

# THE CREATION OF CONTENT IN SOCIAL NETWORKS AS AN IDENTITY-FORMING ELEMENT IN YOUNG MILLENNIALS

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## ABSTRACT

This article is a case study based on the content generation strategy of a startup, e-commerce platform, dedicated to users looking for or offering shared housing. The company's content creation strategy was analyzed. The data was obtained from the publications made through its Facebook fanpage in the period from January to December 2019. The results show that this company uses its content in order to promote an identity based on lifestyle of millennials from large cities prone to sharing an apartment, which facilitates generating engagement, and which has allowed it to position itself as the most important in its market. The virtualization of social relationships has a significant identity-forming power that allow the formation of a certain part of the identity of a subject. Information technologies have helped these companies to communicate more efficiently and mainly economically with their users. Content creation, as a marketing strategy, emerges as an easily accessible alternative based on TI, for startups to increase their reach on social networks and for their product to reach more users. However, content creation should not only be perceived as a short-term conversion marketing tool, but also as an identity-forming element through symbolic references that are meaningful to the user at a particular moment.

**Keywords:** *Ecommerce; Content Marketing; Millennials; Inbound Marketing; Social Networks.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In administration as in other disciplines, it is common to evaluate the influence of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) within organizations [1,2]. In marketing, the importance of ICT in the acquisition of potential customers is recognized, in this case through digital media [3].

Conventional marketing channels are, for economic reasons, inaccessible for most startups - there are two main ways to define a startup: the first based on its performance in the market, and the second referring to the characteristics of the business and its content [4]. For the purposes of this article, this company will be understood as an emerging and innovative company that bases its business model on ICT.

Given the aforementioned, inbound content

marketing emerges as an alternative that enables both small and medium-sized companies to reach the user sector to which their service is directed. Digital marketing is an essential tool in the growth of an e-commerce company, since in addition to being a marketing medium, it is also a channel for acquiring potential users, in the short and long term [3,5].

The case study that is addressed includes young millennials between 25 and 35 years who have financial difficulties in finding a home and being able to leave their parents' house. It also targets that part of young people who have migrated from one city to another in search of employment or for school reasons. The drawbacks range from the economic to the social, to the typical office problems of a young person, the experiences of an outsider in a new city, and the complicated process of being an adult.

This article aims to recognize the creation of content from a transdisciplinary point of view, taking up conceptual elements that allow understanding the identity of millennial users of social networks as a marketing strategy in the short, medium, and long term, and therefore a tool generator of engagement -understood as the commitment that the consumer acquires with the company: its roots- [3]. For this purpose, the case of a digital platform that bases a large part of its acquisition on inbound marketing has been taken up, mainly on the creation of content on its Facebook and Twitter profiles.

It is important to note that the research and results are aimed at evaluating the performance of the platform's metrics. Identity is considered as a determining variable of love, but the article does not aim to analyze in detail the identity traits generated by the marketing strategy, nor the effects it causes on users.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

The main objective is to expose the inbound digital marketing strategy of an e-commerce startup based on the creation of content as an identity-forming element in young millennials, and to recognize the results that the company has achieved both in the number of new users, and in the percentage of recurring users.

## 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 3.1. Content-based inbound marketing

Small companies, like many other organizations, have seen in the virtual space the way to produce, manage and advertise their services. Digital marketing has given space to the growth of small and medium-sized companies through different acquisition channels. Social networks are the most effective channel for creating links between companies and users [6].

While traditional marketing involves sending messages through intrusive means, inbound marketing represents the possibility of reaching potential users through the use of online content strategies [7]. Outbound marketing floods advertising through conventional media such as television, radio, magazines, and billboards; the first is based on interaction and engagement based on content creation [8].

Inbound marketing requires thorough knowledge of the audience and personalized communication with users through content that is relevant to them [9]. Content-based marketing is a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant and consistent content to attract and maintain a clearly defined audience and ultimately become a profitable action for the business [7]. The aforementioned is possible through content on social networks and SEO positioning (Search Engine Optimization; which is defined as actions aimed at classifying web content in the first results in search engines) [10].

