

Starbucks and the Siren Call

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Website & Social Media Analysis

In today's society, there is a need for marketers to appeal to their customers in ways that other companies have not yet strategized. While this is not always the smartest or the most readily available route to take for a company, there are still elements that separate a successful company from other businesses of like services. This is especially true in terms of a business's website and the digital services that are offered. As stated by Zahay and Roberts (2018), "Digital transformation must focus on providing excellent customer experience as well as on streamlining operations and reducing costs. Marketers must take the lead in creating satisfying customer experience and be an active participant in identifying needed changes in business models" (p. 28-29).

This is a vital role that the marketer needs to accomplish if a company is to stand out to the target market. Individuals are bombarded with many advertisements of companies that are very similar in nature. How does a company get noticed in the plethora of advertisements that manifest daily? A unique and efficient webpage that offers rewards and a closeness with the company is one way to attract attention. While most companies have a website, it does not automatically gain a lot of customers. To a certain degree, social media is what entices individuals the best in today's society. However, there are some companies which provide enough value on their website to keep their customers satisfied.

Describing the Selected Website and Social Media

To first understand the social media site, there is a benefit in understanding the main webpage. A company's website might impact the traffic on the company's social platform itself. The website that I chose for this analysis is the Starbucks website. This website is one that shows how much Starbucks appreciates their customers. This is seen in the many different options available to individuals on the landing page. Examples of this include the option to order beverages and food online so that the products are waiting for the individual upon arrival to the shop of their choosing. This feature is arguably the biggest usage for the website. The app that is based off the website is also centered around the idea of ordering before arriving. This communicates to the individual that they are taken care of and that the products are reserved for them, like a seat in a movie theater or a ticket in first-class on a plane. It illustrates luxury even if it is just a simple task like ordering ahead of time. No matter how small the gesture is, the customer feels appreciated. Starbucks has gone through the process of creating a system specifically with the hopes of showing the customer how special they are to the company. This method of ordering also communicates an innovative, quick way of receiving a product. If an individual was running late for a meeting, this ordering method would cut down on time significantly. In this example, online preordering also prevents a customer from not committing to a purchase.

On the other hand, the social media site for Starbucks that I chose was their Instagram platform. The site itself displays the typical colors of Starbucks in nearly every post (ex. Green, recyclable cups, and holiday colors). There are also posts that talk about ways to use the different flavorings in the cups and different ways to order that are not readily displayed on the menus. This gives the followers on Instagram a sense of exclusivity. The simple idea of Starbucks giving their customers a list of syrups they can order into their coffee is enough to make the customers convinced that Starbucks is giving them an insider's "secret." This is one of their biggest profit strategies. Starbucks employs simple "recipes" that can attract the attention and curiosity of most individuals. Additionally, in their Instagram biography, Starbucks also includes a link to their website for a Pistachio Latte. This is one of their new beverages and is something that is gaining popularity. According to Camila Barbeito (2021), "All in all, the Pistachio Latte is a fun flavor alternative I'll definitely be ordering again." This also shows that Starbucks can introduce "strange" flavors and still have enough of a following for the product to be successful. This profits the company immensely and contributes to their success as a company.

Target Market and Provided Value

The largest portion of Starbucks's target market are individuals who enjoy coffee. Based on the National Coffee Association, 64% of individuals in the United States drink coffee (Deneen, 2019). Since this is the majority of the population, Starbucks has high chances of gaining a large following. On their Instagram page, Starbucks has 18.1 million followers. Despite the large following, there are some customers who still prefer the main website over the app and the social media site. Luckily, Starbucks caters to this and can gain the attention of most individuals by appealing to their preferred method of customer/business interaction.

As stated previously, one example of the provided value that Starbucks's Instagram account offers to its users is the "secret" recipes that would have otherwise not been public. Another example of the value in the site is that most posts are about self-care.

This can be seen in Starbucks's profile biography, saying, "To inspire and nurture the human spirit—one person, one cup, one neighborhood at a time" (Starbucks, 2021). Additionally, there are posts that focus on inspiration for having a good day and taking care of oneself. Individuals who follow the site find value in the idea that the coffee company cares about them personally. This will then translate into how a customer views the brewing process of their order and will also see that as an act of care on Starbucks's part.

Starbucks, undoubtedly, has created value in the form of a nurturing caretaker and is the true resemblance of their logo—a siren. Starbucks conveys to their customers that they are enchanting and America's number one coffee shop. The "siren call" is their posts luring its followers in with the idea that each individual is cared for and appreciated on a personal level with the company. Those who know Starbucks can identify the coffeehouse with just the symbol alone. This is how deeply Starbucks has ingrained themselves in their ever-growing empire of loyal individuals.

Value Provided to Firms

The value that SSM provides for firms is that of communication with individuals who may or may not be part of the target market, to advertise and to learn more about their target market and how to tailor content accordingly. This aids in the marketing strategy and gives the firm who uses social media a more personal reputation among individuals.

