



**The Grass Always Looks Greener on Social Media:
an analysis of social media marketing**

**University of Miami
M.S Media Management**

**Lianna Christine Tsakonas
lxt128@miami.edu
JMM 632: Current Issues in Media Management
Professor Paul Driscoll
Fall 2019**

Abstract

The primary objective of this paper is to research social media marketing. It scrutinizes both traditional marketing techniques and social media marketing techniques. Ultimately, it determines that social media marketing is an exceptionally effective approach and advantageous to the success of a business. Additionally, it investigates different approaches and techniques correlated with social media marketing. It discovers that social media marketing is paramount to executing a successful marketing campaign because it is cost-efficient and especially capable of promoting commodities to wide audiences. The paper provides various examples and discusses different social media platforms to show how impactful social media marketing is to a business

First, this research paper explains what marketing is and why it is important. Next, it will explain what traditional marketing was and why it is no longer effective. Then, it will explain how and why digital marketing emerged, what it is, and why it is more beneficial than traditional marketing. Afterwards, it will thoroughly evaluate social media marketing including its different methods including content marketing, viral marketing, influencer marketing, aesthetic / interactive marketing, and paid distribution. From there, it will describe what it takes to be a successful social media marketer. Finally, it will conclude with arguments based on the research findings.

Introduction

Marketing is the process of promoting commodities including, but not limited to, businesses, products, and people. Initially there was traditional marketing, but with the advancement of technology, a new concept of digital marketing has emerged. This paper researches social media marketing, a fundamental method of digital marketing. It will explore the primary differences between traditional marketing and digital marketing in order to determine how social media marketing is transforming the traditional marketing landscape, and if, how, and why social media marketing is effective. I hypothesize that my research will show that social media marketing will undermine traditional marketing and is an effective approach to modern day marketing. Researching this method of marketing is critical because social media has become a prominent part of everyone's lives; moreover, it has changed the way we interact with the commodities that marketing promotes.

The process of marketing is important because a comprehensive marketing plan for a commodity is more valuable than the commodity itself. Eight out of ten online stores fail within the first year because they failed to market successfully (Wertz). These businesses primarily focus on their product and/ or service rather than the marketing techniques to successfully promote their commodity. Although it might appear like the commodity being promoted is most important, an inadequate marketing plan will not bring relevance or interest to the commodity (Wertz). Marketing is of the utmost importance to a successful business because as Jaiden Vu, CEO of Ventura Cosmetics, said, "It's not the best product that wins but the best-known one that wins" (Twitter).

Traditional Marketing

Traditionally, marketing strategies included techniques such as printing, broadcast, mail, cable, and/ or landline telephones. Every business typically used one, but in most cases more than one (depending on their allocated marketing budgets), traditional marketing techniques to promote their commodities (Marketing Schools). Initially, this worked successfully because people did particular things such as read newspapers, listen to the radio, or watch cable television. However, now that the news is accessed on the internet, the radio industry has been overpowered by streaming services accessible at all times and places with wireless headphones, and cable viewers are rapidly cord-cutting also to subscribe to streaming services on different digital devices (JMM 632), traditional techniques are no longer integrated into our daily lives and are no longer viable marketing sources (Figure 1). Therefore, these traditional marketing strategies are no longer successfully promoting commodities.

