

The Power of Instagram's Algorithm in Boosting the Visibility of Startups & Small Businesses

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ABSTRACT

As the world progresses towards digitalized platforms for ease of access, social media is getting more popular amidst the younger generations, causing marketers to quickly adapt to the social networking space to be able to interact with customers.

India is one of the world's fastest growing economies, with startups contributing approximately 4-5% to the nation's gdp. The metropolitan city of bangalore serves as a hub for many up-and-coming startups and small businesses. Networking is crucial for small businesses, as word-of-mouth referrals can boost sales. Social media marketing is a cost-effective way to reach a broader audience and engage with customers. Additionally, traditional advertising channels such as billboards, flyers, and newspaper ads can still be effective in certain regions.

In order to stand out in a saturated market such as ours, it is essential to strategize and create a marketing campaign that taps into the resources offered by interactive social media platforms the likes of instagram, facebook and many others.

Through social media, big business can do better and small business can become better known without putting much investment on advertising. This study aims to provide insight into the seemingly vast marketing tool often underestimated by many – instagram's algorithm.

Keywords-- Social Media, Instagram, Marketing, Entrepreneur, Small Business, SMEs, Marketing Tool, Start-ups, Advertising

and Myspace in 2002 and 2003 respectively. These platforms paved the way for the development of more sophisticated social media platforms like Facebook, which was launched in 2004 and quickly became the largest social media platform in the world. In 2010, Instagram was launched and quickly gained popularity, especially among young people, due to its focus on visual content and easy-to-use features.



With the growth of social media platforms, digital advertising became an increasingly important aspect of these platforms. Advertisers saw the potential for reaching a large, captive audience and began using these platforms to promote their products and services. The effectivity of digital ad space is higher as it offers a more targeted approach to advertising, with the ability to reach specific demographics and track the success of campaigns in real-time. This direct line of communication can help companies improve their

I. INTRODUCTION

Research study for Project Centric Learning

The origin of platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and other digital ad spaces can be traced back to the advent of the Internet and the rapid growth of social media. The first social media platform, Six Degrees, was launched in 1997, succeeded by Friendster

customer service, increase customer satisfaction, and foster customer loyalty.

Instagram's algorithm is designed to show users content that is most relevant to their interests, based on a variety of factors such as engagement, timeliness, and relationship. This means that if your small business can create content that resonates with your target audience and generates high levels of engagement, Instagram's algorithm will reward you with increased visibility and reach.

In addition, Instagram's features such as the Explore page and the Shopping feature have also provided small businesses with new opportunities to reach potential customers. The Explore page shows users content that is relevant to their interests, and the Shopping feature allows businesses to tag products in their posts, making it easier for customers to make a purchase.

Another important aspect of leveraging Instagram's algorithm is to make use of features such as Instagram Stories and Reels. These features are designed to increase engagement and create a more interactive experience for users. By regularly posting Stories and Reels, small businesses can increase their visibility and reach a wider audience.

Following are a few constraints faced by startups and small businesses while venturing into digital marketing:

1. **Limited Budget:** Startups often have limited resources, including marketing budgets, making it difficult to compete with larger, established companies.
2. **Lack of Brand Awareness:** New startups often struggle with establishing brand awareness and building a strong reputation in their target market.
3. **Difficulty Reaching Target Audience:** Startups may struggle to effectively reach their target audience due to a lack of data and insights, or limited understanding of consumer behaviour and preferences.
4. **Limited Marketing Skills and Expertise:** Many startups are founded by entrepreneurs with little marketing experience, which can make it difficult for them to create effective marketing strategies and campaigns.

These challenges can make it difficult for startups to establish themselves in the market, build brand awareness, and generate leads and sales. Keeping in mind the limitations faced by such businesses, this study aims to prove Instagram's ability to facilitate two-way communication between an enterprise and its audiences.

II. METHODOLOGY

This research paper aims to gather information on the role played by a social media platform such as

Instagram in facilitating brand communication and brand awareness for startups and small businesses. The research methods employed to collect the data for this study are observational and descriptive in nature.

There are a few limitations for the study, which are listed below.

- **Lack of Data:** Despite Instagram being a popular platform, there is limited research surrounding its effectivity in marketing for startups.

By using an assemblage perspective, the current study intends to analyse these clouds of expressive and networked cultural codes as digital expressions of market meaning and comprehension across social media. This study does so by focusing on the interactional processes that co-codify markets through social media among various configurations of (non) human market actors.

III. RESEARCH GAP

There is a significant amount of research on how social media platforms like Instagram can help small businesses to grow. However, there may be gaps in research that specifically focus on how the Instagram algorithm has contributed to the growth of small businesses. Here are a few relevant research gaps:

Impact of Instagram Algorithm on Organic Reach

While Instagram has made changes to its algorithm over the years, it is not clear how these changes have impacted the organic reach of small businesses. Research could examine how small businesses have adapted to changes in the Instagram algorithm and whether these changes have had positive or negative effects on their reach and engagement.

