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SOCIAL MEDIA PROFILING FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF ONLINE MARKETING STRATEGIES

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Abstract:

Social media has become an almost permanent presence in our lives and in the business world. In the last two decades the marketing activity has changed greatly due to the development, of social interaction platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or TikTok. The usage of social media marketing has created new challenges for the marketing specialists which needed to adapt and adjust their strategies to meet the direction but the business environment is going. Among the challenges that the marketing world is facing when using social media is that of profiling the consumers (current and potential) in order to achieve a successful marketing strategy and therefore lead to higher financial gains. The current paper aims to bring forward the importance of social media profiling in the marketing activity while underlining some important theoretical aspects about social media and profiling and at the same time presenting the results over short secondary data analysis that shows some general profiles for Instagram and TikTok user, with a direct link to the evolution of the revenues generated by the advertising done on the two mentioned social media platforms.

Key words: *marketing strategy, social media marketing, online, marketing profile*

1. Introduction

Social media has become one of the world's most important communications platforms that allows individuals to interact with one another in the fastest way possible and at the same time it streaches the distances and intsantainously create links with friends, family or with people having the same hobbies or interests.

At the same time social media platforms have become, since more than a decade, a veritable marketing tool that allows the companies to promote their products or services in a more targeted and direct way by using consumer profiles and by using communication and marketing strategies designed to reach only those that realy desire or are interested in the products or services that one sells.

In the last ten or so yers, we have witnessed the creation and rapid expansion of "complex, multifarious, and intensified interactions between companies and their customers through social media usage" (Li et al, 2020). We are all aware that the role of social media has gradually evolved from a single marketing tool to that of a marketing intelligence source (in which firms can observe,

analyze, and predict customer behaviors), it has become increasingly imperative for marketers to strategically use and leverage social media to achieve competitive advantage and superior performance (Lamberton and Stephen, 2016).

Recent researches in the field of social media (Choi and Thoeni, 2016; Griffiths and Mclean, 2015) shows that there is a wide spread understanding of the desire to use social media to interact with ones' customers but at the same time there is also the need to understand the importance of more than using social networking sites campaigns but also to combine the marketing tools and strategies used in promoting their products and services.

But one has to also consider that the companies must become aware of the limitations of using social media in the process of developing online marketing strategies based on these communication platforms, such as the need for privacy, impact of negative attitudes of consumers, loss of trust and many more (Arnold, 2018).

The current paper aims to bring further understanding in the usage of social media as a marketing instrument and the development of marketing communication strategies by using social media profiling on young individuals that are maintaining an account on platforms such as Instagram of TikTok. We also aim to bring forth some statistics that resulted from secondary data analysis regarding such profiles wile undelining the advantages of creating a social media based marketing campaign on the above mentioned platforms.

2. Brief literature review

The concept of social media marketing is one that derived from the general concept of social network, which represents the totality of people (friends, family or colleagues etc.) with which the person has a special relation, like friendship, commercial relationship (Hu and Wang, 2009). Of course that we have to consider the fact that we see social networks as groups of individuals that have come together based on specific criteria like the size of a community or in smaller subdivisions such as a building or the workplace, where they have developed links with one another and have somewhat of common goals.

In the last two decades the popularity of the social networks have surpassed even our wildest expectations by bringing the social interactions in the virtual environment to a whole new level. Of course, this important development of couldn't be possible without: access to new communication technologies, whide spread Internet access, and willingness to be part of a social media platform.

Over the last years, several definitions of the social media concept have come to life. Multiple authors (Kim et al, 2004; Boyd and Ellison, 2007; Zarella, 2010; Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, Haidemann et al., 2012 etc.) agreed that social media is a web-based platform that allows individuals to create as a public or somewhat public-profile within a pre stablished system and with it to allow other platform users (with which they have a certain connexion) to interact and to exchange various information relative to both or multiple parties. According to Mitrou (Mitrou et al, 2014) users are encouraged by the nature and structure of social media to reveal information and produce or share content, resulting in a participatory culture, which supports ordinary users to express their views and disseminating them.

As it was mentioned before social media has become one of the main marketing communication tools used by today's companies. In a world where acting fast, thinking on your feet and reacting to what is happening in the online environment has become more than a necessity, companies must use all the advantages offered to them by social media marketing. One of the main advantages of social media has become the ability to use the platforms profiling services in order to make it possible for the companies to reach their clients faster and with greater accuracy than ever before. Using social media profiling has increased the chances of the message to get through to the intended customer, but this only happens when several criteria can be met.

In recent years social media profiling has become an important tool in the arsenal of a marketing specialist that aims to increase the efficiency of its marketing campaign and the simple search on searchengines shows the interest has gone beyond the business environment and towards academia.