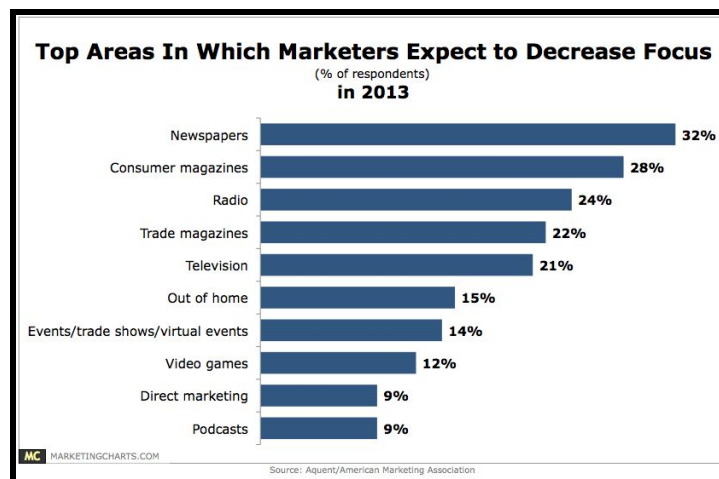


Figure 1

Moreover, traditional marketing no longer works because of detrimental drawbacks that prevent it from being effective. First off, the exposure is short-lived and not searchable. When something was printed on a billboard, a viewer passed the ad and continued on with their drive; they could not save the ad or send it to others, and it was easy to quickly forget about it. Secondly, traditional marketing techniques are not able to target a narrow audience. If a

commercial is aired, it can be thoughtfully placed on a specific channel at a specific time, but it cannot exclusively be disseminated to the largest amount of the business's target audience.

Lastly, it is challenging to monitor engagement, viewership, and progress of traditional marketing because no direct data can be gathered (Yusof). For example, an individual could have drove by a billboard, but might not have actually seen it, the commercial may have aired, but the television may have been left on after everyone left, or the magazine might have been printed, but it might not have been purchased. Now with the advancement of technology, traditional marketing and it's drawbacks have started to vanish and digital marketing has emerged (Lavinsky).

Digital Marketing

Digital Marketing exists because technological innovations such as computers, mobile phones, watches, and tablets now enable advertising to be integrated into our lives, which have adapted new technology inventions. Out of the seven and a half billion people in the world, there are currently over four billion people who use the Internet for an average of six and a half hours per day (Figure 2). This number has been rapidly increasing by more than one million new users per day since January 1, 2019 (Kemp). These individuals are doing anything from using search engines, enjoying social media platforms, exploring e-commerce sites, utilizing streaming service subscriptions, etcetera (Kemp). Technology adoption is currently on the rise and the number of individuals who actively use them are expected to continuously increase at a rapid rate.

