

4.5 The seven Ps of the marketing mix

Promotion: Social media

There are many social media platforms, including Instagram, Facebook and TikTok, that are used by people all over the world. Businesses can use these platforms to communicate with potential customers. It is important for businesses to understand how these platforms work, what content to create for the platforms, and which platforms are the best for reaching their target market.



Figure 1. Social media marketing has become increasingly important for businesses.

Credit: Maskot, Getty Images

Who uses social media?

It is difficult to imagine the world without social networks and it is clear that, since 2005, their use has increased hugely. Users of all ages are connected to different social networks. The main reasons for using social networks are to keep in touch with friends and family, to fill spare time, to find content or to follow celebrities and influencers.

Figure 2 shows the most popular social media platforms.



Figure 2. The most used social media platforms.

Source: Our World in Data (<https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/users-by-social-media-platform>), CC BY 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.en_US)

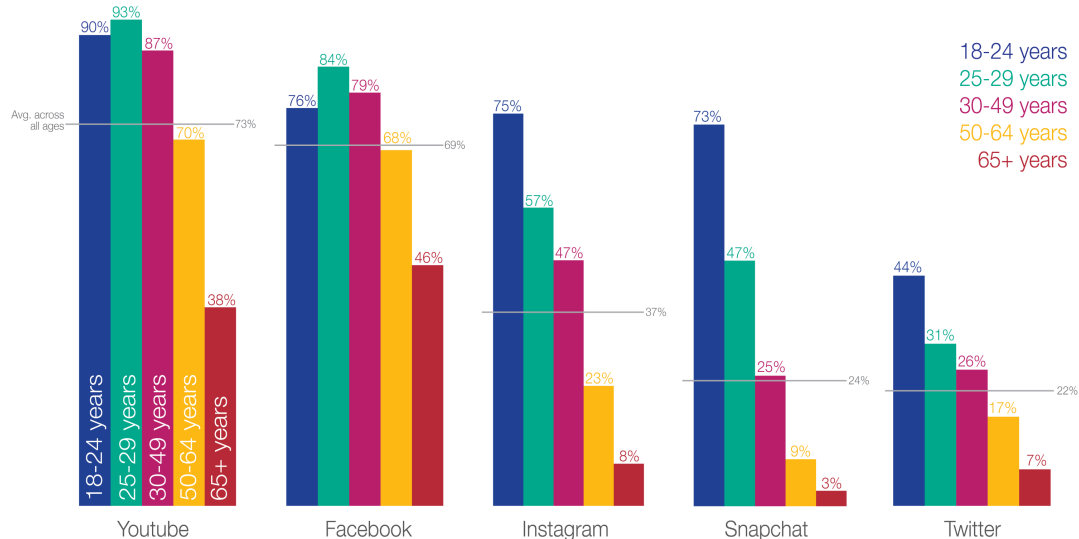
The graphic gives clear information about which social media platforms are the most popular. This is important information that businesses should consider when planning to use social media in their marketing plan.

Additionally, **Figure 3** shows the favourite social media platforms by age in the US. It can be seen that Facebook is the favoured platform for people aged 65 and over, whereas YouTube is the favoured platform for those aged 18–29.

Use of social media platforms by age group in the US

The share of adults in the United States who say they ever use the following online platforms or social media apps in 2019. This is shown by age group.

Our World
in Data



Data source: Pew Research Center (2019).

This is a visualization from OurWorldinData.org, where you find data and research to make progress against the world's largest problems.

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Figure 3. Favourite social media platforms by age group. (Click to enlarge image.)

Source: Our World in Data (<https://ourworldindata.org/rise-of-social-media>), CC BY 4.0
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How can a business use social media to promote its products?

A business can use social media to promote its products in several ways:

Paid advertisements

Businesses can pay to advertise on social media platforms that are used by their target market. Social media platforms use the data provided by the users of the platform – along with their daily activity – to show personalised advertisements. The users may appreciate having advertisements targeted at their interests. A business advertising in this way benefits because its advertisements are more likely to be seen by its target market. Some consumers, however, are uncomfortable seeing advertisements related to their activity on social media.

Content generated by users

Businesses can share content generated by other users of social media, for example when a user mentions the business or its product. A business can, for example, 'retweet' a comment posted voluntarily by a user. Consumers may see this as more trustworthy than the business creating content about a product itself. But it can also be difficult for a business to make use of unpredictable content created by social media users.

One-to-one messages

The most direct way of communication with the consumer is a conversation. Businesses can use social media to deliver customer service through private messaging. Consumers may appreciate this personalised service. However, if the business is not able to respond and engage with consumers quickly, some loyal customers could be lost.

Influencers

Influencers are people who can persuade a lot of other people. Influencers on social media platforms are able to attract many users and can affect the users' opinions about products. Followers of influencers trust their judgement and many businesses hire influencers to increase the sales of their products.



Figure 4. Influencers can play an important role in the social media strategy of a business.

Credit: amenic181, Getty Images

Activity

Learner profile: Reflective

Approaches to learning: Research skills (media literacy)

Watch the following video about influencers and then consider the points below.

Under the influence: The power of social media influenc...



Video 1. The power of social media influencers.

- Do you follow any influencers? If so, make a list of them.
- Reflect on the impact that influencers can have on your life and on the lives of other people.

Making connections

The use of social media and its influence on people is part of our culture. In the IBDP Psychology course, students learn about cultural dimensions, which refer to the values of members of a society living within a culture. So businesses might ask how their customers use and value social media. They could also ask what role social media might play in their attempts to communicate with their customers.

Advantages of using social media for promotion

Businesses that use social media marketing will have a number of advantages:

Differentiation at low cost

Social media enables businesses to differentiate their products with relatively low cost. For instance, businesses can replace a static image with a video on their Facebook front page. A video can capture the attention of customers and deliver more information about the product of a business.

More knowledge about customers

Large quantities of user information are gathered by social media platforms. Computer algorithms can deliver targeted promotion to just the right group of people that are interested in the products of a business. This can save valuable time and money on promotion activities.

Improvement of customer service

Social media has become an important customer service channel. It is often the first channel people use to contact a company with a problem. Businesses can gain valuable insights about their products through this direct communication.

Easy way to measure the performance of businesses

Social media allows the business to measure practically all the actions it carries out, in order to know whether or not it is meeting its objectives. This is one of the main advantages of social networks for businesses, since offline actions are more difficult to measure.

Disadvantages of using social media for promotion

There are also a few disadvantages of social media marketing for businesses:

- **Social media must be part of a broad promotional strategy.** A good marketing plan is needed to integrate social media marketing with other promotional strategies. This will involve time and expertise.
- **Social media marketing has production costs.** Businesses must pay for qualified people to manage their social media presence. The wide reach of social media platforms means that poor social media marketing can quickly harm a business.

Theory of Knowledge

Using the information in this section on social media marketing, consider the following question:

- What impact has social media had on how consumers acquire and share knowledge of products and businesses?