Generating content in social media, is important for the development of information flows, flows that are used by marketing specialists to profile the intended target. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram or Google offer insight about website usage or social media platforms, about its audience, demographics, location, consumer behaviour, buying behaviour and general usage of such platforms.

A user profile can be considered an interface of an individual’s characteristics interests thoughts or preferences on a social media platform. But at the same time the profile is a dynamic tool that changes overtime and creating a user profile has become in the last years a rather difficult task due to this dynamic (Azzam et al., 2022). In the last years profiling has focused on criteria, data sourcing, features used in the profiling process and the main techniques used buy the marketing specialists. Some authors (Siswanto et al., 2014; Raghuram et al., 2016; Gorrab et al., 2017) proposed different techniques such as psychographic interests, scalable and comprehensive models for automatically classifying users, group profiling methodologies, in order to identify the best way off delivering the optimum understanding of social media users.

When designing a social media consumer profile, a company or a specialist must not allow himself / herself to be trapped by the idea that one profiling method can be successfully duplicated from one platform to all platforms. Some social media platforms are designed for general use, some have been created just for entertainment, online gaming or others are only using images and video to transmit a message, therefore the reasoning behind its usage differs and so by consequense so does the reasons behind the individuals’ usage of the platform.

A research developed some years ago (Al-Qurishi et al., 2018), has created a model that can be used to profile Twitter users and has generated a solution that consist of four elements: users influence, topic classification, most interest area, and investment level of the identified social media users within a certain topic. Further research has been done in this field and results shown by Wu (Wu et al., 2017) show that profiling can be used across multiple applications in order to recommend solutions for multiple social media platforms.

As we can see from the above brief literature review profiling while seeming simple in reality it is not, it is a complicated matter which involves multiple aspects that have to be considered when designing a social media based campaign.

Of course one must be aware of the careful nature of the profiling activity because it involves using somewhat personal information that come from social media users, their desires the groups that they follow or a part of, their hobbies, their education, all combined with visual content that is more and more supported by social media platforms and which can help communication and marketing specialists have a better image of who their target really is.

3. Social media profiling for Instagram and TikTok users

The next section of the paper covers a brief secondary data analysis, based on information gathered from previous reports, public information from official social media accounts about Instagram and TikTok users. This analysis will help bring better understanding on who are the people that are using these two platforms and how can they be targeted in a more effective manner in order to increase the efficiency of social media marketing campaigns. Previous research shows that social media has become the primary online communication method used by young individuals (up to 35 years old) and companies might want to take into consideration some of these profile characteristics of social media users when designing their online marketing strategies.

According to David Curry (2022) in the latest statistics regarding the general usage of social media there are more than 4.8 billion people that have social media accounts which represents more than 55% of the worlds global population, and the average smartphone user spends more than two hours and 20 minutes a day on social media and about 70 hours a month. Social media has right now become responsible for billions of interactions on daily basis. The evolution of social media platforms and at the same time the evolution of Internet based communication has created an environment which fosters online interaction that have generated changes into social structure within a society.

The same author (Curry, 2022) underlines the fact that in 2022 Facebook and Instagram are generating more than half the revenue in the social networks business and the largest social media provider is Facebook with more than 2,9 billion users followed by YouTube (which is a video sharing platform) and WhatsApp, that is more a messaging platform than a social media one. In the top five most used social media accounts we find Instagram with 2.3 billion users and on the 5th place we identify TikTok which represents a newer generations of social media platforms which combines short videos media sharing and rapid interaction.

In an article published in August 2022, Dave Chaffey shows that information regarding the general overview of social media use as of July 2022 published by reportal.org and by which, as seen in table 1 we can observe some important statistics related to how these communication are being used.

Table 1. Social media use - overview of July 2022

Evaluated item	Result
Number of social media users	4,7 billion
Social media users vs. general population	59%
Social media users vs. population aged 13 +	75,5%
Social media users vs. total internet users	93,6%
Social media users - female	45,7%

Evaluated item	Result
Social media users – male	54,3%
Change from quarter to quarter	+ 47 million
Average day spent on social media	2 h, 29 min.
Average number of social platforms used / month	7,4

(Source: https://www.smartinsights.com/)

If we look at the data from table 1 we can see some slight differences from the data presented by Curry (2022), in the sense that Curry's data seems to be a little bit higher due to the fact that his research was presented in November 2022. Nevertheless we can observe the fact that social media is an environment that can be used by the business community to interact and communicate with their customers. The large figures presented by Chaffey (2022) are the result of multiple changes that occured within the social media and online digital activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A report from Datareportal.org of July 2020 shows that due to the pandemic an increase occured in the digital activities area especially in watching online shows and streaming platforms (54% +), spending more time on social media (43%+), listening to more music online (37%+), spending more time on mobile apps (36%+) or uploading videos on designated platforms (16%).

