What is Social Media Marketing?

Interact with consumers on social media
Improve social media campaigns
Attract new online customers
Target the right customers with social
Use native advertising on Social
Influence purchasing decision with Social
Develop Social Media Strategy
Efficiently promote your page
Get more website visits
10 Laws of Social Media
Improve your social media engagement
How to create visual and emotional content
Increase social media engagement for free
Get more views on video using social media

How to use social media ads
How to make a personality for your business on social media
Increase brand awareness with social media
How to tell a good story on social media
Identify social media goals
Keep your fans engaged
Grow your online audience
Use social media to get consumers in your store
Optimize your content
Define social media tone of voice
How to build a content strategy
Design a social media campaign
Increase click through rates
How to use real-time engagement
When I hear people debate the ROI of social media? It makes me remember why so many business fail. Most businesses are not playing the marathon. They’re playing the sprint. They’re not worried about lifetime value and retention. They’re worried about short-term goals.

~Gary Vaynerchuk, founder of the social media agency VaynerMedia and author of Jab, Jab, Jab, Right Hook.
Facebook revealed that at the beginning of 2015, the company had approximately 1.3 billion users. For comparison, the total US population consists of 320 million people and the Netherlands consist of 16 million inhabitant. If every register person in these two countries were on Facebook, they would only amount to 25% of the total Facebook users. It is no surprise that companies are interested in social media. However, there has been some debate as to how and if companies should use social media. On the one hand, there are many books and articles online that give tips and strategy on how to successfully use social media. The majority of these articles focus on specific tips that every company should use. On the other hand, there are companies who think that social media is not effective. In fact, the vice president of Forrester Research, a global and advisory firm, stated that “It's clear that Facebook and Twitter don't offer the relationship that marketing leaders crave, yet most brands still use these sites as the centerpiece of their social effort – thereby wasting significant financial, technological, and human resources on social networks that don’t deliver value (Becks, 2014). Both sides of the argument sees social media as a one size fits all glove. Either it will work for every company or it will not work for any of them. Furthermore, these two viewpoints on social media have something else in common. Whenever they talk about social media as either good or bad, it's always in the context of results. It's either social media will or will not help your companies get more customers. In fact, the main selling point of social media for companies are the ROI (return on investment). However, the added value for every company should not be in the results, because not every company aims for the same customers or target. If the value of social media lies not in the results it can offer, what is the general added value of social media that would apply to all companies?
Before going into social media marketing, there needs to be a definition of what a social media actually is. Meriam Webster (n.d.), defines social media as “forms of electronic communication (as Web sites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content.” In order to be a social media platforms, there are three points that these platforms have to meet. First, it has to be a platform that is only available for electronic devices (laptop, phone, tablet, etc.). Second, users should be able to share certain information with each other, which includes both for a broader audience (for a larger group) and for personal interaction (for one person). Additionally, social media platforms are not created for advertising purposes, but as a form of community building and communication for people. Some of the biggest social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat did not have an advertising feature at the beginning of their platforms. The advertising feature came later. Social media is not a platform for companies, but a digital platform where people communicate and share information with each other.

If social media platforms are not meant for companies, why do they have advertising feature at all? Furthermore, companies who don’t pay for advertising have a low reach on their posts. For example, it has been said that organic posts on Facebook only reach between 5% and 10% of people who liked the company page. Looking at these figure, one can easily think that social media platforms are hostile towards companies. However, there is another, and more probable, reason why social media platforms have low organic reach and an advertising service. The problem starts with what Schaefer (2014) calls Content Shock. This phenomenon explains what happens when social media continues to grow and more companies continue to put so much content that people can’t process all the information. For example, if there wasn’t a filter, someone would see on average over 2,000 company posts a day. This would also change how social media platforms process. To avoid content shock, social media platforms have an advertising system. This allows companies to aim specific people for an amount of days. It’s a system that is meant to efficiently organize the messages sent out by companies to consumers. Organic (unpaid) posts still aim at a too large group, which is why the reach is low. The advertising system is also a way for social media to control that the messages by companies don’t look like the typical advertisements. It is a method that will keep companies’ posts within the values of the platforms. Facebook wants companies to be authentic and share what excites companies, Twitter wants companies to keep it conversational and write as though companies are writing with a good friend, Instagram wants companies to use high quality pictures like the ones users are already seeing from companies/people they are following, and Snapchat wants companies to put narratives first. Social Media let’s companies use social media (both paid and unpaid) as long as they don’t change what the platforms stand for and that they don’t overflow user’s pages with advertisements.

