels offer a creative platform for users to showcase short-form videos, often incorporating music, effects, and transitions to captivate audience attention. With its dedicated category on the explore page, Reels garner significant visibility and interactivity, making them a preferred choice for brands seeking to maximize engagement and reach on the platform.
5. **Reposts/Re-shares** facilitate the sharing of user-generated content produced by other accounts, providing brands with an opportunity to amplify authentic user experiences and testimonials. By showcasing user-generated content, brands not only foster a sense of community and reciprocity but also leverage the credibility and trust associated with peer recommendations.

In essence, these form categories represent a diverse toolkit of content formats that enable brands to connect, engage, and interact with their audience on Instagram. Whether through visually engaging Feed Posts, ephemeral Story Updates, interactive Polls and Question Stickers, or dynamic Reels, each format offers unique opportunities for brands to communicate their message, foster community engagement, and build meaningful relationships with their audience.

a. Languages :

- 1. English**
- 2. Arabic**
- 3. Arabic (Algerian dialect)**
- 4. French**

b. Length of content:

1. Long format text on Stories: Instagram Stories featuring detailed textual content, suitable for conveying extensive information, narratives, or announcements within the temporary story format. This format allows users to share in-depth updates or stories with their audience, leveraging the temporary nature of Stories to create a sense of urgency and exclusivity.
2. Short format text on Stories: Concise textual content optimized for quick consumption within Instagram Stories. This format is ideal for delivering brief messages, updates, or calls to action, catering to the fast-paced browsing behavior of social media users and encouraging immediate engagement.
3. Short video/reel: Short-form video content, typically following the format popularized by platforms like TikTok. These videos are designed for quick viewing and engagement, offering brands and users a creative platform to share entertaining or informative snippets in a visually engaging format.
4. Long video/reel: Longer-form video content within the reel format, providing an opportunity for more comprehensive storytelling or showcasing. This format allows for deeper dives into topics or narratives, capturing viewer attention with detailed tutorials, behind-the-scenes footage, or product showcases.
5. Long format text on feed posts: Feed posts featuring extensive textual content alongside visual media. This format offers a space for detailed captions, narratives, or explanations, providing users with additional context or information to complement the accompanying visuals.
6. Short format text on feed posts: Succinct textual content integrated into feed posts, delivering brief messages, announcements, or prompts for user interaction. This format is designed to quickly capture audience attention and drive engagement without overwhelming users with lengthy content.

The content categories:

Reoccurring themes: These are recurring topics or elements often found in social media content, representing key areas of focus or engagement for brands or individuals. These themes

encompass various aspects of content strategy and audience interaction, serving to drive engagement, foster community participation, and convey brand messaging effectively.

1. **Upcoming Product Launches:** This theme revolves around the anticipation and promotion of new products or services set to be released in the near future. Brands often leverage social media platforms to generate buzz, tease upcoming launches, and build excitement among their audience, driving anticipation and interest in their offerings.
2. **User-generated content:** User-generated content (UGC) refers to content created by users or consumers rather than the brand itself. This theme involves encouraging and showcasing user-created content, such as reviews, testimonials, or user-submitted photos or videos, to foster authenticity, trust, and community engagement.
3. **Suggestion Box:** The suggestion box theme involves providing a platform for users to share feedback, suggestions, or ideas with the brand. Brands often utilize features like polls, question stickers, or dedicated suggestion boxes to solicit input from their audience, demonstrating a commitment to customer feedback and engagement.
4. **Customer Preferences Poll:** Customer preferences polls involve polling the audience to gather insights into their preferences, tastes, or opinions on various topics related to the brand or its offerings. These polls enable brands to tailor their products, services, or marketing strategies to better align with customer needs and preferences.
5. **Contests/Giveaways/Games:** This theme encompasses interactive activities such as contests, giveaways, or games designed to engage and incentivize audience participation. Brands often use these tactics to drive engagement, expand their reach, and reward their audience for their loyalty and participation.
6. **Available products:** This theme focuses on showcasing and promoting the range of products or services offered by the brand. Brands utilize social media platforms to highlight new arrivals, bestsellers, or featured products, providing information and incentives to encourage purchase consideration and conversion.
7. **Additional Information/Trend Promotion:** This theme involves sharing supplementary information, industry trends, or relevant news to educate, inform, or entertain the audience. Brands may use social media to stay current with industry trends, share valuable insights, or position themselves as thought leaders within their niche.

1. **Opinion trends:**

- a. **Positive**
- b. **Negative**

2. **Persuasion techniques:**

- a. **Rational**

b. Emotional

3. Interactivity rates:

- a. Strong
- b. Moderate
- c. Weak

Analysis and discussion of results

1. Content analysis of Vintage Stuff Only (TL)'s Instagram page:

A. Form Categories:

1. Description of the page:

Table 1: Data relative to the description and identification of the brand on Instagram.

Name of the page	Vintage Stuff Only/Thrift Lover
Username	@vintagestuffonly.dz / @thrift.lov3r
Number of followers	117K followers / 25.4K Followers
Category	Shopping and Retail online store
Colors of the brand	Muted Black and White
Slogan/Catch phrase	Specializing in Vintage
Website	N/A
Address	The online store does not have a physical store; however, it delivers to all states of Algeria.
Date of creation of the page	January 2020 / Second page in October 2021

Description and Analysis :

The table presents details of the Instagram account, Vintage Stuff Only and sub-brand Thrift Lover. Vintage Stuff Only has accumulated 117K followers, and Thrift Lover has accumulated 25.4K reflecting the brand's engagement with their respective audience. The main name and username of the brand's platform, @vintagestuffonly.dz indicate their focus on vintage items and thrift shopping, with a playful twist in the usernames possibly hinting at the brand's identity and location.

Categorized under Shopping and Retail online store, the brand caters to customers interested in purchasing vintage and thrifted items. The brand's chosen color scheme, Muted Black and White, suggests a minimalist and classic aesthetic, reflecting the vintage theme. The slogan, "Specializing in Vintage," emphasizes the brand's core offering, reinforcing its identity and attracting like-minded customers.

While the brand doesn't operate a website, it effectively utilizes Instagram as its primary platform for marketing and sales. Despite the absence of a physical store, the brand ensures

accessibility by offering delivery to all states of Algeria, demonstrating its commitment to serving customers nationwide.

Vintage Stuff Only was established in January 2020, while Thrift Lover was created in October 2021, indicating their respective durations on the platform. These creation dates provide insights into the brand's online presence, with Vintage Stuff Only likely having a more established following and engagement due to its longer tenure.

2. The interface of the page:

A. Useful information on VSO's Instagram page :

Category	Points
Follow feature	1
Account Category	1
Direct Messaging feature	1
Description and presentation of the brand	1
Total of points	4

B. Useful information on Thrift Lover's Instagram page :

Category	Points
Follow feature	1
Account Category	1
Direct Messaging feature	1
Description and presentation of the brand	1
Total of points	4

Description and Analysis :

The examination of Vintage Stuff Only's Instagram interface provides a thorough assessment of how easy it is to use and how well it supports interactive marketing methods. By looking at four specific aspects, we can see the important features that encourage users to get involved and interact with the brand. These features include the "follow" button, which makes it easy for

people to subscribe to updates and content, and the direct messaging option, allowing direct communication between the brand and its followers. Moreover, the detailed brand description and presentation help users understand what Vintage Stuff Only offers and what it stands for, increasing brand visibility and comprehension. Overall, this evaluation emphasizes the importance of a user-friendly interface in supporting effective interactive marketing efforts, helping Vintage Stuff Only to connect with its audience and create a lively online community on its Instagram platform.