For e-commerce companies, the objectives of this strategy are to generate user acquisition, a potential conversion, and long-term engagement, that is loyalty, which means having a continuous and productive relationship between users and the company.

Due to financial concerns, small and medium-sized businesses must resort to these digital marketing practices. However, as will be seen later, content creation is a potential tool for creating identity for users, which, if executed successfully, can lead to a high degree of engagement. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick [3] define engagement as repeated interactions that strengthen a client's emotional, psychological, or physical investment in a brand. In other words, this relationship is determined by the ability that the company has to get a user to interact with its platform repeatedly.

Regarding these digital commerce platforms, traditional marketing is ineffective and expensive, and in order to achieve significant economic objectives, effective online marketing strategies must be used [11]. Considering the low cost of the tools it uses, inbound marketing implies lower costs compared to traditional advertising media [8], this allows generating traffic in an organic way.

As Taken Smith mentions [19], marketing via the internet can level the playing field between small and large companies. They should connect with this generation of consumers on their turf, the digital arena.

In this regard, within digital marketing, the creation of content has a transcendental function. Hollebeek and Macky [12] define content marketing as the creation and dissemination of relevant and valuable content to develop

engagement and trust between users and the brand. They establish a three-tier model; In the first instance, a relationship is created in which cognitive, emotional and behavioral engagement promote a construction of identity and meaning in consumers. These, in turn, originate a second level of interaction, which includes trust and attitude towards the brand; finally, the third level is the construction of brand equity. In this way, they show that content allows creating engagement, then forming an identity, and finally contributing to the brand value.

### 3.2. Forming identity

Although it is true that marketing and advertising design offer us definitions of identity, in order to analyze the conformation of identity from a perspective of the subject within a social group, it is essential to review in this article the concept of identity that is proposed from social disciplines such as sociology and anthropology.

Using sociological or anthropological concepts for studies about the influence of social media marketing on people's behavior is something that has already been done. Hudson and others [6] propose the concept of anthropomorphism to explain the relationship between people and branding. They describe how humans tend to anthropomorphize things. The higher the brand anthropomorphism, the more likely consumers will apply social norms to view and deal with the relationships with the brands. However, this theoretical framework is limited to understanding the influence of branding on the consumer, and not on the user. The user is a person with particular characteristics, he has an identity.

Identity answers essential questions asked to any kind of human being, such as: what are we? With what values and ways of thinking do I feel more related? Which group do I belong to? [13]. Even the identity influences the formation of objectives and goals in the short, medium and long term. Therefore, its conception must be understood beyond the formation of a brand, as an essential element in the existence of the human being, and its search for a social group.

To understand the importance of identity, it is necessary to resort to theory. The first and most essential approach to the concept of identity must be based on the ideas of Zygmunt Bauman.

For Bauman [14], individualization is a product of modern society that consists of transforming the human identity of something given into a task. In modern society, the individual has the constant need to seek identity, which is changing shape. Therefore, identity is something flexible, moldable, that can be adapted according to the moment. Identity only makes sense within the context of modern society; a society that individualizes and causes individualization. In this sense, technology plays a transcendental role because this is the current means by which individuals seek and find - or at least immediately perceive that - the characteristics that define them as part of an identity.

Information and communication technologies have assumed part of the influence around the perceptions that individuals have on any topic. Digital culture -product of the evolution of ICT- can be considered as a phenomenon that has influenced the ways of assuming oneself as an individual, in such a way that it has established communicational, cognitive and emotional changes [15]. Social networks, being the most important virtual space for social interaction, are essentially the showcase in which individuals observe and through which they acquire identity-forming elements. And for the mentioned, individuals have the power to influence and affect behavior, thought and consumption patterns. That was a finding Hudson and others reached too [6].

In a catastrophic view, Martín Serrano [24] perceives that virtualization tends to limit face-to-face interactions and that computerization can lead to group control. For the case of this study, it is not relevant to bring this up for discussion, however, it is worth rescuing the idea that the virtualization of social relations has a significant identity-forming power, and that it can lead to the formation of an identity part of a subject, whatever the end.

