

Assignment 1

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ATTENTION ECONOMY: THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

ABSTRACT

This paper argues that social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Tumblr are primarily active agents in the so-called attention economy, before being communication platforms. The factors that made social networking sites part of the attention economy are aesthetics, selfie culture and business purposes. These factors have changed the social media platforms from a communication aspect to an attention aspect. The paper will shed light on the fact that the attention economy is dominating the social networks. The methodology used for this paper was conducted by researchers in the domain. The studies and facts are secondary data collected from scholarly sources on Curtin Library and Google Scholar which will talk about aesthetics, selfie culture and business purposes.

Keyword: Social networks, online media, aesthetics, selfie culture, influencers, business, fame.

INTRODUCTION

The internet is a vital part of our everyday life. Through the use of internet, people can interact and engage with other people across the globe. Attention is another aspect which engages people in this digital age. Goldhaber (1997) defines the attention economy as the center of interest that the audience desire and need. The attention economy is a resource that cannot be bought by money as the users pay the service or information, they receive online through the attention. The social networking sites are commonly used and popular in this digital era. Millions of users engage in these social network sites every day- it has become part of their daily routine and important aspect of their life. According to a research carried out by Lin et al. (2014), it was revealed that 76% of teenagers and young adults use social networking sites. The social media platforms attract the attention of the users through the attention economy system. Social networking sites are known as a common platform to communicate with other people through chats, video calls, emails, group discussions, among others. Luo & Zhong (2015) states that the communication aspect on social networking sites plays an important role in transmitting information. Social networking sites are fueling the attention economy with the number of users using those sites every day. Today, businesses are operating on social networking sites to gain more attention locally and globally. Social networking sites have revolutionized the business sector and created more job opportunities. Therefore, this paper will highlight the fact that social media platforms have now become an attention economy rather than being just a communication platform by using the aesthetics, selfie culture, self-representation and business purposes.

Social Networking Sites and Aesthetic

With a rise in the number of people who want to project their ideal self on social networking sites, the online sites are getting a lot of attention for their aesthetic features. Liu (2007) defines aesthetic as the visual theme and mood that entertain the users. The aesthetic features enable them to do many things with their pictures, for example, they can add new filters, adjust the brightness, add an emoji on the photo among others before uploading them online. The aesthetic concept is more associated with Instagram in terms

of visual content. The aesthetic of social media platforms is usually color themes, filters, contents, fonts, emojis, captions, feed overview and many other factors. Leaver et al. (2020) explain how Instagram attracts the attention of the audience through aesthetic. Instagram was known for a visual communication platform where people uploaded their pictures and videos, or even add stories to share their posts. The source of communication on Instagram used to be direct messages (DMs) but now users communicated through hashtags, comments and IGTV which is enabling people to receive more attention. The advantages of IGTV are that videos are no longer restricted to 1 minute, but it can go up to 1 hour long (Systrom 2018) which attracts more followers.

With the advancement of technology nowadays, digitization has enabled social media platforms to improve their aesthetics into something worthy. Instagram is a mobile application which portrays the visual presentation of an account as the vital aspect to gain attention, that is the more the account is visually presented and loved by the audience, the more people will visit the account and follow the user. For example, Instagram has launched the IGTV which enables users to post videos and allows people to communicate vocally and through comments. Instagram has started to push forward a new photogenic vernacular through manual editing, new filters and many more. According to a survey carried out on Instagram in 2019 (Instagram Survey Result, 2019), it has been shown that there is a large percentage of people that use new features on Instagram. 64% use the hashtags (#), 58% watch live stories, 39% follow the hashtags photos and 25% watches the IGTV on Instagram. People use these new features to engage on the platform for attention purposes and not as a communication platform. The aesthetic that social networking sites provides, contributes to the attention economy. Due to the amount of attention one can receive on social networking sites through a nice feed and visual content, it can be deduced that aesthetic features make social media more of an attention economy than a mere communication platform.