Table 2: Languages used in the brand's two platforms :

Language	Repetition in collected data	Percentage
English	106	44.17%
French	68	28.33%
Arabic	32	13.33%
Algerian dialect	30	12.50%

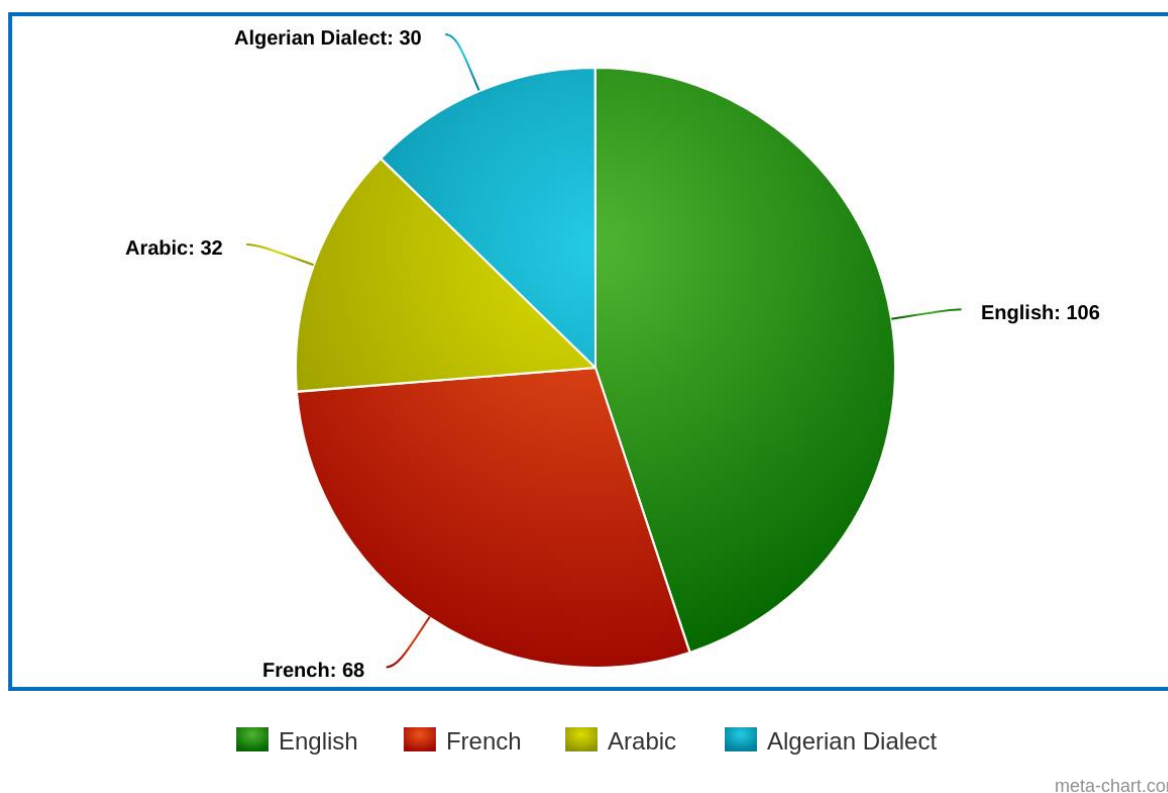


Illustration 2: Pie Chart of the languages used.

Source: Our analysis with the help of meta chart.

Observation: Please note that in the data collected, some content contained more than one language.

Description and Analysis:

Description:

Table 2 offers a detailed breakdown of the languages observed in the content analysis of the brand's Instagram, complementing the initial insights we collected from the first table. This analysis which takes the linguistics aspect into consideration sheds light on the brand's communication strategy and its alignment with the demographics and target audience identified in the earlier table.

English stands out as the most common language, making up 44.17% of all repeated content. This supports the idea from the earlier table that there's a lot of interest and a big following, hinting that there's a specific effort to appeal to English-speaking people. It's interesting to note that the trend of online thrift shopping became really popular in the United States, especially during the pandemic. This might explain why the brand mostly uses English – because it's trying to reach an audience that's used to Western media and might be more likely to shop at an online thrift store.

Apart from English, the presence of Arabic, including both the Algerian dialect and standard Arabic, demonstrates the brand's dedication to connecting with local Algerian audiences and wider Arabic-speaking communities. The use of the Algerian dialect, which makes up 12.50% of repeated content, aligns with the brand's focus on serving its Algerian customers, highlighted by its delivery services across all states of Algeria.

Furthermore, the appearance of standard Arabic, comprising 13.33% of the content repetitions, suggests an outreach strategy aimed at broader Arabic-speaking regions.

French, making up 28.33% of repeated content, is another important language in the analysis. This supports the brand's engagement strategy seen in the earlier table, where it delivers to all states of Algeria. It's likely targeting French-speaking areas within the country and possibly French-speaking communities elsewhere.

Analysis:

The use of multiple languages throughout the analysis highlights the brand's dedication to being inclusive and accessible. By incorporating different languages, the brand can a specific targeted English-speaking audience, while maintaining the use of the local languages, building stronger connections and attracting more customers from various language preferences and cultural backgrounds. This multilingual approach is particularly significant in Algeria, a country with a rich linguistic diversity. Understanding the languages employed by the brand on their social media platforms requires acknowledging Algeria's multilingual population, which includes speakers of Arabic, French, and increasingly, English.

Recently, the English language has become more prevalent on social media, and the Algerian population is embracing this trend. English is now being incorporated into the school system, reflecting its growing importance. The increased use of English can also be linked to the global thrift/second-hand fashion movement, which gained significant popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in the United States. As this trend took off in the US, it influenced global fashion markets, including Algeria. The integration of thrift-based fashion into the retail

and shopping sectors has expanded the field's scope, and as a result, English has become a key language for engaging with this trend. Consumers in Algeria who are drawn to the thrift/vintage wave are often those who first encountered it when it was a prominent trend in the US. Therefore, the brand's use of English caters to these consumers, aligning with their interests and experiences.

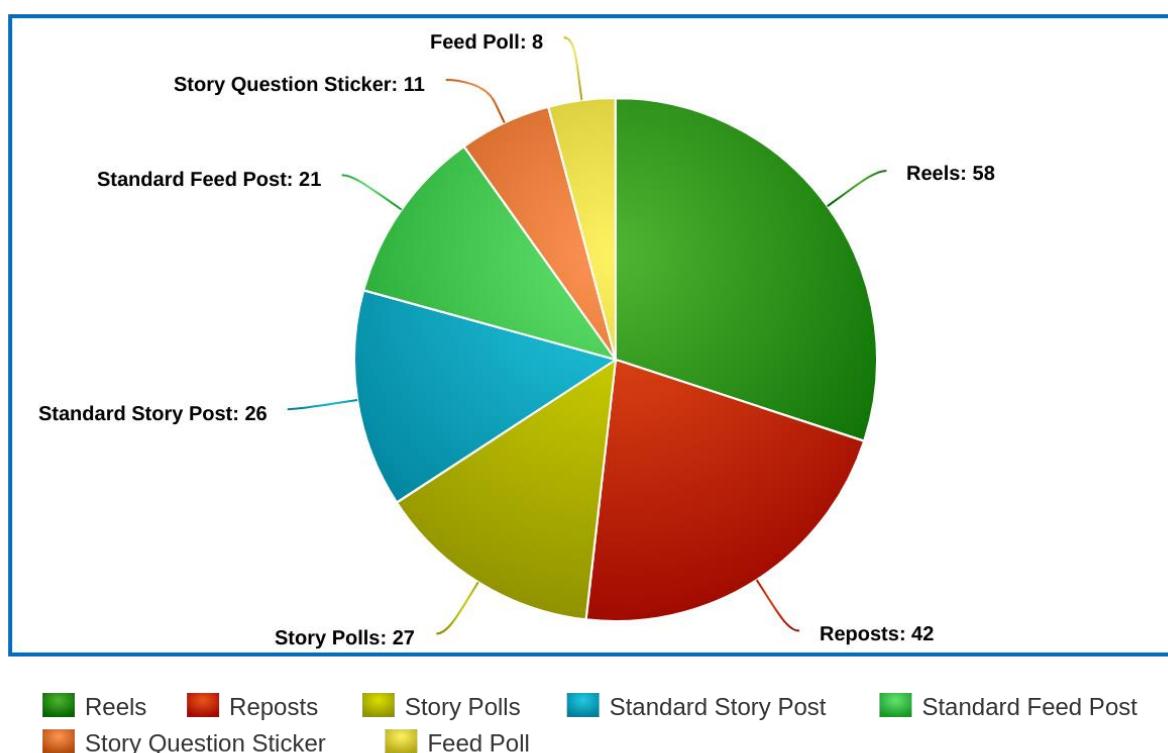
The use of the French language is also prominent in the brand's social media content. This is due to Algeria's historical and cultural ties with France, stemming from its colonial past. French colonialism left a lasting impact, resulting in a bilingual population where French is widely spoken alongside Arabic. French words have also been integrated into the local dialect, making French a crucial language for communication in Algeria. By using French, the brand appeals to a significant portion of the Algerian public who use the language daily. This linguistic choice helps the brand connect with consumers who are more comfortable with or prefer French, ensuring that the content is accessible to a broad audience.

