

Chapter 21

YouTube as a Contemporary C2C Communication Channel for Companies: Analyzing Differences Between Sponsored and Non-Sponsored Videos

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ABSTRACT

The rise of social networks coupled with the new consumption habits are the triggers of the appearance of influencers. The connection between influencers and customers and the influence they exert on them through social networks is of great interest to implement an up-to-date marketing communication strategy. Influencers are creating a new way to reach customers through the generation of customer-to-customer communication (C2C), which can be exploited by companies through the sponsorship of some contents. In this sense, the main goal of this research is to analyze if there are differences between sponsored and non-sponsored influencers' videos in terms of engagement and other variables. Data used for this study have been manually collected from three different YouTube channels (from the category How to & Style) using statistics offered by YouTube and behavioral information about the interactions users/social media. The results have interesting implications for the marketing communication strategy.

INTRODUCTION

Current customers spend much of their time in their social networks (Laroche et al., 2013); obviously, this fact has been exploited by companies, which use social networks as platforms for communication with their customers (Gao and Feng, 2016; Kohli et al., 2015). Social networks have received growing

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interest because of the great attractiveness and interactivity that these platforms provide users (Swani et al., 2017; Wu, 2016). This is the reason that justifies that for some years now business managers have been raising the possibility of integrating social networks into their communication business strategy (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). Social networks are configured as an effective mechanism to achieve higher levels of customers' involvement and/or engagement, better communications and a closer relationship between companies and their customers (Filo et al., 2015; Saxena and Khanna, 2013). Companies can make use of social networks through their own social networks accounts or through influencers, but the effectiveness of the communication strategy developed through influencers has not been widely analysed in previous literature. Therefore, this study is focused on the usage of influencers by companies to know if they are really effective when they promote products.

From the fact that social networks are gaining popularity in the field of communication and advertising for companies, numerous studies have supported their role in improving customer's perception and awareness about the brand (e.g. Lin and Kim, 2016; Swani et al., 2017; Wu, 2016). For example, some studies indicate that the use of social networks as a communication tool positively and considerably improves loyalty and purchasing behaviour (Crofton and Parker, 2012), while others show how the content shared by users in different social platforms could be a source of inspiration for companies in the process of developing a new product (Rathore et al., 2016). In addition, the creation of relationships with customers differs depending on the online social network used (Moore et al., 2013). While platforms such as Facebook or Twitter have been widely examined by previous literature (Ballings and Van den Poel, 2015; De Vries et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2014), YouTube has received less interest from academic researchers (Alalwan et al., 2017; Kannan and Li, 2017; Siamagka et al., 2015).

Since YouTube appeared as an online streaming video platform in 2005, audience figures have been increasingly growing. YouTube is the largest online video social network in the world and it becomes an interesting tool for communication of companies. Analysing the popularity of YouTube from a psychological point of view, its key for success is that it combines elements that directly impact users' senses through sight, sound, movement or emotion (Bonsón et al., 2014). All these differences with other social platforms justify figures such as one billion users in YouTube (equivalent to one third of all Internet users) and that every day hundreds of millions of hours of videos are seen and billions of views are generated (YouTube, 2017). Given the magnitude of YouTube, companies have decided to include this platform as part of their digital communication strategies also thanks to it is freely available, its storage capacity, its popularity, and the possibility to obtain constant feedback from customers and stakeholders. In this regard, YouTube is an opportunity for companies to interact with their fans or followers, and the decision of not include this channel in the social media strategy of a company would mean the loss of a profitable opportunity to target audience (Socialbakers, 2013). The communicative possibilities that brands have on YouTube are not limited to advertisements in TrueView format, bumper, sponsored cards, or the creation of their own channels where they promote their products (see Figure 1). Currently, there are anonymous customers who decide to create a YouTube account and, after gaining several thousand followers, they become opinion leaders or influencers (currently also known as youtubers).

Users' opinions published in social networks or user-generated content (UGC) are a way to create online communication between customers (Boyd and Ellison, 2008). UGC is a kind of content that is defined as "content created outside the practices and professional routines of companies" (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010; OECD 2007, p.61) that is produced, modified, shared or consumed individually or collectively and that has become part of the customers' buying decision process. There is a large variety of UGC related to brands in different social networks that could be based on text, images, links, videos or

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