While the different platforms all want to keep their values intact, they are not used the same way by consumers. According to Wang (2013), social media can be categorized into two section. First, there are the prescribed platforms. These are platforms that focus on social interactions. It’s about primarily connecting people with their family and friends.
online. Second, there are the elastic platforms. These platforms focus on shared interests. The main focus of these platforms are in connecting people with each other based on common interests and values. In figuring out where a platform falls, there are three key points to look for. First of all, there is the suggested connections. For a prescribed platform there will be connections based on friends or friend of a friend. These platforms are built to find people you might know based on who you are already connected to. The elastic platforms find connections based on user’s interests. These platforms automatically look for shared interests between people, even if there aren’t any common connection. Secondly, there is the names of these connections. The name for connected people on platforms reveal a deeper connection. Words such as “friends” are used to show how two people are connected. On the other hand, elastic platforms use words to indicate a connection that might not be there offline. Words such as followers are used that do not necessarily indicate offline connections. Lastly, there is the username. Prescribed platforms required users to have their real name. On these platforms, users are discouraged or penalized for using names that is not their given names. It is seen as a “fake account” if the name does not belong to a user. Furthermore, this user is only allowed to have one account with the “true user”. On elastic platforms this is not important. A user can have many accounts with many different username. Because the focus is on interests it does not matter who a person is offline.

Social media cannot be seen as one way of marketing anymore because it is a broad word for a group of platforms that have similar characteristics. While initially social media was not built with companies in mind, they have created a way that companies can actively participate in communication with consumers. However, to avoid social media becoming solely an advertisement place, many platforms have taken measures to insure that companies keep the values of social media, whether a platform focuses on prescribed or elastic tendencies. To conclude, social media has one role when it comes to how companies communicate with consumers. Social media platforms intermediate between companies and consumers, and guides the communication to ensure that the values of the platforms are not disrupted.
With an understanding of what social media is, it’s important now to look at what companies want to accomplish with consumers. In other words, what is marketing? There are three definitions that are important in answering this question. First, Investopedia (n.d.) defines marketing as “everything a company does to acquire customers and maintain a relationship with them … the ultimate goal of marketing is to match a company’s products and services to the people who need and want them, thereby ensure profitability.” According to this definition, marketing is a glue that catches and holds customers to the company. Furthermore, the company is successful in marketing if they can get the right product to the right customers. Second, the American Marketing Association (n.d.) states that marketing is “activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large.” In this definition marketing takes many different form. It can be a person, an activity, or even an organization. It is a marketing as long as it participates in an interaction with consumers. Third, Philip Kotler (n.d.) sees marketing as “the science and art of exploring, creating, and delivering value to satisfy the needs of a target market at a profit.” Mr. Kotler sees marketing as a process of satisfying customer’s needs with something that is valuable. According to these three definition, a general definition of marketing shows that it is about the interaction between companies and consumers, which can take many different form based on a company’s strategy.