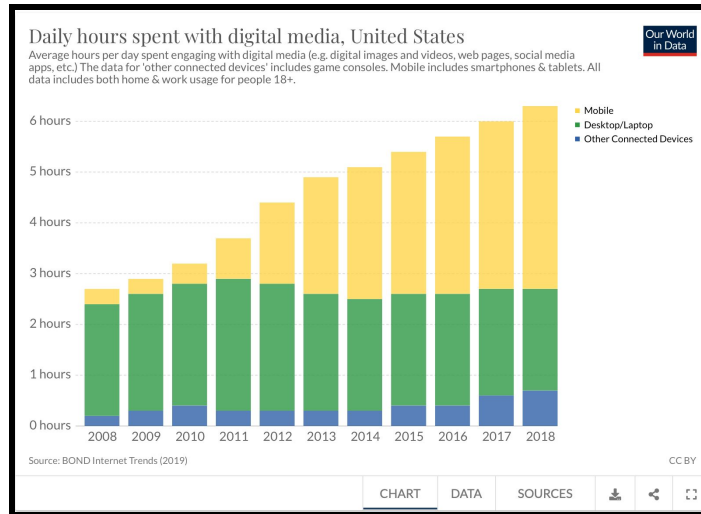


Figure 2

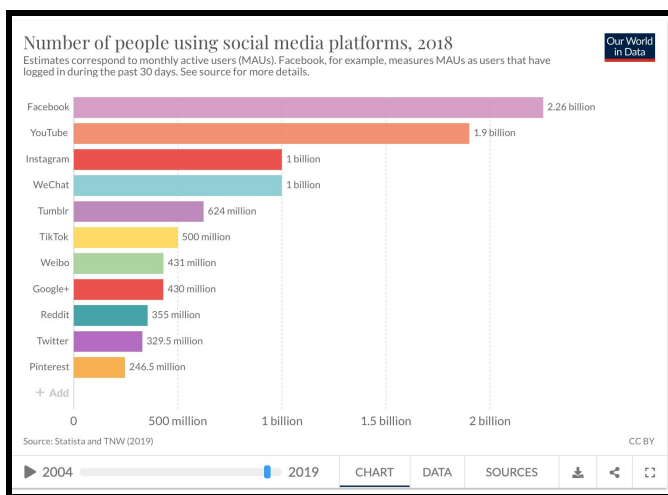
Digital marketing is “the use of digital technology and also processes, in the development, distribution, and promotion of products and services” (Doyle). This new marketing concept has been developed around the innovations of digital technologies such as the Internet, mobile devices, digital media, digital communication, etc. Inevitably, since digital technology has emerged in various forms around our entire lives, various digital marketing methods have surfaced. The most common forms of digital marketing include, but are not limited to, Content Marketing, Search Engine Optimization (SEO), Search Engine Marketing (SEM), Social Media Marketing (SMM), Pay-Per-Click Advertising (PPC), Email Marketing, and Mobile Advertising. Although these approaches are all dramatically different compared to traditional marketing, they have all been proven to be more effective in today’s digital world (Revive.digital).

Now that customers can consume products and services directly from the Internet and no longer need to go to the store, digital marketing is essential for businesses to be successful because it provides them with an incentive to make purchasing decisions. With access to the Internet, customers can now easily go online to determine what they want or need to purchase (Standberry). Therefore, a digital marketing campaign can be consequential to the success of a

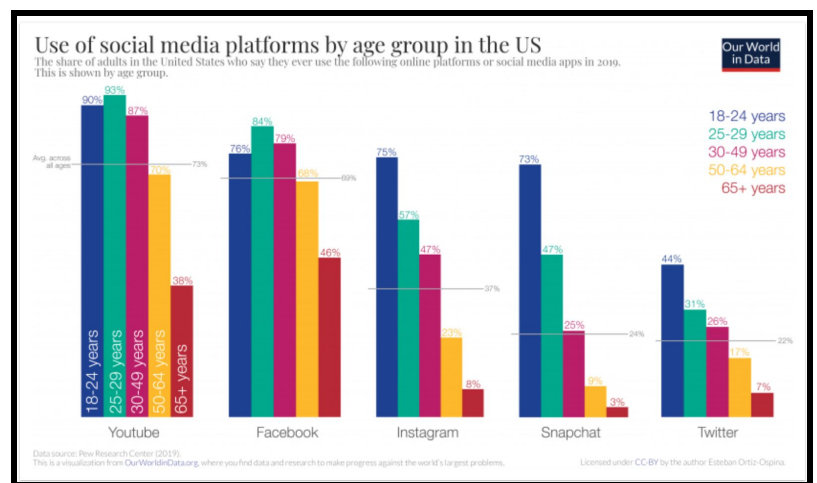
business because it attracts individuals, influences them to make specific purchasing decisions, directs them to the proper channel to finalize their purchase, and eventually enlightens them with satisfaction and converts them into promoters of the business themselves to their friends, family, or general acquaintances.

Social Media Marketing (SMM)

Social media platforms are becoming a predominant part of our daily lives. Said platforms “are used by one-in-three people in the world, and more than two-thirds of all internet users” (Ospina). These platforms began to successfully emerge and entice engagement from numerous people to engage in the early 2000’s when MySpace was launched. Today, there are numerous social media platforms, such as Facebook, Youtube, Instagram, and Snapchat, that all have over a billion active users per month (Figure 3). In 2005, only five percent of US adults used social media; today, in 2019, that percentage has increased to seventy-nine percent. Generally speaking, however, social media is more likely to be used by younger people under the age of twenty-five (Ospina & Figure 4).



(Figure 3)



(Figure 4)

Based on these statistics, marketing experts argue that social media marketing (which will often be referred to as SMM) is the most valuable method in approaching digital marketing; this methods also includes the sub-methods of content marketing, viral marketing, influencer marketing, paid SMM, and aesthetic / interactive marketing approaches. These marketers argue that SMM will be “the next generation of business engagement” due to the fact that social media platforms are accessible to nearly everyone (Evans). SMM is a unique form of marketing because it does not follow the traditional approach of creating promotional information about commodities; instead, it creates content that perceives an enhanced experience with a particular product and/ or service provided by a business for the consumers (Evans).