Pérez-Torres and others [16] show that a common practice among youtubers is to tell their own experiences as a strategy to generate links with their followers. The identity is continually formed and reinforced with the passage of the videos. The electronic commerce platform that is studied in this article has as its main market users from large cities in Latin America, with an age range between 25 to 35 years; In other words, they are mainly millennials, which is why the content of their social networks is attached to the socioeconomic conditions and the experiences that millennials live

in these cities.

Millennials entered the labor market during a global recession with high rates of youth unemployment; A series of qualities that were not previously requested have been demanded, and they start with a long work journey before being able to retire. While their parents could retire in their 50s or 60s, millennials hope to be able to retire after age 65. Additionally, they conceive their professional careers as something that presents constant changes, since their main objective is to prioritize time for themselves, choosing to take breaks to travel, vacation, or simply resting [17].

Cartagena [18] distinguishes the general characteristics of millennial users: high exposure to technology and information, intensive use of social networks, ease of going from one platform to another, the need for socialization and connection, which are not very permeable to traditional advertising and that are critical and demanding; they also have a tendency to support social and environmental causes. Given the high exposure to social media, digital marketing is the most effective way to reach millennials [19].

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

This research is a descriptive case study that consists of an analysis of the content creation strategy of an e-commerce startup dedicated to people who seek or offer shared hosting, the content strategy includes publishing memes, infographics and posts from blog for SEO positioning purposes, as seen in Figure 1. The data was obtained from the publications made through its Facebook fanpage in the period from January to December 2019. During this period, it was observed that the content memes and infographics were shared two to four times a week, with a total of 194 images. Subsequently, the movement of each publication was counted, including the number of reactions, views and shares.

Additionally, Google Analytics and Facebook Analytics were accessed, and data was received directly from some members of the startup as shown in Figure 5, which is an extract from the platform's user journey.

Me, empowered, with a new job, and leaving my parents' house to live my own life

After 3 years with 3 existential crises, 2 failed relationships and the same salary



Figure 1: Example Of Content On The Platform's Facebook Fanpage

To determine the performance of the startup's marketing strategy, some of the elements are retaken -mainly those that allow us to know the engagement- proposed by Opreana and Vinerean [8] in order to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of digital marketing:

1. Activity on the site or app. Through traffic (unique visitors and recurring visitors), and page views.
2. Source of traffic. Regarding the most popular acquisition channels, how many people visit the site through a direct link and how many through a search.
3. Answers and results. In this case, sales and user acquisition are measured - users who register and users who make a purchase.

#### 5. RESULTS

At the end of 2019, the Facebook fanpage counted with more than 370 thousand followers, distributed mainly between different cities in Mexico and a smaller proportion of South America countries; From January to December 2019, approximately 160 thousand new followers were achieved. Of the total of 194 memes and infographics, the page got 156,810 reactions; 43,576 comments; and 118,711 shares. Figure 2 shows the distribution of these numbers by month; Despite the fact that in the months of November and December there is a decrease in the number of interactions, the rest of the year maintained a constant upward trend, with a couple of peaks in April and October.

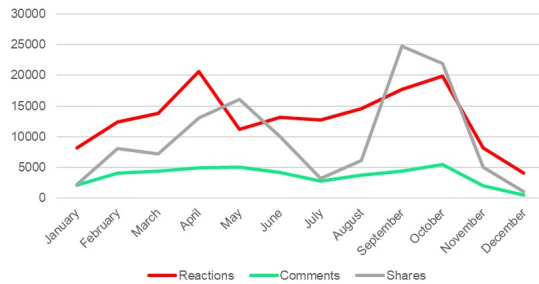


Figure 2: Total number of reactions, comments and shares per month

As can be seen in Figure 3, from the direct traffic of social networks, more than 90% comes from Facebook; This is significant, since it is the main organic acquisition channel, which means, it does not involve a payment or a purchase to activate the campaign. The commitment to the acquisition through Facebook is notorious.

