What Channel of Advertising is Most Influential to University of Tampa Undergraduate Students

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Social Media and Mobile Data Platforms

Since the invention of the internet there has been a surge in the different channel opportunities for marketing and advertising; one of the most influential, rapidly growing of these mediums is the mobile phone (Hanley 2008, 67). A leading analyst in the mobile industry, Gerry Purdy, stated: "probably the most important medium for advertising in the 21st century is going to be the cell phone, not print media, not billboards..." (SMS Marketing, 2006).

According to Metrics, 2005, the majority of teens and young adults are early adopters of new technology, therefore, among this age bracket mobile content and cell phone usage has been accepted and utilized at a higher rate than any other medium (Metrics 2005). In addition to full-time students, those who are students with employment consume higher rates of mobile content than any other demographic; in comparison to the typical subscriber, they use 42% more mobile email and 23% more than full-time employees who are not students (Metrics 2005). This subpopulation of working students also personalizes content and download games twice as frequently as other consumers (Metrics 2005).

The medium of social networking and internet use is a vast platform with immense potential for building brand awareness and recognition (Wallace 2009, 101). Within the particular age bracket of 15 to 24-year-olds, internet use is considerably more prevalent than other age groups (Wallace 2009, 101). Despite the potential of this generation, there are also numerous challenges surrounding how to influentially advertise to them; due to this channel of advertising being utilized so frequently, targeting this age group, they are generally dubious about being "advertised at (Wallace 2009, 101)." For this reason, more personal and interactive methods of advertising are being implemented; the need for more innovative techniques is exemplified by an intolerance shown towards the common and outdated methods of advertising,

such as email advertisements, spyware, and pop-up advertisements (Hempel 2005; Fuscaldo 2003).

This subset of the population; full-time students with employment have significant disposable revenue, therefore, have substantial purchasing power (Kotler 2006). According to Kotler, 2006, this prosperity is thought to further encompass and influence $30 billion of an individual's legal guardian's income in addition to their own (Kotler 2006).

Previous Studies Conducted in This Area

A previous study on this topic shows the "influence that social networks can have on the purchasing behaviors of college students through word-of-mouth and advertising on popular websites (Wallace 2009, 102)." The focal purpose of this empirical research was to detect what varieties of online marketing influenced college students purchasing behavior and which social media platforms were utilized the most by these students (Wallace 2009, 104). What was discovered was that Email is the most popular platform used by students with 98% of students frequently using this platform, however, this use is not simultaneous with advertising tolerance (Wallace 2009, 105). Closely following this with over 50% usage were sites including MySpace, Facebook, and YouTube, and 47% of individuals using RateMyProfessor. Other websites used were utilized by only 26% of less of students, therefore, showing them to not hold the most influential potential (Wallace 2009, 105). To further this research and in order to find out the age of students most active on these websites, T-tests were used; the results showed the average age of social media users to be 23 which was considerably younger than non-users (Wallace 2009, 105-106). This exemplifies how the range of ages in college students can yield significantly different results, therefore, a proposed research question tailored to University of Tampa seniors is required to avoid external validity issues.

Another issue when working with college students is acting on this discovered knowledge; we know mobile usage is the highest traffic platform, the issue is that individuals view this as a personal device (Harris 2007). A study conducted on the cell phone usage and advertising acceptance among college students employed the longitudinal methodology spanning over four years and utilizing online survey methodology in order to find the most influential technique for advertising across this channel (Hanley 2008, 69-71). It was discovered that income is a large factor for this demographic; money incentive influenced over 76% of college students to accept an advertisement, whereas ads such as wallpapers or ringtones have an acceptance rate of less than half (Harris 2007).

A study conducted on college students in America shows this age group to be the most indicative of users on this platform; there are, of course, many demographics of users, college-aged individuals being the most abundant (eMarketer, 2009). Roughly 60% of females and 44% of males enrolled in college stated that they utilize Facebook and other social networking sites (SNS) in order to gain more information on a product, brand, or service (Shu-Chuan 2011). A societal trend is highlighted due to this college demographic being active on Facebook and conducting research on brands through SNS platforms (Ferguson 2008; Marken 2007). It opens up high-traffick channels to advertise through that is shown to be effective in presenting information that will be passed on to others through word-of-mouth; this is the essence of viral, personalized marketing (Shu-Chuan 2011).

