

Social Synergy: How Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram Use Integrated Marketing Communications

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Abstract

Many companies use social media to gain awareness and create relationships with their audience, which includes social media platforms themselves. The tactics behind the use of these platforms come from the overall theory of integrated marketing communications. This study explored how major social media companies Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram employ different social media channels in a strategic way. Through a content analysis, this exploratory research determined which integrated marketing communications tactics were used and how many times they were posted in 2018. Overall, the study found that @Facebook, @Twitter, and @Instagram used different tactics and methods based on the medium they are use and the type of content they share. These findings may contribute to research concerning social media strategy and the strategic use of several social media platforms for a company or brand.

I. Introduction

Throughout the past decade, social media has become a key component of the communications field, becoming a key avenue to get out information and content quickly and effectively. According to social media management platform Hootsuite, 3.48 billion people now use social media, which is 45% of the total world population. Within that, 90% of brands use social media to increase brand awareness, maintaining anywhere between four and 10 social media profiles. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are three of the most used social media platforms in the world (Newberry, 2019, p. 1). More specifically, there are more than 1 billion monthly active Instagram users, 2.32 billion monthly active Facebook users, and 321 million Twitter monthly active users in 2019 (We Are Social, Hootsuite, & DataReportal, 2019).

These robust numbers demonstrate the significance of the social media industry and these platforms more specifically. Each platform actually has “meta” social media accounts on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. In other words, social media companies use their respective social media channels to showcase their own branded content. This closely relates to the concept of integrated marketing communications, which uses several channels to support an overall campaign or brand. This study explores how Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter each uses these different social media channels and how they relate to integrated marketing communications.

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II. Literature Review

What is integrated marketing communications?

Integrated marketing communications is a simple concept that has been used across several communications fields. It is a strategic way to organize and control the promotional mix to produce an overall message and brand that is unified, customer focused, and achieves the goals of the organization (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Integrated marketing communications has a particular focus on strategy as opposed to how content is created. This concept can include a combination of print material, television ads, websites, and more. It is the strategy behind the combination of tactics that makes integrated marketing communication so effective. This includes planning, execution and evaluation of all channels to optimize the impact of each channel's differences (Reid, Luxton, & Mavondo, 2005).

There are specific aspects of the idea that need to be highlighted before it can be applied. Integrated marketing communications is a sum of several "communication options." or many forms of communication that are related directly to the client and brand. These options are then broken out into categories and broad types. Print materials, advertising, and video are all examples of these broader types (Keller, 2001).

When putting together these varying communications options, there are different qualities of the content and strategy that can be in place for higher impact. First, the coverage of the communication option should be considered, or how many people are reached by each channel and how much overlap exists among these channels. Next, contribution needs to be analyzed to showcase exactly how each channel performs and adds to the desired response of the consumer when others are not revealed to them (Keller, 2001).

Following that, the commonality of the content on the channels should be considered, or how similar the content and message is across these platforms. For some, the strategy could be to post the same thing across all channels, while for others it could be using different complementary content, which is important because it creates linkages between the communication channels. It is also important to note that the strengths in one option should also help to negate the disadvantages of another.

Application to Social Media

Integrated marketing communications applies to social media in a very specific way. For many communications professionals, integrated marketing communications would mean putting together different types of media like radio, print, television ads, and more. However, in the case of social media, integrated marketing communications applies to each social media channel. The strategy emphasizes the identification of what type of media channels to use, while the tactical dimension is exactly which channels would be used, the schedule, and more (Reid, Luxton, & Mavondo, 2005).

Social media has an important relationship with consumers because it is interactive, ever changing, and the consumer can be in control. Social media often is seen as a more trustworthy source of information about products and services than corporate-sponsored communications. In other words, consumers like to see how others review and use the product as opposed to reading about them on platforms owned by the company. Furthermore, social media has become a "hybrid" of technology and media that allows users to curate instant communications in different formats with global reach abilities (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). If companies make their social networking sites overly commercial, this might make users turn away if it feels just like advertising. This is because it "violates social networking's intrinsic qualities of socialization and trust" (Miller and Lammas, 2010, p. 5).

