Ephemeral Social Media Content - Remember after Seeing instead of Burn after Reading

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Abstract

Ephemeral social media content, a type of Social media content that takes on a central function in social media, refers to content that automatically disappears from social media platforms (like Instagram) after a certain amount of time. Currently, this format is used by more than 500 million users every day. Using Instagram Stories Ads, advertisements can be placed in the same format. The aim of this study is to find out which content and elements of Instagram Stories ads appeal to certain target groups of a large Swiss sporting goods manufacturer along the notorious marketing funnel used by the sporting goods manufacturer. Various Instagram stories ads of a large sporting goods manufacturer were tested by means of an online experiment with regard to their suitability for the different phases of the marketing funnel: Three recommendations for action for the design and area of application of so-called "ephemeral social media content" were derived.

Keywords: ephemeral content, social media, online advertising

Track: Digital Marketing & Social Media

1. Introduction

Academics and practitioners have taken it upon themselves to investigate and learn which channels should be equipped with which content to accompany the management of the brand experience throughout the customer journey (Marketing Science Institute, 2019). Ephemeral Social Media Content ("ESMC") is a type of content that can be used to achieve marketing objectives along the customer journey (Ahrholdt, Greve, & Hopf, 2019) and takes on a central function in the social media (Bayer, Ellison, Schoenebeck, & Falk, 2016). ESMC refers to ephemeral content that disappears from social media platforms within 24 hours (Beilharz, 2020). The pioneer of ESMC is the social network Snapchat, which was initially used mainly by teenagers after its launch in 2011 - mainly because of its self-solving function, which other platforms did not offer at the time (Beilharz, 2020). Snapchat was able to continuously increase daily user numbers from 2014 to the end of 2019 (Anderson, 2015). Instagram and LinkedIn already rolled out their own ESMC versions, Twitter plans to do so in the future (BR Web Desk, 2020; Kreutzer, 2018; Milz, 2020). Instagram Stories ("Stories" for short) are used by more than 500 million users every day. One third of the most-viewed Stories are published by companies. Stories ads can be used to display advertisements in the same format. (Kemmler & Raasch, 2018). A large sporting goods manufacturer from Switzerland (Up AG for short) would like to find out which ESMC content types should be optimally used along the marketing funnel and the associated goals. The team of authors took these inputs and formulated the following question:

> **Which content and elements of the Instagram Stories ads resonate with the testing target audience and are purposeful along the marketing funnel?**

The asset design used for the study is described but not mapped. This empirical study fits within social media marketing, which is one of many tools of online marketing (Kreutzer, 2019).

2. Marketing Funnel

If an event occurs that triggers or highlights a need, the potential customers enter the awareness phase, the first phase of the marketing funnel. (von Hirschfeld & Josche, 2018). In the

Top-of-Funnel (“TOFU“ for short) (Gipp, 2017) potential customers may not yet know whether and what solutions are available for their needs. The goal of TOFU is to inform the potential clientele about the existence of the company and/or product. In terms of ad placement, one metric that is targeted in TOFU to move to the next stage is the click on the ad itself (Ahrholdt et al., 2019). When a person feels a strong urge to satisfy their own need, they look for more information about a solution or product. Now the potential customer has arrived to the middle-of-funnel (MOFU) stage (Gipp, 2017). The metric to be used here, which is to be used as a proxy for transferring the consumer to the next phase, is the addition of a product/service to the shopping cart (= add-to-cart, "A2C") (Ahrholdt et al., 2019). If he knows the brand or product but has not yet purchased a product, the MOFU should show why the person should choose this solution (Zubak, 2019). The third step in the funnel is the conversion (bottom-of-funnel "BOFU") (Gipp, 2017). The potential customer should complete the act of buying the product and thus become a customer - the metric here is therefore the transaction (Ahrholdt et al., 2019). Offerings within the BOFU are extremely specific to the product or service (Gipp, 2017).

3. ESMC Implementation

Instagram's Stories feature allows users to share images or 15-second videos that are displayed in a slideshow. On average, businesses receive a direct message from a user on one in five Stories (Pahrmann & Kupka, 2019). The 'burn after reading' principle of stories leads to the knowledge that messages can be reopened - which in turn can lead to abbreviated and superficial attention (van Nimwegen & Bergman, 2019). Ads on Instagram are perceived by users as more entertaining than those on comparable platforms (van Nimwegen & Bergman, 2019; Voorveld, van Noort, Muntinga, & Bronner, 2018). In 2019, spending on stories ads increased by 40% compared to the previous year (Stelzner, 2020). Over four million monthly advertisers are now active with Stories ads to accompany their target customers at every stage of the marketing funnel (Stelzner, 2020). Various studies have shown that the graphic design has an influence on the further use of stories (Israfilzade & Babayev, 2020; Kircova, Pinarbasi, & Köse, 2020) and on the memory of the display itself (Flecha-Ortíz, Santos-Corrada, Dones-González, López-González, & Vega, 2019; van Nimwegen & Bergman, 2019). The most common elements used are moving image material (videos), the presence of people (including faces) and the presence of calls-to-action (CTAs).