While many company use marketing as a method to communicate and interact with consumers, companies have different marketing strategies. According to Jacobs and Mossinkoff (2007), there are two opposite perspectives when it comes to what companies focus on. First, there is the (hyper) modern perspective. Companies who are more hypermodern want to be in control. They use meticulous calculation to figure out what consumers want and how they can fulfill their latent needs. What is important in this category is the level of products. Second, there is the postmodern perspective. Companies who are more postmodern in nature don’t aim at controlling every aspect of marketing. In fact, they give control over to consumers. They see consumers as self-efficient and aware of what they want. Postmodern companies tend to focus more on the level of values. There are level of hypermodern and postmodern. Furthermore, there is also interactive marketing, which falls in the middle of the two extremes. Companies who fall in the interactive marketing see both level of products and values as essential to their strategies. Whether or not it is possible to control consumers or if consumers know exactly what they want, companies do tend to focus on the level of products (e.g. our clothes are the best quality you will get for such a cheap price) and level of values (e.g. our brand has the same passion for sports as you do).

![Marketing at extremes, including intermediate forms (Jacobs & Mossinkoff, 2007)](image-url)
Next to the different strategies, there are differences in the execution of marketing. According to the Glue Value model by Mossinkoff (2012), there are three key points in the aim of marketing. First, there is the strategic relevance. These are the aim of the marketing approach. On the left side of the model focuses on characteristics of the products. It is about characteristics of a product (such as efficient) or what it represents (status). On the right side of the model focuses more on community building. The brands focus on creating a community through belonging or differentiation. Second, there is the cultural context. On the left side of the model the meaning of the message is universal. The messages of these marketing approach are clear and easy to understand by most people. On the right side of the model the meanings of the messages are contextual. In this situation, the messages are aimed to be deciphered by specific people. Last, there is the question of whether the message triggers group activities. On the left side of the model there are no group activation. On the right side of the model there are group activities. Consumers start to create activities where they share or act on certain values of the company. An example of a group activity surrounding a brand is the Nutella Party, where people host parties for people who love the brand. Marketing is not implemented the same way for everyone, companies differentiate in different aspects, such as strategic relevance, cultural context, and group activity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Glue Value</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Relevance</td>
<td>Efficiency &amp; Effectiveness</td>
<td>Recognition &amp; Status</td>
<td>Belonging &amp; Reciprocalisation</td>
<td>Differentiation through belonging</td>
<td>Differentiation through contribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural context</td>
<td>Meaning is shared worldwide</td>
<td>Meaning is shared in a specific society</td>
<td>Shared in a specific society and historical context</td>
<td>For some consumers meaning is localised</td>
<td>For most consumers meaning is localised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group triggering</td>
<td>No triggering</td>
<td>Standing out from the crowd</td>
<td>Massive gatherings</td>
<td>Occasional smaller gatherings</td>
<td>Frequent smaller gatherings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples of related brand values</td>
<td>Faster, Cheaper, Vitamin rich Lower cholesterol ‘Improved’ Reliable</td>
<td>Wealth, Perfection, Social achievement, Sex/Nastiness, ‘Cute’</td>
<td>Authenticity, ‘Tongue-in- cheek’ humour, Ideological values (environment, health), National identity, Popular sports</td>
<td>Marginalization, Controversial issues, Offence</td>
<td>References require knowledge of a quite small group of ‘those in-the-know’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3: The Glue Value qualifier (Mossinkoff 2012).

While marketing is universal and available for all companies, why and how it is used varies. Some companies choose to focus more on why their products are valuable for consumers while other companies will focus more on values that tie consumers together. Furthermore, the implementation of strategies are not the same either. Some companies choose to focus on a large crowd with special features of their products, while other companies focus contextual messages for specific group. Marketing is a very complex interaction between companies and consumers, and the reason lies in the fact that the aim of companies with marketing are very diverse.
If social media is a group of platforms for people to communicate with each other, and companies aim at creating an interaction with them, how do companies interact with consumers on social media? This question is essential to understanding social media marketing. It’s not about the consumers, but about how companies approach them in the digital world. In this section, the before mentioned marketing theories are applied to social media. The aim is to find out what social media marketing is on a broader level and to also look at some of the different ways that it is used by companies.