It is also important to note that with communication strategies, consumers want to feel special. By offering products, info, and exclusive deals that are available only to a subset of consumers, an emotional connection can be fostered. This often happens when certain content and features are only available on a single social media platform (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). These features and content can be cross-promoted in other places to draw the consumer to that particular social media channel.

Another aspect of integrated marketing communications is showcasing causes important to consumers. If users are emotionally connected to these causes, they will share them with others. Posting about these causes may grab the attention of viewers and create a closer connection with them (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). This can be done with commentary on social issues, company policies, and current events.

Integrated marketing communications has a goal of making a strong connection with the consumer or the follower, as opposed to just a one-off sale with one-way communication (Papasolomou and Melanthiou, 2012). An important aspect of integrated marketing communications is that it is implemented over a long amount of time, so communications specialists need to stay committed to it to gain the benefits from it (Papasolomou and Melanthiou, 2012).

Social Media Platforms + Their Functions

Each social media platform has its own main functions and content. Facebook is a social media network where videos and more personalized content is posted. Instagram is ideal for higher resolution photos, quotes, and the use of the 24-hour Stories feature. Twitter is ideal for keeping up with the news, sharing gifs, and reading more word-centric content (Lua, 2017). Content must be optimized for each specific platform and must keep the “social” aspect of social media foremost in mind. The content should provide a way to generate discussion or at least provide an open forum or comments section.

Those posting content on social media often see great success with one platform and very limited success with another. This is due to the different types of content that are optimized on each channel and how that translates to different audiences. Cori Amato Hartwig, a content creator with over 100k followers on Instagram explains: “When I post on Instagram, I can expect about 2,000 likes a post. With Twitter, I expect about two retweets and 20 to 30 likes.” This is because this particular creator’s content does not translate as well on Twitter than it does on Instagram. She said that Twitter rewards faster social relevancy and Instagram offers more flexible evergreen content (Farokhmanesh, 2018).

III. Methods

This study will examine how integrated marketing communications is showcased in social media by actual social media platforms. Based on the previous literature, the study asks the following questions:

- RQ1:** How frequently did Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram post on social media platforms in 2018?
- RQ2:** What type of content did Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram post on their social media accounts across platforms in 2018?
- RQ3:** To what extent were integrated marketing communication tactics present on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram’s social media channels?

In order to answer these questions, a content analysis was performed on social media posts by @Facebook, @Twitter, and @Instagram on the platforms Facebook.com, Instagram.com, and Twitter.com in 2018. A content analysis was adopted to identify how many posts were created in 2018 across each social media platforms’ social media channels, while also analyzing a collection of these posts for themes of integrated marketing communication. Using systematic sampling, the first post of each of the 52 weeks in 2018 were selected for analysis. If there was not a post that week, that week would be skipped. Out of a total of 2,600 posts in 2018, 323 posts were systematically chosen for analysis in this study.

After posts were selected, they were coded for specific elements that relate directly with integrated marketing communications. These included the incorporation of a logo, call to action copy, company news, and duplicate posts. When looking for signs of integrated marketing communications, these four elements were selected for coding because of their ability to showcase a particularly engaging strategy that goes across social media channels. These four types of content were chosen because they include different elements that go beyond a simple social media post on one channel. This content that is being coded is either branded with a logo, leading followers somewhere else related to the company, informing the followers about company news, or reinforcing information and content from other channels.

First, a logo is a simple, clean way for a social media platform to brand its content across other social media platforms. Logo use may suggest the company is trying to remind users to return to its site, or as a branding element that reminds users exactly which social media platform content they were scrolling through.

Next, “call to action” copy was identified. Each post’s captions were analyzed for text intended to draw

the social media user back to the company’s social media platform. This could include providing a link to a specific social media platform, or directly stating to the viewer a call to go to their social media platform. No matter how it is done, a call to action directly integrates one social media platform with another.