Buzz marketing is an increasingly utilized method of advertising through these channels, fulfilling the need for personalized and interactive advertising experiences shown to be effective with this demographic audience (Kaikati, 2004, 6-22). This consists of causing a communicable

discussion about services or products through social media platforms, often involving tradition

methods of advertising paired with multimedia (Fuscaldo 2003).

Those college students involved in this research stated that they banner advertisements

were minutely influential on them to purchase a product or service; 18% stated Consumer Report

ads had some influence on their decisions, 10% saying Email did, and less than 10% from the

advertisements shown on any other website and social media platform (Wallace 2009, 106). In

contrast to this, it was shown that engaging in interactive mobile games in which college students

learnt about the product or service was the most effective method of advertising; out of the 25%

that downloaded and played the games, 50% made a purchase after being influenced by an

advertisement (Wallace 2009, 107).

Through these empirical research experiments conducted on this topic, it is shown

college students to be early adopters of technology; over 50% of respondents use social media

sites established within the last five years whereas the older platforms rapidly become obsolete

and non-influential (Wallace 2009, 107). It was also discovered that, although college students

typically have relatively low levels of income, the power generated by buzz marketing within

this demographic has immense potential in influencing buyer behaviors on their peers as well as

their guardians (Wallace 2009, 107).

This empirical research was based on 98 respondents; a small sample size. For this

reason, it may not be indicative of the population, however, the research emphasizes the need to

follow trends in society and how these affect social media sites as these are shown to hold

substantial marketing and advertising potential for college-aged students (Wallace 2009, 108).

Hypothesis

If the conditions and empirical research from these literature studies are indicative of the general population of college students in the United States of America, then it would be expected that social media and mobile marketing will be the most influential channel with regards to the persuasive reach of advertising campaigns.

Methodology Revision

Within my initial survey version, the noun 'influence' was shown to be somewhat confusing. Due to those attempting to answer my survey questions without having previously read my literary review, the question was raised; influenced in what way? To clear this issue up, I inserted a small description at the head of my survey, explaining; '*Influence:* The capacity to have an effect on the behavior of someone (Dictionary), for example, do Facebook advertisements play a greater role in your purchasing decisions than a YouTube video advertisement?'

Another edit that was made to my first draft survey was in questions 4, 5, 6, 8a, 9,10,12, and 13, and the option of 'Other, please specify' was given. I chose to eliminate this option and submit 'None of the above' as the final choice for clarity and ease of coding. My SNS option choices were chosen due to my prior literary review research; college-aged students are early adopters of new technology, therefore, any SNS platform older than 5 years is generally obsolete. For this reason and due to the study of current societal trends, I chose to highlight: Facebook; Twitter; Instagram; Snapchat; and YouTube.

To further improve the precision of my survey questions I conducted a focus group on two seniors, one junior, and one sophomore student at the University of Tampa.

On question four, a senior commented they did not know YouTube was also not

acknowledged as an SNS, so at the top of the survey, I added a definition of an SNS site I created

my survey using *Qualtrics* and their system requires you to click and drag to rank order. I made

the instruction on this clearer as it was also expressed that question seven needed some

instruction on how to physically rank the options. Further confusion was discovered in the

wording of question 13, resulting in, "How do you view an advertisement message on a social

media site (Facebook, Twitter etc.) vs. traditional media (TV, radio, billboards, newspaper

etc.)?" to become, **"Do you have a preference between receiving advertising messages through**

social networking sites or traditional media (TV, radio, billboards, newspaper etc.)?"

In the demographics section, when asking school year, I provided another answer option

for graduate students as initially I was focusing on undergraduate students, however, it was

highlighted that my question one; 'Are you a full-time student" proved exclusive of graduate

students should there be any answering the survey.