Vernacular photography is a mundane activity that grabs the attention of the users on the social networking sites. Vernacular photography is very popular and common in this digital age. It allows the users to share their photos on social media platforms worldwide

in just a click away which can grab the attention of everyone (Vinodrai, 2013). According to an article on Vernacular Photography (Batchen, 2000), it is a traditional process to attract attention of the audiences on photography. This specific creativity builds up an image for the audiences which allows them to keep on looking for more. This is how the social media keeps on getting attention by aesthetic and vernacular photography.

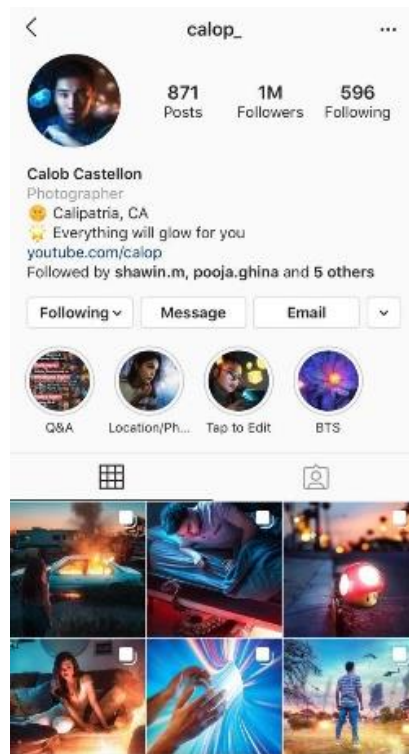


Figure 1: Vernacular photograhpy

Calob Castellon [@calop]. (n.d) Posts [Instagram profile]. Retrieved April 04, 2020, from https://www.instagram.com/calop_/?igshid=exb5vwq9hgq4

The Selfie Culture on Social Networking sites and the Attention Economy

The 'selfie culture' has gained a lot of popularity and is an important factor in the rise of the attention economy on social networking sites. Selfie is an image taken by smartphone or a webcam by oneself (Eckel et al., 2018). Nowadays, in this digital era, millions of selfies are uploaded on common social networking sites such as Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Twitter and Tumblr. Murray (2015) defines selfies as a self-expression on the social media sites. People share their selfies online to define themselves, that is to represent themselves. Marwick (2015) argues that through the selfie culture, common people, celebrities and influencers get attention from the audience. People use social networks to become famous which makes them become influencers, bloggers, public figures among others due to the attention they create through their posts. The selfie culture is dominating the social networking sites through the attention economy.

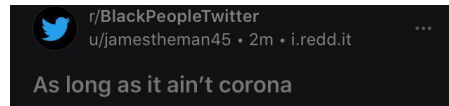
Nowadays, the visual focus is more important on social networking platforms to achieve success. Leaver et al. (2020), argue Instagram puts the visual images, videos and other aspects in the stories on the top list and the communication on the second place. They argue so because people scroll through visual content on their feed and explore page on Instagram without interacting with other users as well as to share content while monitoring their views or likes. This shows that the main aim of Instagram users is not to communicate but rather to have other users like their photos and videos or simply look at other user's content in their free time. Kendall Jenner post a lot of selfies of herself to show her body parts and this makes her gain popularity. Many celebrities use selfies to show what they are doing and their contribution about their wealthy lifestyle (dream style)



Figure 2: Kendall Jenner's mirror selfie

Kendall Jenner [@kendalljenner]. (2020, May 02). Story [Instagram story]. Retrieved May 02, 2020, from <https://www.instagram.com/kendalljenner/?hl=en>

On the social networking sites, people upload many pictures which indirectly deliver a message. For example, the meme culture which has been spreading online on all the social media sites are shared among users. The meme culture forms part of the communication system, but it is more about grabbing attention of other users by creating and sharing memes (Börzsei, 2013).