According to the Pew Research Center (2021) 31% of Facebook users use the platform to get news, compared to 13% on Twitter, 11% on Instagram, 6% on TikTok, or 4% on LinkedIn. Some other interesting statistics about general use of social media (also presented by Pew Research centre) show that the age distribution among different social media users differs combined with their educational level.

Table 2. Social media user profile – age and education

Age (%)						
Characteristic	**Facebook**	**YouTube**	**Twitter**	**Instagram**	**TikTok**	**LinkedIn**
18 – 29 y.o.	23	27	43	44	52	25
30 – 49 y.o.	41	40	38	37	34	46
50 – 64 y.o.	22	22	14	13	12	20
65 + y.o.	14	11	5	5	2	8
Education level (%)						
Characteristic	**Facebook**	**YouTube**	**Twitter**	**Instagram**	**TikTok**	**LinkedIn**
High School and less	41	37	25	33	42	18
Some college	31	35	31	36	40	24
College +	28	28	43	30	17	57

(Source: www.pewresearch.org)

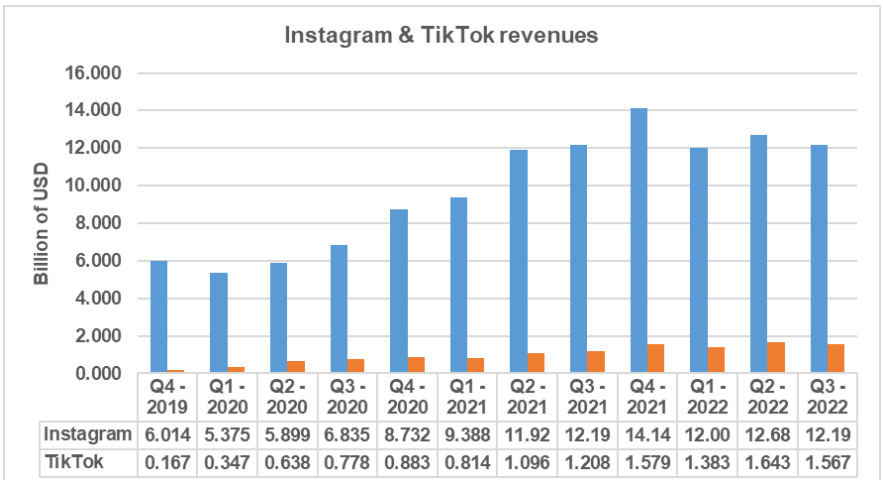
Table two shows an interesting distribution of the social media users by age and education and underlines the age gap between Facebook and Instagram and TikTok users, where is more than 70% of Facebook users are aged over 30 y.o., Instagram and TikTok have more than 80 percent aged less than 49 years old. The same direction in the distribution of users can be seen when we're talking about educational level where Instagram has 42% of users with high school or less education and 40% with some college degrees.

Just from these two tables we can see that choosing social media platforms to use in by companies in a marketing strategy becomes more complicated by every passing year. Depending on the product or service that the company is offering or providing marketing specialists and managers alike, must carefully choose the social media channel/platform that they are using keeping in mind statistics, profiles or user characteristics as those presented in the above presented tables.

The world of social media has changed in the last years with a higher input and presence of visual and video type content compared to the initial content that most of the first social networking websites had in their first years.

If we look at the general profile of an Instagram user (keeping in mind that Instagram is part of the Facebook corporation and there are strong links between platforms). According to the latest data report released by Datareportal.org (Kemp, 2022), we can see that the total reach of Instagram is 1.45 billion people which represents 18.7% of the world's total population with an increase since the fourth quarter of 2021 of plus 6.1% (85 million people). If we consider the changes from one year to the other (2021 to 2022) the increase in reach is of 257 million people meaning about 21.4 million people a month. If we continue the analysis we can observe that Instagram has a 23.9 percent population reach for individuals over the age of 13 years old and with a balanced gender distribution.

Using the same data reporting as the one for Instagram (Kemp, 2022), at the beginning of 2022 they were 884.9 million TikTok (that that based on the company guidelines were 18 years old and higher) with an 11.2% of the total population aged 18 and higher and with an increase from quarter to quarter of 7.3% (60 million), which represents 17.9% of total Internet users aged 18 and higher with a TikTok add reach divided a little bit more than Instagram with 57% females and 43% males. Another aspect is that 43% of TikTok's global audience is aged 18 to 24 and 32% are aged between 25 and 34 years old, which is roughly along the lines presented in the Tabel 2 that resulted from Pew Research. Also according to the research date, TikTok users are active around 52 minutes per day on the social media app.