Descriptive Data and Analysis

The results of this survey exemplified those from the empirical research discussed

throughout my literary review. Out of the University of Tampa students surveyed 100% of them

stated they were full-time students, with 81.41% of these students simultaneously in

employment. This coincides with Kotler's finding's in 2006, despite 11 years having passed,

this shows how students are still a high target audience for advertisers due to their disposable

income and changing lifestyles. The majority of these students; 81.48%, are aged between 19-21

years of age with the remaining 8.52% being between 2-24 years of age. As expected with these

results only 14.81% are sophomores, 25.93% are juniors, and the majority of those involved;

59.6% are seniors. This furthers how SNS is a growing platform for targeting advertising efforts

to students, as the University of Tampa students follow the demographical trends shown within

the empirical research of Wallace, 2011. Males involved in this study comprised of 7.41%, with

the remaining 2.59% being comprised of females. These results, however, suggest that the study

may not be indicative of the University of Tampa's population as not all of the elements in the

sample are proportionally representative of the student body as a whole; the University of Tampa

is comprised of 42% of student body is men and 58% are women, with 97% of these being full-

time students with an average age of 20 (University of Tampa).

Out of these students, 30.77% utilized social networking sites 11-20 times per day,

closely followed with 23.08% only going on the social media sites 10 or fewer times a day. With

100% of students using technology at least once a day and the considerable amount of 7.69%

going on these sites over 50 times in one day, it seems to prove a positive correlation between

progression of time and technology with mobile and SNS usage. This supports the prior

mentioned statement by Gerry Purdy on 2006 regarding cell phone usage to be the most

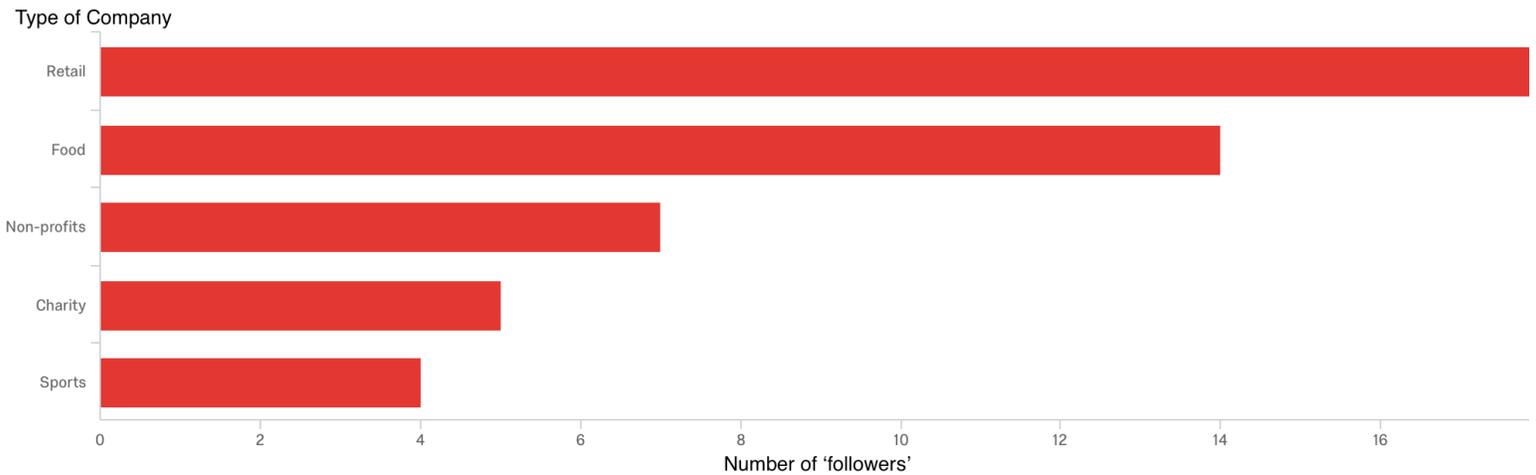prominent channel of advertising in the 21st century.

Out of these social media sites visited, Facebook and Snapchat were the most used, both

with a 25.53% of people using them, Instagram was a close second with 24.47% usage rate, then

YouTube and Twitter falling behind with 12.77% and 1.70%. This exemplifies the need to study

societal trends shown within my literary review, as Twitter is becoming an obsolete form of

social networking, therefore, would have less of an impact on University of Tampa students in

comparison to other social networking platforms. This is exemplified by the fact that 14% of

students still have an active account on Twitter despite its lack of use, proving how it was once

an influential platform that was outcompeted by other sites. It was shown, however, that 24.56%

of people feel like they are most heavily advertised through YouTube, despite this being one of

the least used platforms and only 8.77% of people feeling as though they are advertised through

Snapchat despite its hierarchy as second most popular with college-aged students in today's

current society.

