

LIBERAL ARTS

Starbucks: Examining Brand Equity Through Effective Social Media

Student researcher: Chelsea Spring, Senior

In a society where countless corporations, organizations, and institutions compete every day for consumer attention, social media has quickly become one of the most crucial tools for forging genuine connections with audiences and setting desired communication apart from surrounding noise. In order to effectively distinguish one message sent through social media from the next, however, an understanding of not only how social media works, but also of the strategies for what companies can do to make social media content more effective makes all the difference.

The purpose of this research was to examine the social media tactics of Starbucks—a corporation with a strong social media presence—and identify effective aspects of the Starbucks strategy for other businesses to look to as a model for using social media to increase brand equity, the commercial value derived from the consumer perception of a brand.

This case study was performed through the close observation and analysis of various Starbucks social media channels, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest, MyStarbucksIdea, the corporate blog, and the official Starbucks website. The analysis of the strategies applied across all of the nine Starbucks social media channels led to the conclusion that through the implementation of user-focused content, corporation-consumer dialogue, and corporate storytelling, marketing departments that are posting content to social media can more effectively connect with consumers through creating higher quality content, building a stronger base for increased levels of brand equity.

Research advisor Brian Smith writes, “The potential of social media engagement in strategic communication remains underdeveloped, with most research emphasizing the promotional opportunities online. Chelsea’s research broadens understanding from the one-way perspective of engagement to the two-way interactivity inherent in social media.”