The McRae Agency, a marketing communications firm in Arizona with over twenty-four years of marketing experience, provides various righteous reasons as to why SMM is effective to companies and/ or individuals whom are doubtful of this new approach. They explain that social media is influential because you can use various social media platforms to produce and distribute exactly what you want your customers to see. Whether it be your company’s mission, or a particular service or product, social media allows a company to build a reputation and perception of the businesses choosing. Moreover, these profiles allow you to develop various forms of content in order to provide repeated exposure, which will continuously remind your followers what you have to offer and increase your brand recognition. Additionally, SMM creates a community and allows a company to build a trusted relationship with their customers, which will allow for influence over followers and in turn, will also make followers appreciate that they have full control over their ultimate purchasing decisions (Chandler).

Content Marketing

Social media marketing always begins with content marketing, which is “a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience - and ultimately, to drive profitable customer action” (Content Marketing Institute). The ultimate goal is for content producers to make the grass (aka the content) look greener (aka more distinctive and valuable) on social media. It is important to know the different adaptation abilities (video, photo, etc.) and capacities (file size) of various platforms so ads can be distributed and circulated across more than one platform, especially since dual usage is very common. Without worthwhile content, SMM cannot successfully market commodities for businesses to target audiences.

Content is most persuasive when it is valuable; individuals who cross ads must want to consume the content and get the value they are interested in (Steimle). Producing quality content requires being mindful of the human attention span, which is eight seconds (alarmingly less than the attention span of a goldfish), that people need less time to identify their engagement decisions and/ or process things to memory, and people do not have the patience nor want to consume content that is too overwhelming (Watson). Marketing Eye, a successful marketing consulting firm in Atlanta, developed an acronym to specify the characteristics of good quality advertise(ments), which reads:

***A** ppeal to the right audience*

***D** raws attention*

***V** alue communication*

***E** ducate the target*

***R** elates to the brand*

***T** rust is key*

***I** nclude a call to action*

***S** hort and sweet*

***E** asy to remember*

Viral Marketing

Viral Marketing is a distinctive technique of social media marketing. This technique aims to “influence consumers to transmit messages and content to other consumers in their social network” (Petrescu). Essentially, viral marketing intentionally produces extraordinary content that will result in widespread circulation of said content across various social media platforms. In order to successfully execute a viral marketing campaign, a business must have extensive information and a clear understanding of how their followers perceive, receive, and engage with content. Successful viral campaigns are “distinct appeals, [and have] entertainment qualities... creative, proactive, and out-of-the-box content... and messages” (Petrescu). Viral Marketing campaigns are considerably cost-efficient because rather than paying for advertisement placement and distribution, it relies on social media users to distribute the content at no cost; therefore, the only capital required for Viral Marketing is of the production of the content itself.

A company that is notorious for utilizing Viral Marketing is Nike. On multiple occasions, Nike has been able to capitalize on Viral Marketing by using controversial subjects as the premise of producing content. Most recently, Nike executed a marketing campaign with Colin Kaepernick, a former NFL athlete, who famously kneeled while the national anthem was sung before his football games, as a way to protest racial injustice concerns, which were ignited under the presidency of Donald Trump. Following the initial publication of the image on social media (Figure 5), the controversial photo instantaneously went viral; it was countlessly reposted, shared, and circulated across other social media platforms. A year later, the advertisement has won an Emmy Award and the viral ad caused Nike shares to increase by thirty-six percent and

added nearly six billion dollars to their market value (Gibson). This campaign is exemplary of how beneficial Viral Marketing can be for profitability.



Figure 5. Nike's Colin Kaepernick ad for the 30th anniversary of "Just do it" campaign (Nike Inc.)