4. Empirical Analysis

In three sets of hypotheses, the three most common elements of the ESCM content design were to be addressed and the extent to which they are suitable for the different phases of the marketing funnel was to be ascertained. In order to optimally investigate the following hypothesis sets, the team of authors decided to conduct a field experiment within the framework of a controlled experiment. In the controlled experiment, the target group members are randomly divided into two groups. One group is shown variant A, the other group variant B of the advertisement (Kohavi & Longbotham, 2017). The definition of the population as well as the random assignment of the subjects into a control and a study group is indispensable for the implementation of a successful experiment (Olbrich, Schultz, & Holsing, 2019). To test these hypotheses, the target group targeting of the Facebook Business Account of Up AG was used, which in turn enables easier and more efficient testing of different ads (Bauer, Greve, & Hopf, 2011). For all hypotheses, the key figure to be investigated was the click-through rate (CTR), the further purchasing behaviour after the click on the basis of the further purchasing process with the conversion rate Add to Cart (CR A2C) and the transaction rate (= Conversion Rate, "CR") (Olbrich et al., 2019).

H1a: The CTR of two ads differ with regard to the presence of moving image material.
H1b: The CR A2C of two ads differ with regard to the presence of moving image material.
H1c: The CR of two ads differ with regard to the presence of moving image material.

H2a: The CTR of two ads differ with regard to the presence of a person (incl. face).
H2b: The CR A2C of two ads differ with regard to the presence of a person (incl. face).
H2c: The CR of two ads differ with regard to the presence of the representation of a person (incl. face).

H3a: The CTR of two ads differ with regard to the presence of the representation of a CTA.

H3b: The CR A2C of two ads differ with regard to the presence of the representation of a CTA.

H3c: The CR of two ads differ with regard to the presence of a CTA.

The following target groups were identified with the business account for the creation of the advertisements: H1 DACH region, female Instagram users, aged 18-65+; H2 Austria and Switzerland, male users aged 18-65+; H3 Germany, male users aged 18-65+ selected. In order to be able to compare the different variants of the assets to be tested with each other, key figures must be determined before the actual experiment (Olbrich et al., 2019). In order to be able to carry out the desired tests, the assets for the advertisements had to be created first. Up AG created ads for each set of hypotheses. Shoe subjects were selected for H1. Variant A shows three static images of the same shoe (same model, same colour) in carousel format. Variant B consists of the same assets as Variant A, but Variant B is moving image footage of the shoe in the same setting. In H2, shoe subjects were also selected, but here these shoes are worn. In variant A, Insta-gram users see the male wearer of the shoe from the height of the calves, whereas in variant B the entire body - including the face - of a male person is visible. For H3, variant A uses the shoe without an animated element, whereas variant B uses an animated swipe-up element that highlights the CTA. The campaigns with the ad groups were implemented in the Up AG ad manager, started on 29.04.2020 and were continuously monitored. The experiment was terminated on 08.05.2020 after the necessary sample volumes were reached.

5. Results

For the statistical evaluation of the data obtained, chi-square tests ("X^2 test") are carried out according to the recommendations in the literature (Bortz & Schuster, 2010). The CTRs show control values in the X2 tests that are higher than the critical threshold value of 3.84. The null hypotheses are thus rejected for all hypotheses when comparing the click-through rates of the respective variants A and B. The CTRs are significantly different everywhere with a 95% confidence interval: The CTRs differ significantly from each other everywhere with a 95% confidence interval. There is no significance at all for the so-called conversion rate (short: "CR", ratio between the number of transactions after a click on the ad and the number of clicks on the ad): Here, the respective X2 tests show control values that are lower than the critical threshold

value of 3.84. The null hypotheses cannot be rejected when comparing the CR of the respective variants A and B. The CR of the respective variants A and B is not significant.

Tabelle 1 Chi-square calculations for CTR, A2C rate & conversion rate (own representation based on (Olbrich et al., 2019)

	$H1_a$	**$H1_b$**	**$H1_c$**	**$H2_a$**	**$H2_b$**	**$H2_c$**	**$H3_a$**	**$H3_b$**	**$H3_c$**
Variants	Click-through-rate	A2C Rate	Conversion Rate	Click-through-rate	A2C Rate	Conversion Rate	Click-through-rate	A2C Rate	Conversion Rate
A	0.54 %	39.61 %	9.74%	0.35 %	44.23 %	8.65 %	0.29 %	45.45 %	7.27 %
B	0.43 %	66.79 %	14.12 %	0.25 %	43.64 %	7.27 %	0.46 %	33.57 %	5.00 %
Chi-Quadrat	5.20*	29.20*	1.70	4.35*	0.01	0.09	8.66*	2.39	0.38

* significant für $p < 0.05$

For the relationship between the number of times that a website visitor who came via ad click placed one or more items in the shopping cart and the number of clicks on the ad, there is a single X2 test control value that is higher than the bounds Here the null hypothesis can be rejected, which is not the case for hypotheses H2 and H3.