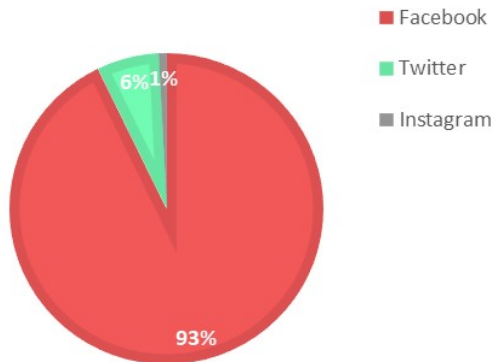


Figure 3: Acquisition Of Traffic To The Website Through Social Networks

The main advantage that the company has potentiated over its competition is the creation of content which eventually leads to direct traffic. As can be seen in Figure 4, of the total publications made on Facebook, more than half are content for marketing purposes to acquire new users on the platform. Room ads are posts with a direct link to a landing page on the platform; These mentions in social networks are sold within the premium plans of the site which allows them to be considered as outbound marketing. While this type of marketing is invasive since it is based on the promotion of paid ads through different media, inbound marketing allows to reach consumers in an organic way.

Blog articles, which contain a direct link to the platform, represent 5% of the total publications that are shared on Facebook. This type of content is

considered part of inbound marketing as they are articles of interest to the user segment to which the platform is directed and they do not turn out to be intrusive.

Finally, memes and infographics represent practically half of the content shared through Facebook -49% of the total-; These images do not contain a direct link to the site, but do contain a watermark of the platform domain.

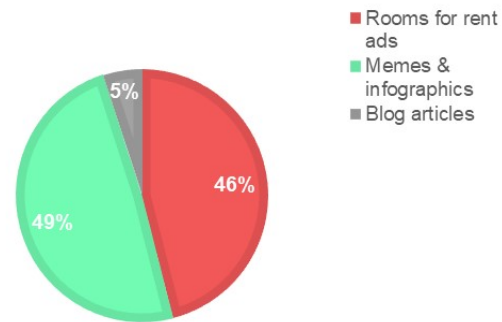


Figure 4: Acquisition Of Traffic To The Website Through Social Networks

Content creation is mainly based on sharing memes, infographics and blog posts for SEO positioning purposes. This marketing strategy has been practically the same since the emergence of the platform, which has paid off in its growth to the point of having surpassed its main competition in a span of seven years.

As can be seen in Figure 5, the ratio of new users to existing users is similar. Of a total of 23,600 users who logged in during a month, 45% logged for the first time (new). Of the returning (existing) users, 34% will return at least one more time during the same month, which means, they are and will be recurring users. Regarding the behavior of new users, 60% of them return during the same month, which shows that the proportion of recurring users is higher in both cases.

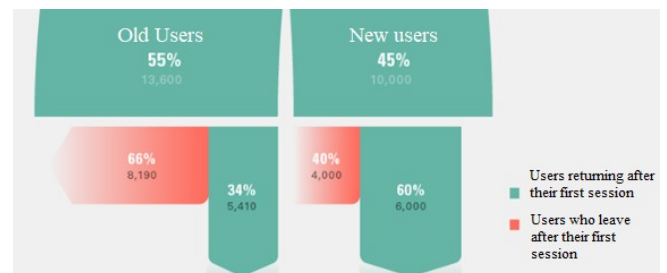


Figure 5: Acquisition Of Traffic To The Website Through Social Networks

Currently, the platform is considered the most



popular in Mexico City to the extent of doubling the number of ads on the website and exceeding 18 times the size of its community on Facebook; this was achieved in a span of 5 years. Despite being a startup with limited financial resources, it has created a consistent user base of around 55% of its total visitors, which reflects the high engagement status.

## 6. DISCUSSION

This research addresses the marketing strategy of a startup; The objective was to recognize how, based on the creation of content, the company managed to generate identity, and, therefore, this was reflected in the number of visits and mainly of recurring users.

