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How Social Media Marketing Is Helping In Customer Retention And Customer Engagement: A Case Of Marks And Spencer

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The goal of this research was to find out how Marks and Spencer are using social media channels to accomplish customer engagement and customer loyalty. In order to find out the same, this research has followed both primary data collection method and secondary data collection method. Primary data is collected by conducting surveys with 25 random consumers of Marks and Spencer. On the other hand, secondary data is presented by collecting information from authentic websites. It was found that customer engagement of the organization comes from its strong investment in social media marketing. The organization is conducting different types of campaigns and using different tools such as Style Finder and Instagram stories. These activities are allowing the organization to continuously communicate with its existing and potential consumers. In terms of customer loyalty, from primary data, it was found that the organization's communication and engagement with consumers are ensuring customer loyalty. Therefore, customer engagement is playing a mediating role in social media communication and customer engagement for the organization.

Keywords: Customer engagement, Marks and Spencer, social media usage, social media marketing

Introduction

Customer engagement and acquiring customer loyalty have become two important activities for business organizations to remain competitive in any industry (1). Some organizations use traditional marketing while other organizations use social media marketing for customer engagement and customer loyalty (2). In recent years, a number of research works are conducted on how to accomplish customer engagement or customer loyalty however, none of the research works focus on the connection between social media marketing, customer engagement and customer loyalty. It can be considered as a major research gap.

This research intends to eliminate this research gap by identifying how social media marketing ensures customer engagement and customer loyalty. For this purpose, in this research work, Marks and Spencer are selected.

This is one of the leading retail brands around the world and one of the companies that puts emphasis on social media marketing for customer engagement and customer loyalty. Based on the research gap and intention of this research work, the following research questions are developed that would be followed in this research work.

Research question 1: How Marks and Spencer are using social media marketing to engage with its customers?

Research question 2: How social media marketing is helping Marks and Spencer to acquire customer loyalty?

Background of Marks and Spencer

Marks and Spencer Group PLC is also known as M&S is a multinational retailer brand from the UK headquartered in London. This organization mostly specializes in selling clothing products, home products and food products. The organization is listed on the London Stock Exchange and is also known as a constituent of the FTSE 250 Index. Michael Marks and Thomas Spencer in Leeds founded the organization in the year of 1884. As of 2019, the organization had 959 stores in the UK among which 615 stores sell food products. Around the world, the organization has over 1400 stores in different nations.

In the year of 1998, Marks and Spencer became the first British retailer brand to make a pre-tax profit of £1 billion. However, in recent times, the organization is facing major issues and due to that in 2018, it announced that it will close over 100 stores by the end of 2022. In 2020, the management of the organization had to cut 7,000 jobs due to the Covid pandemic. The situation has not changed for the organization as on May 26, the organization announced that it would close further 30 stores over the next 10 years period.

What is marketing?

In simple language, marketing is a strategy to acquire potential consumers who are interested in an organization's products and services. Even though it sounds simple, it includes complex activities such as researching, promoting, selling and distributing products and services.

Benefits of marketing

- Marketing is important for any organization as it gets people acquainted with an organization's products and services (3). It also makes a brand memorable to the consumers who can become loyal consumers and tell their friends and families about it. Simply, marketing can be used to increase brand awareness.

- In today's digital world where almost every successful organization has its own active e-commerce site, marketing is more useful than anything else is (4). It is marketing that drives traffic to the e-commerce sites of companies that increases sales.
- Every business organization intends to increase its sales and marketing can directly help it (5). Through SEO, the development of email campaigns, sharing content through social media and other various methods of marketing, companies can attract consumers to buy their products and services (6).
- Developing a high level of trust in one's brand always leads to loyalty from consumers that ensures repeat purchases (7). Marketing is the tool through which customer loyalty can be accomplished (8).

Different types of marketing

- Digital marketing is a type of marketing that mainly puts emphasis on developing a marketing strategy within the digital environment. It can be social media marketing or search engine optimization.
- Direct marketing is a type of campaign that completely depends on direct, two-way communication that looks to trigger a result for a particular group of consumers (5).
- Email marketing is considered as one of the most profitable and efficient marketing methods in terms of return. Generally, it includes sending emails to the existing and potential consumers about discounts, special offers, or the launch of new products.
- Mobile marketing is another type of marketing, which is highly effective. However, mobile marketing is a broad concept that brings together different marketing campaigns and actions focused mainly on mobile applications and platforms such as smartphones or tablets.
- Viral marketing is another marketing technique that includes organic or word-of-mouth information about a product or service to spread at an ever-increasing rate.
- Influencer marketing is a comparatively new mode of marketing. In influencer marketing, business organizations hire social media influencers to promote products and services to the influencer's millions of followers.