Overall, only 25.42% of these students feel they typically receive the majority of their

brand promotions through social networking sites; the product information received through

these channels influenced 48.15% of students who claimed this method of advertising would

likely affect their decision purchase and 14.81% claiming it would extremely likely affect their

purchasing decision. This does not just extend to receiving advertisements; it was shown that

through SNS and mobile data 31.15% of respondents found user reviews on which to base their

decisions, 29.51% utilized these platforms to see if there is a cheaper price offered at an alternate

location, 22.95% went online and on social media pages to see if they could find a discount code

at the checkout, 14.75% contacted friends through these platforms for an opinion of whether or

not to purchase, and only 1.64% of respondents; that is only one respondent, do not do any of

these. This exemplifies the dependence this particular group of consumers place on social

networking channels for some form of purchasing decision making, exemplifying it's potential to

reach and persuade college aged consumers.

To exemplify the personalization available with this channel of advertising, consumers

can essentially sign up for advertisement by becoming a 'fan' or 'follower' of a brand. The

respondents suggested that within today's society, more prominence and importance is placed on

branding with 74.07% of respondents claiming they voluntary 'follow' company or brand pages

and receive advertisements and promotional messages; retail brands were shown to be the most

abundant within this group of consumers.

Graph showing which type of company UT students were 'followers' of on SNS platforms

Type of Company

Type of Company	Number of 'followers'
Retail	~17.5
Food	~14
Non-profits	~7
Charity	~5
Sports	~4

Number of 'followers'

Search engine browsers are the second most common channel through which advertisements where received with 37.29%, followed by 30.51% of students say they receive the majority of advertisements through email, and only 6.78% of students saying they feel as though they receive traditional postal mail. This further exemplifies how advertising methodologies are evolving along with societal trends and the development of technology in order to remain persuasive in a competitive environment. These findings exemplify how college students at The University of Tampa heavily exemplify the rapidly increasing use of social networking sites and how these sites are becoming an increasingly prominent presence in our lives.

Despite this vast platform of social media and the high frequency of usage, the influencing power to persuade through advertising is shown to be less dramatic as one might expect. 48.15% of University of Tampa students claimed that they do not have a preference between the two platforms of advertising and they are the same in terms of influencing power, with 14.81% of students preferring traditional forms of advertising such as billboards or radio ads. Despite the evolution of social networking sites, more traditional channels of advertising

are still shown to be abundant within this age group with television advertising consistently remains the most common channel; 50.00% of these students say they receive the majority of their brand information through this medium, 16.67% through radio, 13.33% through magazine, and 0% through newspapers.

When examining these statistics, however, it is important to acknowledge that SNS and mobile platforms are still a relatively new channel of communication and rapidly increasing and evolving. When comparing these statistics to those from just 10 years ago, the abundance and dependence on social networking sites are clearly intensifying, exemplified by the fact that 20% of the respondents claimed they don't receive advertising through any of these traditional means and rely 100% on SNS for their product information. This embodies the findings within my literature review that suggested college-aged students are a unique target as many of them live on campus, therefore, without access to radio or cable television leaving mobile data and SNS platforms the most readily accessible.

Despite traditional channels still being utilized, 37.04% of students prefer advertisements received through social networking sites. One of these forms of advertising proven to be effective through social networking sites is buzz marketing. Proving Kaikati's 2004 research still remaining true in today's society, 33.33% of students claimed the methodology of buzz marketing definitely impacts their purchasing decision and 62.96% stated that it sometimes has a persuasive effect on their purchasing decisions; this 96.29% of students exemplifies the growing opportunities that SNS provides for advertising companies, however, it also highlights the competition and need for new, innovative, and personalized methods of reaching and engaging people.

The top incentive for ad clicks or website visits, with 60% of the respondents ranking it most persuasive, was discount codes and coupons, closely followed by the remaining 40% ranking monetary incentives most motivational. The least affective incentive for generating interest in a brand was personalized ringtones with 68% of respondents ranking this 4th place.