When you work at a bank and
3 guys with mask come in but
they're just robbing the place



Figure 3: Memes culture

Yeets69420. (2020). Post [Reddit]. Retrieved from March 30, 2020, from https://www.reddit.com/r/lostredditors/comments/fm0iao/on_rblackpeopletwitter/

When you suspect this green thing you're
bout to eat to be coriander but turns out
it's parsley



Figure 4: Memes culture

Elinorsalo. (n.d). Post [Cheezburger]. Retrieved March 30, 2020 from <https://cheezburger.com/8884485/theres-a-facebook-page-of-coriander-haters-and-here-are-the-funniest-memes>

The two memes above have been created using the same picture but different meanings. This shows that it catches the attention of many people online through sharing and creating memes. The meme culture which is trendy on the social networking sites allows the users to participate and interact with others which also forms part of the attention economy.

The relationship between Business and Attention Economy on Social Networking sites.

Social networking sites were meant to act as communication tools but with digitization, they are now business platforms as they are also used for business purposes because of the attention social media receives globally. Billions of people go through the social networking sites, and it is the most appropriate place to promote a business and gain popularity through attention. Social media networks have created online job opportunities such as digital influencers and content creators which is certainly adding on to the attention economy. This is because they have huge followings and amass a lot of attention which encourages businesses to partner with them in order to promote their products. Leaver et al. (2020) argues that social media influencers transform the social media platform into a business only for the sake of attention and commerce. For example, Greta Thunberg is a 17 years old teenager, well known for her speaking manner to the public, politician and assemblies in which she addresses to take immediate action to tackle the climate change crisis. But the question is: “Is it for the sake of business and fame?”. Busco et al. (2020) mentions in his article that Greta Thunberg is trying to frame climate crisis into a business for fame. This will help her in popularity and make her famous in the social media world. She is now well known and famous for her speeches on her social networking sites which literally grabs all the audience’s attention towards her. Walker (2020) states that children of age 12 – 15 years old use social media to promote activist causes and it is called the “Greta Effect”. This creates a massive attention towards Greta, and this is a sort of business that is making her famous. Influencers, content creators and celebrities do not have anything to sell except their fame and status. They receive a lot of attention regardless of whether they have a unique selling point or interesting visual content. This reveals that they are using those platforms

and turning it into a personal brand in order to gain business partnerships and other opportunities.

Nowadays, even common people make small businesses online as they know that the social networking sites is an effective marketing tool to grab attention of the users. Small online businesses use marketing strategies such as giveaways and shout outs to make the audiences participate and pass the attention to other users. This will encourage the audiences to make the business get more attention from other people. Businesses achieve their success through Instagram as it is related to the attention generation. According to a survey (Instagram Survey, 2019) carried out on Instagram, users engage with brands on Instagram 10 times higher than any other social media platforms. This shows that the users discover new products and serves that are proposed to them on the social platform which leads to the growth of the business through the attention economy.

Self-Representation contributing to the attention economy.

Instagram is known for self-representation which is used by billions of users daily. Everything that matters on Instagram is the body image satisfaction. Picture speaks louder than words. As a fact, celebrities like Kendall Jenner shows that the body image is more important to gain popularity and fame. Celebrities post pictures with captions and hashtags “#no_makeup”, “#natural_glow”, “#no_filter” when in reality they have put make up to make their skin look flawless. They influence the users and it forms part of the attention economy. Murray (2015) mentions in his article how feminist represents themselves through the selfie phenomenon. Emma Watson, known as an actress, model and activist is famous for speeches on feminism. On a Vanity Fair, Emma Watson was posed in a see-through top and the picture was uploaded on all her social media platforms (CNN, 2017). The question is whether she did this for fame? "Feminism is about giving women choice. Feminism is not a stick with which to beat other women with. It's about freedom. It's about liberation. It's about equality. It's not -- I really don't know what my tits have to do with it," Emma Watson said in one of her social media platforms and during an interview.