As with the Starbucks's Instagram account, the value that it creates for the individuals who follow the account is then translated into value for the firm in return. For example, if a customer leaves positive feedback on one of the Instagram posts, this may then translate into more service from others who follow the positive feedback, increasing sales. This type of word of mouth (WOM) could then lead to the building of an "army of advocates." This is described by Barker (2017), saying:

Advocacy goes beyond focusing social media efforts around brands themselves and simply publishing content about the brand...While social media can be a platform for businesses to share their content, it can become even more valuable by building the number of people who are passionate about a business...These brand advocates will talk to their friends—not because of a contest or prize—but because they are truly passionate about a business and want to tell the world. (p.37)

When this occurs, there is a burst of attention that the company receives from those who were reached through the positive WOM of the "army." On the other hand, the negative WOM can also create positive results in the end, because the negativity will invoke some curiosity to some individuals and could potentially increase sales. Additionally, some of the individuals who spread the negative WOM, if handled properly by the firm, could even convert the individuals into part of the "army." As stated by Barker (2017), "Some very passionate brand advocates can start off as disgruntled customers or skeptical purchasers" (p. 38). In every journey of a firm, there will be negativity that follows. How a company takes care of this situation is what can make or break business. For Starbucks, this has been shown in some of their campaigns that have both succeeded and failed. While the success of the company continues, it is obvious that the way Starbucks has handled opposition has kept them a fan favorite, with little scarring from their struggles as a business.

Value Provided Due to Campaigns

One of the campaigns that brought value to Starbucks was their post dedicated to #BlackHistoryMonth. The campaign was centered around the idea of bringing back peace and to love one another to make a difference. Inspired by the racial events in 2020, Starbucks launched a campaign that welcomed any and all customers who walk through their doors. The post even included a quote from one of their managers who made a comment about bringing peace and fighting for justice. At the end of the post, Starbucks referred to their employees as "associates" to show their commitment and high level of regard that Starbucks has for their employees.

This brought value to Starbucks because it shows that Starbucks is accepting of all beliefs and people. This paints Starbucks as a judgment-free space and the

company could start to see support from the Black community as a result. Because all employees are “associates,” the respect from the employees towards the business increases since most companies do not refer to their employees in this manner. Since Starbucks’s values are centered around the concept of acceptance and respect, the posts on their social media reflect this and serves as a constant reminder that Starbucks supports all communities.

Another example of a successful campaign was that of the #whatsyourname campaign that was held in honor of the LGBTQ community in 2020. This campaign started with the idea to invite those who identified with the community of LGBTQ individuals to have the names that they wanted to be identified by written on their cups and their new names would be announced when their order was ready. During this campaign, the symbol that Starbucks used was that of the mermaid. In support of the community and the tough times that occur during some individuals’ transitions, every special edition mermaid cookie sale would add to the fund for the Mermaid charity.

This brought value to Starbucks because of the respect and appreciation of those who go through the long, tough journey of transitioning, and this campaign saw an increase in sales and money being donated to the charity. Much like the #BlackHistoryMonth campaign, the #whatsyourname campaign created a safe space for acceptance and a judgment-free zone in which anyone could find approval. Starbucks has undoubtedly created value in this concept and many individuals have supported this throughout the years.

Risks and Disadvantages

There is always a risk when it comes to releasing a post on social media. Not everyone is going to accept what the company is saying, and there can be some backlash that comes out of it as a result. An example of an “epic fail” is the “Race Together” campaign. This campaign was specifically tailored to the idea that all races should be respected. To “prove” this, the campaign urged the employees to write “Race Together” on each customer’s cup to start a conversation about racial issues. The employees did not have training on how to approach this heavy topic, and some customers found this offensive. In some cases, there were comments from customers saying that they didn’t have time to stand around and talk about race and how history has affected the current state of the world. It would make them late to their meetings. This could also become inconvenient if the conversation became heated and would cause the line to be backed up, inadvertently causing other individuals to be late for their meetings as well (Duryee, 2015). When the backlash came, some managers from varying Starbucks locations decided to block comments on their social media since they claimed they were feeling verbally attacked by customers. Another aspect of this campaign that angered some individuals was that the post that mentioned “Race Together” was a picture of white employees handing out drinks and discussing racial issues. The Black community did not take well to this and was another factor that contributed to the failed campaign.

Another example of a risk is when Starbucks posts campaigns such as the “Race Together” and #whatsyourname, there may be some backlash as to why specific

individuals need to be targeted for a campaign. This may come across as the company favoring certain individuals over others. While this factor is hardly one to make a negative dent in the company, it is still a factor that could create some negative backlash for the company. For example, older generations may feel alienated by some of the campaigns. While the target market is not mainly comprised of older generations such as the Baby Boomers, there is still a large enough population from this generation to be affected by the campaigns that Starbucks releases on their social media. Since Starbucks is known for its value in accepting all individuals, there should be more attention given to some of the older generations who comprise a portion of Starbucks's customer base. For now, however, there is still a gap in Starbucks's campaigns in that not every generation is considered on their social media.

Starbucks's social media is there to encourage individuals to become a part of the "family" and to enjoy what Starbucks has to offer: community, acceptance, and warm memories in a cup.

Conclusion of Overall Value

Overall, the value that Starbucks's Instagram account offers is more positive than the potential risks that it could cause. Because of this, Starbucks may have yet an increase in their following in future years. From "secret" recipes to inspirational posts, Starbucks's social media is there to encourage individuals to become a part of the "family" and to enjoy what Starbucks has to offer: community, acceptance, and warm memories in a cup.

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