The inbound marketing strategy has generated visits, users and identity. This included memes and infographics whose predominant themes comprised various problems that many millennials go through, such as financial difficulties finding a home and being able to leave their parents' house, or who have migrated from one city to another in search of employment or for school issues.

The results of this study are consistent with the ideas held by other authors; Cuervas-Mons, and San Emeterio [11], argue that the first visit should not imply the fulfillment of one of the final objectives such as a purchase, but rather recognition, the user's first contact with the brand. What is shown in the case of the platform that has been studied is that such a strategy has allowed a close relationship with its users, and that, regardless of its functionality, its reputation is positive within the market sector to which it is aimed. Müller and Christandl [20] also conclude that companies should consider creating their own content as a marketing method since it is perceived more favorably than outbound marketing. Research from Hudson and others [6] support the proposition that engaging customers via social media is associated with higher consumer-brand relationships too.

In this case, the content is so personalized that it is only understood by a group of users who share the same cultural context and who, therefore, understand the meaning attributed to the message provided through the meme or infographic, as mentioned by Bauman [21]: "At the heart of social networks is the exchange of personal information (...), users are happy to be able to reveal intimate details of their intimate lives, to record true

information" and exchange photographs.

In the constant search for identity that Bauman speaks of, users not only share information about their life, but also acquire elements that contribute to the conformation of their identity. Through these publications, young people see situations reflected in a context similar to theirs and assimilate them as their own. In this sense, they find an affinity with an entity that shows how a young person should be with the characteristics of their identity.

Observing a meme referring to daily life leads users to strengthen a relationship with whoever is publishing it; 39% of users who make purchases on the internet follow the brands they like through social networks [22]. In this way users feel closer to something that attracts them and makes them feel understood.

Platforms and applications created to facilitate online interaction increase the possibilities of generating flexible, ephemeral identities, and in some cases relatively stable [23]; this can be reflected in the memes with more interactions. The memes that get the most reactions are those that capture the way of perceiving a fragment of the user's reality, something with which they identify. Digitization shares spaces of social relations with physical interactions, and this allows the factors that form identity in individuals to have part of their origin in virtual spaces, which is why memes create identity.

Taken Smith [19] weighs with great importance the use of coupons and the price factor in the attempt to attract millennial users. For the case of this study, the price variable was not considered, because the platform has never used coupons or discounts, so for this case study it is clear that it is an irrelevant aspect.

The use of social networks strengthens brand awareness and therefore reduces uncertainty; builds trust [6]. The elements that make up an identity are strengthened by the content that users perceive as something close to them. Consumers follow the brands with which they identify and with which they feel familiar, which allows the company to maintain constant communication with its consumers.

Millennials come to online products and services influenced and influencing others, it is a generation that considers the opinions of other

consumers more than traditional advertising. Additionally, they are users who are used to spending long periods of time on the internet, which is why they should be understood as the main acquisition channel for e-commerce platforms [19].

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

Social networks have become a fundamental marketing channel for all companies. For e-commerce platforms, the acquisition of new users is favored with the investment of resources made in these channels. Due to the innate limitations of a recently created company, it is essential to understand social networks not only as a conversion channel, but also as a channel for the formation of an identity among its users.

Creating content to define the characteristics shared in a social group, allows in the first instance to generate identity in the users, due to which a bond of empathy is created between user and company. This empathy can lead to conversions, but it can also promote engagement - measured by a high retention rate.

The creation of content as an identity-forming element in the consumer should be a recurring practice in electronic commerce companies, because in addition to being a channel of acquisition and conversion, it can become a means of relationship between the company and the users, which in the event of being successful, will result in benefits for both parties.

This investigation was limited to looking at the problem from the company's point of view. However, it did not consider changes and identity shaping from the user's point of view. This fact opens the door to more research on the relationship between user and platform, incorporating elements of IT and social sciences.

This article can lay the groundwork for further IT research to incorporate sociological theories. The fact of incorporating concepts from these theories enriches the analysis and allows us to approach the object of study from a transdisciplinary point of view.

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