Future Implications

Throughout this paper, it has been shown that there is a large need for research in this area in order for advertising, a billion-dollar industry, to reach its maximum potential of being effective and persuasive on an audience and allowing companies to achieve the highest degree of benefits versus cost. While my study represents topics that are important in making managing decisions, such as which channel of advertising will generate the highest reach, further research and discussion would be required in order to gather data indicative of a population as a whole. Due to such a large amount of this research being based around rapidly developing societal trends, it is important for the longitudinal methodology to be applied, studying people over time in an ever-evolving society.

Throughout this study and future studies in this area, there are implications in the areas of context, methodology, sampling, and outcome. Firstly, the data collected within my research survey are applicable to only University of Tampa undergraduate students; as this is a specific niche from a large population, the outcome I resulted with may not be replicable in other contexts that vary in geographic and sociological demographics. Although surveys prove to be an effective way to gather information of this nature in a short time period, a better design would be longitudinal studies and tracking of consumer spending; collecting the data through direct observation. These implications in my research would likely affect the outcome. If more in-depth research and arduous observations and trend studies were to be utilized and developed, a

link or stronger correlation between advertisements and consumer demand may become more

prevalent.

This data exemplifies how even though personalization is key in the advertising industry,

remaining current with market trends and consumer demands is key to creating effective content.

This also highlights how college students as a collective audience are greatly motivated by

monetary benefits due to their lifestyle more so than other consumer groups.

Survey

Influence: The capacity to have an effect on the behavior of someone (Dictionary), for example, do Facebook advertisements play a greater role in your purchasing decisions than a YouTube video advertisement?

Social networking sites (SNS) aka social media, is an online platform which people use to build social networks or social relations with other people who share similar personal or career interests, activities, backgrounds or real-life connections.

Question 1:
Are you a full-time student?

- Yes

- No

Question 2:
Do you have a job?

- Yes

- No

Question 3:
How many times do you use social networking sites per day?

- Less than 10

- 11-20

- 21-30

- 31-40

- 41-50

- 51+

Question 4:
Which of these social networking sites do you use? (choose as many that apply)

- Facebook

- Twitter

- Instagram

- Snapchat

- YouTube

- None of the above

Question 6:
Which of these social networking sites do you have an active account on? (choose as many that apply)

- Facebook

- Twitter

- Instagram

- Snapchat

- YouTube

- None of the above

Question 7:
Through which of these social networking sites do you feel you receive the most advertising? (choose as many that apply)

- Facebook

- Twitter

- Instagram

- Snapchat

- YouTube

- None of the above

Question 8:
Which incentive would you be most influenced by to click on an advertisement or check out the company website? Drag and drop to rank order them - (1 = most influential, 4 = Least influential)

- 1Monetary

- 2Ringtone

- 3Backgrounds/wallpaper

- 4Discount codes/coupons

Question 9:
Are you a "fan"/ "follower" of brands pages on social networking sites?

- Yes

- No

> Display This Question:
>
> If Are you a "fan"/ "follower" of brands pages on social networking sites? Yes Is Selected

Question 10:
Which type of company/organization? (choose as many that apply)

- Retail

- Food

- Non-profits

- Charity

- Sports

Question 11:
When making a purchasing decision on an item, have you ever checked a social networking site for any of the following reasons? (choose as many that apply)

- User reviews

- Promotions

- Cheaper prices elsewhere

- To contact a friend for an opinion

- None of the above

Question 12:
How do you typically receive brand promotions? (choose all that apply)

- Postal mail

- Online browsing/ Search engine advertisements

- Email

- Social Media

- None of the above

Question 13:
How likely will the product information you receive through social networking sites affect your purchasing decision?

- Extremely likely

- Somewhat likely

- Neither likely nor unlikely

- Somewhat unlikely

- Extremely unlikely

Question 14:
Through what information channels do you learn about products/brands/services? (Please choose all that apply)

- Television

- Newspaper

- Radio

- Magazines

- None of the above

Question 15:
Do you have a preference between receiving advertising messages through social networking sites or traditional media (TV, radio, billboards, newspaper etc.)?

- They are the same

- Prefer social media advertisements

- Prefer traditional advertisements

Question 16:
Do you feel that viral advertisements/ads that generate buzz have an impact on your purchasing decisions?

- Yes

- Sometimes

- No

Question 17:
Gender?

- Male

- Female

Question 18:
School Year?

- Freshman

- Sophomore

- Junior

- Senior

- Graduate student

Question 19:
Age?

- 16-18

- 19-21

- 22-24

- 24+

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