

Semester Client: Talking Leaves...Books

Research Question: Will Social Media Engagement Increase Sales Through Brand Trust,
Credibility, and Loyalty?

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COM 641

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Independent bookstores are competing with conglomerates like Amazon and various e-bookstores constantly. Because of this, I was interested in determining whether engagement from independent bookstores online would have an impact conversion rates. I defined conversion rates as sales, “follows”, and “likes” received on the social media platforms utilized by the businesses. The research conducted included literature reviews, an in-depth interview, content analysis, and a survey. The findings and recommendations for Talking Leaves...Books are summarized below, beginning with the literature review.

The articles I reviewed included, “How Does Consumer Engagement Evolve When Brands Post Across Multiple Social Media?” and “Sustainable Customer Retention Through Social Media Marketing Activities Using Hybrid-SEM-Neural Network Approach.” The articles discussed the effects of brands using multiple social platforms as well as the impact social media marketing had on brand loyalty. Regarding the types of social platforms used by businesses, the first article concluded that Facebook significantly outperformed its competitors when measuring the reach and engagement of each of the posts. When measuring the impact of social media, the second article determined that when the posts are engaging and emotionally-provoking, they will perform better and generate an increase in participation.

The interview conducted with Lauren Poplawski, Mindshare’s Digital Media Manager, provided me with a lot of insight into the importance of having a solid digital strategy in place that will effectively drive sales and traffic. Lauren reiterated the importance of creating stimulating posts that encourage responses and found that rich media facilitates this objective. In Lauren’s experience, she found that brand loyalty increases when businesses put the effort

and research into developing an effective, engaging social strategy used across various platforms. Building brand loyalty is a great first step in increasing sales.

To corroborate my findings from the literature reviews and the in-depth interview, I performed a content analysis. I made sure to focus my content analysis on independent bookstore accounts because the literature studies and in-depth interview gave more of a broad overview of businesses and social media. I went through the Instagram accounts of five local independent bookstores and assessed the impacts of hashtag strategies in each post. My research deduced that search volume and relevance are important factors to research prior formulating a hashtag strategy. Posts that were filled with random hashtags never outperformed posts that more closely reached their targeted audience.

Additionally, I conducted a survey to measure the usage of social media by various age groups. The 10-question survey was created using Google Forms and was administered to friends on social media and colleagues at work. The ages of the respondents ranged from 20-60. 70 percent of the participants were female, and 30 percent were male. The survey was conducted in a Likert format where the respondents were provided with statements that they could agree, disagree, or remain neutral with. The statements were centered around engagement from brands and included statements that measured the frequency in which the respondents used social media and how likely they were to engage with brands who offered promotions, product release information, or various blog posts in their social strategies. 90 percent of the respondents from the survey answered that they use social media every day. This is important to note because businesses must find the best medium to connect with their

consumers, and presently that is online. The results from the survey emphasized the importance of brands using engaging tactics to interact and build trust with their users digitally.

Based on my research conducted throughout this semester, I would recommend that Talking Leaves...Books places an emphasis on its social media strategy and makes a concerted effort to connect with its users. The research concluded that in order to build trust and credibility, brands that are active online will receive increased engagement, ultimately leading to higher sales and loyal customers. Some ideas that Talking Leaves should consider include creating polls where members of the community can vote on which books should be selected for book clubs, adding rich media (e.g., videos) to their posts, offering promotions where users who use a hashtag or share a post linked to the promotional opportunity will have a chance to receive a discount on a new book release or a signed copy of a book where an author is coming to do a live read. The more engaging and entertaining the posts can be, the better for the success and engagement rates for Talking Leaves. This strategy will work to not only increase the engagement within each of the posts, but it will increase the number of "followers" the accounts have. The customer-independent bookstore relationship will the store increase sales and achieve its goal of consumers choosing Talking Leaves...Books over Amazon for their next book purchase.