	Q4 - 2019	Q1 - 2020	Q2 - 2020	Q3 - 2020	Q4 - 2020	Q1 - 2021	Q2 - 2021	Q3 - 2021	Q4 - 2021	Q1 - 2022	Q2 - 2022	Q3 - 2022
Instagram	6.014	5.375	5.899	6.835	8.732	9.388	11.92	12.19	14.14	12.00	12.68	12.19
TikTok	0.167	0.347	0.638	0.778	0.883	0.814	1.096	1.208	1.579	1.383	1.643	1.567

Figure 1. Evolution of Instagram & TikTok revenues between Q4 – 2019 and Q3-2022

Source: (Ibqual, 2022)

Based on the above mentioned source (Kemp, 2022) and that of Ibqual (2022) we can deepen the analysis towards the importance of using Instagram for the marketing activity. Instagram as well as Facebook,Twitter, TikTok and many other social media platforms are largely used by companies for their profiling ability and for personalised and direct ad campaigns. In the case of Instagram in 2022 the revenue generated based on ads is of $47.6 billion which represents almost half of Facebook's total revenue. As for the distribution of the revenue Instagram in the first 3 quarters of 2022 they are around the value of $12.1 billion per quarter compared to the previous year where 2021 represented a period of permanent increase in ads revenue for Instagram, as it can be seen in Figure 1.

If you look at figure 1 and also at Table 3 and we compare Instagram and TikTok revenues we can observe the same evolution of the financial results over the same period of time, however we cannot say the profile of the users and also the existence of the social media platform. Instagram has been around since 2010, whereas TikTok has been launched to the general public in 2017 and a seven-year gap between the two makes the difference in number of users.

Table 3. Evolution of Instagram & TikTok revenues between Q4 – 2019 and Q3-2022

Financial Quarter	Instagram Δ	TikTok Δ
Q4 – 2019		
Q1 – 2020	-11.89%	51.87%
Q2 – 2020	8.88%	45.61%
Q3 – 2020	13.69%	17.99%
Q4 – 2020	21.72%	11.89%
Q1 – 2021	6.99%	-8.48%
Q2 – 2021	21.24%	25.73%
Q3 – 2021	2.18%	9.27%
Q4 – 2021	13.82%	23.50%
Q1 – 2022	-17.83%	-14.17%
Q2 – 2022	5.37%	15.82%
Q3 – 2022	-4.01%	-4.85%

Source: (Authors calculation)

In Table 3 we can see the evolution of the above mentioned revenues for the 2020 to 2022 time frame based on the data presented Figure 1. From the data of table 3 we can observe higher percentages throughout the evolution of the revenue for TikTok compared do Instagram in Q1, Q2 and Q3 of 2020, compared those of 2019, a trend that continues up until the second quarter of 2022.

By looking at the revenue based secondary analysis we can observe an increase in interest of the business environment in using Instagram and TikTok for their marketing strategies. Of course one has to consider what are the main advantages and at the same time some disadvantages when using social media marketing strategies and also using the best available profiles offered by these platforms.

Among the most important aspects that a company must consider is the fact that social media marketing allows for reaching a large and diverse audience (for example TikTok is present in 155 countries). Another aspect that must be considered is the fact that these platforms have the majority of their users on the young side of age, users which come from the millennials or Gen Z groups which have a high interest in using ICT.

The social media platforms analysed in this paper have a visual profile which allows for a more authentic showcasing of a companie's product, and at the same time both platforms can bring additional traffic to the companies or products website using the features of the platforms.

In the last years another aspect that has to be linked to the social media marketing activity is the presence of influencer marketing in the marketing strategy of the company. And using influencer marketing can bring further reach for your company or your products especially given the fact that influencer marketing uses very well known individuals (actors, footballers, media personalities etc).

4. Conclusions

The current paper aimed to showcase some statistical data related to the usage of profile when deciding what type of marketing strategy and what media channel to use and also underlines some theoretical aspects related to social media.

The desire to create an effective marketing strategy using social media platforms should consider using, alongside the profile, other marketing aspects like enhancing brand identity, increasing brand awareness, improving the brand image using targeted video and audio content, the ability to reach your target group faster and, of course, social media provides a budget friendly alternative the traditional advertising campaigns.

Of course there are also some limitations to the usage of profiling when designing social media campaigns due to the fact that there are social media platforms which have much too general content or cover a larger client base which might not fit the desires of the company, and at the same time there are specialised social media platforms (which are strictly using just some type of activity: photo or video sharing) which may not fit the needs of the company.

Also, there are some aspects that limit the online marketing strategy such as: When using bad profiling your ad might not reach the desired target, you must be open for potential embarrassment, wow cheap social media marketing takes up a lot of time in the designing of the campaigns (to reach the ‘’perfect customer’’), It takes some time until you see the results of your profiling activity and the effectiveness of your social media campaign. So choosing a social media platform must be done very carefully, whilst considering these advantages or disadvantages and of course linking them with the image objectives of the company, with the desired perception that the company wants to achieve, with the company reputation and many more.

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