

Is Social Media Marketing a Necessary Evil?

Summary

John is the owner and manager of a popular casual Italian restaurant in Manhattan, New York City. He understands the benefits of using Social Networking Sites (SNSs) and has adopted several SNS platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, to promote his business. However, he feels that day-to-day operations don't leave him enough time to manage the restaurant's SNSs. Assigning the task to Amanda, his lead hostess, doesn't seem to solve the issue; despite Amanda, who is a Millennial, being an experienced user of SNSs for her personal entertainment, she does not have the skills needed to manage the business SNSs.

John has also noticed that, due to an increase in guests using their cell phones to take photos of the food and uploading them on SNSs, the meal duration of each customer has increased, while the average check per customer remains the same. The "Camera eats first" behavior has negatively impacted the restaurant ambiance, while the number of customers who make unreasonable requests due to user comments on SNSs has increased. Furthermore, Chef Vito is concerned that the low-quality photos taken with cell phones and uploaded on SNSs misrepresent his work. He also points out that such posts ruin the surprise for future customers, and may lead to copyright infringement. John needs to weigh the pros and cons of using SNSs in order to decide the best way to manage the restaurant's online presence effectively, while resolving the current SNS-related problems.

Theoretical Background

The proliferation and popularity of social networking sites (SNSs) has changed the way companies communicate with their customers and promote their businesses. Table 1 presents (in billion US dollars) social media marketing spending in the United States (Forrester Research, 2016) along with the number (in billions) of social media users worldwide (eMarketer, 2017). Both expenditure in the US and the number of users worldwide have increased since 2014 and are expected to continue increasing until 2019. Expenditure in the US on social media marketing, especially, is expected to more than double from \$7.52 billion in 2014 to \$17.34 in billion by 2019.

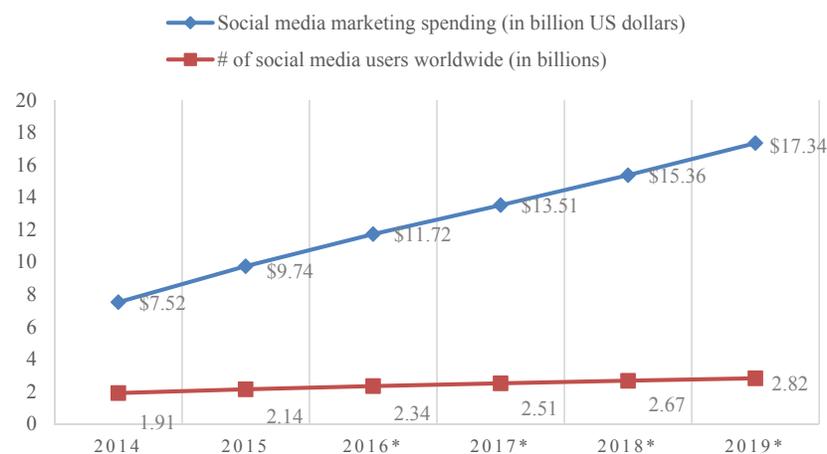
User motivations to participate in a company's SNSs differ from user motivations to engage in personal SNSs. Specifically, the motivations for visiting a company's SNSs include personal identity, integration and social interaction, and entertainment (Muntinga, Moorman, & Smit, 2011), while user motivations for implementing personal SNSs cover socializing, entertainment, self-status seeking, and information search (Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009). The differences in motivation suggest that a company's SNSs should be managed differently than personal SNSs. The potential challenges related to managing a business's SNSs are discussed in this case study.

Target Audience

This case study is appropriate for many courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels, including Hospitality Marketing, Food Service Management, and Introduction to Hospitality Management. To adapt

Table 1

A Comparison of Social Media Marketing Spending in the US and Number of Social Media Users Worldwide



*Forecast

the case study to a graduate-level course, it is recommended to assign two articles from the additional reading and to require a research paper instead of the reflection paper required at the undergraduate level.

Teaching Objectives

Upon completion of the case study analysis and its related assignments, students will be able to:

- Discuss the values and benefits of managing SNSs to an independent restaurant
- Identify the issues and challenges of adoption and implementation of SNSs by an independent restaurant
- Explain the legal implications of postings on SNSs
- Conduct supplementary research on social media marketing efforts by independent restaurants

Instruction Plan

The lesson will require 1.5 hours to complete the full exploration of the presented topics and ideas. Prior to the lesson, students will be assigned the case study and additional materials for reading.

Part 1 – Review of Definitions

At the beginning of the class, the instructor will ask students to research the following definitions:

- Social Networking Site (SNS): Web contexts that allow the individual users to create a profile, to share photos, images, text, and feelings, and to connect and maintain connections with other users in the online system (Choi, Fowler, Goh, & Yuan, 2016)
- Social Media Marketing: A marketing provides meaning and connection between brands and consumers and offers a personal channel and currency for user-centered networking and social interaction (Chi, 2011)
- User-Generated Content: Media content that is created or produced by the general public rather than by paid professionals and is primarily distributed on the Internet. This includes such online content as digital video, blogging, podcasting, mobile phone photography, wikis, and user-forum posts, among others (Daugherty, Eastin, & Bright, 2008)
- Electronic Word-of-Mouth: All informal communications directed at consumers through Internet-based technology related to the usage or characteristics of particular goods and services, or their sellers (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008)
- Chain versus Independent Restaurant: Chain restaurants are defined as those restaurants that are found in multiple numbers and have the same look, the same menu, the same décor. An independent restaurant is one that is unique in its look and menu. An individual or company can own multiple locations of an independent restaurant, but they will be small in number and may have unique characteristics that make them indepen-

dent (Harris, DiPietro, Murphy, & Rivera, 2014)