In addition to English and French, the brand's use of the Algerian dialect and Arabic underscores its commitment to catering to the local, Arabic-speaking population. Since the business currently operates only in Algeria, it is essential to communicate effectively with the majority of its customers who speak Arabic or the Algerian dialect. This approach not only enhances accessibility but also demonstrates respect for the local culture and linguistic heritage. By prioritizing these languages, the brand can engage more deeply with its audience, fostering loyalty and trust among its customers.

In summary, the brand's multilingual strategy is a thoughtful response to the linguistic diversity of Algeria. By using English, French, and Arabic, the brand ensures that it is accessible and appealing to a wide range of consumers. This approach reflects an understanding of the cultural and social context of the country, as well as a recognition of global trends that influence local markets. Through this inclusive and adaptable communication strategy, the brand can build stronger connections with its audience, enhance customer engagement, and ultimately drive business growth.

Table 3 : Post Format

Format	Repitition in collected data	Percentage
Reels	58	24.58%
Reposts/Re-shares	42	17.80%
Story Polls	27	11.44%
Standard Story Post	26	11.02%
Standard Feed Post	21	8.90%
Story Question Sticker	11	4.66%
Feed Poll	8	3.39%



meta-chart.com

Illustration 3: Pie chart of the post formats.

Source: Our analysis with the help of meta chart.

Observation: *Please note that some of the data collected included more than one type of content format. For example: A story poll may be accompanied by a story question sticker.*

Description:

The table provides a detailed overview of the content formats used by the brand on its Instagram account, offering valuable insights into its methods for encouraging engagement and interaction with its audience. Reels appear as the most commonly used format, making up 24.58% of the collected data. This emphasis on Reels indicates the brand's proactive stance in leveraging dynamic video content to engage its audience. By embracing this format, the brand benefits from Instagram's algorithm, which favors video content, thereby boosting its visibility and reach. Additionally, it enables the brand to deliver captivating and shareable content tailored to resonate with its followers.

In close succession, Reposts/Re-shares make a substantial contribution, comprising 17.80% of the gathered data. This demonstrates the brand's commitment to engaging with its community and displaying user-generated content. By reposting or sharing content from its audience or collaborators, the brand not only highlights genuine experiences but also promotes a culture of involvement and cooperation within its community. This interactive approach nurtures a feeling of belonging and mutual support among followers, ultimately strengthening brand loyalty and advocacy.

Story Polls and Standard Story Posts are also significant contributors to real-time engagement and interaction, together making up 22.46% of the data. Story Polls, accounting for 11.44%, offer a direct way for audience feedback and involvement, enabling the brand to collect insights, conduct polls, or entertain its audience with interactive features. Meanwhile, Standard Story Posts, representing 11.02% of the data, provide a flexible platform for sharing timely and temporary content, like behind-the-scenes looks or product spotlights, creating a feeling of exclusivity and immediacy that appeal to followers.

Moreover, Standard Feed Posts, Story Question Stickers, and Feed Polls enhance the brand's engagement strategy by offering additional chances for interaction and feedback. Though these formats are less common in the content mix, each serves a unique role in enabling communication and fostering community, thus reinforcing the brand's digital footprint and nurturing valuable connections with its audience.

Analysis:

VSO as a brand relies heavily on the use of Reels as a primary content format, this is a noteworthy element in our analysis, as Reels on Instagram have their own category on the explore page, which automatically puts the feature at the top of the list engagement-wise. The algorithm pushes content in the form of reels notably more than other content. This is due to recent studies on the average attention span, which proved that most social media users prefer to consume content in the format of short videos because they view them as more digestible and less effort consuming. Conveniently, the way instagram reels are formulated, the content covers the entire screen, which makes it much more likely that the user will not be distracted by other content popping up on other areas of the screen.

This, in addition to the fact that the feature garners very high engagement rates, is a solid reason to use this format so heavily in social media marketing.

Reposts and re-shares are another significant format used by VSO, making up 17.80% of their content. This strategy leverages existing user-generated content, which can enhance the brand's authenticity and community engagement. By reposting content from followers or related accounts, VSO not only saves on content creation costs but also strengthens the community by highlighting customer experiences and endorsements. This type of content often comes with built-in trust and credibility, as it shows real customers interacting with the brand, thus encouraging others to engage similarly.

Story polls are utilized in 11.44% of VSO's content, serving as an interactive tool to engage followers directly. This format is particularly effective for gathering quick feedback and opinions from the audience. Story polls encourage participation and make followers feel valued and involved in the brand's decision-making process. The interactive nature of polls can also increase the time users spend engaging with the brand's content, boosting overall visibility on Instagram due to the platform's algorithm favoring content that generates interaction.

Standard story posts constitute 11.02% of the content, serving as a versatile and informal way to keep followers updated on the brand's activities. These posts can include anything from behind-the-scenes content, daily updates, to promotional announcements. The transient nature of stories, which disappear after 24 hours, creates a sense of urgency and exclusivity, encouraging followers to check the brand's stories regularly so they don't miss out on updates.

Standard feed posts make up 8.90% of VSO's content. These posts are crucial for maintaining a consistent brand presence and aesthetic on the profile grid. While they might not generate as high engagement rates as Reels or Stories, they provide a lasting visual representation of the brand that users can refer back to. High-quality images and well-crafted captions in feed posts can significantly contribute to the brand's image and narrative.