Social media marketing of Marks and Spencer

Social media marketing in Marks and Spencer began in 2014 when the organization launched its new e-commerce platform to drive up online sales (9). That was the time when the management of the organization shifted its marketing approach to digital-first and social media first starting with the "Leading Ladies" campaign that was

launched on Facebook (10). The organization's Christmas ads called as "Believe in magic and sparkle" were also shared on different social media platforms (10). It also ran social media campaign where it asked its consumers to name the dog seen in the TV spot. Its Christmas ads shared on different social media channels reached to more than a 23million people within the first 24 hours. It helped Marks and Spencer to acquire 300,000 new Facebook fans. Since this time, Marks and Spencer started to invest more in its social media marketing strategy.

During that time, Julia Monro was the head of social media in Marks and Spencer. She during an interview stated that listening to the customers is paramount to doing well in the highly competitive UK industry. As a part of the plan, Marks and Spencer started to engage with consumers more on different social media sites. It started to host polls for product selection. For example, it motivated its customers to present on Facebook and Twitter to vote for the flavor that Marks and Spencer should ring back to its shelves. Whatever the results were, the organization successfully engaged with millions of consumers in no time. On the other hand, the organization also experienced the increased sale of its Percy Pig Sweets after another social media campaign. The management of the organization used Facebook to motivate consumers to establish a story about Percy and his girlfriend Penny that was then translated into a bag of sweets. According to Monro, Percy and Penny was the organization's first crowd-sourced product that was born out of social.

Now, Marks and Spencer are focusing to attract younger customers more. For this purpose, the management of the organization has focused on two areas that are a photo search feature called Style Finder and Instagram stories. According to the head of digital product and user experience design at Marks and Spencer, Jim Cruickshank, the organization realize that consumers are busy entities and most of the time they are inspired when they are out and about.

This is why; the organization implemented Style Finder. In this feature, customers just snap a picture of an article of clothing. The artificial intelligence system of the organization then matches primary features to products in the inventory of Marks and Spencer. When a close match is found, the application provides the consumers with a link to where they can purchase it.

On the other hand, the management of Marks and Spencer strongly believes that social media has become pivotal for the organization to engage with its consumers. As a result, Marks and Spencer started to use Instagram stories, which are considered as the fastest-growing part of the social network. Marks and Spencer have increased its posts on social media to at least three times per week for its food-related products. Most of the posts of the organization are gamification and polls that create meaningful engagement with the consumers. However, in terms of the clothing business of the organization, the organization mostly focuses on meaningful conversations.

Overall, from the social media marketing strategy of Marks and Spencer that heavily depends on Instagram it can be seen that the organization is focusing mostly on engaging with consumers by sharing motivating and attractive content around it using Instagram stories. It is also using different strategies for its food products and clothing products. Using factors such as gamification and polls, the organization is directly

engaging with the consumers. It is also cultivating positive results for the organization. Therefore, research question 1 is accomplished through this part of the research report.

Data Analysis

In order to identify the answer to research question 2, data is collected from 35 random social media users who are also consumers of Marks and Spencer. A set of survey questionnaires were shared with them.

They were given 48 hours of time to complete the survey questionnaires and send them back. After 4 hours, only 25 complete responses were found. The rest of the responses was incomplete. The responses collected from the participants and the analysis of the data are hereby presented below.

Q1. What is your gender?

TABLE I. Responses for male and female participants

Option	Numbers of responses	% of responses	Total number of responses
Male	13	52	25
Female	12	48	25

From the table above, it can be seen that there were 13 male participants and 12 female participants in this research work. This is good for this research work as diverse information will be collected here.

Q2. What is your age?

TABLE II. Responses for age groups

Option	Numbers of responses	% of responses	Total number of responses
18-22	6	24	25
23-25	10	40	25
26-30	1	4	25
Above 30	8	32	25

The table above shows that most of the participants are from the age group of 23-25 years (10). On the other hand, 8 employees are from the age group of above 30. Six are young participants are they belong to the age group of 18-22. Only one employee is from the age group of 26-30. Once again, it can be seen that the participant group is quite diverse in terms of their age which would be good for this research work.

Q3. Do you buy from Marks and Spencer?

TABLE III. Responses for male and female participants

Option	Numbers of responses	% of responses	Total number of responses
Regularly	22	88	25
No	0	-	25
Sometimes	3	12	25

It was previously mentioned that data is collected only from random people who are existing consumers of Marks and Spencer. Therefore, it was not surprising to see that 22 participants stated that they regularly buy from the organization and 3 participants stated they buy from the organization sometimes. None of the consumers opted for the option “No”.

Q4. How often do you buy from Marks and Spencer?