User behaviour and Instagram Algorithm

Another potential research gap is understanding how user behaviour on Instagram affects the algorithm and, in turn, small business growth. For example, research could investigate how users interact with different types of content (such as videos, images, or stories) and how this impacts the visibility of small business content.

Strategies for Optimizing Instagram Algorithm

There is a lack of research on strategies for optimizing Instagram algorithm performance for small businesses. Research could investigate what tactics small businesses use to improve their visibility and engagement on Instagram and how effective these strategies are in driving growth.

Cross-platform Comparison

While Instagram is a popular platform for small businesses, there is little research that compares how the Instagram algorithm stacks up against other social media algorithms in terms of driving small business growth. A study could investigate whether Instagram's algorithm is more or less effective than algorithms on other platforms (such as Facebook or TikTok) for small business growth.

IV. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Jenkins, R. D. (2018), analysed marketers' ability to leverage visual storytelling. Instagram is a visual platform, so it's important to utilize high-quality images and videos to tell your brand story and showcase your products. Usage of Instagram Stories, Reels, and IGTV to share behind-the-scenes content, product demos, and other engaging visuals has changed the way marketers strategize their campaigns, making it essential to hyperfocus on the visual elements.

According to Kaushik, R. (2016) & Blank, S. (2020), startups typically look for several key elements in a marketing campaign, including:

1. **Relevance:** The marketing campaign should be relevant to the target audience and address their specific needs and pain points.
2. **Cost-effectiveness:** Startups typically have limited budgets and are looking for campaigns that deliver high ROI for the investment.
3. **Scalability:** The marketing campaign should have the potential to grow as the startup grows.
4. **Measurement and tracking:** Startups want to measure the success of their marketing campaigns, so they look for campaigns that have clear metrics for success and methods for tracking and analysing results.
5. **Flexibility:** The marketing campaign should be flexible enough to adapt to changes in the market, the startup's offerings, and the target audience.
6. **Creativity:** Startups want marketing campaigns that stand out and capture the attention of their target audience.
7. **Integration with other marketing efforts:** The marketing campaign should complement and reinforce other marketing efforts, such as content marketing, social media, and branding efforts.

There are many Indian startups that have benefitted from Instagram marketing, the likes of Myntra, The Man Company and Nykaa, who belong to the fashion and lifestyle sector. They use Instagram to showcase the latest collections and other promotional purposes. They use influencer marketing, product photography, and user-generated content to engage with their target audience.

Jenkins, R. D. (2018) also talks about the importance of building a strong community on Instagram. Responding to comments and messages, running contests and promotions, and encouraging followers to engage with the brand helps in reaching potential new followers and increase visibility. Moreover, partnering with influencers in the target audience to promote the brand or its services can increase brand awareness.

Soedarsono, D. K., Mohamad, B., Adamu, A. A., & Pradita, K. A. (2020) emphasize on the importance

of persuasion in a campaign's marketing mix. Traditional advertising has always overshadowed newer marketing strategies, but with the increasing demand and use of asymmetric advertising platforms such as Instagram, a compromise must be made by advertisers and consumers alike.

In addition, using Instagram's paid advertising options, such as sponsored posts and Instagram Shopping, facilitates wider audience reach and drives sales. Utilizing Instagram's unique features and engaging with your followers can help establish your brand and drive growth for your startup or small business.

V. FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS

This study intends to utilise social network analysis to analyse social media users' thoughts on the transparency of the garment supply chain, identify significant topics, and locate the main communities debating the topic. Despite the intended theme of the campaign to promote transparency in terms of working conditions specifically, networks and Instagram both demonstrated high interest in environmental, working condition, and community support in the apparel supply chain. This is explained by the moral responsibility framework of corporate sustainability. However, some discrepancies regarding the significance of these communities in the network were discovered, indicating that while survey methods are important for determining user intentions, user-generated data on social media that is based on reaction can be helpful in determining users' actual behaviour. Also, whereas the network was dominated by communications that shared knowledge, the Instagram network featured posts that shared emotion.