Influencer Marketing

Another advantageous method of social media marketing is Influencer Marketing. This approach “involves marketing products and services with those who have a sway over the things other people buy” (Marketing School). Typically, an influencer has notable expertise, is well known, and/ or has an admirable status in society. An influencer can be an account of a brand, place, company, but in most cases a person. Influencers are not just talented celebrities, they can also be bloggers, vloggers, and other profiles with the accessibility to a multitude of users on social media platforms. All influencers have been able to gain enough respect, trust, and admiration from their followers, which allows them to have influence over their purchasing decisions.

Influencer marketing is strategized based on increasing awareness, in the hopes of unfolding into an increase in sales and/ or consumption based on the relationship between an influencer and their followers. Once a business has outlined its goals for a marketing campaign, they search for an influencer who attracts the same target audience and determine how much the

influencer or influencers should get paid, which depends on the amount of followers they have and the engagement with their content. From there, the company will use “endorsements and product mentions from influencers” (Chen). Companies must work closely with influencers to ensure they are distributing the appropriate message about their commodities in order for the campaign to be successful. To ensure sufficient influence is occurring, measuring the progress of the campaign is crucial.

To determine the results of an influencer marketing campaign, there are several metrics that can be measured. Social media platforms recognize the magnitude of influencer marketing and have made measuring metrics easily accessible and obtainable. Once content is posted, the impressions, which is the amount of times the post has been viewed, can be assessed to ensure ample distribution reach. Additionally, a company can evaluate the amount of likes, clicks, shares, and comments on the influencers post to determine if engagement between followers and the post is adequate to reach their ultimate goals. Moreover, if a company provides an influencer with affiliated links to provide to their followers or customized promo codes for their follower’s purchases, they can measure how many times those links were clicked on or the code was used (Chen).

Influencer marketing is tremendously effective and can result in a business to grow rapidly, which is undoubtedly proven by social media influencer Kylie Jenner, the highest paid influencer for SMM campaigns who makes over a million dollars per post (Hanbury). Across all social media platforms, Jenner has millions of followers, with her highest following being on Instagram with over a whopping one-hundred-forty million followers (Figure 6). In 2016 Jenner started her beauty business, which produces makeup (Kylie Cosmetics) and skincare products (Kylie Skin). Jenner revealed that her social media platforms are the reason for the company’s

success. She has also confirmed that she does not pay any capital for marketing distribution, she only markets on her social media platforms. Over the past year alone, just three short years after her company's launch, they have earned approximately one-hundred seventy-seven million dollars. Earlier this week, Jenner sold fifty-one percent of her company to beauty company, Coty Inc. for six-hundred million dollars, after the company was valued at over one billion dollars (Heller). Jenner is a commendable influencer who has demonstrated both the power of an influencer and the favorable consequences influencer marketing can achieve for the success of a business through the triumph and recent sale of her business.

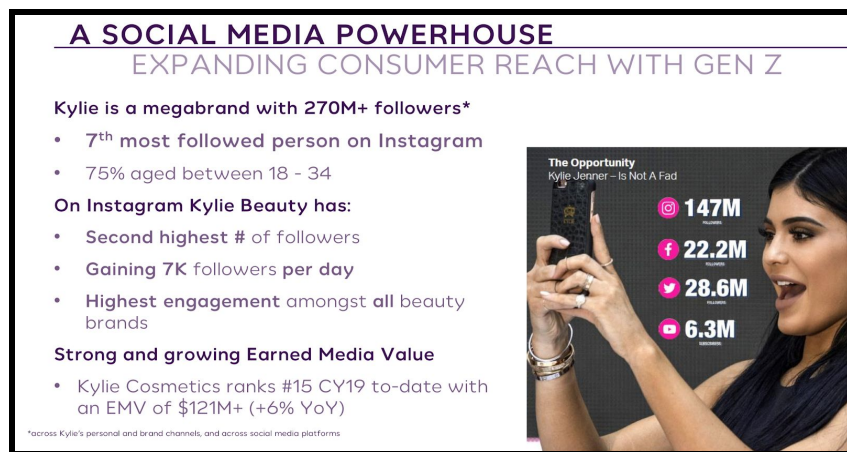


Figure 6. Presentation of Coty and Kylie Jenner Strategic Partnership. November 18, 2019 (Coty Inc.)