TABLE IV. Responses for buying behavior of participants

Option	Numbers of responses	% of responses	Total number of responses
Once in 2 months	3	12	25
Once in one month	5	20	25
Once in 15 days	9	36	25
Once in week	6	24	25
More than once a week	2	8	

From the table above it can be seen that most of the participants (9) buy from Marks and Spencer once in 15 days. Next, six participants buy from the organization once in a week. Five are buying from the organization once in one month while three are buying from the organization once in 2 months. Two participants are buying from the organization more than once a week. Therefore, from the responses, it can be stated that all the participants who took part in this research are loyal consumers of Marks and Spencer.

Q5. How do you get new product/service information or information about campaigns or discounts in terms of Marks and Spencer?

TABLE V. Responses for social media engagement

Option	Numbers of responses	% of responses	Total number of responses
Word of mouth	2	8	25
Television/newspapers	2	8	25
Social media	18	72	25
SMS	1	4	25
Emails	1	4	25
Others	1	4	25

From the secondary data that was presented in the literature review section, it was found that Marks and Spencer are highly active in social media sites such as Instagram. It was also found that through different campaigns and polls, Marks and Spencer regularly engage with its existing and potential consumers. Therefore, it was expected that a lot of participants would vote for the social media option while answering the above question. The same can be found as a total of 18 consumers stated they get new product and service information from social media sites. Two consumers stated that they learn about new products/services through word of mouth. Two participants stated that they learn about new products/services through televisions and newspapers. One participant mentioned that SMS marketing is the way through which he/she came to know about a new

product/service of the organization. One participant stated that it was emailed, through which he came to know about a new product/service of the organization. One participant voted for the "Others" option while answering the question.

Q6. Do you agree that the social media engagement of Marks and Spencer motivates you to buy from it?

TABLE VI. Responses for the use of style finder of participants

Option	Numbers of responses	% of responses	Total number of responses
Agree	11	44	25
Strongly agree	12	48	25
Disagree	1	4	25
Strongly disagree	1	4	25

From the existing literature and secondary data, it was confirmed that Marks and Spencer use Style Finder and Instagram stories and other social media tools to continuously engage with its young consumers; both existing and potential. The same can be confirmed from the table above. On the other hand, from the above table and answers of the respondents, it is also found that Marks and Spencer not only engage with its consumers through social media sites but also motivates them to buy from the organization. A total of 11 participants agreed that social media channels of the organization help Marks and Spencer to engage with the consumers and they also agreed that it motivates them to buy from the organization. Besides, 12 participants strongly agreed on the fact. Only one participant disagreed and 1 participant strongly disagreed with the fact.

Q7. Do you agree that the social media engagement of Marks and Spencer makes you loyal to the organization?

TABLE VII. Responses for engagement to social media

Option	Numbers of responses	% of responses	Total number of responses
Agree	15	60	25
Strongly agree	8	32	25
Disagree	1	4	25
Strongly disagree	1	4	25

According to the existing literature and secondary data, if an organization constantly engages with its consumers on social media channels, it makes the consumers loyal to that organization. The same can be found in the table above. A total of 15 participants stated that they agree to the fact that social media engagement of the organization makes them loyal to Marks and Spencer. On the other hand, 8 participants strongly agreed to the fact that the social media engagement of Marks and Spencer makes them loyal to the organization. Only one participant disagreed with it while one participant strongly disagreed with it.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research paper was to identify how social media marketing is helping Marks and Spencer in fulfilling consumer engagement and accomplishing consumer loyalty. Two research questions were developed to complete the purpose of this research work. Those research questions were,

Research question 1: How Marks and Spencer are using social media marketing to engage with its customers?

Research question 2: How social media marketing is helping Marks and Spencer to acquire customer loyalty?

While answering the first question, secondary data was collected in the form of a literature review. From the secondary data, it was found that along with different social media campaigns, the marketing team of Marks and Spencer is using social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and using tools such as Style Finder and Instagram stories to engage with its consumer; mostly the young consumers. It fulfills the first research question.

On the other hand, primary data was also collected to find out how Marks and Spencer are accomplishing customer loyalty. From the primary data, it was found that customer engagement implemented by the organization is ensuring customer loyalty.

It means customer engagement of Marks and Spencer through social media is playing a mediating role in accomplishing customer loyalty. It fulfills the second research question. Despite the fact that this research has fulfilled both research questions, it includes some limitations, which are mentioned in the next part of the paper.

Research Limitations

The biggest limitation of this research is the sample size, which is only 25. For the research topic of "How social media marketing is helping in customer retention and customer engagement: A case of Marks and Spencer" larger sample size was required. On the other hand, this research, due to lack of time could only collect quantitative data. In order to more precisely understand how the organization is accomplishing customer engagement and customer loyalty, it was required to conduct interviews with some of the managers of the organization.

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