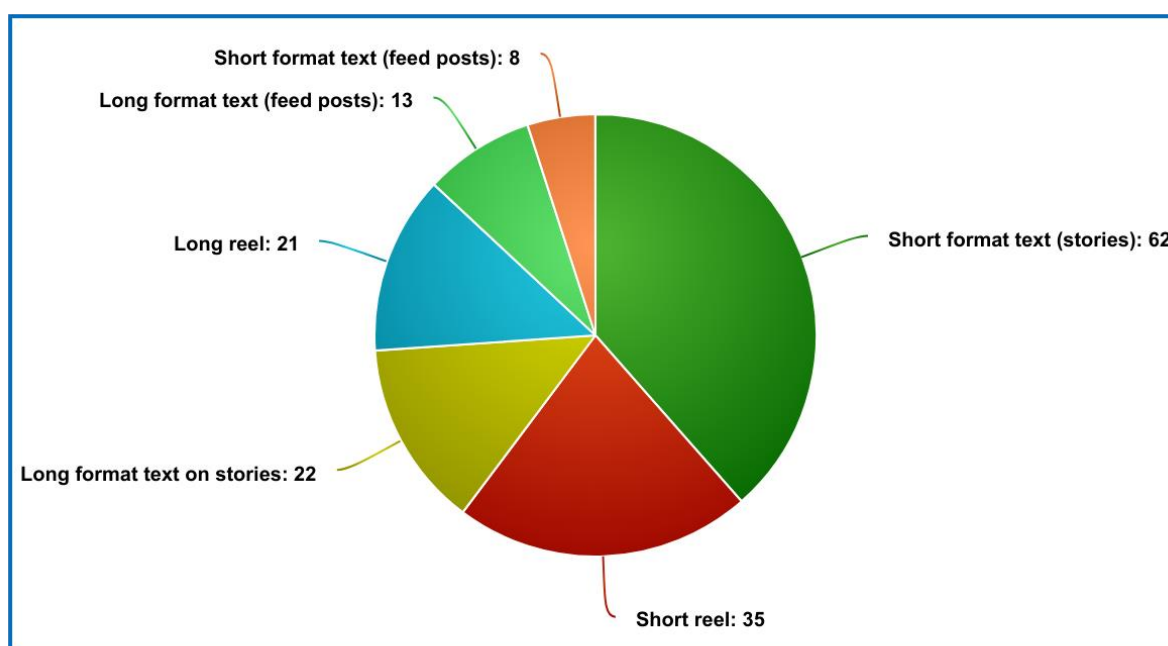
Story question stickers, used in 4.66% of the content, provide another layer of interactivity. They allow the brand to directly engage with followers by asking questions and inviting responses. This format can be used for market research, to gather feedback, or simply to engage followers in a fun and interactive manner. It helps in building a two-way communication channel, making followers feel heard and involved.

Feed polls, making up 3.39% of the content, are similar to story polls but are embedded within the feed. This format can generate valuable insights by asking the audience's opinions on various topics. Despite being less common, feed polls can be an effective way to engage the audience directly in their feed, where they are more likely to spend time scrolling and interacting with posts.

VSO's diverse use of content formats reflects a strategic approach to social media marketing, aiming to maximize engagement and reach. Each format serves a unique purpose, from enhancing visibility with Reels to building community with reposts and re-shares, and gathering feedback through interactive polls and question stickers. By analyzing these formats, we can understand how VSO effectively uses Instagram's features to engage with its audience and foster a strong online presence.

Table 4: Length of Content:

Length of content	Repetition in collected data	Percentage
Short format text on stories	62	32.29%
Short Reel	35	18.23%
Long format text on Stories	22	11.46%
Long Reel	21	10.94%
Long format text on feed posts	13	6.77%
Short format text on feed posts	8	4.17%



Short format text (stories) Short reel Long format text on stories
Long reel Long format text (feed posts) Short format text (feed posts)

meta-chart.com

Illustration 4: Pie chart of the content length.

Description:

The table presents data regarding the length of content, repetition in the collected data, and the corresponding percentages. It includes six categories: Short format text on stories, Short Reel,

Long format text on Stories, Long Reel, Long format text on feed posts, and Short format text on feed posts. Each category is accompanied by the number of repetitions observed in the collected data and the percentage it represents in relation to the total.

In the first column, the length of content categories are listed, including both textual and video formats. The second column denotes the number of times each category was repeated in the collected data. Finally, the third column provides the percentage representation of each content length category within the overall dataset. The percentages range from 32.29% for Short format text on stories to 4.17% for Short format text on feed posts, demonstrating the distribution of content lengths observed in the dataset.

Analysis:

The table presents a detailed analysis of the content length and format employed by the brand on its Instagram account, providing valuable insights into its interactive marketing strategies. These insights gain significance when compared with information from earlier tables. Short text formats in stories emerge as the most frequently used content type, with 62 repetitions, constituting approximately 32.29% of the data collected. This suggests a deliberate emphasis on delivering concise and compelling messages through Instagram Stories, which aligns effectively with the platform's ephemeral nature and encourages immediate interaction with the audience. By utilizing brief text snippets, the brand effectively captures attention and prompts engagement from its followers, fostering a dynamic and interactive experience on the platform.

Following closely behind are Short Reels, with 35 repetitions, making up 18.23% of the collected data. This highlights the brand's proactive use of dynamic multimedia content to engage the audience. By utilizing Reels, the brand takes advantage of Instagram's preference for video content, enhancing visibility and reach while providing captivating and shareable content that connects with its audience.

Long format text on Stories and Long Reels are important elements of the content strategy, together making up 22.92% of the collected data. Long format text on Stories, with 22 repetitions, offers a platform for sharing more detailed or comprehensive content through Instagram Stories, allowing the brand to convey in-depth narratives or information to its audience. Similarly, Long Reels, with 21 repetitions, enable the brand to showcase longer-form video content, facilitating storytelling and immersive experiences that captivate and engage viewers.

Moreover, Long format text on feed posts and Short format text on feed posts add to the variety of content offered by the brand, each fulfilling distinct roles in communication and community building. Long format text on feed posts, totaling 13 repetitions, and Short format text on feed posts, totaling 8 repetitions, provide platforms for sharing more permanent and detailed content on the feed. This allows the brand to present its products, initiatives, or stories in a visually engaging and informative manner.

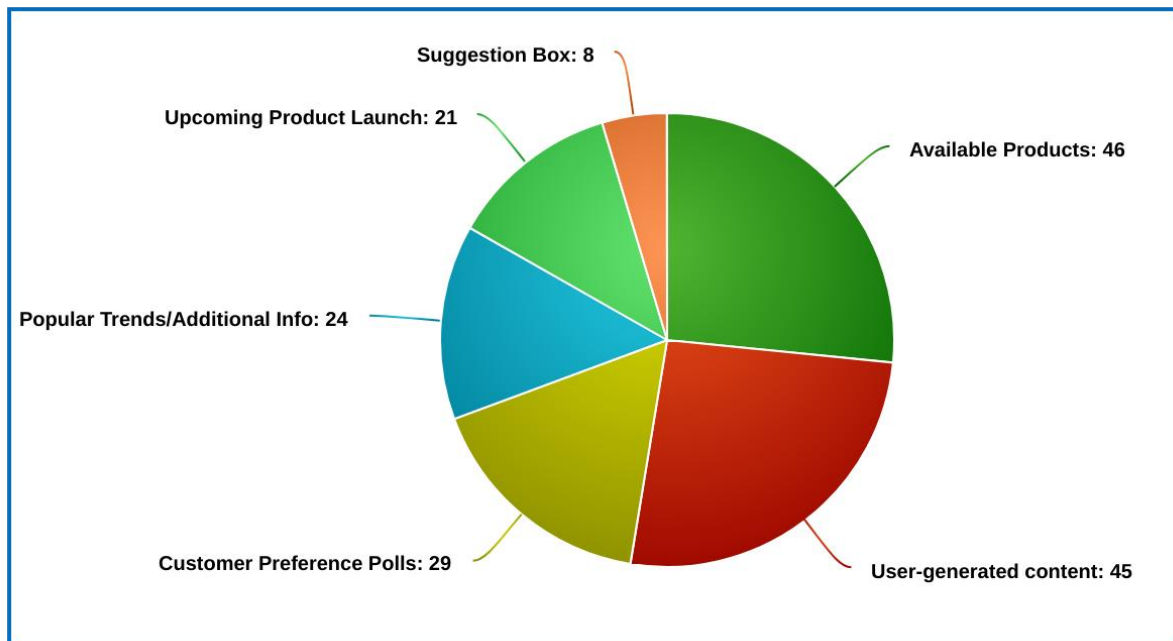
In essence, the brand's use of a diverse range of content lengths and formats on Instagram highlights its multifaceted approach to interactive marketing. By strategically employing a mix of short and long-form content in different formats, the brand successfully cultivates significant connections with its audience, consequently enhancing brand awareness, loyalty, and advocacy.