Influencer marketing has become a valuable method for successful marketing because it allows consumers to make their own decisions and be confident of their purchases based on their trust, admiration, respect of the influencers. Studies and experiments that have monitored influencer marketing prove the benefits of this particular technique. It is determined that “ninety-two percent of consumers turn to people they know for referrals above any other source” (Newman). Although consumers might not know an influencer personally, the trusted relationship and admiration is influential on purchasing decisions. Moreover, these studies have

been able to prove that on average, for every dollar a business invests into influencer marketing, they make a profit of six dollars and fifty cents, which is a return of more than six-hundred percent of the initial investment. These studies confirm that this technique is impressively and cost efficient.

Aesthetic / Interactive Marketing

A unique method for SMM is to develop an aesthetically pleasing and/ or interactive concept into the production of marketable content. This is mostly useful for businesses that cannot generate revenue online and requires customers to come into their store, but it can also sometimes work for digital based businesses as well. Essentially, the concept of the business must be developed around the idea of a consumer being able to produce social media content themselves. The idea here is for the aesthetic and/ or interactive concept to add value and differentiation to the production of social media content. If this method is executed successfully, it will attract others to desire their own interactions with said concept.

To better comprehend aesthetically aimed / interactive marketing, it is useful to evaluate an execution of this particular approach. The Rosé Mansion, a wine tasting bar, developed their business around the idea of consumers being able to create distinctive social media content through their interactions at the bar. To enter as a customer, you must pay a flat rate of fifty dollars at the door before starting the tasting. Instead of traditionally sitting at a table to taste different wines, customers stroll through different rooms, each offering a different type of rosé, that each present a new interactive concept that is developed around the ability for consumers to create aesthetically visible content for their personal social media platforms. For example, one room has a ballpen with strobe lights to play, another room has bathtubs full of flower petals to

sit in, and a different room has low-hanging chandeliers for people to swing on (Figure 7). The success of this business is a result of aesthetically aiming / interactive marketing because social media users have distributed their personally produced content from their interactions at this bar, which established a prevailing reputation for the business and created a desirability for others to want to go and create their own content through their own interactions.



Figure 7. Content produced by consumers at The Rosé Mansion in NYC

Paid Distribution

The most costly method of SMM is for a company to pay for production of the content and to also pay social media platforms for the distribution of the advertisements. Essentially, a company “pays to display adverts or sponsored messages to social network users based on user profile” (Gurd). The process of marketing by paying platforms for distribution varies from platform to platform; and, the way the cost incurred can also vary from either a flat rate or a cost per click, depending on the platforms business model.

Although more expensive than other methods of SMM, this method is advantageous because the algorithms social media platforms use, can limit the impressions of a post. For

example, on Instagram content used to be published in chronological order; as a user scrolled through their primary feed, they would see content in the time order it was posted. Now, they generated a new algorithm that arranges posts based the likelihood a user would be interested in a post rather than in chronological order. Therefore, content, viral or an influencer post might not present itself in front of every possible target. As of this week, Instagram is also now removing the ability to see how many likes an influencer receives, making it more challenging for companies planning an influencer campaign to receive requisite data. Paying social media platforms for distribution is useful because they have the necessary data and power to determine when, how, and to whom a post is distributed in order to reach your largest target audience.

Becoming a Social Media Marketing Expert

Although this paper makes social media marketing seem easy, there have been executed campaigns from upstanding companies that have also downright failed. In March 2018, a game company produced an interactive ad and paid Snapchat to distribute it on their platform. When confronted, the ad asked users to choose between slapping Rihanna, a female singer, or punching Chris brown, a male singer, which disgustingly referenced a domestic violence incident between the two singers (Figure 8). Several celebrities and influencers, including Rihanna herself, spoke out about the incident, which caused Snapchat shares to drop five percent overnight, wiped off nearly a billion dollars off of Snapchat's value, and made the company of the game shut down completely (Levin & Snapes). Assuming that social media marketing is easy and not devoting the appropriate amount of time to comprehend the complexities that go into it can lead to detrimental results.