6. Discussion

The results of the ads tested for hypothesis set 1 show that the tested ads (variants A and B) differ significantly from each other based on CTR and CR A2C, but this cannot be shown based on CR. Ad A, which shows the static images, has a higher CTR than ad B with the moving images - similar to what is found in the literature (Kemmler & Raasch, 2018). The people who clicked on variant B initiated significantly more ordering processes than those who clicked on variant A. We are therefore in a situation where variant B is operational in the MOFU phase, while variant A is operational in the TOFU phase.

For hypothesis set 2, it could be statistically confirmed that the click-through rate of the tested ads (variants A and B) differed significantly. The ad with the product focus (variant A) resulted in a higher CTR than the one with the person or emotion (variant B). The literature, on the other hand, emphasizes that content with people is particularly effective in reaching targets (Flecha-Ortíz et al., 2019; Kemmler & Raasch, 2018; Kircova et al., 2020). However, this could not be confirmed with regard to the CTR in the experiment conducted with the present sample. The CTR of variant B with the person depicted could have been disturbed by other disturbing influences. It is conceivable that the person depicted (male) was not perceived as likeable by the sample (male) or that the sample could not identify with the person depicted. This possible confounding factor of the personal characteristics of the target group is also mentioned in the academic literature (Hess & Melnyk, 2016). The CTR could also have been disturbed by the presence of further articles of the manufacturer in variant B, as the target group might not be interested in all advertised products. Neither for the MOFU nor for the BOFU phase can significant statements be made with the resulting values.

The results of the ads tested for hypothesis set 3 show that the click-through rates of the tested ads (variants A and B) differ significantly. Ad B with the additional animated element generated a higher CTR than ad A without the animated element (Kemmler & Raasch, 2018). Although variant B of the ads has a higher CTR, the purchase process was completed proportionally more often by people who clicked on ad A, but not significantly more often. Across all three sets of hypotheses, it can be seen that the statements in the literature cannot be applied to all phases in the marketing funnel. However, it is observed across all displays and on the basis of the present sample in this constellation that the different variants show a significant difference with regard to the CTR. The moving images (H1) are not clicked on more by the tested target group than the static images. The animated elements (H3) seem to work well with the selected target group for a higher CTR.

7. Recommendations

Recommendations for action can be derived with limited certainty based on the current state of research, as later studies should explore the findings in more detail and, as far as possible, confirm them. The formulated recommendations for action are divided according to the tested advertisements into moving images, people and animated elements.

Moving images in carousel format were not conducive to improving the click-through rate for the target group tested. Within the framework of the experiment, it was possible to determine on the basis of the available sample that the CTR of ads with static and moving images show a significant difference. However, the findings suggest that static images in the MOFU phase of the funnel do not appeal as strongly as moving images to people in the target group who are interested in buying. Within the framework of the experiment, it was possible to determine on the basis of the available sample that the CTRs of an advertisement with a product focus and an advertisement with a depicted person differed significantly: The ad with the product focus had a higher CTR. In addition, the ad with the product focus in the present sample resulted in a higher percentage of products being placed in the shopping basket and ultimately purchased. Based on the CTR, these results suggest that ads with a person or emotion are less popular with the target group than those with a product focus. In order to achieve a higher CTR for the tested target group, the use of animated elements in ads is beneficial. Within the framework of the experiment, it was possible to determine on the basis of the available sample that the CTR between ads with and without animated elements differed significantly. The ad with the animated element achieved a higher CTR in the present sample, but a lower CR was achieved with it.

For other companies, this consideration of the differentiated expectations with regard to the metrics to be taken into account along the marketing funnel for ECSM is certainly suitable: The significant differences between the individual CTR and occasionally the CR A2C between variants A and B has shown that companies have optimisation potential with regard to the use of creative approaches for ad design - facts which, in turn, should not be underestimated with regard to the increasing advertising expenditure in ESCM.

8. Conclusion

Due to the further development of ESMC, it makes sense in future to carry out another examination of the opportunities and risks. These could be considered according to phases of the marketing funnel and separately for organic and paid ESMC. In addition, research could be conducted on the expectations of ESMC of the followers. Based on these findings, company-specific guidelines could be elaborated and developed. It would also be worthwhile to further investigate the content, formats and functions that have not yet been tested. It would also be

interesting to test the elements under consideration with other target groups in order to enable comparisons between the different target groups.

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