First, it’s important to look at how companies with different marketing strategies use social media. As mentioned before, companies can focus on the level of products, level of values, or a combination of the two. Unlike a campaign where a company has limited images and texts to convey the marketing message, social media gives companies the ability of using many posts for this. Because social media is about using multiple posts to send a marketing message, both products and values are almost always visible, regardless of a company’s strategy. However, there is a difference in how a company who focuses on level of products use social media as opposed to a company who focuses more on values. Companies who focus on the level products primarily focuses on what makes their products great, but they also use values as a way to increase their products. For example, a company that aims at convincing consumers that their products have the latest fashion trends for a good price would use values to increase this level of product. They might show the latest picture of fashion shows or write blogposts about popular events, but it’s a way to increase their standing as fashion forward products. On the other hand, a company that focuses on both products and values would use social media differently. A company that focuses on interactive marketing, would use products and values together. For example, a sports company would use their shoes as a way to connect sports and exercise enthusiast together, but they would also use this value to show that their shoes are the best for this value. Regardless of whether a company leans more towards (hyper) modern or postmodern marketing, on social media they have to deal with both products and values, but the difference lies in which one is dominantly presence and how they use the other aspect.

H&M using Coachella to increase their product’s level of fashion.

Adidas using their products to increase value and quality of products.
Second, it’s important to look at how companies who aim for different consumers act on social media. More specifically, there is a difference in how a company who focuses on contextual messages for specific people use social media than companies who focuses on direct and clear messages. Many social media focuses on what makes them different in terms of people who use their platforms. Facebook focuses on the quantity of people, Twitter and Instagram let’s company know that the majority of their users are in their 20s, and Snapchat market themselves as a hotspot for young millennials. Furthermore, some platforms focus on social relationships of users while others focus on their interests. It’s natural that companies use specific platforms for specific messages. However, when looking at companies, they tend to use the same texts on multiple social media platforms. A company that focuses on clear and direct messages use this method to get as many people as possible to read their message. It’s casting a net to catch as many fishes as possible. A company who focuses on contextual messages also uses this method. By using a contextual text on multiple platforms, a company increases the chance that the right people will read the text and understand it. A company that wants to get as many consumer as possible uses direct and clear text on multiple platforms to attract as many people as possible, and a company that aims at specific groups uses contextual texts to find the right people to attract.

Example of clear and easy to understand message on multiple social media. Notice how they explain exactly what earth day is with words like “green, reusable, and recyclable”.

Example of a contextual message. People who follow sports would know who the tennis player is and what competition he won.

The way companies use social media depends on their marketing strategies. Naturally not all companies use it the same way. However, what is the broad reason why companies use social media as a marketing tool? While there are many social media strategies, there is one thing that they all have in common. Whether a company aims for level of products, level of values, broad audience, or specific people, it all comes down to reach. In social media terms, a reach is the amount of people that will see a company’s message. Social media is generally about reach, but different strategies and implementation of strategies have different reasons and approach to social media.
The question of what values social media offers companies is more complicated because of the diverse aims of platforms and companies. While companies and platforms are diverse, there is a fundamental value that social media offers companies. At the base of social media, there are platforms that offer companies the opportunity to interact with consumers. However, to avoid that social media platforms are flooded with advertising, the communication is supervised. Companies have their own ways of increasing reach, such as using the same text and image on multiple social media. The relationship between companies and social media is more complicated than it seems. On the one hand, social media wants companies to use their platform to connect with consumers in an authentic way that fits with the values of social media. On the other hand, companies want to use these platforms as a way to communicate their marketing messages to consumers. Understanding the different viewpoints is the first step in understanding what the value of social media is for companies. However, because social media was not built to meet companies’ return on investments, it is not always understood. Social media marketing is not just one of the many marketing approaches, there is actually a more complex system which makes it a category on its own.
REFERENCE LIST


Mossinkoff, M., 2012, Modern marketing in disguise: creating value connections between companies and consumers.