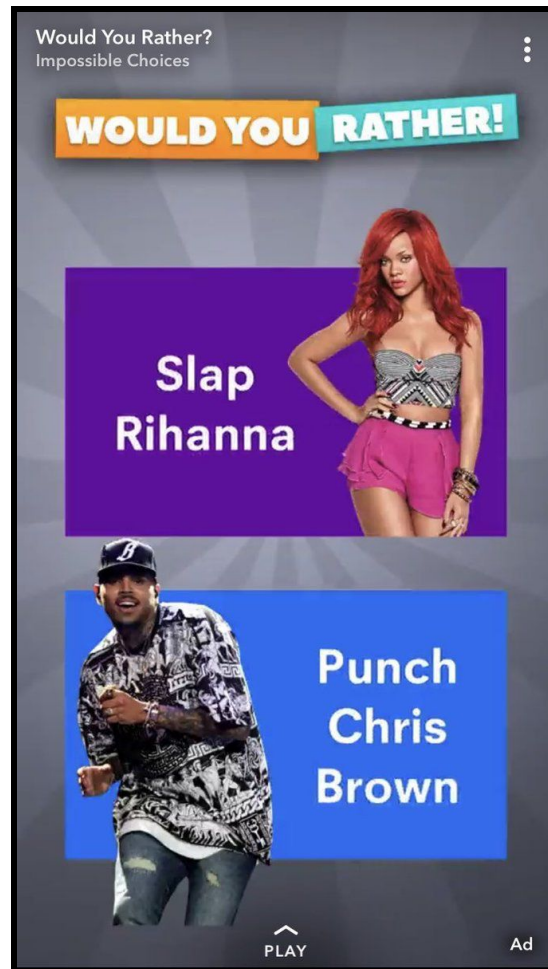


Figure 8. Insensitive advert produced by a gaming company and paid to be distributed on Snapchat

Bearing this in mind, it is important to acknowledge that it is not easy and not anyone can successfully execute a social media marketing campaign. Only an expert who fully comprehends and is knowledgeable on the necessary elements, thoughts, considerations, and research that must go into the planning of the social media campaign can successfully execute one. In order to become a respected expert, one can enroll in an undergraduate or graduate marketing program that focuses on social media marketing (or even digital marketing). Additionally, to keep up with constant changes, tools such as Lynda.com provide informative tutorials that explain social media marketing. In order to be acknowledged as a revered social media marketing expert, one must learn the profundity of how to make the grass look green on social media (Figure 9).



Figure 9. An portrayal of the capabilities of a social media expert (edited by myself)

Conclusions

Based on this research, I confidently conclude that social media marketing is an effective way for businesses to successfully promote commodities. Social media Marketing is exceedingly effective because of the amount of active users of social media, the amount of time people consume on social media, social media platforms are easily accessible to everyone, social media can always make the grass (metaphor for the commodity), and because numerous campaigns have confirmed the ability of great success. All methods including, content marketing, viral marketing, influencer marketing, aesthetic/ interactive marketing, and paid distribution, all strategize on different foundations, but they all have proven to be effective for promoting the offered commodities of a business and achieve pre-established goals of a company.

I also conclude that social media marketing is conquering the traditional marketing landscape to become the newest marketing process. Traditional methods of marketing used to be effective prior to the innovation of digital devices, technology, and platforms. These methods used to be effective because certain things, such as newspapers, used to be a significant part of our daily lives. However, with the continuous advancement of technology, these traditional

methods are no longer effective because we do not interact with the instruments required for traditional marketing. Social media marketing now works more efficiently than traditional marketing because these platforms are easily accessible to all and high in demand. Therefore, savvy use of social media platforms have increased the amount of advertisement exposure, likely of influence, and ability to promote commodities well enough to reach ultimate goals.

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