In essence, the brand's strategic embrace of a diverse array of content lengths and formats on Instagram underscores its multifaceted approach to interactive marketing. By astutely integrating short and long-form content across various formats, the brand cultivates meaningful connections with its audience, thereby fortifying brand awareness, fostering loyalty, and nurturing advocacy within its digital community.

B. Content categories:

Table 5: Reoccurring Themes:

Reoccurring themes	Repitition in collected data	Percentage
Available products	46	19.49%
User-generated content	45	19.07%
Customer preference poll	29	12.29%
Popular trends/Additional info	24	10.17%
Upcoming product launch	21	8.90%
Suggestion Box	8	3.39%
Behind-the-scenes content	7	2.97%
Games/Contests/Giveaways	5	2.12%



Available Products User-generated content Customer Preference Polls
Popular Trends/Additional Info Upcoming Product Launch Suggestion Box

meta-chart.com

Illustration 4: Pie Chart of reoccurring themes.

Source: Our analysis with the help of meta chart.

Description:

The table provides a glimpse into the prevalent themes recurrent in the brand's Instagram content, shedding light on its interactive marketing strategies. These insights hold particular significance when examined in conjunction with data from previous tables.

Leading the thematic trends is the focus on "Available products," which appears 46 times, representing 19.49% of the collected data. This underscores the brand's strong dedication to showcasing its range of offerings, aiming to pique interest and potentially drive sales among its audience.

Next up is "User-generated content," seen 45 times, comprising 19.07% of the data. This shows how the brand emphasizes authenticity and community participation by using content from its followers to build trust and create a sense of belonging.

Another significant theme is "Customer preference poll," found 29 times, making up 12.29% of the data. This suggests that the brand actively seeks to understand what its audience prefers and adjusts its offerings accordingly, promoting a customer-centered approach.

"Popular trends/Additional info" and "Upcoming product launch" are also worth noting, appearing 24 and 21 times, respectively, each making up about 10% of the data collected. These themes indicate the brand's commitment to keeping its audience updated and involved in industry trends and upcoming product releases.

Other themes like "Suggestion Box," "Behind-the-scenes content," and "Games/Contests/Giveaways" provide additional opportunities for interaction and engagement, enhancing the brand's connection with its audience through feedback, exclusive peeks, and interactive promotions.

Analysis:

The prominence of available products in VSO's content strategy underscores the brand's focus on showcasing its offerings to the audience. By featuring available products in its content, VSO aims to drive sales, increase product visibility, and inform customers about their product range. This theme serves as a direct marketing tactic, providing valuable information to potential customers and encouraging them to make purchases. Additionally, highlighting available products fosters brand loyalty among existing customers by keeping them informed about new releases and product updates.

User-generated content is a powerful tool for VSO to build community engagement and credibility. By featuring content created by users, such as reviews, testimonials, or user-submitted photos/videos, VSO humanizes its brand and showcases real-life experiences with

its products. User-generated content also encourages audience participation and fosters a sense of belonging within the brand's community. Moreover, by incorporating user-generated content into its marketing strategy, VSO leverages the social proof phenomenon, where consumers are more likely to trust recommendations from their peers.

Customer preference polls serve as a valuable tool for VSO to gather insights into its audience's preferences, tastes, and opinions. By conducting polls, VSO can engage directly with its audience, solicit feedback, and tailor its products and marketing strategies to better meet customer needs. Additionally, involving customers in decision-making processes through polls enhances brand transparency and fosters a sense of inclusivity, as customers feel valued and heard by the brand.

Incorporating popular trends and additional information into its content allows VSO to stay relevant and engage with its audience on topics of interest. By monitoring industry trends and providing relevant information, VSO positions itself as a knowledgeable authority within its niche. This theme also enables VSO to capitalize on timely events or discussions, driving engagement and visibility for its brand. Additionally, sharing valuable insights and information reinforces VSO's commitment to providing value beyond its products, further solidifying its relationship with its audience.

Highlighting upcoming product launches generates anticipation and excitement among VSO's audience. By teasing new products through its content, VSO builds anticipation and curiosity, driving interest and engagement leading up to the launch. This theme also allows VSO to gather valuable feedback from its audience before the official release, enabling the brand to make any necessary adjustments or improvements based on customer input. Furthermore, promoting upcoming product launches creates a sense of exclusivity and urgency, encouraging customers to stay connected with the brand to be the first to access new releases.

The inclusion of a suggestion box in VSO's content strategy demonstrates the brand's commitment to listening to its audience and incorporating their feedback into its operations. By providing a platform for customers to submit suggestions, feedback, or requests, VSO fosters a collaborative relationship with its audience, demonstrating responsiveness and customer-centricity. This theme also serves as a valuable source of insights for VSO, informing future product development, marketing strategies, and overall business decisions.

Sharing behind-the-scenes content provides VSO's audience with an exclusive glimpse into the brand's operations, processes, and culture. By showcasing behind-the-scenes content, VSO humanizes its brand, allowing customers to connect on a deeper level by understanding the people and stories behind the products. This theme also builds trust and transparency, as customers gain insight into the brand's values, craftsmanship, and commitment to quality. Additionally, behind-the-scenes content creates a sense of authenticity and authenticity, distinguishing VSO from competitors and strengthening its relationship with its audience.

Incorporating games, contests, and giveaways into its content strategy adds an element of interactivity and excitement, driving engagement and participation from VSO's audience. By hosting games or contests, VSO encourages audience interaction and creates opportunities for customers to showcase their creativity or skills. Giveaways incentivize audience participation and loyalty, rewarding customers for their engagement with the brand. Moreover, games, contests, and giveaways can help VSO expand its reach and attract new followers, as participants often share the content with their networks, increasing brand visibility and awareness.

Table 6: Persuasion techniques:

Persuasion technique	Repetition in collected data	Percentage
Rational	63	71.57%
Emotional	25	28.43%

Observation: Please note that not all the data collected employed forms of persuasion techniques.