Part 2 – Small Group Activity

Students will work in small groups to reflect on the thoughts and attitudes of the people involved in the scenario by discussing the following questions:

Undergraduate Level

- What are the benefits of managing SNSs for the restaurant?
- What are the challenges of managing SNSs for the restaurant?
- What are the unique characteristics of user-generated content compared to company-generated content?
- What are user motivations to engage in personal SNSs?
- What are user motivations to participate in corporate SNSs?
- Do you agree with Chef Vito's concerns regarding guests uploading photos of their meals on SNSs?
- Do you photograph your food in restaurants and post them on SNSs? Why or why not?

Graduate Level

- Identify typical social media marketing metrics for performance measurement on the following SNSs: Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.
- Discuss potential infringement of chefs' intellectual property by posting photos on SNSs.

Part 3 – Analysis of Social Media Marketing Efforts of a Local Independent Restaurant

The instructor will ask students to identify a local restaurant in the area where they live, analyze its current SNSs, and evaluate its social media marketing efforts by answering the following questions:

- How many followers does each platform have?
- Is content updated regularly? If so, how often?
- Does the business respond to all customer comments, even negative ones?
- Would you follow the restaurant's SNSs? Why or why not?

At the graduate level, the instructor will ask students to create a list of the possible research topics related to social media marketing and discuss them in class.

Assessment

Undergraduate Level

- Undergraduate hospitality students will be assigned a 3-page reflection paper. The students will research the best practices of social media marketing by small businesses in the area.

Graduate Level

- Graduate hospitality students will be assigned a 5-page research paper on tools and methodologies for measuring a company's performance on social media marketing.

Analysis of Discussion Topics and Questions

Below is the analysis of the discussion questions included in the case study:

- 1. John understands that it is extra work for Amanda to manage the restaurant's SNSs, but he knows that he himself lacks the skills and time to do so effectively. He doesn't have the budget to hire new personnel to take over the SNS duties, so who should manage the restaurant's SNSs?**

Students' ideas regarding SNS management will vary and could include the following responses: some students might think that the owner should manage the SNSs; other students might suggest assigning the duties to an existing employee, such as a server or hostess, making sure that John trains them on managing SNSs according to the restaurant's policies and procedures.

- 2. How could the person learn the skills to manage the restaurant's SNSs effectively?**

The company should develop social media policies and a manual. Then, the restaurant manager should train the employees who will represent the company online. This can also be accomplished through online trainings offered by marketing professionals. Students will likely mention a positive ROI from social media campaigns.

The restaurant could partner with a local university and offer internships to the students who are interested in a career in social media management.

- 3. Should the restaurant accommodate all customer requests, even the unreasonable ones?**

The answer depends on the philosophy of the restaurant. Some restaurants emphasize that they "reserve the right to refuse service to anyone," while other restaurants put customer satisfaction as their top priority and try to meet all customer requests, including unreasonable ones. Restaurant managers should consider long-term benefits, as well as potential problems with accommodating such requests. If the restaurant's policy is "The customer is always right," then some people might like it and become loyal customers. However, in a worst-case scenario, some customers might come back and take advantage of this policy because the restaurant management has trained the staff to accommodate any requests, no matter how unreasonable.

- 4. Longer dining times and slower table turnover negatively affect revenues. How could the restaurant reduce the time spent at the table? Also, what could the restaurant do to combat the reduced speed of service due to customers requesting group photos of their parties?**

Students' answers will vary. Restaurants could shorten customers' time at a table by hiring more employees or changing the

service structure at the restaurant; however, neither of these is an easy task. Students might also suggest providing guests with photos of the food taken in the kitchen, or developing a policy that does not permit servers to take photos of customers.

- 5. What could the restaurant do to protect Chef Vito's intellectual property?**

Restaurants could inform customers that food items are the Chef's intellectual property. In addition, when they post pictures and videos on Facebook, they grant Facebook "a non-exclusive, transferable, sub-licensable, royalty-free, worldwide license to use any [IP] content that you post on or in connection with Facebook" ("IP License") (Facebook.com, 2015).

Analysis of the Teaching Objectives

Both Undergraduate and Graduate Levels

- Discuss the values and benefits of managing SNSs to an independent restaurant.

Students will be able to explain how a company can create a brand community, engage their current and potential clients and, ultimately, increase sales by building a social media presence. In addition, students will be able to identify the benefits of SNSs, such as customer engagement and brand promotion.

- Identify the issues and challenges of adoption and implementation of SNSs by an independent restaurant.

Using the Italian restaurant presented in the case study as an example, students will be able to discuss challenges such as managing multiple channels, updating content regularly, and investing time and money in creating a brand's presence on SNSs.

- Conduct supplementary research on social media marketing efforts by independent restaurants.

Students will identify a similar independent restaurant in the area where they live and evaluate its social media marketing efforts based on suggested key performance indicators.

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