Content regarding company news was also identified and coded. Whether it was about a software update, their platform, or other internal news in the company, this is another vital part of how companies showcase themselves across social media platforms. Finally, duplicate content also was coded. In order for something to be considered duplicate, the content needed to be seen on at least two of the three platforms. Duplicating content is a tactic that is used to showcase the connection between social media content platforms and to create synergy between them. It could also be a tactic to make sure that audiences across all platforms see their content. Examples of each aspect of the content analysis are provided in figures 1-4:

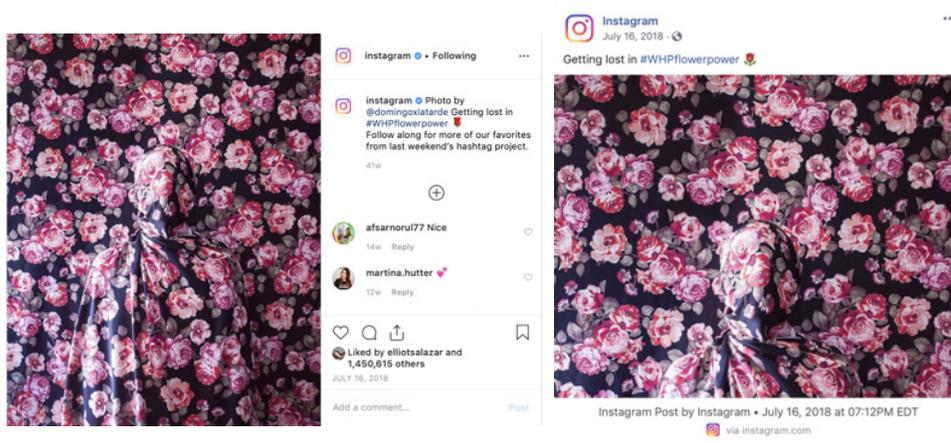


Figure 1. DUPLICATE POSTS: A post from @Instagram on Facebook.com and Instagram.com



Figure 2. LOGO: @Twitter showcases a Twitter logo in their content on Twitter.com



Figure 3. COMPANY NEWS: A company post from @Facebook on Twitter.com



Figure 4. CALL TO ACTION COPY: @Instagram directing followers back to Instagram.com

IV. Discussion

The first steps involved counting all of the social media posts of @Instagram, @Twitter, and @Facebook on all three of the platforms. There were 2,600 posts in total from the three platforms across the three channels (Table 1).

Table 1

Company	Instagram			Facebook			Twitter		
Platform	On IG	On FB	On TW	On IG	On FB	On TW	On IG	On FB	On TW
Sum of posts	642	595	748	40	139	228	30	16	162
Average posts/week	12.35	11.44	14.38	0.78	2.67	4.38	0.58	0.31	3.12
Overall average/week	12.72			2.6			1.30		

Instagram posts the most across social media, with an average of 12.72 posts a week in 2018. Facebook follows Instagram with an average of 2.6 posts a week, and then Twitter with 1.3 posts a week. It is also important to note that the majority of the content from all three of these platforms were posted on Twitter.

These numbers indicate there is a difference in how companies will post on social media. The nature of Twitter necessitates shorter content, thus allowing companies to post more often on social media. These numbers showcase that these companies don't post the majority of their content on their own platform. For example, Instagram actually posted most often on Twitter. The medium affects the message, an important aspect of integrated marketing communications theory.

Next, content from each social media company's three social media channels were analyzed for whether it included a logo, call to action, company news, or duplicated information across platforms. The analysis of Twitter is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Twitter on Instagram				
	Logo?	Call to action?	Company news?	Duplicate?
Yes	12	11	0	1
No	0	1	12	11
Total #	12	12	12	12
% Yes	100%	92%	0%	8%
Twitter on Facebook				
	Logo?	Call to action?	Company news?	Duplicate?
Yes	13	10	5	1
No	2	5	10	14
Total #	15	15	15	15
% Yes	87%	67%	33%	7%
Twitter on Twitter				
	Logo?	Call to action?	Company news?	Duplicate?
Yes	13	19	21	1
No	33	27	25	45
Total #	46	46	46	46
% Yes	28%	41%	46%	2%

Overall, Twitter used all of these integrated marketing communications tactics except for duplicating content. First Twitter used its logo frequently on Facebook (87%) and Instagram (100%), but less frequently on its own channel (28%). There was frequent call to action copy that suggested and directed viewers back to Twitter (92% on Instagram, 67% on Facebook). Twitter most often posted company news on Twitter (46%), and then would occasionally post news on Facebook (33%). Finally, duplicate content was rare across all the channels.