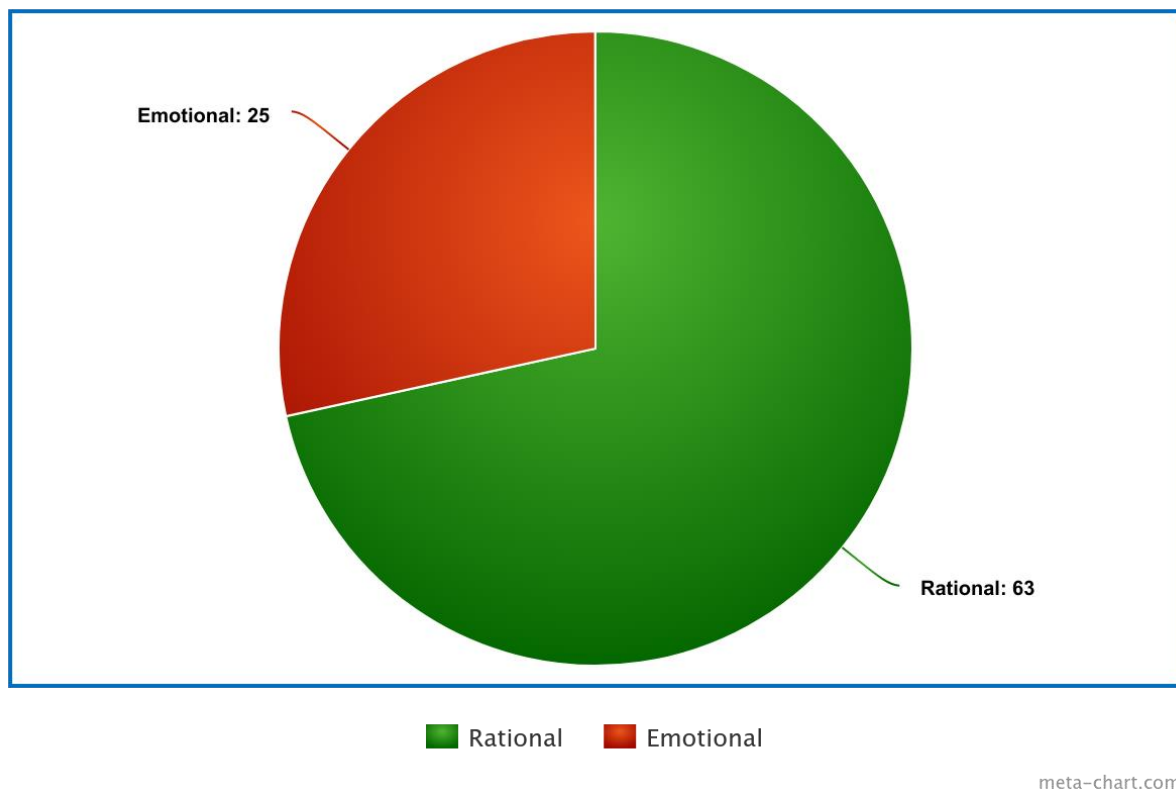


Illustration 5: Pie chart of persuasion techniques.

Description and Analysis:

The table outlines the persuasion techniques used by the brand in its Instagram content, offering insights into its interactive marketing strategies. Rational persuasion, with 63 instances, dominates at 71.57%, indicating a reliance on logical arguments and factual information to influence the audience. In contrast, emotional persuasion, with 25 instances at 28.43%, aims to evoke feelings and forge emotional connections with the audience. Together, these techniques reveal a balanced approach that educates and engages the audience, fostering trust and loyalty in the brand.

Analysis:

The table presents data regarding the utilization of persuasion techniques in the collected dataset. It consists of two distinct persuasion techniques: Rational and Emotional. The Rational persuasion technique is represented by 63 instances, constituting approximately 71.57% of the collected data. Conversely, the Emotional persuasion technique is observed 25 times, accounting for the remaining 28.43% of the dataset.

This table indicates a predominant reliance on Rational persuasion techniques within the analyzed content, where logical arguments, factual information, and reasoning are employed to influence the audience. In contrast, the usage of Emotional persuasion techniques, which appeal to the audience's feelings, desires, and emotions, is comparatively less frequent. This distinction sheds light on the strategic approaches employed by the entity or entities behind the analyzed content, suggesting a preference for logical appeals over emotional appeals in their persuasive messaging.

The rational persuasion techniques employed by the brand are multifaceted and strategically designed to appeal to the logical faculties of the audience. One notable aspect is the emphasis on reasonably good pricing for the products offered. By positioning their products at competitive price points, the brand seeks to rationalize the value proposition for potential customers, highlighting affordability and cost-effectiveness as compelling reasons to make a purchase. Additionally, the inclusion of high quality, accurate photos of the products serves to instill confidence and trust in the brand's offerings. Clear and detailed product imagery enables customers to make informed decisions based on visual evidence, thereby reducing uncertainty and mitigating perceived risks associated with online shopping.

Moreover, the integration of customer reviews into the persuasion strategy serves as a powerful rational tool for influencing purchase decisions. Positive testimonials and feedback from satisfied customers function as social proof, validating the brand's claims regarding product quality and performance. By showcasing authentic experiences and endorsements, the brand leverages the credibility and trustworthiness of peer recommendations to sway potential buyers. Furthermore, the provision of reliable sources for vintage products underscores the brand's commitment to authenticity and transparency. By citing reputable origins and provenance for vintage items, the brand establishes itself as a trusted authority in the niche market, catering to discerning consumers seeking genuine and unique offerings.

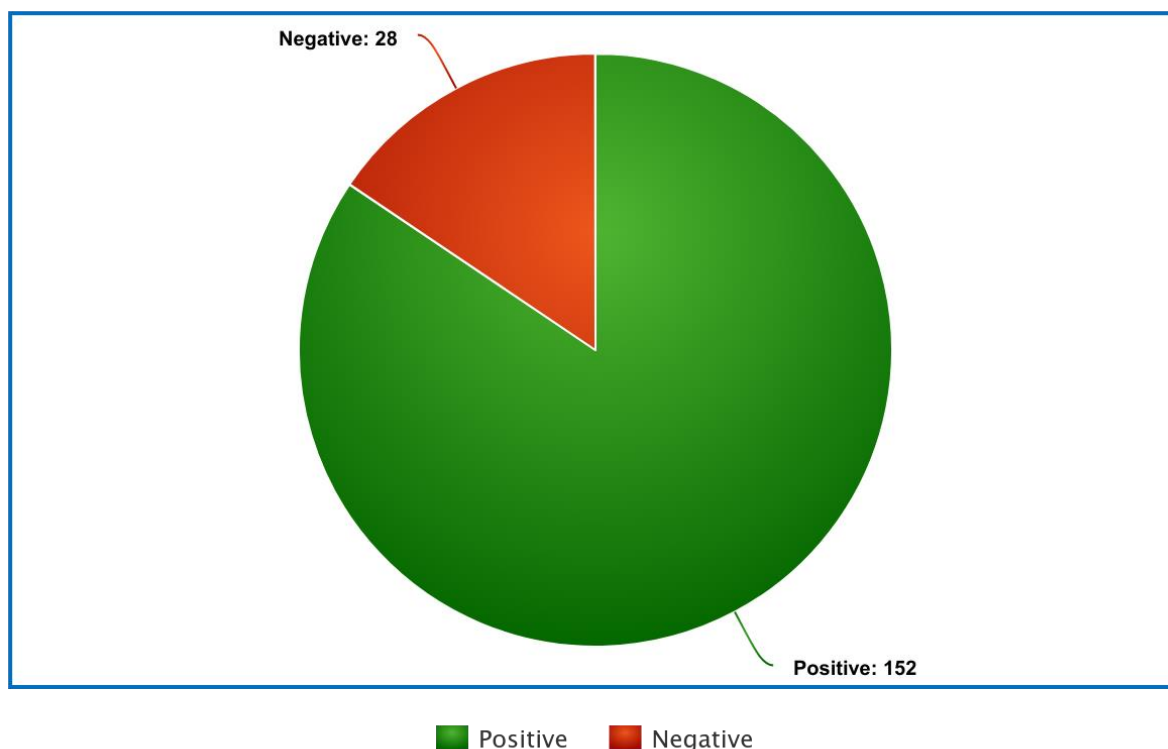
In contrast to the rational appeals, emotional persuasion techniques are designed to evoke specific feelings, desires, and aspirations within the audience, tapping into their psychological motivations and emotional responses. One prevalent strategy involves creating the illusion of embodying a certain aesthetic or energy through product imagery and descriptions. For instance, associating a dress with 'fairy vibes' invokes whimsy, enchantment, and a sense of ethereal beauty, appealing to customers' desire for magical and romantic experiences. Similarly, implying that purchasing a specific pair of sunglasses transforms the customer into

an 'office siren' capitalizes on aspirational imagery associated with confidence, allure, and professional success.