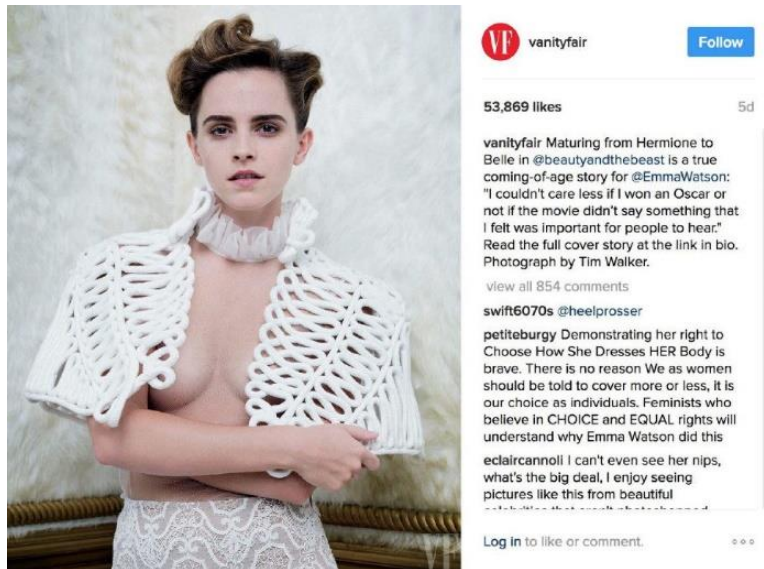


Figure 5: Emma Watson as feminist

Isaza, M. (2017). Emma Watson says Vanity Fair shoot doesn't betray feminism [Image]. Retrieved from <https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/2017/03/06/emma-watson-says-vanity-fair-shoot-doesnt-betray-feminism.html>

Emma Watson uses the social networking sites in creating her feminist movement where she keeps on tweeting, posting her speech and moreover she is an UN Goodwill Ambassador which makes people follow her example and her campaign HeForShe (UN Women, 2016). However, it can be argued that she did this to market her own brand and gain money out of it. Having more followers maximizes the amount of revenue one will receive which perpetuates the idea that social networking sites are becoming attention economies and have transgressed the notion of only interacting with other users. There is a rise in the social media influencers where they promote brands of companies. They rely on the social media influencers to promote their brands and build their image. For example, Kendall Jenner who is a famous model promotes the brand Proactive and she shows her skin care routine on the social media platforms by using the product. Social media influencers drag the attention of the audience towards them as they try to self-brand themselves (Khamis et al., 2016). Social media influencers such as Kendall Jenner, Emma Watson, Greta Thunberg and many more have achieved their own brand on the

social networks. They create their own brand and sell them online for other users to buy through the network. Celebrities market their products such as movies, music or concerts. Through the facade of bettering the world, stopping climate change or connecting with fans, influencers and celebrities are actually conveying these messages to gain more followers so as to increase their revenue.

Users can be influenced by those celebrities and try to imitate them by posting and posing similar pictures of themselves. Murray (2015) states that young women describes themselves as radical feminists by posting pictures in an exposing way such as Emma Watson did. Another famous celebrity is Kendall Jenner, who posts photos that are engaged in a sexual activity or sometimes completely nude. It all comes to get attention from users on social media platforms rather than embracing femininity and represent themselves as an idol to other people.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, there are many reasons why the social networking sites focus more on the attention economy than on communication. Social media platforms have improved from the past years through aesthetics such as evolving features (new filters, IGTV, photography, manual editing among others). The selfie culture is another factor which makes social networking sites become more an attention economy. The celebrities make use of it to gain more attention and become famous. The social media platforms are the center of attention which many businesses focus on. Businesses make use of those platforms to promote their brand and products through influencers. Even celebrities build up their images based on those platforms to get fame and create their own brand name. Users are not interested in using the social media platforms to communicate but rather than to get attention and give attention to others. Ultimately, social networking sites are more than a communicating platform as it has become an attention economy.

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