Markets can be viewed as socially built, self-replicating networks of components, where frequent exchange is governed by (in) formal laws and cultural norms governing interactions and relations. Markets therefore represent intricate social systems where "discussive negotiations among and practises of several stakeholders including a market-result in a shared market knowledge." According to previous studies on the formation of market discourse, market participants together frame cultural codes and market categories to provide meaning and comprehension for the market. Moreover, changes in market meaning that result from changes in semantic categories have an impact on cultural notions and consumption habits. Moreover, users' impact on the creation and reshaping of market understanding is acknowledged by research, as is the case when users attempt to alter market representations and redefine market meanings through identity construction. Social media facilitates market engagement by enhancing consumers' roles in the marketplace, according to recent research. Only a small number of studies, however, go into detail about the actual importance of social media and its users in market

shaping. User-driven market-shaping studies, on the other hand, acknowledge the central role of, for instance, fashion bloggers in institutional work, the reinforcement of institutional market logics, and the unsettling of institutionalised market practises. For example, user innovation research illuminates the mediating role of social media in the creation and qualification of exchange objects and services. These research streams, however, do not take into account the increasingly agentic role of digital technology and infrastructure in these market dynamics and instead only grant social media an enabling or mediating role of user-driven framing and shaping of cultural codes and semantic categories attached to markets.

Social media and other digital platforms actively organise and drive both the interactional and communicational infrastructure and the market, rather than only serving as enablers and mediators of socioeconomic, cultural, and political interactions that have an impact on markets. Scholars are paying more and more attention to nonhuman market actors as agentic entities, and they are theorising smart items as nonhuman actors who actively influence consumer behaviour and experiences. In a similar way, algorithms operate as an active nonhuman workforce, influencing how culture is seen by acting as curators and gatekeepers. As such, they can be seen as important authority in terms of taste and preference.

Yet, interactions between nonhuman and human activity are inevitable. On the one hand, content recommendation algorithms make use of machine learning based on compiled social media user behaviour patterns. On the other side, in order to best tailor their material to algorithms, content creators theorise how algorithms function and adopt a promotional mindset. For instance, by employing particular hashtag vernacular, content producers can both participate in affordance-mediated dialogues and modify their expressive networked material so that algorithms will more likely find and share it. The end effect of these interconnected (non-human) activities is "a recursive loop between the calculations of the algorithm and the "calculations" of individuals generating bubbles and algorithmic consumer cultures formed by repetitive cycles of user and machine actions and matching responses." Large clouds of expressive algorithmic cultures are networked cultural codes that echo with people, digital technology and infrastructure on a market level

Instagram's algorithm is a complex and constantly evolving system designed to determine which posts users see in their feed. The algorithm takes into account a variety of factors, including the user's interests and behaviour, the timeliness of the post, the engagement it receives, and the relationship between the user and the person who posted it.

Understanding the Algorithm

For small businesses, the power of Instagram's algorithm can be a crucial factor in boosting visibility

and attracting new customers. By understanding how the algorithm works and how to optimize their content and strategy, small businesses can increase their chances of appearing in the feeds of potential customers and gaining more followers.

Instagram's algorithm prioritizes content based on how likely a user is to engage with it. The algorithm takes into account several factors, including the user's past behaviour, the timeliness of the post, and the relevance of the content. To ensure that their posts appear on their followers' feeds, small businesses need to understand how Instagram's algorithm works.

The Impact of Paid Advertising

In addition to optimizing their content and strategy, small businesses can use paid advertising on Instagram to reach a wider audience. Coupled with targeted advertising, businesses can reach users who are likely to be interested in their products or services, increasing the chances of a sale.

Paid advertising on Instagram is a powerful tool for small businesses to increase their visibility on the platform. Instagram's advertising platform allows small businesses to target specific audiences based on their interests, demographics, and behaviour.

Leveraging User-Generated Content

User-generated content (UGC) is content created by Instagram users that features a small business's products or services. Small businesses can leverage UGC by sharing it on their profile or Stories, which can increase engagement and visibility.

The Importance of Engagement

Instagram's algorithm prioritizes content that generates engagement, such as likes, comments, and shares. Small businesses can increase engagement by creating compelling content that resonates with their target audience, using interactive features like polls and quizzes, and responding to comments and direct messages promptly.

Small businesses can also increase engagement by partnering with influencers or other businesses to cross-promote their content. When a user engages with content from an influencer or another business, the algorithm considers the engagement as a positive signal and may prioritize the content on the user's feed. They can also use hashtags to reach a wider audience and participate in community events and campaigns to build relationships with their followers.

Role of Consistency in a Brand's Image

Last but not the least is consistency. Small businesses that post regularly and maintain a consistent brand image and tone are more likely to attract and retain followers. The algorithm also takes into account the timing of posts. To maximize visibility, small businesses should post at times when their target audience is most active on the platform

VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the power of Instagram's algorithm can be a valuable tool for small businesses looking to boost their visibility and attract new customers. Despite the restrictions faced by startups and small business on the marketing front, by understanding how the algorithm works and taking steps to optimize their content and strategy, they can increase their chances of appearing in the feeds of potential customers and growing their following. Paid advertising can also be a powerful tool for reaching a wider audience and generating sales.

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