Additionally, creating a fear of missing out (FOMO) by linking the product to current trends is a common emotional persuasion tactic utilized by brands on social media. By highlighting the product's relevance and alignment with contemporary styles, the brand instills a sense of urgency and desire within the audience to stay 'on-trend' and socially connected. Whether through limited-time offers, exclusive collections, or trend-driven marketing campaigns, the brand leverages FOMO to stimulate impulsive purchasing behavior and capitalize on customers' fear of being left behind or overlooked. This strategic use of emotional triggers enables the brand to forge deeper emotional connections with its audience, fostering loyalty, engagement, and long-term brand affinity.

Table 7: Opinion trends:

Opinion trend	Repetition in collected data	Percentage
Positive	152	84.44%
Negative	28	15.56%



meta-chart.com

Illustration 6: Pie chart of opinion trends.

Description:

The table presents a snapshot of the prevailing opinion trends within the collected dataset, categorizing opinions as either Positive or Negative. Positive opinions dominate the dataset, constituting 84.44% of the collected data, indicating a widespread favorability towards the subject matter under scrutiny. This overwhelming positivity suggests a high degree of satisfaction, approval, or enthusiasm among the respondents, reflecting positively on the subject being evaluated. The prevalence of positive opinions underscores the entity's success in garnering positive sentiment and fostering favorable perceptions among its audience, which could potentially translate into enhanced brand reputation, customer loyalty, and overall satisfaction.

Conversely, Negative opinions represent a smaller but notable proportion of the dataset, accounting for 15.56% of the collected data. While relatively less prevalent than positive

opinions, the presence of negative sentiment signals areas of concern, dissatisfaction, or critique within the subject matter. These negative opinions could stem from various factors such as product flaws, service shortcomings, or unfavorable experiences, highlighting areas for improvement or corrective action. Addressing and effectively managing negative feedback is imperative for the entity to mitigate reputational risks, enhance customer satisfaction, and maintain trust and credibility within its target audience.

Analysis:

The substantial prevalence of positive opinions, accounting for 84.44% of the collected data, underscores the resounding success of Vintage Stuff Only and Thrift Lover in cultivating a strong sense of affinity and satisfaction among their followers. This overwhelming majority of positive sentiment reflects favorably on the content and engagement initiatives deployed by the brands, which strategically leverage interactive marketing strategies such as user-generated content, customer preference polls, and behind-the-scenes glimpses. By actively involving their audience in content creation, seeking their input through polls, and providing exclusive insights into their operations, Vintage Stuff Only and Thrift Lover effectively foster a positive brand image characterized by authenticity, community-building, and trust. The high percentage of positive opinions serves as a testament to the brands' adeptness in resonating with their audience, cultivating meaningful connections, and nurturing a loyal and engaged customer base.

Conversely, the 15.56% proportion of negative opinions within the collected data signals areas of discontent or criticism, albeit to a lesser extent compared to positive sentiments. While not pervasive, these negative opinions offer valuable insights into areas for improvement and refinement within Vintage Stuff Only and Thrift Lover's interactive marketing strategies. For instance, feedback concerning the timing of product launches during prayer time in Ramadan or issues related to slow responses and product availability highlights potential pain points that warrant attention and corrective action. However, it is noteworthy that the relatively low percentage of negative sentiment suggests that Vintage Stuff Only and Thrift Lover adeptly manage negative feedback, addressing concerns promptly and transparently to maintain a predominantly positive brand perception. This strategic approach to managing feedback underscores the brands' commitment to customer satisfaction, continuous improvement, and maintaining trust and credibility within their audience.

Table 8: Interactivity rates:

Content form	Avg of Likes per post	Avg of Impressions per post	Average of Comments per post	Average of Views per post
Story Poll	x	6869	x	x
Reel	47,403	x	76	264.18K
Standard Story Post	x	4009	x	x
Repost/Re-share	366	1799	3	x
Story Question Box	x	1902	x	x
Standard Feed Post	103	x	7	x
Feed Poll	723.3K	412	x	x

Equation used to assess the average of each category:

Average Likes per Post = Total Likes / Number of Posts per content form

Average Impressions per Post = Total Impressions / Number of Posts per content form

Average Views per Post = Total Views / Number of Posts per content form

Average Comments per Post = Total Comments / Number of Posts per content form

Description:

The table provides a comprehensive overview of various content forms utilized by Vintage Stuff Only and Thrift Lover across their social media platforms, accompanied by average

metrics of engagement including likes, impressions, comments, and views per post. Among the different content forms, Reels emerge as the most impactful, garnering an average of 47,403 likes per post and an impressive 264.18K views. The substantial average impressions per post for Reels further underscore their reach and visibility.

Additionally, the table delineates the performance of various other content forms, including Story Polls, Standard Story Posts, Reposts/Re-shares, Story Question Boxes, Standard Feed Posts, and Feed Polls. While these content forms exhibit varying levels of engagement metrics, they collectively contribute to the brands' overall social media presence and content diversity. Notably, Feed Polls stand out with an exceptionally high average of 723.3K likes per post.

Moreover, the table highlights the average performance metrics for Story Polls, Standard Story Posts, Reposts/Re-shares, and Story Question Boxes. While these content forms may not command the same level of engagement as Reels or Feed Polls,

Analysis:

Table 8 offers a nuanced analysis of the interactivity rates across various content forms employed by Vintage Stuff Only and Thrift Lover on their Instagram platform, shedding light on the effectiveness of each format in engaging their audience. Among the content forms examined, Reels emerge as a clear frontrunner in terms of engagement, evidenced by their impressive average of 47,403 likes per post, along with an average of 76 comments and over 264,000 views. The exceptional performance of Reels underscores their ability to captivate audience attention and foster interaction, thereby amplifying brand visibility and engagement. This heightened engagement can be attributed to the dynamic and visually captivating nature of Reels, which resonate effectively with the platform's user base and encourage active participation and sharing among followers.

In contrast, Feed Polls demonstrate remarkable popularity, with an average of 723.3K likes per post, indicative of significant engagement from followers. Although data on impressions, comments, and views are unavailable for Feed Polls, the staggering number of likes suggests a high level of interaction and affinity among followers. This robust engagement can be attributed to the interactive nature of polls, which provide followers with an opportunity to express their preferences and opinions, fostering a sense of involvement and ownership within the community.

Reposts/Re-shares, while exhibiting moderate engagement levels with an average of 366 likes per post, serve a crucial role in amplifying user-generated content and nurturing community engagement. Despite relatively modest impressions and comments, reposts facilitate the dissemination of user-created content, enabling followers to share their experiences, recommendations, and testimonials with a wider audience. This fosters a sense of camaraderie and authenticity within the community, thereby enhancing brand loyalty and advocacy.

Furthermore, the integration of Story Polls and Story Question Boxes underscores a commitment to interactive communication, despite specific data on likes, comments, and views being unavailable. By facilitating direct engagement and feedback from followers, Story Polls and Question Boxes empower users to actively participate in polls and submit queries, thereby enriching the interactive experience and strengthening brand-consumer relationships.

In contrast, Standard Story Posts and Standard Feed Posts exhibit comparatively lower engagement levels, suggesting the need for refinement or diversification in content strategy. With fewer likes and comments, these formats may benefit from experimentation with content themes, formats, or storytelling techniques to enhance audience engagement and interaction. Overall, Table 4 offers valuable insights into the effectiveness of different content formats in driving engagement and fostering interaction on Vintage Stuff Only and Thrift Lover's Instagram platform, guiding strategic decisions for optimizing audience engagement and brand visibility.