In contrast, Facebook used all of the integrated marketing communications tactics, except for duplicating content (Table 3). First, Facebook used its logo frequently on Facebook (59%) and Instagram (72%), but infrequently on Twitter (15%). There was limited call to action copy except on Twitter.com, where @Facebook included it in 83% of the posts. Facebook frequently posted company news on Twitter (83%), but only occasionally on Facebook (23%). This is a common theme because Instagram is seen as a much more visually oriented platform.

Table 3

Facebook on Instagram				
	Logo?	Call to action?	Company news?	Duplicate?
Yes	13	1	0	3
No	5	17	18	15
Total #	18	18	18	18
% Yes	72%	6%	0%	17%
Facebook on Facebook				
	Logo?	Call to action?	Company news?	Duplicate?
Yes	23	11	9	6
No	16	28	30	33
Total #	39	39	39	39
% Yes	59%	22%	23%	16%
Facebook on Twitter				
	Logo?	Call to action?	Company news?	Duplicate?
Yes	6	29	33	5
No	34	11	7	35
Total #	40	40	40	40
% Yes	15%	73%	83%	13%

When analyzing Instagram's use of social media (Table 4), it is interesting to note that the company used its logo in less than 2% of all posts. However, call to action copy guiding users back to Instagram.com was high on all channels (including more than 80% of the posts on Facebook and Twitter). Instagram posted company news infrequently, but when it did, it went on Twitter (19%). Instagram is the only company that posted its company news on Instagram, but it was still only at 6% of the total. Duplicate strategies were used the most by @Instagram, with 70% across all three channels.

Table 4

Instagram on Instagram				
	Logo?	Call to action?	Company news?	Duplicate?
Yes	0	28	3	40
No	52	24	49	12
Total #	52	52	52	52
% Yes	0%	54%	6%	77%
Instagram on Facebook				
	Logo?	Call to action?	Company news?	Duplicate?
Yes	0	42	5	36
No	51	9	46	15
Total #	51	51	51	51
% Yes	0%	82%	10%	71%
Instagram on Twitter				
	Logo?	Call to action?	Company news?	Duplicate?
Yes	1	44	10	44
No	51	8	42	8
Total #	52	52	52	52
% Yes	2%	85%	19%	85%

After looking at the data from all three platforms on the three channels, it is clear that each of the social media platforms use integrated marketing communication tactics differently. Twitter used all of these integrated marketing communications tactics except for duplicating content. This is most likely because Twitter is a word-based medium and would end up creating different visuals for Instagram, copy for Twitter, and a combination of the two for Facebook. Facebook posted about company news and used its logo frequently, while not posting duplicates or call to action copy as often. This may be because Facebook is the leading social media platform and is focused on keeping its billions of users informed with branded messaging. Instagram did not use its logo frequently and rarely posted company news, but often used call to action copy and duplicate content. This may be because Instagram is a visual medium and the strong photography can resonate across channels.

Overall, all three social media platforms showcased logos, call to action copy back to their native platform, shared company news, and posted duplicate content. However, they did so in very different ways. The main types of content on their native platform isn't always optimized for the other channels they are posting on.

V. Conclusion

This study sought to identify if and how social media platforms Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram used integrated marketing communications over three social media channels. A content analysis of 323 posts discovered that all of the social media platforms included these integrated marketing communication tactics, but in ways that were specifically catered towards their individual brand and type of content. The findings in this study can be used when companies and social media platforms are planning social media in a cross-promotional context. This study also explains the theory and ideas behind integrated marketing communications with social media particularly in mind.

There are several limitations to this study that are important to recognize. First, the "stories" feature on Instagram and Facebook were not incorporated when looking for social media content. These provide 24-hour windows for social media platforms to showcase information. Because this content is deleted after such a short time, it could not be factored into this study. Next, it is important to note that any of the social

media accounts could have deleted or archived content from 2018. Finally, this study looked specifically at @Facebook, @ Twitter, and @Instagram, but each social media platform has several official social media accounts (like @TwitterVideo) across each channel. These were not incorporated into this study, but definitely could be in the future.

For future extensions of this study, all of the posts from a year could be studied as opposed to just the first of each week. Also, the 24 Stories feature could be implemented into the research. Also, interviews and surveys with employees at each of these social media platforms could give insight into the strategy behind the particular channels. It would also be worth including other social media platforms into this study, such as Reddit, Tumblr, Pinterest, and Snapchat.

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