Study findings:

- Throughout our observation of the brand's platforms, we were able to detect a consistent posting schedule, from October to April; the brand was committed to regularly sharing posts that contributed to further promoting and bettering the business.
- The brand's most used post format is Reels, which is a strategic and well-thought-out move in social media marketing on Instagram, and reflects a current understanding of social media trends. As stated in our analysis, this format is one that was popularized in recent times, and heavily relies on the manner in which it keeps the users entertained and shields them from any distractions in a short amount of time.
- The brand's most common content themes are available products and UGC, followed by customer preference polls, aligning content with customer interests and preferences is crucial for driving engagement.
- The opinion trends relative to the shared-content are mostly positive, indicating a generally favorable response from the audience, with a smaller percentage of negative feedback which can help the brand in addressing its shortcomings.
- The brand relies mainly on short format content, however, it still employs long format content as well. Alternating between the two to keep the customer engaged and involved.
- Interactivity rates show that Reels, the most used format, is the one that garners the most likes. Whereas stories garner the most impressions according to statistics provided by the brand owner herself.
- The brand relies on multilingual approach in their posts, so as not to neglect an audience that does not speak one language or the other. The brand utilizes almost all of the languages spoken in Algeria.
- The content includes some persuasion techniques, which aided us in coming to the conclusion that most of the content relied on a rational approach to persuasion techniques more than the emotional approach.
- The content we analysed varied in terms of format, themes, interactivity, and linguistics. With some of the content analysed containing more than one format or utilizing more than one language.

Discussion of results

Through our research, we have aimed to understand the employment of interactive communication techniques in the marketing strategy of retail brands, mainly ones that offer their services online.

In order to achieve this goal, we have selected an Algerian online retail store that is mainly present on Instagram under the name of Vintage Stuff Only, with sub-brand Thrift Lover. The selection of an online store permits us to work on a sample that is already an active user of social media marketing techniques, which has been the core of our focus throughout our research.

Our analysis of Vintage Stuff Only and Thrift Lover's Instagram platform provides interesting insights into their interactive marketing strategies, offering a nuanced understanding of their engagement techniques, content preferences, and audience interactions.

By conducting a thorough analysis of content using different categories such as post formats, language use, content lengths, and themes, we explored how these brands use Instagram and interactive communication to promote engagement and community building.

Our research shows that Vintage Stuff Only focuses on visually captivating content formats like Reels and Reposts/Re-shares, which generate considerable audience engagement and interaction. By using these formats well, the brands attract audience attention, inspire user-generated content, and improve community involvement, leading to increased brand loyalty and advocacy.

Moreover, the brands utilize multiple languages including English, French, and Arabic (both standard and Algerian dialect), underscoring their dedication to inclusivity and accessibility. This deliberate use of language reflects an awareness of the diverse linguistic backgrounds of their audience, facilitating effective communication and engagement with a specific target audience.

Regarding content themes, Vintage Stuff Only and Thrift Lover employ a balanced approach, incorporating a variety of recurring themes such as available products, user-generated content, customer preference polls, and behind-the-scenes glimpses. By consistently aligning with audience interests and preferences, the brands promote engagement, community, and brand loyalty, contributing to sustained growth and success on the platform.

Moreover, the analysis of persuasion techniques and opinion trends reveals that the brands effectively balance rational and emotional appeals to influence audience behavior and perception. With a predominantly positive sentiment among followers, Vintage Stuff Only and Thrift Lover adeptly manage negative feedback, maintaining a positive brand image through their interactive marketing endeavors.

In conclusion, the study underscores the brands' dynamic and strategic approach to interactive marketing on Instagram, highlighting their commitment to engaging content, community building, and customer-centric communication. By leveraging a diverse array of content formats, languages, and thematic elements, Vintage Stuff Only and Thrift Lover effectively

connect with their audience, drive engagement, and cultivate a vibrant online community, ultimately enhancing brand awareness, loyalty, and advocacy.

General Conclusion

In conclusion, our research delved into Vintage Stuff Only's use of interactive communication as a marketing strategy on Instagram highlights the store's use of engaging communication techniques customer engagement, and community building. Through a meticulous content analysis of its Instagram platform, including content formats, language usage, thematic elements, and engagement metrics, Vintage Stuff Only's approach emerges as a compelling case study in modern marketing.

Vintage Stuff Only proved to be a brand that showcases an immense understanding of interactive communication, leveraging a diverse range of content formats and interactive features to cultivate meaningful connections with its audience.

Furthermore, Vintage Stuff Only's adept utilization of UGC/User-Generated Content, comment replies, and direct messaging options fosters two-way communication with customers, nurturing a sense of community and trust. By actively engaging with user-generated content and responding to customer inquiries, the brand reinforces its commitment to customer satisfaction and community building.

Overall, Vintage Stuff Only's interactive marketing strategies exemplify the potential of modern marketing to drive brand awareness, customer engagement, and loyalty. By leveraging interactive communication techniques effectively, Vintage Stuff Only positions itself as a trusted partner and cultivates a vibrant online community, driving sustained growth and success in the competitive landscape of online retail.

We acknowledge the research project's limitations and difficulties, which lie in the difficulty to assess certain interactivity rates for specific post formats, as not each format category included similar features. For example, Story interactions, while the owner provided us with the private statistics, do not include the likes

feature. This pushed us to rely on other aspects such as ‘impressions’, which may have created an obstacle in assessing interactivity rates.

To conclude our research, we will begin with a summary of the findings:

1. Our research identified several reoccurring themes in the brand's social media content. One prominent theme is the consistent showcasing of available products, which underscores the brand's focus on keeping its audience informed about its offerings. Another significant theme is the use of user-generated content, fostering community involvement and enhancing authenticity by featuring content created by customers. Additionally, the brand regularly includes customer preference polls, demonstrating its commitment to understanding and responding to customer preferences. The content also frequently highlights popular trends and provides additional information, which helps keep the audience engaged with the latest developments. Posts about upcoming product launches show the brand's strategy to build anticipation and excitement for new releases. Other recurring themes include suggestion boxes, behind-the-scenes content, and interactive elements like games, contests, and giveaways, all contributing to an interactive and customer-centric marketing approach.
2. Utilization of Interactive Features:
 - Vintage Stuff Only/Thrift Lover actively employs interactive features on Instagram, including question stickers, polls, Story, and Post re-post options to prompt user interaction.
 - These features serve as direct avenues for audience feedback, participation, and engagement, enabling the brands to gather insights, conduct polls, and entertain their audience through interactive elements.
3. Two-way Communication:
 - The brands effectively leverage UGC/User-Generated Content, comment replies, and direct messaging options to prompt two-way communications with customers.

- By showcasing authentic experiences and engaging with user-generated content, the brands foster a culture of participation and collaboration within their community, ultimately strengthening brand loyalty and advocacy.

4. Identification of Content Formats and Contribution to Engagement:

- The most frequently used content formats on VSO and Thrift Lover's Instagram platform include Reels, Reposts/Re-shares, Story Polls, and Standard Story Posts.
- These formats contribute significantly to general brand visibility and user engagement by maximizing visibility, stimulating audience interaction, and fostering community engagement.

Contributions to the field's knowledge:

Our analysis can be viewed as a contribution to the field of social media marketing in terms of:

- Highlighting the most effective post formats, which garner the most interactivity rates.
- Showcasing an effective social media marketing strategy.
- Highlighting the most engagement-inviting themes observed in SMM content.
- An in-depth explanation of the use of interactive features on Instagram to promote the brand as well as foster a relationship with the customer.
- The theoretical framework of our research offers a solid ground for future research in the field.

We conclude our work by highlighting the importance of understanding the evolving of social media marketing, and the fact that it is vital to understand that the aspect of interactivity is no longer an optional one.

Therefore, we, as researchers, implore our fellow researchers to further explore this new field, by conducting studies on the algorithms of social media platforms, as it would be an important addition to the understanding of features that drive engagement and interactivity.

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